

## The Woman in the House of Simon, the Pharisee

Lk. 7:36-39

### Introduction:

1. This is a very dramatic account set in a very specific context.
2. It seems quite unusual to us in our western culture. What's this woman doing here in the first place?
3. Luke places this in a context recording incidents that reflect people's different responses to Jesus.
  - a. He tells of the healing of a centurion's servant and records Jesus statement, "Not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Lk. 7:9).
  - b. Then there are the disciples of John who come asking, "Are you the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" Jesus validates John as great, but says, "He who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk. 7:28). It would seem He is confirming Himself as the Expected One and even initiating the kingdom.
  - c. Luke then makes the observation, "The people and the tax collectors acknowledged God's justice and were baptized by John, BUT the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves rejecting John's baptism" (7:29-30).
  - d. Then Luke records that Jesus compared the people to children who played the flute and objected because people did not dance. And sang a funeral song and objected when the people did not mourn. In other words, people had their expectations of John and Jesus and objected to both.
4. Luke then introduces this account of this woman in the Pharisee's house. The woman accepts Jesus, but the Pharisee does not!
5. What exactly is happening here? What is Luke trying to say? What is its significance for us?

### Discussion:

- I. Greater understanding of Middle Eastern culture may give us some insight.
  - A. Why is this woman in this house in the first place?
    1. Kenneth E. Bailey lived in the middle east for 60 years. He taught in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Cyprus lecturing on Middle Eastern New Testament studies.
    2. He makes this observation, "At traditional Middle Eastern village meals, the outcasts of the community are not shut out. They sit quietly on the floor against the wall, and at the end of the meal are fed. Their presence is a compliment to the host who is thereby seen as so noble that he even feeds the outcasts of the community. The rabbis insisted that the door be opened when a meal was in progress lest you shut out God's blessing upon yourself" (Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, p. 246).
    3. So the situation sets up the status of the Pharisee by comparison to the woman, who has no status. She is just another sinner the Pharisee is feeding.
    4. Nevertheless, she seems to be out of place here. A sinner, in a Pharisee's house. What about the laws of purity? Some consider this woman a prostitute (Joel B. Green,

NICNT, Luke).

- B. Bailey also observes that rabbis reclined at the table in the order of age the senior reclining first and the junior taking his place below him (p. 244). In Luke 11:43 Jesus observes that Pharisees love the chief seats in the synagogues.
  - 1. Evidently these elements of status transferred over into the setting at the dinner.
  - 2. Luke says, "Jesus entered the house and reclined at the table." What position did He take? Probably about 30 years old He is probably not the senior here. What if He took one of the chief seats appropriate to the "Expected One," a prophet?
  - 3. The dynamics of this situation are powerful! Tension fills the room.
- C. But then it was evidently traditional to provide one's guests with water to wash their feet, to give a kiss, and anoint them with oil (Baily, p. 243). Cf. "Come in. May I take your coat? Sit here. What would you like to drink?" These traditional courtesies were omitted here.
  - 1. What's going on?
  - 2. Is this whole scenario an examination, a test, to find out whether Jesus is a prophet or not with the presumption that He is not (7:39)?

## II. Simon's omissions in contrast to the unnamed woman's actions (Lk. 7:40-50).

- A. Simon as omitted the common courtesies.
  - 1. Water to wash feet.
  - 2. Kiss.
  - 3. Anointing with oil.
  - 4. I would ask if this is meant to be an insult? If Simon is hostile to Jesus, probably. If he is merely skeptical and investigating, maybe. The context notes that the Pharisees and lawyers "rejected God's purpose for themselves" (v. 30). Perhaps he is deliberately humiliating this so-called prophet.
- B. The woman, Simon identifies as "a sinner" (v. 39).
  - 1. We have already noted that some identify her as a prostitute.
  - 2. She has an alabaster vial of perfume. Evidently, she has brought it purposefully. This suggests that this is not her first encounter with Jesus. Has she encountered Him before and received forgiveness and is now coming to honor Him with the perfume?
  - 3. She is a witness to Simon's omissions.
  - 4. Her actions are responses to his omissions.
    - a. She wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Is she crying because of the humiliation Jesus has experienced from Simon?
    - b. She kissed His feet.
    - c. She anointed His feet with the perfume.
  - 5. Joel B. Green, in NICNT, sees sexual overtones in the woman's actions.
    - a. He says that for a woman to let her hair down in a circumstance like this would be like appearing topless in public.
    - b. He says she would have appeared to be fondling Jesus' feet.
    - c. He says her actions would have appeared as erotic. Perhaps even in our society her actions appear that way. How much more so if she is a known prostitute?

- d. If this is the case, can you imagine what Simon is thinking, the other people in the room? Luke says, "When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.'"
- e. Is He a prophet? Simon is about to find out!!! Note vs. 40ff. Now we might like to read Jesus' response with a hostile tone. But I find only gentleness in Jesus' response. Gracious forgiveness like that given to the woman, now available to Simon. I really want to punch Simon in the face.

Conclusion:

1. What Jesus has done here has shocked the room.
2. The expression of gracious forgiveness is shocking.
3. They ask each other, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"
4. Are you a sinner like the woman? Are you a sinner like the Pharisee?
5. The message is, "God has sent a messenger of gracious forgiveness."
6. What are you going to do with Him? Will you respond in faith and receive the peace He brings? Will you anoint Jesus in honor? Will you be a messenger of forgiveness like He was?