

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
April 10, 2016

Lesson Text: Luke 7:36-50
Lesson Title: Saving Faith

Introduction

Luke records the story of an uninvited dinner guest at the house of Simon the Pharisee. The story presupposes Jesus had spoken on the subject of God's forgiveness, and was invited to Simon's house for a meal and possibly a follow-up conversation. The interruption of the meal by a notorious sinful woman sets the stage for Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, love, and saving faith.

If the meal at Simon's house was in keeping with the Pharisaic protocol, it meant Simon had invited the "elite," the "movers and shakers" of the day. It would be strange if this sinful woman had received a personal invitation to Simon house. Simon and the woman have nothing in common. At least not on the surface.

Who was this sinful woman? What dark sin stained her soul? Where did she find the courage to come to Simon's house? Would Simon have her removed from his house? Would Jesus accept her acts of love and worship?

Saving Faith and a New Perspective (Luke 7:36-38)

Verse 36-38

"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. 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, 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."

It is difficult to know exactly why Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to "eat with him." He could have been an admirer of Jesus' teaching or miracles, but that is doubtful, especially as the story unfolds. Some suggest Simon wanted to trap Jesus or do him harm, but that is equally doubtful. More likely, Simon the Pharisee was curious about Jesus and wanted to hear him in a more private setting. Regardless, Jesus accepted his invitation and "went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat."

“Sat” describes the traditional posture for eating in New Testament times. Simon, Jesus, and the other guests were reclined around a low table, propped on their left elbows with a cushion for support. Their feet were always facing away from the food. It is a position of ease and comfort. There was nothing threatening about a meal like this.

Having set the scene, Luke drops a bombshell, especially for a room full of Pharisees. “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.” “Behold” suggests something startling, or something shocking is taking place. The shocking thing is this woman “was a sinner.”

“Sinner” means she was unsaved and her life demonstrated her sinfulness. It is a term describing a reprobate person. When the word “sinner” was used to describe women it often meant “prostitute.” Whatever her sin, she was not welcome in the presence of Pharisees.

The text indicates this woman had already met Jesus. Although the people of the city and in Simon’s house knew this woman because of her sin, it is possible she had already been redeemed from her life of sin when she came to the meal. As Jesus ate, the “sinful woman” approached the table, fell at His feet “weeping,” and “began to wash his feet with tears.” Martin Luther called the woman’s tears, “heart water.”

There are two words for “weeping” in the New Testament. One means “to weep silent with a lump in your throat” (John 11:35). The other means “to sob, wail out loud” (Matthew 26:75). This sinful woman “sobbed, wailed out loud” but never spoke a word. She assumes the position of a humble slave bowed before a loving master.

Luke used the imperfect tense in denoting her actions of “wiping, kissing, and anointing,” suggesting she carried on for an uncomfortable long time. By using “the hairs of her head” to wipe Jesus’ feet, she is laying all her dignity aside (1 Corinthians 11:6, 15). Her “hair” touching Jesus’ feet represented the greatest act of humility possible. While her tears flowed, and her kisses showered the Lord’s feet, the woman “anointed them with the ointment.” Her actions are nothing less than pure heartfelt worship. Saving faith had given her a new perspective on Jesus.

Saving Faith and a New Purpose (Luke 7:39-47)

Verse 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.”

All of this is taking place while Simon the Pharisee and his guests recline around the meal table. When he “saw” what the woman was doing, “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.” Simon is thinking like a Pharisee. Somewhere along the way Simon has come to understand Jesus is “a prophet.” But in his mind he concludes if Jesus was a true “prophet,” he would know this woman who is touching him and anointing him is a filthy sinner. Simon’s hypothetical “if, would have known” statement seeks to prove Jesus is not a true prophet or he would not have allowed her to touch him. For example, “if Tom were smart, he would not fail that test.” The implication is Tom is not smart because he failed the test.

Verse 40

“And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.”

Note that Simon “spake within himself” but Jesus will answer him openly. Simon is seething inwardly as he watches the sinful woman worship Jesus. Simon is the type of man who will “sit” down with Jesus for a meal, but he would never kneel down before him in humility. Jesus had “somewhat to say” to Simon and Simon said, “Master, say on.” Simon’s reply, “Master, say on,” was respectfully polite but cold.

Verse 41

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.”

Jesus confronted Simon with a parable to “two debtors.” One owed “five hundred pence” or about a year and a half’s wages for a common worker. The other owed “fifty pence” or about two month’s wages. Both owed money, but the difference was dramatic: the money a man could earn in one and a half months compared to one and a half years.

Verse 42

“And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

In Jesus’ parable, “they” or both indebted men, “had nothing to pay.” In spite of their inability to pay their debts, the “certain creditor” or the man they owed, “forgave them both.” Jesus asked Simon, “Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?”

Verse 43

“Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.”

The phrase “Simon answered and said, I suppose...” indicates he answered the Lord somewhat begrudgingly. His answer was, “I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most.” In other words, the one who had the greatest debt would obviously love or appreciate having his debt cancelled.

Jesus responded to Simon’s answer, “Thou hast rightly judged.” Remember, no one knew (except Jesus) what Simon said to himself internally. In fact, from the outside, it appeared Jesus affirmed Simon for “rightly judging.” Actually, Jesus was rebuking Simon without calling attention to his secret bigotry.

The application of Jesus’ parable is simple. The debt owed is sin and the debtors represent sinners. God is the gracious “creditor” who released the men from their obligation to repay what they could not afford. If Simon identified with the man in deeper debt, he would view the woman with compassion. If Simon identified with the man with smaller debt, he should at least feel rebuked.

How can a sinful woman be considered in the same league as Simon the Pharisee, or the likes of you and me? That is the question. Simon and the sinful both owe, and neither can pay; yet both are forgiven. We have an instinct for self-justification. We are descendants of Adam. We are sinners in need of saving faith and forgiveness of sin. Saving faith begins with an appreciation of what God has done for us, and it begins with an appreciation of what we are by nature.

Verse 44-46

“And he turned to the woman, 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. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.”

Jesus “turned to the woman” while directing His comments to “Simon.” His body language magnified the irony of what He would say next. “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. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.” Simon failed to give Jesus the

common courtesy and the customary welcome of a guest in the typical Middle Eastern home. An honored guest typically received the assistance of a servant or someone in the household, who removed his sandals, washed his feet, dried them with a towel, then applied a small amount of perfume or ointment.

Simon the Pharisee has no problem seeing the sinfulness of the woman. Jesus wants Simon to see what he is. Simon is a self-centered man and therefore could not understand or appreciate the worship given by the woman to Jesus.

Verse 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.”

“Wherefore,” or as a result of the woman’s actions, “I say unto thee.” “I say unto thee” means Jesus is still speaking directly to Simon. “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much...” The way to justification, the way to an appreciation of grace is not to play down the reality of our sinfulness. Her sins were “many.” Her sins were great. The gospel is not a scheme for making us feel good about ourselves.

“Are forgiven” means this woman had already been “forgiven” before she came to Simon’s house. Saving faith had given her a new perspective and a new purpose in life. “Forgiven” means “sent away” like a prisoner set free.

Jesus connected His parable with the present situation, again without revealing publicly what was privately in Simon’s heart. By calling the woman one who “loved much,” Jesus identified her as the debtor who owed “five hundred pence” in the parable. But He left the “whom little is forgiven” unclear, although Simon could have guessed the Lord’s meaning.

“To whom little is forgiven” are those who lack humility and see themselves owing a small debt to the Lord. Little need for forgiveness results in little love for God. Those who pride themselves as God’s favorites have the least love and devotion for Him.

At this point in the story the Pharisee’s spiritually superior world is turned upside down. Pharisees, like Simon, viewed themselves as favored by God because of their religious devotion. They believed they were better than others, who had shown a lack of devotion to the Lord through sinful living.

Saving Faith and a New Peace (Luke 7:48-50)

Verse 48

“And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.”

Jesus' conversation with Simon ended. He now spoke privately to a sinner. While Simon and those in his house rejected the "sinful woman," Jesus "said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven." As previously stated, the woman's "sins" were forgiven before she came to dinner at Simon's house. She now hears the fact of her forgiveness stated by the One who forgave her. Jesus did not excuse the woman's sins or minimize the sinful life she had lived. Because of the nature of saving faith and grace He accepted the woman, not in spite of her sin, but with them.

Jesus could say, "Thy sins be forgiven" to this woman because He would lay down His life on the cross for her sins (John 10:17-18). Christian leader and author John Stott says, *"When we have glimpsed the blinding glory of the holiness of God and have been so convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit that we tremble before God and acknowledge that we are namely hell-deserving sinners, then and only then does the necessity of the cross appear so obvious that we are astonished that we never saw it before. We need a fresh glimpse of the gospel."*

Verse 49

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

After seeing the woman's devotion to Christ and hearing the Lord's parable, those at the table "began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" Jesus' healings and miraculous acts were widely known. But could He "forgive sins also?" This elite religious group reclined around the table heard Jesus pronounce "forgiveness of sin." By saying, "Thy sins be forgiven," Jesus was claiming to be God (Luke 5:21). He is God! His words of forgiveness are not trivial or cheap.

While "they that sat at meat" questioned the authority of Jesus to forgive sin, the woman continued to worship at Jesus' feet. Her life had a new purpose.

Verse 50

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

Jesus' final words to the woman was, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." This woman was not forgiven because she loved Jesus. Her love for Jesus is the response of her heart to the gospel she has believed. At some point in her life she understood Jesus was going to die for her and she responds to that truth in unrestrained gratitude and worship.

For the first time in her this woman has "peace." Her "faith" saved her, not her tears, or acts of gratitude. This is a very important truth for everyone. If you

have never asked the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness, you are lost. This woman had no good works to her credit, but she believed in the Lord, she trusted Christ, and she experienced saving faith. What about you?

Conclusion

With whom do you identify most in this story? You may not be willing to openly answer that question. But, in the quiet of this moment as you read these words, give that question some serious thought.

Spiritual pride blinds us to our personal need of saving faith. It magnifies the sin of others and minimizes our own standing with the Lord. On the other hand, humility accepts the truth of personal sinfulness and cherishes the opportunity to believe and trust Christ for forgiveness of sin.

What is your perspective on life? What is your purpose in life? Do you have the peace this sinful woman had? A new perspective, a new purpose, and a new peace is some kind of life. It can be yours today through saving faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Amen.