

The Interrupted Dinner Party: Luke 7:36-50

Intro: There are many mix-ups in life and sometimes they're funny. A young successful businesswoman was opening a new branch office with a friend. She sent a wreath to her friend for the opening. When the friend arrived, she was shocked to find a wreath with the inscription "Rest in Peace." She complained to the florist. After apologizing, the florist said, "Well, look at it this way. Somewhere today in a graveyard a man was buried under a wreath with the inscription "Good luck in your new location."

Most Bibles title this story "The Sinful Woman," or "A Sinful Woman Forgiven." I think Jesus ought to be the focus. How about "Jesus Forgives a Sinful Woman"?

Simon the Pharisee

Who were the Pharisees? They were hyper-religious government officials. They were the dominant party in the Sanhedrin, the governing Jewish Council. What Pharisees were infamous for were minute refinements of the Law of Moses. Most of the common people didn't know their minute refinements of the Law and could've cared less. They followed Jesus around and constantly judged him according to their religious rules. Example Luke 6:1-5. Plucking the grains broke the rule of no reaping on the Sabbath. Rubbing the husk off the grains broke the rule of no threshing on the Sabbath. Throwing away the husks broke the rule of no winnowing. Eating the grains showed they had prepared food. They broke four Sabbath rules in one mouthful!

The great defect of Pharisaic religion was that it made sin purely external. Have you ever had to deal with someone who followed you around and always criticized and tried to correct the way you do things? (*Youth: I'm not referring to your parents.*)

What is reclining at table? We sold or gave away all our furniture including our dining room table and chairs. All we had left was a low coffee table. We sat on pillows on the floor and reclined at the coffee table to eat dinner. When we recline at table we lean on the left arm and eat with the right and our feet extend behind us. That's how the woman was able to weep on Jesus' feet.

I give Simon the Pharisee credit for being open-minded. He invited Jesus to his house for dinner. Simon was willing to consider Jesus as a prophet, but after the woman interrupted the dinner part he had his doubts. Simon said to himself, "If this man were a prophet then he would know she is a sinful woman and he wouldn't let her touch him." (*I don't think you would have to be a prophet to know who she was!*)

Jesus allowed the sinful woman to touch him. According to the Pharisee this made Jesus unclean like her. Sin gets passed on like germs or viruses. If someone unclean touches someone clean, the uncleanness is transferred to the clean person, and that person becomes unclean. Pharisees were very careful to avoid unclean things and people. When someone

unclean touches Jesus the reverse happens – that person’s uncleanness doesn’t stick to Jesus. Jesus’ holiness cleanses the repentant person. (If I rub my hand on a dirty car then my hand gets dirty. What if the reverse happened? I put my clean hand on a dirty car and then the dirt vanishes, and the car looks like it’s been washed and waxed. That’s what Jesus does for us when he touches us. We come to Jesus in repentance with our dirt and touch him and we become clean. We are forgiven and receive his righteousness.

How would you describe the attitude of Simon the Pharisee? It’s “I’m-better-than-you” attitude – arrogant and self-righteousness.

Sinful woman

The woman is described as a sinner, an immoral woman. She was probably a prostitute. I imagine one of her clients sarcastically said to her, “I hear that crazy rabbi, Jesus, is in town. He’s dining at Simon the Pharisee’s house. You should go see him... if he will even look at a sinful woman like you!” She had become disgusted with her lifestyle and felt shame. She grabbed an alabaster vial of perfume – very expensive – and went to the Pharisee’s house. I imagine her walking there, apprehensive, but desperate to be free of her past, desperate to have a new life. She entered the house oblivious to the man staring at her.

What motivated this woman to walk into a room full of religious men and risk ridicule and rejection? She was desperate for forgiveness and a new life. She had a single focus... “I must get to Jesus!” She walked into that room and didn’t see all the men glaring at her; men who may have been some of her regular clients (*if you know what I mean*). She came behind Jesus while he was reclining at table and wept on his feet. She wiped of the dust on his feet with her tears. She dried his feet with her hair. She poured the perfume on his feet. The aroma of the perfume filled the house. I think it was the perfume she used for her prostitution. She poured it on Jesus feet as an offering.

After weeping in repentance, she sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to what Jesus said to Simon the Pharisee. “A certain banker had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii (\$50,000), and the other fifty (\$5000). When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

Then she heard Jesus say the words she was desperate to hear, “Your sins have been forgiven.” Then Jesus assured her of her salvation, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

She never said a word, but she was saved by her faith. What she did was an act of faith. It took great faith to interrupt the dinner party, ignore the judgmental stares, and kiss Jesus' feet.

Jesus told her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." What was the woman's faith? Faith is based on knowing who Jesus is and what he can do. She came to Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins, so she must have believed he could forgive sin, and if Jesus could forgive sin then he must be divine. She must have believed Jesus was more than a prophet because no prophet in the OT ever forgave sins. John the Baptist made no claim to forgive sins. My guess is she knew what happened with the paralytic, 5:17-26. The news that Jesus forgave his sins was all over social media and talked about in every coffee shop.

Jesus

Jesus never refused an invitation. (*If you invite me to your house, then I will not refuse the invitation.*) Pharisees followed him around and criticized him, but he didn't hate them.

How would you describe Jesus? Jesus is merciful, compassionate, and forgiving, but we must never forget he is first holy and he doesn't overlook sinful attitudes and actions.

Jesus pointed out the sinful attitude of the Pharisee which was exposed by his refusal to do basic social customs. He didn't treat Jesus as an honored guest; he didn't even show common courtesies to Jesus. He was hospitable when he invited Jesus to dine with him, but inhospitable when Jesus entered his house. Jesus pointed out the Pharisee's sin by contrasted what the sinful woman did with what the Pharisee failed to do. Verses 44-46. The Pharisee provided no water for Jesus to wash his feet; no greeting kiss; no fragrant oil on the head. (*If I come to your house, then you should offer me slippers when I take off my shoes. You should offer me a drink and a comfortable seat. No kiss is necessary. A handshake is enough.*)

Jesus didn't excuse the woman's sin. I have heard liberal Christians say "Love Wins" to justify unbiblical immoral behavior. They celebrate the decision of the Supreme Court to legalize gay marriage and say "Love wins!" They mean love wins over hate. The world thinks opposing immoral behavior is hate. Jesus didn't say to the sinful woman, "I excuse your immoral lifestyle. Love wins!" She acknowledged her sinfulness. Jesus acknowledged her sinfulness. She repented. Jesus forgave. She had no pride. She was broken by her sinful choices and desperate for forgiveness and a new life. Pride is what keeps people from repentance and loving Jesus.

Application Lessons:

Q: Why was the woman drawn to Jesus and not the Pharisee? How would have the Pharisee reacted if the woman wept on his feet? He would have recoiled in horror and disgust. She avoided the legalistic judgmental attitude of Simon the Pharisee and was drawn to the

love and grace of Christ. Christ was not “turned off” or offended by her outpouring of repentance and love. Legalistic religion drives people away. Love draws people in.

There is a big contrast in this story between legalism and love for Christ. People ought to be drawn to Christianity because of Christ. Which attitude is more prevalent in our church – legalism or love? Legalism pays more attention to outward appearance than the inward condition of the heart.

Q: What is revealed in this incident? The judgmental attitude and works righteousness of the Pharisee was revealed. That’s no surprise. He had an arrogant attitude toward Jesus; an “I’m-better-than-you” attitude. The most important trait revealed in this story is the grace and mercy and holy deity of Jesus. Big surprise! Certain circumstances in life reveal what’s in us? Does Christ-likeness or self-righteousness come out of us? Is Christ’s nature or my sinful nature revealed?

Q: How much do you love Jesus Christ? Would you be described as someone who loves much or loves little? “He who is forgiven little, loves little.” It’s important to know how much we have been forgiven and how much it cost. All of us in this church are probably more like the \$5000 debtor than the \$50,000 debtor. But we still all need forgiveness and we can love like the \$50,000 debtor. You cannot be a Christian and not be in love with Jesus Christ. Do you love Christ with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength?

[Link to Communion:](#)

We come to communion like the sinful woman came to Jesus. Her sins were forgiven the moment Jesus said “Your sins are forgiven” in anticipation of His atoning sacrifice. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Sins aren’t just cancelled like the debtors who owed the banker. Jesus paid the price for our sins. He paid the sin debt we owe. He withdrew the money from his account and paid off our sin debt. Communion reminds us that our sin debt was paid with Christ’s body and blood. We come to Jesus in Communion and he transfers his holiness and righteousness to us.