

How Much Do You Owe?

Which one of these is not like the other? When I was little, I used to watch *Sesame Street*. And that was one of the games they used to play on that TV show: Which one of these is not like the other? At a very early age we are used to playing this game. We learn which things belong with others and which things do not. In the words we look at this morning we see a woman who does not belong. We meet a woman who does not fit in anywhere. Luke tells us: “Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,” (Luke 7:36–37 NIV)

In these words we meet a woman. We don’t know her name. But, there is one fact we know. She did not belong. She did not belong in the house of the Pharisee. She did not belong with the guests gathered there. She especially did not belong with the Prophet of prophets, Jesus.

Before we get into the details too much at all, Luke answers a question for us. If we ask: ‘Well, *why* doesn’t she belong there?’, Luke tells us that she was a *Sinner*. It doesn’t come across too well in the English, but what’s he’s doing here is assigning to her a class¹. She belongs to the ‘sinner’ group. She does not belong to the righteous group. She does not belong to the ‘normal’ group. She belongs to the *sinner* group.

Luke also then describes *why* she belongs to this out-cast group. She had lived a sinful life. Now, we don’t know what sort of lifestyle she had. Most often when this sort of description is used, it’s used of women who break the 6th commandment. This was the sort of woman who had broken her vows to her husband long ago—if she even had a husband. This was the sort of woman that mothers did not let their sons or daughters hang around. She had committed wicked sins against her body many times.

This is the sort of woman we meet in these words. And yet, it is this very woman who chooses to go where she doesn’t belong. She takes notice of where Jesus went. Then there is a very important progression for us to take notice of. First, she goes and gets expensive perfume and goes back to the house where Jesus was. She goes in—this woman who had led a sinful life. She goes into the room where the *rich* and the *righteous* were. She goes to Jesus and she stands there. She just stands there at his feet, behind him.

We wait for the part where Jesus looks up and sees her there. But he doesn’t. As she is there she sees it all. For it’s one thing to be around the rich people and the righteous Pharisee. But, to be at the feet of the holy and righteous Jesus—that is more than she can take. She cries. And Luke, with his eye for detail, lets us know that it wasn’t a small weeping. It was weeping with tears². And it wasn’t just one or two tears. It was a stream. It was a flood of tears. These tears flowed down her cheeks and dropped like rain on her Savior’s feet.

And then when she drenched Jesus’ feet, she bent over and started to wipe them with her own hair. Now, this is an image we need to see in our brains. Jesus came to this house. And in the words that follow, we find out that no one washed his feet. His feet were dirty. They were sweaty. No doubt, they were sticky. No doubt, they were stinky. And yet there she was, wetting his feet with her own tears and washing them with her own hair.

Then, after his feet have been wiped off with her hair, we would expect that she would then pour her expensive perfume on his feet. But she doesn’t. No, instead she kisses his feet again and again and again. Finally then, she pours her perfume on his feet.

My brothers and sisters, look at this woman! For here is a woman who owed so much and then, with such gratitude in her heart, she went into that room and embarrassed herself. Because it wasn’t enough to receive forgiveness. She, with tears of shame and tears of joy, showed her thankfulness. Look at her! For, if you understand these words correctly, you will say to yourself: “I am this woman.” And, if you aren’t able to say this, let me introduce you to someone else: “Then he turned toward the 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”” (Luke 7:44–47 NIV)

This woman embarrassed herself with every bit of joy in her heart that day. But, I tell you the truth, she was not the one who left that house ashamed. Hers were sins of commission. She had done many bad sins. But the Pharisee’s were sins of omission. There were many good things he *should* have done, but didn’t. When this great prophet, Jesus came to

¹ἦτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀμαρτωλός

²κλαίῃσα τοῖς δάκρυσιν

eat with him. He *should* have met him at the door with a servant. This is the least we would expect. In any decent Jewish household there should have been someone to wash Jesus' feet. But who was it who washed his feet? This sinful woman. If Jesus were really a friend to Simon, then he should have greeted him as a friend. He should have given him a friend's kiss. Simon did not kiss him on his cheek even once. But this sinful woman kissed Jesus' feet hundreds of times. Here Jesus is, the great Prophet, Priest and King. Simon should have greeted him as one greets a king. He should have been there with expensive oil in his hand. But, instead, it was this sinful woman who had the privilege of treating her King as he deserved to be treated.

You see, Simon did not see his sin. So he did not see his debt. He did not see his many, many sins of omission. He did not see how he had treated Jesus as if he were less than a slave, because that's exactly where he thought Jesus belonged. Simon did not see his sin. So Simon did not appreciate the Savior eating with him.

My brothers and sisters, look at this man. For, if you do not see yourself in the sinful woman, then you will most definitely see yourself in the Pharisaical Simon. There was a pastor in Marietta, Ohio once. And this pastor invited one of the guys he met to attend his church. In response, the man said: "I don't want to go to your church. There's nothing but a bunch of hypocrites there." The pastor responded: "True, and you'd fit right in with us." You see, there are two types of people sitting in these pews. There are those who see the depth and weight of their sins. And there are those who do not.

So, my question for you is this: How much do you owe? You can't get through these words without reaching the conclusion: We owe our Savior so very much more than we could ever pay back. For, like the woman, we have led a life of sin. And like the Pharisee, we have not served and loved. And yet, your Savior forgives you just like he forgives this woman. And that is truly the most beautiful part of these words: "*Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*" (Luke 7:48-50 NIV)

Now, after all the tears and all the kisses—now he looks up at her. And the *simplicity* and *sincerity* of his words amaze us. Look at the simplicity. There is no flowery speech. He simply says the truth. Her sins are forgiven. Were they forgiven because of her many tears? Were they forgiven because of her many kisses? Were they forgiven because of her expensive perfume? No. Her faith rescued her. The very same faith Jesus, himself had given to her. That is what saved her. The tears and kisses and anointing were all effects of that faith.

His words were sincere and simple. But, notice what was lacking in what he said. Where was the part where he lectured her, telling her to go out and do good deeds to earn her own way into heaven. It's not there. She was forgiven. And she was fully forgiven.

My brothers and sisters, this is an amazing gift that so many of you have enjoyed most of your lives. And it's only when you see it in contrast that we appreciate it. Most families do not look like yours. Most families are either libertine or legalist. On the one hand, there are those families out there where the children say disgusting language, and the parents laugh. The teenagers get drunk and the parents shrug. They are libertine.

On the other hand, there also legalists out there. They are the ones who, when they see their children are sorry, that isn't good enough. They treat them horribly. Because to them, repentance isn't enough. They have to delight in the punishment.

How thankful we are that the Holy Spirit teaches us to forgive as Jesus did. For so many of us, our parents loved us enough to show us our sins. For so many of us, when we repented of our sins, they did the same thing our Savior did. They forgave and forgot—so simply, so sincerely. And even if we didn't grow up in that sort of family, the Holy Spirit is so strong, living and active that he teaches us to forgive just as Jesus forgave.

And so we close this morning with this question: How much do you owe? Nothing. You owe Jesus nothing to take away your sin. Jesus forgave you simply and sincerely. The only debt you owe is thanks. Continue to thank your Savior as this woman did all the days of your life. Amen.