

# The Worship of an Unnamed Woman

(Luke 7:36-50)

Matthew 26:6-13 “While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. 9 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.” 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Mark 14:3-9 “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. 6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

John 12:1-8 “Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

Each of the Gospels has an account of an woman washing the feet of Jesus. It is my personal opinion that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John all deal with the same washing, but that Luke’s account is a unique incident, recorded only in his gospel. Luke’s incident appears to occur much earlier in Jesus’ ministry than that of the others, which occurs just prior to our Lord’s death (thus serving as a preparation for His burial).

In Luke’s account, “Simon” is a Pharisee and not a leper. Also, Simon the Pharisee is the one who protests; in the others’ accounts, the disciples protest. Luke doesn’t name the woman but she is thought to be a woman of unfavorable reputation where as in John’s account this woman is Mary, sister of Martha.

At first look it would seem that there are two people equally zealous to see Jesus: Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Simon could easily converse with Jesus in the comfort of his home, around a meal. For the woman, getting close to Jesus was no easy matter. Her sinful life, known to all who lived in her town, made it difficult for her, a woman, to seek

out Jesus, a man. If she owned a home, she could not invite Jesus there, for this would be inappropriate, especially if she were a harlot, for this would be her place of business.

Reports of Jesus' ministry and teaching had somehow reached this woman, and she was most eager to see the Savior. When she learned that Jesus was to have dinner at the house of Simon, the woman knew it was her opportunity to see Jesus. From our Lord's words, it would seem that she arrived at Simon's house before Jesus: ***"You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet"*** (Luke 7:45).

If the dinner were to begin at 7:00 P. M., the woman seems to have arrived at 6:45. She was there, ready and waiting. With her, she brought a container of perfume. It is my opinion that this woman came prepared to anoint the feet of Jesus, the humble task usually delegated to the lowest servant. Perhaps she would be permitted to do this.

The washing of Jesus' feet can best be understood in the light of our Lord's words of rebuke to Simon, and when compared to the Lord's washing of His disciples' feet as recorded in John chapter 13. As the Lord entered the house of Simon, custom and normal hospitality would have it that Jesus would have been greeted with a kiss, His feet would have been washed, and His head anointed with oil.

The woman no doubt waited near the door for Jesus to arrive. She probably expected that Jesus' feet would have been washed by one of Simon's servants. After His feet were washed, the woman would then likely have planned to anoint His feet with the perfume she had brought. Imagine the look on her face when she realized that Jesus' feet were not going to be washed. She did not let the dirty feet of our Lord keep her from what she had intended to do. She dared not kiss Jesus on the face, as Simon should have done, but she could kiss His feet, His dirty feet. She had come with no basin, no water, and no towel. Nevertheless, as she began to kiss His feet, the tears began to flow, something most unusual for a woman of her profession. As the tears began to flow, the woman must have noted that the little streams of tears carried the dirt of the road as well. She used the water of her tears to wash His feet, something she could hardly have planned in advance. Since there was no towel available to her, she used her hair to dry Jesus' feet. Imagine this, the woman used her hair, the most glorious part of her body, to dry the feet of Jesus, the most ignoble part of one's body! She did not do her duty quickly, so as to quickly finish an unpleasant task. She persisted at kissing the feet of our Lord (cf. v. 45).

This woman's worship of Jesus was at a great cost to her. It cost her the expensive vial of perfume, and the humility to kiss, wash, and dry the dirty feet of the Lord Jesus. But there was a higher price than this paid by the woman. In my opinion, the greatest price which she paid was facing the scorn and rejection of the self-righteous Pharisees and other dinner guests at that meal. Jesus did not give her a "dirty look," but it is inconceivable to think that all of the others did not. Simon's disdain, revealed by his inner thoughts, must also have been evident in his eyes, and so too for the other guests. "What in the world are **you** doing here?" must have been etched on the faces of the guests. It could hardly be otherwise for a Pharisee, whose holiness was primarily a matter of physical separation from sin and from "sinners." The woman's desire to see and to worship Jesus was greater than her fear of these guests. Their scorn was a high price to pay, but to the woman it was worth it.

When Jesus speaks to the woman in the final verses of our passage, He now makes clear to her the basis for her forgiveness: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:50).

Let there be no doubt as to the basis for one's forgiveness. It is not works. It is not the work of loving others, even God's Son. Forgiveness is the gift of God, granted to those who have faith. (Ephesians 2: 8, 9)

The question is this: “What was it that the woman believed by faith?” I believe that this woman, like the thief on the cross (Luke 23: 39-43), knew that Jesus was the Son of God and therefore believed that HE was worthy of her Worship and that He alone could change her life and forgive her. This is how we all should come before HIM.

The “bad news” of the Pharisees—“Jesus associates with sinners”—was good news to this woman, because she acknowledged that she was a sinner. This woman did not dispute the fact that she was a sinner. She rejoiced at the reports that Jesus received sinners. She came to him as a sinner, believing by faith that He would not send her away—and she was right. Of all those who went to the dinner, only this woman is said to have left forgiven.

There are three truths I want us to look at this morning.

- I. **Christ Came to Seek and Save Sinners.** A woman who was considered a great sinner by her peers was forgiven by our Lord, while those who thought themselves righteous went away unforgiven. There is a strange attraction to Christ for those who will admit they are sinners, and who wish to turn from their sins. Jesus is never more approachable than He is to sinners.
  - a. John 6:37 *“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”*.
  - b. John 8:11 *“Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more”*.
  - c. Luke 15:3-7 *“Then Jesus told them this parable: 4“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ 7I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

I plead with you who have never come to Christ as this woman did to come now. Come, trusting that He will receive you, that He will forgive you, that He will save. No one is more accessible to sinners than Christ. No one is more repulsive to the self-righteous than Christ. May each of us be like this woman, rather than like Simon the Pharisee.

- II. **We Need to Seek Sinners and Not Judge Them.** The second lesson which we can learn from our text is to recognize the characteristics of self-righteousness as evident in the life of Simon the Pharisee. I will not dwell on the evils of Pharisaism here, but let me

mention just a couple of characteristics of Simon which are evident in our text, which could be true of us as well.

- a. Simon was more interested in passing judgment on others than he was on God's judgment of him – Matthew 7 says to take the log out of your own eye before you attempt to take the speck out of someone else's.
- b. Simon felt that his home would be more righteous by keeping sinners, like this woman, out, than by inviting sinners in. Many churches feel the same way. Simon was inclined to see some sins as greater than others. Sexual sin was unforgivable, but pride was acceptable. All sins are the same in God's eyes – the smallest of sins causes a break in our relationship with God. All sins are an abomination to God. What is the attitude behind all sin – I know what is best for me – not God. The blood of Jesus covers all sins. (i.e. Homosexuality and Suicide too).
- c. Simon thought of religion as something to be preserved; Jesus thought of true religion in terms of penetration. Simon wanted to keep sinners out, Jesus went out to sinners. Some of Simon's error is the failure to grasp the change from the old covenant to the new. The Old Testament dealt with sin as incurable, and thus the principle defense was simply to avoid contact with sin and sinners. The new covenant came with a solution for sin. The new covenant could change hard hearts to soft ones. Thus, Jesus did not feel compelled to deal with sinners the way the Old Testament taught—seek to destroy or to avoid them. The Pharisee looked at sin something like the way we look at AIDS. It has no cure, and thus the best course of action is to avoid any and all contact. But, you see, the gospel teaches that Jesus is the cure for sin. Thus, Jesus did not need to avoid sinners, He could seek them out, just as we could aggressively attack AIDS if there was a foolproof cure. We also need to seek out sinners – we have the CURE.

Somehow Simon and the other Pharisees of the New Testament found it difficult to be “touched” by those they would not touch. In all of the New Testament I fail to see one incident in which a Pharisee was touched by the misery, the sin, the shame, the grief of another human being. It is little wonder that the Old Testament prophets had to speak so often about mercy and compassion. I see none of it in the Pharisees in the gospel accounts. To have compassion obligates one to minister to others. Jesus, who did not hesitate to touch or be touched by sinners, was constantly “touched” (emotionally) by them. May we be like Him.

The painful reality is that our churches often reflect the mood of Simon's house than they do of Jesus Himself. We ought to welcome sinners, if they acknowledge themselves as sinners, and if they seek to be saved from their sins. All too often, sinners are shunned by the church, more than they are sought by it. May we learn from our Lord to be more like Him and less like Simon.

### III. Worship is for Sinners.

- a. Lastly, we learn a great deal about worship from this woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. It is true that we do not have the opportunity to wash the feet of Jesus, as the woman in our text did, but we can learn a

number of principles pertaining to worship from her actions. Consider these principles with me as we conclude.

- i. **Worship is for sinners.** The woman who worshipped Jesus was a sinner. Our Lord neither denied this, nor minimized it. It is important to recognize that sinners can worship God. The Church is a hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints. Those of us who are most sensitive to the magnitude of our sin, should also recognize the magnitude of God's forgiveness, thus stimulating our worship.
- ii. **Worship takes place at the feet of Jesus.** The proper position for our worship is at the feet of Jesus. While Simon did not even do justice to our Lord's head, the woman was only comfortable at Jesus' feet. She kissed them, washed them, and dried them with her hair. She did not feel worthy to do otherwise. Worship at the feet of Jesus acknowledges His greatness and our unworthiness; His perfection, and our sinfulness. Worship with complete Humility – recognizing that we are not worthy to be in His presence but wanting to please Him and serve HIM.
- iii. **Worship is preoccupation with the person of Jesus Christ.** The woman who worshipped at the feet of Jesus was preoccupied with Him, and Him alone. The fact that there were those present who disdained her did not matter, for she cared only about what her Lord thought about her. The fact that many present were hypocrites did not prevent her from worshipping, for her worship was focused on the Savior.
- iv. **Worship is not concerned about receiving something from our Lord as giving something to him.** Jesus was approached by many people, most of whom wanted something from Him. I do not wish to minimize this or to condemn it. If I lived in Jesus' day and were blind, I would want to come to Jesus for Him to restore my sight. But this woman's worship was expressed by her giving to Jesus, not getting from Him. Too often, our prayers are like a wish list for Santa, at Christmas time. Too seldom, our prayers are praise and adoration alone, without any request, where our only desire is to be in His presence, forever.
- v. **Worship involves the emotions.** The tears of the woman who worshipped Him by washing His feet are most significant. The worship of this woman was, may I say, emotional. Many of us in our tradition and age tend toward a very intellectual worship. We could use a good deal more emotion. Remember that we are to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Worship should involve the mind and the emotions.
- vi. **Finally, worship is not easily hindered.** There were many reasons why this woman could have stayed away from Jesus and not worshipped Him. She was not invited. She was not wanted. She might be expelled. She would be scorned. There would be hypocrites there. But in spite of many difficulties, the woman did what she desperately desired to do—she worshipped Jesus. Why is it that a couple drops of rain, a late Saturday night, and we find worship too difficult.