

LESSON 8

For April 21 • Page 54

Faith of a Woman Who Loved Jesus

In the work I've done as a journalist and pastor, I've heard people out of boastful arrogance say, "Don't you know who I am?"—as if their prestige or level of success was supposed to afford them extra-special privileges. On the other hand, I've also heard people out of self-introspection say, "If you only knew"—as if their past failures or dark hearts were enough for them to forfeit any hope of gaining respect and love.

A gathering of men at a dinner party (the "Don't you know who I am?" types) has just witnessed a woman, whom they all know to be a woman of ill repute (the "If you only knew" type), walk into the room with a jar of expensive perfume. She is crying. As she weeps, her tears fall on Jesus' feet. Using her hair to dry His feet, she then pours the perfume on them. She knows it's not right—not fair, even—for her to be present in the room; but her faith moves her to extravagantly express her love for Jesus. It's as if she's saying, as Martin Luther once said of Jesus, "Thou art my righteousness, and I am Thy sin."

Throughout the biblical story, God deals mercifully with sinners, rather than condemning them outright for their sins. Why wasn't Jacob denounced by God for his conniving ways? Why wasn't David disowned by God for his disgraceful actions? Why wasn't the adulteress condemned by Jesus for her open disregard of the law? Why wasn't Peter disavowed by God after his blatant denial of Christ? The answer is because there's nothing in the world so tenacious and resolute as the grace of God!

- 1.** *Why is a person's character expressed in his or her behavior?*
- 2.** *Why is the expression of faith and love far more important to God than religious activity?*
- 3.** *Is religious faith and love meaningless if it is not in devotion to Christ? Explain your answer.*

LESSON FOCUS: How do your actions express your faith and love?

The Pharisee's Indignation

Luke 7:36-39, KJV

36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Luke 7:36-39, NIV

³⁶When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Luke 7:36 states that a Pharisee named Simon (possibly a synagogue official; see vs. 40) asked Jesus to eat a meal with him. In turn, Jesus accepted the invitation by accompanying the religious leader to his home and sitting down to eat at the "table" (evidently as the guest of honor).

Jesus' critics accused Him of being a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (vs. 34). By this the religious elite especially meant those whom they saw as impious.

The above would have been the case with the woman mentioned in verse 37, who had a reputation for living in a "sinful" or immoral manner. Despite the stigma she bore, when she found out that Jesus had arrived and was dining at Simon's home, the woman unexpectedly showed up at the

meal. She was carrying an “alabaster” flask filled with perfumed oil. Because of the product’s rarity and expense (perhaps worth as much as the wages a day laborer earned in one year), only the wealthy could afford to buy and use it to anoint their esteemed guests.

As Jesus reclined at the table with the rest of the guests, the unnamed woman, while crying audibly, stood behind the Savior’s feet. Undoubtedly, to the shock and amazement of the host (see vs. 39) and guests, the sobbing woman used her “tears” (vs. 38) to bathe Jesus’ feet (which would have been soiled from walking on dusty roads). Next, since the woman had no towel, she used her “hair” to dry off Jesus’ feet. Then, as the woman repeatedly kissed Jesus’ feet, she broke the seal on the flask and drenched Jesus’ feet with the perfumed oil.

In the Savior’s day, slaves usually took care of the guests’ feet. So, the woman’s actions were a sign of humility and reverence. The sacrificial aspect of the woman’s action is evident by the expense of the “perfume” she used to anoint Jesus.

The Savior regarded the intruder as someone whose life He had touched. Yet, Simon considered the woman only as a local, notorious “sinner” (vs. 39, possibly an adulteress or prostitute). The objectionable display unfolding before Simon convinced him that despite Jesus’ claims and those made by His followers, He was not really a “prophet.” Otherwise, Simon reasoned, Jesus would have recognized He was permitting an immoral woman to touch Him. Allegedly, a true spokesperson for God would never permit this to happen.

4. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisee’s dinner invitation?

5. What unusual event took place during the meal?

6. What was the Pharisee’s reaction to the woman’s actions?

The Woman’s Forgiveness

Luke 7:44-50, KJV

44 And he turned to the woman,

Luke 7:44-50, NIV

⁴⁴Then he turned toward the

and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Despite Simon's skepticism, Jesus demonstrated His prophetic powers in a surpassing manner. Rather than show that He knew the woman's heart, Jesus proved He was aware of Simon's thoughts. Jesus did so by stating He had something to share, to which the host gave his permission (Luke 7:40). What follows is a parable (vss. 41-43).

Jesus compared God's forgiveness to the size of a borrower's cancelled debt. Then, Jesus added an observation His host most likely did not want to hear. Perhaps for emphasis, Jesus shifted His attention to the woman and asked Simon to notice her (vs. 44). Next, Jesus compared how the woman and the Pharisee treated Him.

For instance, after Jesus entered Simon's residence, Simon

snubbed his guest by withholding any water for Jesus to clean His feet. In contrast, the woman used her tears to wash Jesus' feet, and she dried them with her hair. Also, Simon, in a discourteous violation of etiquette, did not greet Jesus with a customary "kiss" (vs. 45) on the cheek. Yet, since Jesus had arrived, the woman continued to kiss the Savior's feet. Moreover, Simon did not even anoint Jesus' head with cheap olive oil. Meanwhile, the woman covered Jesus' feet with a costly "perfume" (vs. 46).

Jesus acknowledged that, on the one hand, the woman's transgressions against the law were numerous. On the other hand, Jesus had "forgiven" (vs. 47) all her trespasses. For this reason, she was filled with gratitude and "love" for being pardoned.

Oppositely, Simon, who regarded himself as being exceptionally pious, was convinced he did not need to have that many infractions remitted (if any at all). Accordingly, the Pharisee only expressed affection in a miserly, grudging way.

Jesus assured the woman, who was still standing by, that despite her immoral acts, the Savior pardoned her (vs. 48). Then Jesus kindly sent the woman away (vs. 50).

When Jesus declared the woman no longer to be guilty of wrongdoing, He caused quite a stir among the others reclining at the table with Simon and Jesus. After all, they understood that only God could forgive sinners (vs. 49).

Jesus was fully aware of the consternation being expressed by the others present. Yet, that did not stop Him from telling the woman her faith in Him had delivered her from God's wrath and that she could "go in peace" (vs. 50), knowing He loved her.

7. *In what ways did the Pharisee and the woman contrast with each other?*

8. *How much forgiveness did the woman receive?*

9. *How did the dinner guests respond to Jesus' assertion?*

10. *What was at the heart of the woman's forgiveness?*

The Love We Have

According to Mark 12:41-44, Jesus praised a widow for giving all she had, not the wealthy who donated only a small portion of their riches. Jesus was not demanding that all His followers must give all their material possessions to the church. Instead, He was showing us what matters to God is not the literal, worldly value of our gifts, but that we give generously based on what we have.

“The more we love [Jesus],” said Calvin Miller, “the more we want Him to be a part of our affairs.” This statement was true of Miller, who founded and was the leading pastor of the Westside Baptist Church of Omaha, Nebraska, for more than two decades; who was a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and who wrote the best-selling trilogy *The Singer*. Because of this work, Miller was described as a troubadour singing a love song to his Lord Jesus.

It would be a high honor if our lives as Christians were a love song to Christ Jesus. Indeed, how many family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and even strangers would hear our song and be captivated by the importance and reverence we hold for our Savior and His love for us.

It is never too late to pour our love and our faith into Jesus. And it is never too late to express that love and faith to those around us, particularly to those who are hungry for God’s love. The fruit of the Spirit is always ready to touch the lives of others. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will always be a blessing to others.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,” said Jesus. “Now remain in my love” (John 15:9).

- 11.** *In what ways is your life a love song to Jesus?*
- 12.** *How has your faith in and your love for Jesus touched the lives of others?*
- 13.** *How can you deepen your faith in Jesus?*

An Open Heart

When the sinful woman approached Jesus with her tears and sorrow, Jesus received her with compassion and forgiveness; but when Simon the Pharisee muttered his disdain, Jesus rebuked him. When our hearts are truly open to Christ, He responds to bless us, strengthening our faith in Him and deepening our love for Him. For such a love as His so overflows within us that we naturally will express that love and faith in our actions.

► *Pray about writing a note to a person you know, telling him or her how your faith in Jesus has transformed your character. Moreover, relate how the love of Jesus has been manifested in your life and how you hope His love is touching her or his life as well.*

KEY VERSE

And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.
—Luke 7:50 KJV

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
—Luke 7:50, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of April 22 through April 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Kings 17:8-16—God Provides for a Gentile Woman.
- Tues.** 1 Kings 17:17-24—God's Authority Over Life and Death.
- Wed.** Luke 4:24-30—God Blesses Whomever God Wills.
- Thurs.** Psalm 61—Hear My Cry, O God.
- Fri.** Psalm 20—May God Grant Your Heart's Desire.
- Sat.** James 4:1-10—God Gives Grace to the Humble.
- Sun.** Matthew 15:21-28—Jesus Hears a Desperate Mother's Plea.