

Encounters with Christ

Week 2 — **Simon and the prostitute** — Luke 7:36-50

Prepare...

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” John 17:25-26

In Luke 7, Jesus is invited to dine with Simon, a leader among the Pharisees. It was a common occurrence at the time for rabbis to invite other rabbis to their homes to debate teachings of the law. Crowds of people would look on to learn from their instruction. This time a prostitute joined them.

Begin... by familiarizing yourself with the text. Read the passage two times.

Answer the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Record in detail what you learn about Simon and the prostitute.

Record any other questions or thoughts you have about the text. Are there parts you don't understand? What spoke to you the most?

Memory Verse for the Week...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”
2 Corinthians 5: 17

Historical background

Who were the Pharisees?
Were they really the bad guys?
When the Romans occupied Israel and dominated the Jews they had different choices as to how to respond.

1. Terrorists: Zealots
2. Those who completely capitulated: Sadducees
3. Those who ran off and buried their head in the sand: Qumran communities
4. The principal followers of God who would accept this alien power until such time as they started to suppress their faith—then they would stand up for what they believed in: the Pharisees.

Would I have been a Pharisee?

Jewish customs for hospitality:

In the Ancient Near East, when someone visited your house, if they were your superior, you would kiss them on their hand, and if they were your equal, you would kiss them on their cheek.

If they were your superior, you would have your servant wash their feet with water, if they were your equal you would give them a bowl to wash their own feet.

Regardless of their status, you would give them perfume.

Anointing with perfume:

We can imagine the woman coming originally to only anoint Jesus' feet with oil; but then, being overcome with emotion, tears flowing from her eyes, starting to wash His feet with her tears, wiping them clean with her hair, and kissing His feet repeatedly. Normally, this oil would be used on someone's head. This woman shows her humility by saying, "the best perfume for my head is only good enough to anoint Your feet."

To have her hair flowing would be deemed immodest . . . [she] kissed fervently, again and again. But in her emotional display of love, it doesn't matter to her.

David Guzik, blueletterbible.com

Let's take a closer look...

1. Read about Jewish customs regarding hospitality in the sidebar. Simon didn't do any of these things, which were basic etiquette. In light of the offensive behavior of Simon regarding Jesus, describe the atmosphere in the room.

2. Next, a "woman who had lived a sinful life" walks in. Describe what the atmosphere would be now? How would you have felt watching the woman anoint Jesus?

3. Why did the woman come to find Jesus?

What did the woman risk by coming to Jesus?

How did she approach him?

What does this say about the faith of the woman?

4. In verse 39, Simon says to himself that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know who was touching him—a sinful woman. The Pharisee was concerned about being made "unclean." In verse 40-42, Jesus answers him with a story. Who do each of these people in the story represent?

Who is the person who cancels the debts? _____

Who is the person with a small debt? _____

Who is the person with the great debt? _____

5. Why do you think Jesus told this story to Simon, and what was his point?

6. Contrast the woman's actions towards Jesus with Simon's actions towards Jesus. You did not... she did...

What does this say about the woman's love for Jesus?

7. In what ways would Jesus' words and actions have shocked the Pharisees?

8. In verse 47, Jesus makes the revolutionary statement that those who are forgiven much love much. When we understand how sinful we are, we worship God more sincerely.

What have you found to be the hardest thing about dealing with sin and failure?

What needs to happen for you to feel the kind of forgiveness this woman felt?

9. In the end, Jesus says to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven...your faith has saved you; go in peace." Jesus was not made unclean by her touch; she was made clean. Holiness overcame uncleanness. Using a Bible concordance or an on-line site such as blueletterbible.org, look up other instances in the New Testament where a person is forgiven or healed because of their faith.

10. How is the woman transformed by this encounter with Jesus?

11. Who can you identify with most in this story? Explain why.

12. Look back at your responses on page one. Are there questions you still have that are unanswered?

No undesirables

Pharisees believed that touching an unclean person polluted the one who touched. But when an immoral woman washed Jesus' feet, she went away forgiven and transformed. ...Instead of the message "no undesirables allowed," he proclaimed, "In God's kingdom there are no undesirables."... He extended the realm of God's mercy. —Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*

Verses for contemplation

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Personal Application