

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 7:36-50

(please note, all questions are at the end)

To begin our exploration of this passage we first need to recognize that there is some (minor) confusion regarding this passage. I cannot definitively clear up that confusion, but I'll try to explain it and at least offer an opinion.

The question at hand is: is this story the same incident that we read about in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8? There is enough in common with all 4 passages for some to conclude that they're all the same incident; there is enough differences in this passage compared to the other 3 for some to conclude that they're 2 different incidents.

At the end of the day, it's not a big deal one way or the other...nothing is really lost or gained if what we have here is different perspectives of the same incident or 2 different incidents with some interesting common elements.

But for the sake of exercising our observational skills, let's note these similarities and differences:

-Matthew & Mark name the host as "*Simon the Leper*", Luke names him "*Simon the Pharisee*", and John doesn't name the host...but a quick reading could make/allow one to think it was the home of Lazarus, and his sisters Mary & Martha.

-The woman in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is unnamed, while the woman in John is Mary, the sister of Martha & Lazarus.

-In Matthew and Mark the reaction of the disciples is noted—they were "*indignant*"; in John it specifically names Judas as the one with the negative reaction; and Luke doesn't mention the disciples' reaction but instead focuses on Simon the Pharisee's reaction.

-Only Luke points out that the woman who anointed Jesus was a woman of disrepute.

-Matthew, Mark, and John all include this story later (near the beginning of Passion week) and focus the anointing as preparation for burial; while in Luke the focus is more on love and worship as a response to forgiveness.

So one and the same incident or two separate incidents? While it's interesting to think through the implications if the incident is one and the same, when all is said and done, it doesn't really matter. For what it's worth, I personally think it's 2 separate incidents.

So with the nerdy/geeky stuff out of the way, let's focus on the text in Luke.

Though much of the opposition that Jesus faced in His ministry came from the Pharisees, it's important to note that Simon (we know his name from verse 40) invited Jesus to dinner in his home. We could speculate all day as to what Simon's motives were. (Was he truly curious about Jesus? Was he skeptical about Jesus? Was he simply wanting the latest celebrity in his home to impress his neighbors?) Whatever Simon's motives were, Jesus accepted the

invitation. (And it's probably a safe assumption that whatever Simon's motives were, Jesus knew what they were.) So let's just say, generally, Simon had Jesus over for dinner to get to know him better (regardless of whether or not that was his primary motive, it would be the likely result).

But then someone showed up who wasn't invited...*"a woman who had lived a sinful life."* (7:37 NIV) Keep in mind that homes back in that day weren't nearly as isolated or privatized as we're accustomed to. Homes in towns and villages of Jesus' day were far more open, so it was rather normal for people to "just pop on in", invited or not. Again, very different from what we're used to.

While we don't really know what Simon's motives were, it is abundantly clear what this woman's motives were. She came to worship! She came to show adoring love, affection, and gratitude. While Simon was concerned with having such a woman in his home (what would the neighbors think?), this woman threw off all decorum; crying, letting down her hair, kissing Jesus' feet, wiping Jesus' feet with her hair, anointing him with perfume—she didn't care what anyone thought. There is something important in this for us to understand regarding worship.

Two incidents from the life of King David come to mind. The first is the famous story in II Samuel 6 when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. David worshipped in an unashamed manner...so much so that his wife chastised him for doing so. But David's reply to his wife Michal was telling, *"I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes."* (II Samuel 6:22). For David, when it came to worshipping the Lord, there was no holding back. Then in II Samuel 24 David was commanded to go to the threshing floor of Araunah and build an altar and make sacrifices to God. Araunah was more than hospitable and was willing to give David his threshing floor as well as whatever animals he wanted to sacrifice. But David replied, *"No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."* (II Samuel 24:24)

We could say the theme for this entire passage in Luke is "worship". Worship stems from a heart that is full of gratitude, and a heart that is familiar with its own brokenness. Worship can be planned or spontaneous, but ought to cost something. Worship is focused on the One being worshipped not on the one doing the worshipping. So if you think about it, a comment like, "I really enjoyed worship this morning." (speaking of a Sunday morning worship gathering) is sort of missing the point. It doesn't matter if you or I enjoy it, or get anything out of it. God's opinion of it, His receiving of it, His pleasure of it, is what matters...not your or my experience of it. How easy it is for us to forget that we live for an audience of One. Worship is not something we can critique...that must be left to the One being worshipped. Now that's not to say we won't feel or experience something in the course of worshipping...but that's not the point, and certainly not the gauge/measurement.

David had a decades long relationship with God in which God had called him, provided for him, sustained him, guided him, forgiven him, protected him, etc. David knew who he was worshipping, and had very deep and personal reasons undergirding his worship. The big

question mark in the passage from Luke, however, is what interaction did this woman have previously with Jesus that would inspire such worship? We can only guess/conjecture. But we can safely assume it was just as deep and as personal as David's reason/motivation to worship. And based on where Jesus took this whole situation, likely had something to do with forgiveness.

Simon came to the faulty conclusion that Jesus must not be a prophet, otherwise He would know what type of woman this was. (Which only goes to show why we are not in any position to judge...Simon didn't know the whole story...and Jesus knew far more than Simon gave Him credit for.)

So Jesus took advantage of the opportunity for a teaching moment. He told Simon a story of 2 debtors. For the sake of adding perspective, let's use modern dollar values instead of "denarii". One debtor owed \$10,000, and the other owed \$100,000...so a used car vs. a modest house. And as the story goes, the moneylender cancelled/forgave both debts. Then Jesus asked which debtor would love the lender (now forgiver) more? Simon accurately responded, the one with the larger debt that was cancelled.

Jesus then went on to compare/contrast the woman with Simon in verses 44-47. And this is where the tables get turned. Simon, the Pharisee, the religious leader, the "holy and righteous dude", is demonstrated to be the one who loves little (because, theoretically, he didn't need to be forgiven of as much), while the "sinful" woman is shown as the one who loved much. This is where we see the difference between "religion" and "relationship". And the fact is, faith in God has always been about relationship as the greatest commands point out: LOVE the Lord your God, with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and LOVE your neighbor as yourself. Jesus, in not so many words, showed Simon that all his religiosity was an exercise in missing the point. This sinful woman loved God more than he did...even though he was a better "rule keeper" than she was.

To cap off this little dinner party (there were other "guests" verse 49 informs us), Jesus said to the woman, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" This is not the first time we've seen Jesus say this. You'll recall in chapter 5 that Jesus said the same thing to a paralytic before He healed him. But the reaction was pretty similar, "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*" That is the question, isn't it? Who is this Jesus? It seems that Luke wants to keep this question fresh in the minds of his reader(s). Then He said to the woman, "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*" How did this woman demonstrate faith? Did she articulate proper doctrine about Jesus? No. Did she pray a prayer, make a confession of faith, or was she baptized? Nope. She worshipped Jesus! She sought forgiveness from the only One who can forgive sins. Jesus accepted her worship, forgave her, and sent her in peace. ("*Peace*", by the way, is the Greek word "Eirene"—from where we get the name Irene—and means the absence of strife; denotes a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being.)

Q. Describe an awkward dinner party you've experienced. (possible ice breaker)

- Q. The difference between the woman and Simon in this passage boils down to their respective awareness of their own sinfulness (the woman was fully aware of her sinfulness—and her subsequent brokenness over it; Simon, not so much—and his subsequent concern with social acceptability). Which of these two do you identify with more?
- Q. What causes you/motivates you to worship?
- Q. How do you worship? What form does your worship of God take?
- Q. When you worship, what are you seeking? Or what are you trying to accomplish?
- Q. What has worshipping Jesus cost you?
- Q. In your life, do live burdened by your sin or free and at peace by forgiveness?
- Q. One of the ways we can picture worship is as giving an offering to God. Another compare/contrast we can make between the woman and Simon is that she gave the gift of expensive perfume, while Simon didn't really offer Jesus anything (well, perhaps we could say dinner). When you consider your own worship of God, what are you offering/giving? What can we give/offer to the One who has everything and needs nothing?
- Q. Describe how you came to grips with who this Jesus is. (**HG Leaders, is question could take a while. But from a healthy HG perspective, it would be good for people in HG to know each other's "come to Jesus" story. So if not this week, perhaps carve out time sometime for people to share their stories.**) (Actually, something I've seen work well in the past, is each week, one person share their story...briefly...as part of the rhythm of HG.)