

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 7:36-50

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, April 10, 2016

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 10, 2016**, is from **Luke 7:36-50**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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Luke 7:36-50

(Luke 7:36) One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.

We know nothing about Simon the Pharisee or the unnamed woman before or after this event. We know nothing more than this event tells us and what we can glean or speculate from this event about both of them. Since a Pharisee invited Jesus, he may have wanted the time a dinner would provide to discuss interpretations of the law with Jesus and other dinner guests. The dinner could have been planned to test Jesus.

(Luke 7:37) And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment.

In my opinion, this woman (not Mary Magdalene) had met Jesus previously, had confessed her sins to Jesus, had been forgiven by Jesus, and wanted to thank Jesus for the new life He had graciously given her through faith. She wanted to express her love and thankfulness to Jesus in some concrete way, so she brought an alabaster jar (alabaster is a soft stone that is easily carved) of perfume to anoint Jesus after she learned where He was eating a dinner, even though the dinner was with some Pharisees. She no doubt knew she would be condemned as a sinner in a Pharisee's home, but she would not allow her fear of these judgmental leaders or feelings shame for her former way of life stop her from honoring Jesus before them.

(Luke 7:38) She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Only Jesus, and perhaps His disciples, knew that Jesus had forgiven her and she was no longer living a sinful life. The Pharisee (as Luke reported) certainly believed she still lived a sinful life; however, this thought would have been inconsistent with Jesus' approach to repentant sinners. (For example, Jesus told the woman caught in adultery that He did not condemn her and she should go and sin no more—John 8:11.) The repentant woman was too humble and respectful to interrupt Jesus' meal in the Pharisee's home by speaking publicly. To wash Jesus' feet, she used the only water available to her, her tears. She wept and wept so profusely that her tears washed Jesus' feet and she wiped them dry with her hair. In humility, she kissed Jesus' feet and poured expensive perfume on them in adoration and worship. In some sense, because of the way Jesus had shown forgiving love for her, she treated Him as divine or more than human. Because Jesus was reclining to eat in the fashion of the day, she could come and kneel behind Jesus to wash, dry, and anoint His feet in humble adoration.

(Luke 7:39) Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner."

The Pharisee believed the woman was a sinner by reputation. He did not know whether or not Jesus knew the woman or had met her before. He assumed Jesus knew nothing about her. He assumed that a true prophet would not allow himself to be touched by a sinful woman or any other sinner and become contaminated. He assumed that Jesus was not a true prophet, because Jesus was allowing a sinful woman to touch Him.

(Luke 7:40) Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak."

Jesus did know the woman, and He may have surprised Simon by telling Simon his private thoughts – a prophet and Son of God could easily know Simon's private thoughts. As a prophet, Jesus "answered" what Simon said only to himself. By telling Simon a parable, Jesus gave Simon proof that He knew all about the woman and He would even commend the woman for her actions. In the same parable, Jesus would show Simon that He knew more about Simon's life than Simon's most recent (and wrong) judgment about Jesus and who Jesus really was – Jesus was more than a prophet, and Jesus would soon claim to be more than a prophet as Simon would learn.

(Luke 7:41) "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty."

Jesus' parable focused on gratitude and how people express their gratitude. Jesus commended gratitude on other occasions too; for example, when Jesus healed ten lepers, only one returned to thank Him (see Luke 17:17). Jesus' parable also focused on forgiveness, but rather than speak directly about forgiveness, Jesus appealed Simon's

understanding of finances to teach him some spiritual truths. If a denarius was one day's wage for an agricultural worker (and no one knows for certain); then, it might take longer than a year for a worker to pay the larger debt, and less than two months for a worker to pay the smaller debt. Because they needed to provide food, clothing, and shelter for themselves (and possibly a family) with one day's wage, those working for such low wages could never repay either debt. Similarly, it is impossible for sinners to repay God (or make restitution to God and others) for all the sins they have committed.

(Luke 7:42) When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?"

Neither borrower could repay the lender. According to the customs of the day, the lender could have thrown both men into prison until they or their family or their friends could pay the debt (see Matthew 18:22-35 on Jesus' parable on debt, prison, and forgiveness). In the parable that Jesus told Simon the Pharisee, the lender forgave both debtors. Note: the word "forgave" means more than simply "canceled" – the lender freely (not under compulsion) showed kindness and forgave both debtors (by grace, the lender cancelled or erased their debts). Based on the amount forgiven, who should have loved the lender more? Jesus knew the answer to His question was obvious. The word "love" is from the Greek word "agape," which is love in a moral sense, love that shows goodwill to others or expresses benevolence to someone in practical, helpful ways.

(Luke 7:43) Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Simon the Pharisee probably recognized Jesus was forcing him give a commonsense obvious answer that he did not want to give. He may have suspected Jesus was going to give a spiritual application to Simon's logical answer about finances; therefore, Simon replied, "I suppose" rather than totally commit himself. Jesus said Simon had answered correctly. The person who was forgiven more than the other would show more thankfulness, goodwill, and affection toward the lender than the person forgiven little.

(Luke 7:44) 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair."

Next, Jesus chose to compare Simon the Pharisee with the "sinful" woman. Which one was forgiven more and which one accordingly loved more? Jesus did not describe the state of each one's heart; rather, He revealed by their actions the obvious state of each one's heart. Jesus first told Simon to look at the woman and consider what she was doing; later Jesus would tell Simon why she did this. Then Jesus forced Simon to look at himself and consider what he did not do, was not doing, and why. Simon thought so little of Jesus that he did not even offer Jesus a customary foot washing or even water for His feet so Jesus could wash His own feet before dinner, which was almost a social necessity before reclining with others to eat. Compare that lack of love and respect to the woman's demonstration of love and respect for Jesus! Simon was obviously selfish and self-centered, who probably only wanted Jesus to have dinner so he could test Jesus and

try to prove that Jesus was a fraud and not a prophet before his invited guests. If he had even the slightest notion that Jesus was a prophet or godly person, Simon would have proudly and ostentatiously called a slave to wash Jesus' feet in front of his guests.

(Luke 7:45) You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet.

A kiss would have been a customary social greeting for a friend or family member, and surely for one who was highly regarded or respected and valued personally. As a disciple of Jesus, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47). A kiss could be compared to a handshake or to bowing when greeting someone. Simon should have kissed Jesus as a sign of respect or thanksgiving for Jesus coming to his house for dinner. Jesus wanted Simon to compare his sin of neglect and worse to the woman expressing great love, adoration, and respect for Jesus by offering Him the only water she had (her tears) and her kisses. Perhaps she felt too unworthy to lift up her head or look into Jesus' face.

(Luke 7:46) You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Whether it was an expected custom or honor or not, Jesus said Simon the Pharisee had not anointed His head with oil – a sign and symbol that was used to appoint someone a high priest or king. The prophet Samuel anointed the heads of King Saul and King David with oil (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13). If Simon were a prophet or knew who Jesus was, he might have anointed Jesus' head with oil, because Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One. The woman saw that Jesus was a king and more than a king and she wanted to anoint Him (as led by the Holy Spirit), but she was not a prophet – she was a forgiven sinner – so she humbly anointed Jesus' feet. Later, in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany, God planned for a woman to anoint Jesus' head with pure nard (Mark 14:3).

(Luke 7:47) Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

Though the woman may not have known as much about Jesus as His disciples, she certainly knew more about Jesus than Simon the Pharisee. Simon did know that only God can forgive sins, and Jesus told Simon and reassured the woman that her sins were forgiven. She knew Jesus had given her freedom from bondage to sin, deliverance from guilt, the peace of God, peace within herself, moral renewal, spiritual purity, a clean conscience, a personal rebirth and new personhood that only God the Father and God the Son can give, and the joy of the Holy Spirit. All this and more she knew by her experience with Jesus; therefore, she had great love for Jesus and she could not help but show that love publicly in front of what she knew would be a hostile audience. Simon's behavior revealed his sinfulness, perhaps Jesus' words and the work of the Holy Spirit reached his conscience and convicted him of sin so he would repent and seek forgiveness. But at that dinner, it was obvious that Simon had not even been forgiven a little. His lack of love showed. Based on Jesus' claims that He was divine and more than

a prophet because only God can forgive sins, after this event Simon may have joined those who wanted to kill Jesus. Or perhaps Simon asked Jesus to forgive him too.

(Luke 7:48) Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus often forgave sins and proved He could forgive sins by healing people at the same time (see Matthew 9:6). Jesus spoke directly to the woman that indeed her sins were forgiven. He gave her any reassurance she may have needed. Her expression of love did not earn or merit her forgiveness; rather, because God in Jesus Christ had forgiven her she expressed her love for Jesus and Jesus wanted her to know that her expression of adoration and love to Him had been acceptable and accepted by the Father and Him.

(Luke 7:49) But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

The Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy when He forgave sins: “Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ . . . [Jesus said,] ‘But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So he said to the man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’” (Mark 2:6-7, 10-11— see also Luke 5:21-24). Even after Jesus rose from the dead, Peter answered this question of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law: “The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins” (Acts 5:30-31). Simon and the other guests at Simon’s dinner were obviously teachers of the law and Pharisees who had probably gathered to criticize, examine, and pass judgment against Jesus. Instead, by Simon’s actions, he passed judgment on himself, if indeed he respected what Jesus had to tell him and the Holy Spirit convicted him of sin—which might have led him to Jesus and saving faith.

(Luke 7:50) And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Speaking to her directly, Jesus emphasized that the woman’s faith in Him, a faith expressed so lovingly by her deeds for Him, had saved her. Jesus knew she had a sincere faith in Him, and He wanted her to know that her faith was not misplaced and she had rightly understood the truth about Him. She was forgiven and she was saved. She was not under condemnation by God or Jesus, no matter what the Pharisees who were teachers of the law might say about her or Him. Jesus accepted what she had done for Him and she did not need to do anything more to show her love and thankfulness to Him; therefore, Jesus told her to “go in peace.” She could go with her heart full of joy, assurance, and the peace that only Jesus can give – the peace that passes all (or is beyond) understanding (Philippians 4:7). Until they repented and came to trust in Jesus, Simon and the other Pharisees who rejected Jesus and His teachings could not enjoy the peace that only God can give to repentant sinners who trust in Jesus; neither would they love God and Jesus as much as this repentant and forgiven woman of faith.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What are some things that Jesus did and said in the house of Simon the Pharisee that showed Jesus was a prophet?
2. What are some things Jesus did and said to Simon the Pharisee that showed Jesus was claiming to be God (or the Son of God)?
3. What did the woman do for Jesus that showed her deep love for Him?
4. Which comes first, love for God and then forgiveness for sins by God or forgiveness for sins by God and then love for God? Give a reason for your answer.
5. What saved the woman? How do you know?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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