
Jesus & a sinner

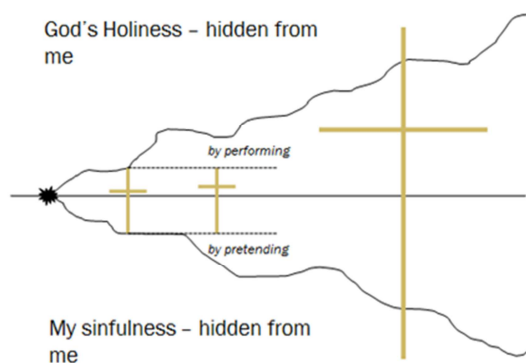
Luke 7:36-50

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Introduction A beautiful sight is a beautiful thing. Whether it is a sunrise, geese flying in formation on the backdrop of a cloudless full moon, a kindergartener playing with her new puppy in the backyard, an elderly couple holding hands, giggling as they walk in a local park – views of God’s creation and common grace are beautiful indeed. But what we are about to see tonight is one of the most heart-warming scenes in the entire Bible. It’s a sight of Jesus and a sinner. Tonight’s message is titled Jesus and a sinner. But we will not see this beautiful sight as a beautiful thing if we have lost sight of the gospel.

The gospel gap

Last Monday morning Lisa and I met with Ron and Nancy Mahler... (tell briefly my testimony by using “the gospel gap”). Point: When Jesus seems distant and the gospel dim in my affections...
Performing - minimizing God’s glory with the thought that I can work for my acceptance OR
Pretending - minimizing sin with the thought that I’m not as bad as I truly am..



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Growing as a Christian means increasing in 1) awareness of God’s holiness 2) awareness of your sinfulness 3) awareness of Jesus and amazing grace freely given the Cross. If your view of the gospel does not grow with the other insights, there will be a gap in your theology. And in this gap you will be crushed by guilt or try to manage your guilt in one of two ways. – perform as a legalist or you will pretend as a hypocrite. The solution to both of these awful things is to recognize and relish Jesus Christ. Tonight I want all of us to notice that a beautiful sight is a beautiful thing. And this beautiful thing is found in Luke 7:36-50 as we see Jesus and a sinner.

<read v.36-50>

The Structure

The structure of our text is fairly simple.

The opening setting	v.36-38
The Four Responses	v.39-49
Simon's response of Jesus (to himself)	v.39
Jesus' response to Simon	v.40-47
Jesus' response to the woman	v.48
The guests' response of Jesus (to themselves)	v.49
The closing command	v.50

The general context

Prior to moving through the text, it will serve us to notice the broad context in which we find this scene. Luke takes pains to disclose who Jesus is by starting his writing off with the infancy of the son of man (1:5-2:52). All the predictions and visitations and accounts of birth highlight the fact that Jesus is the son of the Most High. He is the long expectant One. He is the Messiah who has come to seek and save his people (19:10).

The story line moves forward as we watch the preparation of the son of man for public ministry (3:1-4:13). All of this is somewhat of an introduction to the book. It gives the reader a certainty (cf. 1:4) of who Jesus is and what his ministry is about. As we are taken into Jesus' ministry we become aware of both the scope and nature of this ministry. The rest of the Gospel is concerned with Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50), his journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27) and lastly his passion in Jerusalem (19:28-24:53).

Our passage falls within the ministry in Galilee. This section about his ministry largely has in view Jesus' identity. Last week we noticed this. For example, in 4:22 we read "Is not this Joseph's son"? And in 4:41 we read "[the demons] knew who Jesus was. And in 5:21 we read "who is this". And in 5:30 we read "why do you eat with...sinners"? And in 6:2 we read "why are you doing what is not lawful"? And in 7:16 we read "a great prophet has arisen among us". And in 7:19 we read "Are you the one who is to come"? And in 7:34 we read "Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of...sinners".

The specific context

And in our text for tonight it begins with "if this man were a prophet..." (v.39) and it ends with "who is this" (v.49).

Tonight, right before your eyes we have Jesus & a sinner. We see this as we first notice the setting to the story.

The Setting

In v.36-38 we come upon four characters. 1) a Pharisee named Simon 2) a woman who was a sinner 3) guests at the table (as seen in v.49) 4) Jesus.

The scene opens with one of the Pharisees asking him to eat with him at his house. Jesus accepted the dinner invitation. The Pharisee's name was Simon (according to v.40). We learn from Luke that Pharisees (see v.30) were largely those who rejected Jesus and his ministry. They did not know the true identity of Jesus Christ (though they claimed to know who he was; namely a mere man who needed to be put to death for his blasphemous notion of himself and what he could provide for mankind). They are people who don't need anything. They already are righteous and perfectly secure in their religiosity. They are known as hypocrites; that is, those who pretend to be close to God while their hearts are far from God. They have little concern for people. They have much concern for themselves. And they pride themselves on being separated from sin. (Hence the name "Pharisee" = separated one). Their understanding of sin is faulty. If they didn't touch something or someone unclean, according to their belief they will remain clean. Conversely, if they did touch something or someone unclean, they will be contaminated.

This is Simon the Pharisee.

Next we see someone entering the house that isn't invited. Luke doesn't record her name. She rather is referred to as "a woman of the city who was a sinner". This description influences us to conclude that she likely is a prostitute in the city. Her reputation precedes her. She apparently is allowed to come in to the dinner but will never be allowed to eat at the table.

Luke describes her further. V.37 tells us that "when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house" she came carrying an alabaster flask of ointment. An alabaster flask of ointment was common in the day and used for various reasons; like cosmetics, religious consecrations, medicinal purposes, hospitality (as we see in this passage), preparation for burial (Mk.16:1). Later in Jesus' life we hear his traitor Judas complaining that the ointment poured upon Jesus' feet might have been sold for a large sum of money (Mt.26:9).

This bit of information for the reader about bringing a flask of ointment allows us to see her motive for coming. You can actually "see her heart" by noticing what's in her hand. She longed to express something to Jesus that was astounding and heart moving. We will get to this in a moment.

These descriptions help us to sense the action that now Luke portrays in v.38.

Try to picture with me what is actually occurring. *(Describe in living ways what "standing behind him at his feet, weeping and wetting his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair and non-stop kissing his feet and pouring costly perfume upon his feet" conveys).*

Simon the Pharisee invites Jesus to one of his festive dinners. We don't know whether this Pharisee will be like those of 7:30 who "rejected the purpose of God for themselves". But time will tell.

The two characters who wanted Jesus are exposed when Jesus is present. Simon treats Jesus with no common respect. The woman wants so desperately to see Jesus. And when she sees him she moves over to where he is sitting (In Middle Eastern culture the table was approx. 18" off the ground and the guests around the table would support themselves on their left elbow and the rest of their body would extend off to their right.)

The woman stands over his feet and begins to weep. Her weeping is uncontrollable; pouring out water to the point that the dirt on Jesus' feet is lifted up and taken away. She then kneels down to his feet and undoes her hair (a sign in this culture of a loose woman). Jesus doesn't see this gesture in any other way but humble affections for him. He doesn't stop her. She takes her hair and wipes his feet dry. She pours costly perfume upon his feet and kisses them unceasingly.

What moved her to such public expressions of affection and humility? What did Simon and the guests think of the extravagant expression? What did Jesus make of all this? And what do all the responses that follow this event tell us about the characters in the story and about us who listen to the story?

V.39-49 are the center of the scene. It gives us four responses that will help us understand the message of the passage.

4 Responses

1st Response – Simon to himself

v.39

This verse sets up Jesus' teaching. We read in v.39 that "when...he saw THIS"... When Simon saw how a whore touched Jesus with her broken gratitude and affection he was disgusted. He responded to this event by talking to himself. Here in v.39 we eavesdrop on pharisaic thinking; on how a self-righteous person thinks about Jesus and sinners.

Notice that this first response is not primarily to the woman's sinfulness. He already knows she's scum. No, this response is a response to Jesus' response of the woman. Simon's response is telling. "If this man were a prophet" tells us much about Simon's thoughts regarding himself and regarding Jesus.

His thoughts regarding himself: He thinks his piety and purity are matchless. Because he "knows" who this woman is and what type of person she is he demonstrates his righteousness by distancing himself from her. He cares about holiness so he thinks. And if he even touches dirt like her, he becomes contaminated.

His thoughts regarding Jesus: He has disdain and disregard for Jesus too. Here is how his logic seems to flow.

- If Jesus were a prophet he would know who this woman is.
- And if Jesus knows who this woman is he will distance himself from her like any righteous person would (namely Simon).
- Since Jesus is welcoming all this extravagance he either doesn't know who she is or his concern over holiness is lacking.
- Either way, Simon can reject him and treat him as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners".

2nd Response – Jesus to Simon

v.40-47

Jesus knows what Simon is thinking. In v.40-47 we come to the second response in the text: Jesus to Simon.

This response is in a form of a story.

The story

v.40-42a

In v.40-42 we come to Jesus' story. The story is easy to follow. A certain money lender has two debtors. The one owes him 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii. The lender demonstrates hard to believe mercy. He cancels out both debts.

The point of the story

v.42b-43

In v.42b-43 we find the point of the story. Jesus asks Simon the simple question, "Which of them will love him more?" Simon comes back with a cautious answer, "I suppose the one who had the larger debt". Jesus makes the point: Forgiven much = loves much.

The Application to the story

v.44-47

Now Jesus has him set up to drive home the point and make the application. Notice the "you gave me nothing...she gave me everything" comparison. He goes back and forth from minimum expressions of common courtesy to maximum expressions of affection and gratitude. The point is that the outcast outclasses the Pharisee. The forgiven sinner utterly exceeds the unforgiven hypocrite in public expressions of love for Jesus.

Jesus essentially says, "I know who is touching me. I welcome her not because I don't know who she is nor because I don't care about holiness. I welcome her because she loves me"! Never forget that *Forgiven most produces and expresses most love (i.e. treasured, cherished, adored, awed over, prized)*

The irony in this section is Jesus knows both Simon and the woman. He knows Simon to be a self-righteous hypocrite who is trusting in himself to be right before God.

And He knows the woman to have many sins (cf. v.47), broken over her sin, sensing that Christ is her only hope, confident that He will not reject her when she comes to him vulnerably and humbly out of faith. Jesus knows everyone!

As a result of the story and its point, we see Jesus exposing both people: 1) Simon as a hypocrite and 2) the woman as a forgiven sinner.

3rd Response – Jesus to the Woman

v.48

We now come to Jesus speaking to the woman. And oh, what words she hears. “Your sins are forgiven”. After all that has happened, the abandon expressions of love from the woman and interaction of Jesus with Simon, after all this she hears bondage-breaking, heart-charming, life-changing words: “Your sins are forgiven”.

4th Response – The guests of Jesus (to themselves)

v.49

Coming out of this touching moment, we overhear the fourth and final response to all this. The minor characters of this scene enter on to the scene and say, “Who is this”? They may not be as hardened as Simon but they are still as unbelieving as Simon.

The guests sitting at table were watching all of this. They did not get up and publically worship Jesus. They sat and spoke among themselves these sad, oh so very sad words: “Who is this...” They, like Simon, did not know the identity of Jesus.

The Closing Command

v.50

This leads us to the closing and sweet command found in v.50.

On the basis of faith we now hear the woman is saved. She hears a command given to her by Jesus. It is a command that leads her into peace; a freedom from the strife of sin, a freedom from the power of sin, a freedom to enjoy the blessings of God found in Jesus Christ our Lord. This command I wish for all of us to hear and heed from Jesus. “Go in peace”.

As we wrap up the story for this evening we begin to unwrap the irony to the story.

First, notice Jesus. He knew himself perfectly and he knows Simon perfectly and he knows the woman perfectly. He knows that he is sent to seek and save the lost. He knows that Simon is blinded by his own righteousness. And he knows that the woman with her many sins has faith to see him as her only hope.

Next you see Simon and how he thinks that he knows himself well and that he knows the woman well and that he knows Jesus well. BUT Simon doesn't know himself, the woman or Jesus. He is blind to his self-righteous wickedness. He is blind to a faith-produced extravagant public worship of Jesus. He is blind to the true identity of Jesus the Christ. Left in this state, he can only expect hell.

And now, notice the woman. She knows herself to be “the chief of sinners”. Yet, the reason that this insight doesn't crush her is the fact that she also sees Jesus as the answer to her condition. She

is given faith to see both Jesus purity and pity; his majesty and mercy. She knows herself well. And she knows Jesus well. Her many sins breaks her into humility but doesn't crush her into disparity. At some point, she was given the gift of faith.

This faith brought about gospel worship that:

- comes to Jesus without concern over other people's opinions
- recognizes that the only hope is Christ
- knows that Jesus abundantly pardons the contrite in spirit
- extravagantly conveys love for Jesus publicly
- gladly submits to his commands

As you've listened to this message perhaps you have come to see that to be known by Jesus and not to know Jesus is dangerous. But to be known by Jesus and to know Jesus is heart-felt worship.

Are you glorifying Jesus and gladdening your life through gospel worship? Do you know Him in a saving way? Can you see that in this scene Jesus and a sinner is a beautiful sight? Is this beautiful sight and beautiful thing to you? Oh beloved, look to Jesus by reading more of the gospel of Luke. Stare at every move Jesus makes in this gospel. Carefully listen to each word he utters in this gospel. Notice his body language, his values, his mission, his desires. It is not until we know Jesus as He is seen in the gospel will we have public worship like our sister the "sinner" in this story. Hear by faith Jesus' words: *Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.*