

# The Parables of Jesus: The Two Debtors

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[ 0 : 00 ] My name's Kent Dixon, and I am the lead pastor here. Can you tell it's summertime? It's COVID summertime. Look around you. Wow. We're like a small group.

It's good. It's very good. Let's pray. Holy and gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of life, for the gift of your son.

Lord, you are exalted as we have prayed and sung this morning. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Lord, lead us through trials.

Lead us through suffering and sorrow, challenges and struggles, the tired times and the dark places. Lord, we ask you to be with those who weep or who cannot sleep, who have no peace or who seek release.

Lord, lead us with grace, with love, and with your peace. Fill us with hope, with patience, with stamina, Lord, and the ability to endure and persevere.

[ 1 : 13 ] Lord, transform us in your image, in and through the example of your son and in the power of your name. Lord, transform us to grow, to understand, to see.

Lord, transform us that we can be made whole. And in that wholeness, may we be the hands and feet of Christ. And it's in his precious name that we pray all these things.

Amen. My friends, welcome here for this Sunday. Can you believe it? Sunday, August 1st. Wow. Time is flying by.

We're continuing in our sermon series this morning, the parables of Jesus. And we'll also be celebrating, as I mentioned before, celebrating communion together.

Throughout this sermon series, we've been looking at these familiar stories, and some that I think have turned out to be less familiar, or even relatively new. But we're exploring these parables, the stories that Jesus told quite frequently throughout the New Testament.

[ 2 : 27 ] And my prayer for us, as always, has been may God grant us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the amazing truth that is found in these stories of Jesus.

So this morning, we're going to be looking at one last example of a parable. No, we're not done yet. Of a parable, though, that falls within the category that some scholars refer to as parables of the Christian life.

And as a refresher, you may remember that we consider the Christian life means a life that is connected to God through prayer, through perseverance, through trusting Him and being faithful in our circumstances.

And you probably notice that in most Bible translations, you find descriptive subheadings before passages of Scripture. And essentially, those subheadings set the stage, right?

They set the context or the main topic of what comes next. And in fact, if you look at Scripture, many of Jesus' parables have their own headings in the text.

[ 3 : 34 ] When those headings were established, some of them were ascribed to parables. But also, we recognize, some don't. Some of the parables are embedded within other stories.

And so, perhaps, in some ways, some of those parables become less familiar because they're not set aside for us. They're not set apart. And perhaps that's the case for you, that some of those that aren't laid out or identified specifically become less familiar or maybe something that you haven't noticed.

Well, our parable this morning falls into this category of the Christian life, and it's found in Luke 7, verses 38 to 50. And it is under a heading. There's a couple of possibilities that I came across.

A sinful woman anoints Jesus' feet is one. You may also have a translation that has the heading with this variation. Jesus anointed by a sinful woman.

Luke 7, verses 38 to 50. If you want to turn to it in your Bibles, open it on your phone or listen as I read. Now, one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him.

[ 4 : 49 ] So, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume.

And as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him, Jesus, saw this, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner. Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher, he said.

And it's at this point in the passage that we come to our parable. And in the NIV translation, it's only 43 words, this parable of Jesus.

[ 5 : 54 ] It's most often known as the parable of the two debtors. Jesus continues, Two men owed money to a certain money lender.

One owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them do you think would love him more?

Simon replied, Well, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled. You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then he, Jesus, turned toward the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I came into your house. You didn't give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You didn't give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet.

You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

[ 7 : 09 ] Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven loves little, pardon me, loves little.

Then Jesus said to her, your sins are forgiven. The other guests began to say among themselves, who is this who even forgives sins?

Jesus said to the woman, your faith has saved you. Go in peace. The word of the Lord. In this passage, so is this passage and this parable familiar to you?

Or is it relatively new? I see some nods, I see nods, and then I see head shakes. So it is familiar. A 43 word parable tucked within another passage may actually pass by relatively unnoticed, right?

But we're going to pause here this morning because the circumstances and Jesus' message are as important to us today, right here and right now, as they were when Jesus spoke them and Luke recorded them.

[ 8 : 29 ] Our parable this morning is set, told in the setting of a dinner party. We learn that Simon the Pharisee has invited Jesus to dinner at his home.

And while we don't get the full guest list, right, there isn't a lot of description, it's fair to assume that there were other religious leaders here. Simon was a Pharisee.

There were likely other notable or prestigious people at the event as well. This was a special dinner. And Jesus was someone who was on people's radar.

They had taken note of him. They had taken note of the way he acted, the way he treated other people, the way he taught, and the way he spoke.

Seems awfully nice, right? Jesus is the guest of honor at a dinner party and maybe even a party that was thrown specifically for him. But we need to remember something here.

[ 9 : 33 ] This is important. Jesus' host for this dinner was Simon, a Pharisee. We don't have to fast forward very far in the gospel narratives to recognize that it was the Pharisees who were ultimately instrumental in the arrest, the conviction, the beating, and ultimately the execution of Jesus, the Pharisees.

So I'd suggest if you asked a random person on the street these days for their impression of Jesus, even if they weren't a Christian perhaps, if they didn't recognize Jesus as being the Son of God, I think we'd still get responses like a good teacher perhaps, a holy man maybe even.

Some might even view him as somehow the inspiration or the founder of the Christian faith. For the average person of that day who is aware of Jesus, they likely saw him, they would have seen him as a great teacher, a good man who had things to say, good things to say, possibly even as a prophet or the Son of God.

So why is it in that context, why did the Pharisees seem to distrust him almost immediately? Why did they seem to continuously try to trick or test or trap him?

Well, I'm going to suggest a few reasons for that. First, not surprisingly, they may have been jealous of Jesus, jealous of his audience, of his influence, especially relating to spiritual issues which they would have seen as their domain.

[11:31] Hands off, this is our business, not yours, Jesus. Second, with the ways Jesus questioned and challenged their authority or their views of things, he clearly made them more and more angry over time.

Can you recognize that as you reflect on that progression of events? This man dared, dared to mingle with sinners, dared to mingle with people the Pharisees have deemed, have decreed to be lowlifes and the rejects of society, the absolute worst people.

Jesus hung out with them. And third, the Pharisees grew to hate Jesus because he exposed them. He revealed that it wasn't the human religious authorities at all who had the power to set a moral standard for humanity.

but God himself whom Jesus ultimately declared himself to be. You see that?

[12:48] The Pharisees were not fans of having their authority or their influence, let alone their ideas or their opinions questioned or challenged.

Jesus was a threat to their status, one that they would ultimately try to eradicate. So let's return to the dinner party with new context.

Here we are at a dinner party where Jesus is the guest of a Pharisee named Simon. And the other guests at this party would have likely at least been curious or skeptical of Jesus.

If not, even leaning towards seeing him as a heretic or a crazy person. So I believe then we have a better sense of this dinner party, right?

Perhaps not so much a celebration of its guest as perhaps an environment for examination or even challenge or judgment.

[13:51] man. But Jesus, we recognize, never seemed to be that concerned about situations like that, right? But you can imagine that maybe some of the other guests or the host would have been feeling some tension.

So how, as we read our passage in the middle of this intimate by invitation only dinner party, was a woman able to slip in unnoticed and begin kissing and washing Jesus' feet?

Have you ever thought of that? Maybe it hasn't crossed your mind, but it stuck out to me as odd. How often have you had guests over for dinner and someone starts foot washing? Just, oh, surprise!

Well, remember though, the text explains this to us. It was customary for people to recline at the table during a meal. So the guests would have been relaxing, they would have been resting back on pillows or leaning on the table, so Jesus' feet would have been exposed.

And they would have left their sandals at the entrance to the home. So as we read, this woman really humbles herself here. She enters the home of a religious leader.

[15:12] Simon was not unknown to the community. She is not a guest. She has a reputation in the community. But here she is.

She kneels beside Jesus' feet. We learn that she brought an alabaster jar of perfume. So what's an alabaster jar?

Well, it would have been an ornate and valuable object. And the perfume inside of it would have been very, very valuable. And so naturally, she takes this expensive jar of equally expensive perfume and begins to pour it on Jesus' feet.

His likely dirty, dusty, probably smelly feet. And she's clearly moved by just being in Jesus' presence.

Because we read that she begins weeping. but it doesn't end there. Not only does she pour expensive perfume on his feet, but she essentially washes his feet with her tears and her hair.

[16:30] I think for most of us, even finding a hair in your dinner is gross. Washing someone's feet with your hair? her? I couldn't do a very good washing job, obviously.

But imagine that. It's not just an idea that's really occurred. Are you moved by that image? Are you moved by the woman's actions and the way she humbled herself so deeply?

Are you even struck by the risk that she would have taken showing up here in this place and doing what she did? Well, maybe we're struck by the significance of this, but not Simon.

Because as we read in the text, he seems to miss all of it. He completely misses it. Any of the significance, any of the touching sentiment that's shown, and he remains stuck.

He remains stuck in the status of this woman and status of sin. Our text indicates to us that he's aware of the kind, I'm using air quotes, of woman that she is, and he just moves from there.

[17:50] He moves from there to judging Jesus for seemingly not having the prophetic awareness or simply the good sense to avoid this kind of woman like the plague.

plague. There's a phrase that has new meaning for us these days, avoid it like the plague. And then we come to the parable in our text.

It's short and sweet, but it's mightily, mightily convicting. Regardless of whatever else is taking place, regardless of what preconceptions he may have had about Jesus, Simon still seems eager to learn from him and he refers to him as teacher.

This short parable is one about debt and debtors, owing someone for something that can never be repaid.

Imagine an eternally renewing mortgage or credit card debt. debt. The debts that are involved in this parable are 550 denarii.

[19:06] These are huge sums of money in that day. Huge with significant value. We've talked before about a denarii, a single coin, being worth a day's wages or even for some a year's wages.

And we're talking about multiples of that amount. these would have been fortunes that were owed. And yet the lender, we read, forgives these debts.

It's not just a temporary reprieve, it's not a payday loan that you have to receive at 300% of the original investment, but we read that he cancelled them.

It was as though these debts never existed. It was as though in the ledger where they were written, the page would have been torn out as though it were never there.

Simon clearly gets the basic math here because he recognizes that this larger debt, so simple math, the larger debt would have yielded the best or the biggest response from the debtor.

[20:13] That makes sense, doesn't it? But here's where Jesus turns into full-on conviction mode. He turns the tables on Simon's judgment because as far as customs and conventions would have gone at that time, Simon blew it completely.

In focusing all his attention on what he perceived to be this woman's sin, Simon completely lost focus. he committed several social errors in the process and Jesus outlines them for him clearly.

So while you were distracted, Jesus implies, he neglected to wash Jesus' feet, which would have been the most basic courtesy extended to guests because imagine sandaled feet on dusty roads get very, very dirty.

Simon didn't anoint Jesus' head with oil, which to us in our society and our customs we can't really relate to.

But it would have been a common sign of respect paid by a host to their guests. Did everyone else get oil on their head? Perhaps. But especially the guests of honor would have been given this treatment.

[21:42] judgment. Jesus says, you didn't even kiss me. A customary greeting to bring someone into your home, to show the most basic sense of kindness and hospitality and generosity.

Couldn't be bothered. So did Simon, a recognized religious leader with social status, clearly, somehow feel he was too good for Jesus?

Too good to recognize him certainly for his own status, which he deserved, but at the very least his equal or even a guest?

Or was it that he was so focused on quizzing Jesus, so focused on judging him and judging this woman that he missed that basic, humble, and hospitable attitude of a host, of loving, last week, his neighbor?

Right? We talked about that. The woman's behavior is such a contrast, isn't it? She recognized who she was.

[22:54] This was not news to her. She knew what she had done. She knew what she deserved. She knew that she was judged and rejected by society, and yet she also recognized Jesus for who he was, her Lord and Savior.

She gave everything that she had in gratitude to Jesus. She humbled herself before him and literally fell to her knees.

By contrast, Simon sacrificed nothing. He didn't acknowledge Jesus as an honored guest.

He wasn't willing to humble himself before him, or it seems to even recognize him as a peer who deserved the same status as he did.

Friends, in this story, it's the grateful prostitute of all people, not the stingy religious leader whose sins are forgiven.

[ 24 : 09 ] Talk about circumstances being contrary to expectations, right? It's not position that's clearly valued here, position or status, but perspective.

In this story, a person rejected by society and guilty of many sins has forgiven. Not for the acts that she's done for Jesus, it's not that stuff that redeems her, but it's her faith.

It's the faith that she demonstrated by recognizing him for who he claimed to be. Not only does she recognize him for that, she recognizes him for that in hostile territory.

friends, it's by God's grace that we're redeemed of our sins. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, but this woman's actions displayed her true faith.

Her actions showed what her heart was, where her heart was oriented. And it's that faith that Jesus honored. This parable presents such a stark contrast for us.

[ 25 : 34 ] Are we able to distance ourselves from our selfish perspectives on our lives? Are we able to be reminded, perhaps daily if necessary, that Jesus has forgiven our sins?

Amen? I hope we are. Because only by recognizing the depth of our sin can we fully appreciate the complete forgiveness, the depth of the forgiveness that God offers us.

That debt, our debt of sin, is not postponed or delayed. it is canceled. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God has a different view of our sin.

And we read about that view in Psalms 103, verse 8 to 12. You don't have to turn, you can hear it here. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. Do you hear that? He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.

[ 27 : 08 ] I love this. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.

This part I remember so powerfully resonating with me when I was just a wee fella. As far as the east is from the west, how far?

Pretty far. So far as has he removed our transgressions from us. how far is the east from the west? Never ending. We recognize this morning that Jesus has rescued everyone, those who see him as the son of God, those who call him as Lord, regardless of the depth of their sin or if they were relatively good people.

my friends, do you appreciate the wideness of God's mercy? Are you grateful for his forgiveness in your life?

[ 28 : 19 ] Amen.