

Simon the Pharisee encounters Jesus

Luke 7:36-50



It was a luxurious banquet given by Simon, a leader among the Pharisees in Galilee. He had invited Jesus to dinner because important people invite important people to dinner. When an important man like Jesus shows up at the synagogue, it was expected that he would be invited to dinner by an important person in the synagogue.

The guest of honor came into the room and reclined on one of the couches placed around the U-shaped table. Since it was a public dinner, people often wandered in from the street and sat on one of the benches that circled the room so that they could hear the conversation and the debate that would occur during the meal.

Jesus' reputation was beginning to grow around Galilee. People kept telling stories about things Jesus had said and done, so Simon wanted to know more about him. Jesus was too independent and often stood aloof from what Pharisees taught about being right with God. Yes, he did some miracles and healings, and was noted for his teaching, but that didn't guarantee that he was a prophet sent from God. So, here was another reason to invite him to dinner. Perhaps Simon could find out more about who this Jesus really was.

Then this woman came into the banquet room, and sat down at the feet of Jesus. Since women weren't invited to these banquets, Simon thought at first that she was a beggar. But this wasn't some common beggar. She was a sinful woman, one of the worst kinds. She sat next to the feet of Jesus with her hair uncovered like sinful women do. The perfumed ointment that she poured out on the feet of Jesus probably cost her two years wages. Jesus also allowed her to touch his feet, something else that shouldn't happen.

To Simon, Jesus didn't seem to have a clue about who she was. Some prophet he was.

Study Guide

A. The Woman who Anointed Jesus

1. Why did the woman come to find Jesus?
2. Read Leviticus 5:1-6. To Simon, it was wrong for the woman to touch Jesus. Based on what this passage says, why would it be wrong?
3. The woman who came to anoint Jesus had to take some risks in order to do it. What were some of those risks?
4. Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Why was this question so unusual?
5. Jesus told a parable to Simon in Luke 7:41-43. How does this parable illustrate the difference between the sinful woman and Simon?

6. Note the faith and love of the woman who anointed Jesus.

- a. What does Jesus say about her faith (7:48-50)?
- b. What is the relationship between her love and her faith?

B. Simon the Pharisee

1. According to vs. 39, Simon says that Jesus could not be a prophet.

- a. Why does he say that?

- b. Read Luke 7:40-49. Is Jesus a prophet or not?

In Israel's legal system, God designates certain objects as holy and other objects as unholy or unclean to the touch. Among the holy objects are the altar and God's sacrificial meats (Ex 29:37; Lev 6:27). For God this material holiness is so real that he declares to his people "whatever touches the altar becomes holy" (Ex 29:37). Equally real is physical contact with anything that God calls unclean. If an Israelite touched any of these objects, they must ritually purify themselves (Lev 5:2-3; 7:19, 21).

2. In the Bible, touching is important.

- ^{Matt 9:28} When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." ³⁰ And their eyes were opened.
- ^{Matt 8:14} When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; ¹⁵ he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him.
- ^{Luke 5:13} Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him.

What does Jesus do in each of these verses?

Was it wrong for Jesus to touch these people? (Read Matthew 23:16-28 for a context).

3. In the parable of the two debtors, what is the challenge that Jesus is giving Simon about how to love God truly, and how to follow Jesus?

Application

1. The perfumed oil that the woman used to anoint Jesus was probably worth about two years' salary. It was probably her life savings and retirement account for the future. But she gave up that future when she poured the oil out on Jesus –she gave up everything for him.

a. Does God ask us if we are willing to give up everything, including our future security, in order to respond to God's love and to follow Christ?

b. What is there in your life that Christ might ask you to give up?

2. Simon wants to be holy and pure, so he separates himself from the company of people whom he believes are sinners. How is this different from Christ?

3. Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, saying:

^{Col 2:20} If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"? ²² All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

a. Ultimately, many of the safeguards and barriers that we set up to keep us from sinning are in themselves sinful. Why?

b. Paul says that these barriers come out of our own strength and understanding (see vs. 22-23). What is the best way to keep barriers like this from happening?

3. Simon shows us with a picture of how Not to respond to sinners. The woman represents the hope that sinners can find God. The parable that Jesus gives is a part of the picture of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Lee Stroebel has written:

You may have found that since you've become a Christian, your unbelieving friends have drifted away as you've become increasingly involved in the social network of the church. It has been said that within two years of becoming a Christian, the average person has already lost the significant relationships he or she once had with people outside the faith. Without frequent heart-to-heart conversations with unchurched people, it's easy to forget how they think...¹

We know that this can happen, but when we are in a country other than our country of origin, we may tend to separate ourselves from people who don't speak our language or have a different culture. We want to be holy and pure before God, but the people we know and meet can be a challenge for us to get to know. Discuss your current situation and relationships. Do you think this has happened to you?

How do we maintain these relationships, and have a testimony that will tell others about our relationship to Christ?

Summary: Look at the woman and Simon from the perspective of what Christ expects from his disciples. What conclusions can you draw from this story about holiness, following Jesus, and the grace of God?

¹ Lee Stroebel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993)