

Supper at Simon's

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Date: 11 May 2025

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[0 : 00] Hello, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Richard and I'm part of the membership! It's my privilege to be preaching to you this morning. Many, many, many, many, many, many years ago! It was coming up to the end of year exams. In our physics, we had two topics that we were going to be examined on.

For the sake of the fact that I can't remember what the two topics were, we call them topic one and topic two. So we all revised for topic one first and turned up for topic one exam, turned over the exam papers, there were questions on topic two. So it's always a great relief that the verses that are read on the on the top there are the verses I prepared a sermon on this morning.

This is a next in our series on meals with Jesus. We started with the greatest party ever a couple of weeks ago. I think, where do you go from there? And last week, we had lunch with Levi.

Peter read this morning's passage and it talked about an evening meal, so I think we can call this one supper with Simon. But it's very much not a case of come dine with me, as we don't hear anything about the food that Jesus ate or the menus that were on offer at the different places that he went for meals.

And of course, the food is not the important thing on these occasions. At the different meals we read about and that we'll be looking at, where Jesus was present, it is the actual activities and conversations and discussions and stories that were told and happened on these occasions that are important, not what was actually at.

[1 : 51] The one we're looking at this morning is when Jesus was invited to a Pharisee's house and someone else turns up at the meal who was not invited, a lady from the same area who is described as a sinner.

Although we are not actually told what her particular sin or sinning entailed, there is a hint in the passage that maybe she was a prostitute. But it's not clear by any means that that was true. Indeed, there are lots of other reasons why she might be called a sinner.

And just a few that came to mind were maybe she worked on the Sabbath, maybe she was trading in non-kosher food, maybe she was involved in idol worship, would have been even worse.

We're not told in this passage what the nature of her sin was. And I think therefore it's important that we don't know exactly what her sin was. And that is not of relevance for this story.

Now, those of you who know your Gospels well will know that there is a similar story in all four Gospels in the New Testament about a woman coming and anointing Jesus in some way or another.

[3 : 08] One we're looking at this morning, as we've seen, is from Luke. And we're going to have a quick look and see why this is different to the other three versions. And if you like, in the way of exams coming up everywhere, compare and contrast the different versions. So very briefly, the other three versions in the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and John, all take place in Bethany, whereas the one we're looking at this morning takes place, we're not sure exactly where, but either in Nain or Capernaum.

The other three all take place in the final week of Jesus' life, whereas this one is definitely cited as being a much earlier occasion. In some of them, the woman concerned is unnamed, and in one case we are told it is Mary. In none of the other three versions is the woman that comes described as a sinner. In two versions, they talk about Simon the leper. In one, it's the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, and this one, it's Simon the Pharisee. Two of them have Jesus' head being anointed with perfume, and the other two with the feet being anointed with perfume. And again, the account we're looking at this morning is different to the other three, in which it includes tears, wiping with hair, and kissing the feet, something that's not a feature of the other versions. So there's enough in the different stories to suggest that although these episodes are similar, they actually represent three different occasions, and that this story in Luke is a unique version, and not just an adapted or edited version of one of the other stories. Matthew and Mark refer to Simon the leper, and in those stories there is no rebuke to the person called Simon, but the disciples are rebuked. In John, there is a rebuke for Judas. In this account, there's a rebuke to Simon the Pharisee.

That's what I've tried to summarise. I couldn't get it onto one neat little slide. So if you want a copy of that, I'll leave it at the front for you to look through, and it goes through the four different versions. So the woman, anonymous, anonymous, anonymous, or Mary. Last week, last week, last week, early in his ministry. Simon the leper, Simon the leper, Simon the Pharisee, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus House, and so on through the different examples.

So the example we're looking at, or the account we're looking at today, contrasts with the others in a number of respects, both in the detail of the actions, but also in the teaching that results from the encounter. So let us look a bit further at some of the things that are going on in this story.

Simon, who was the host in this story, did not greet Jesus with a kiss, or supply a servant to wash Jesus' feet. And this may be thought of as, at best, a bit rude, and at worst, and then said that Jesus, who ate and drank, must be a drunkard and a glutton, because he did it with sinners. She cried on Jesus' feet, and tears can represent all being outpouring, and that would seem to be more in keeping with what's going on here in this account. Whichever way you look at it, letting down her hair and wiping her tears off Jesus' feet, it was very surprising, maybe even being able to read Simon's mind, comes up with this challenging parable about a man who has two people who owe him money. One who owes him a small amount, one who owes him a very long amount, and did not do what might have been expected of a reasonable host when Jesus turned up for the meal.

[7 : 08] And that the woman who had not been invited, but had gatecrashed the action, was expressing her love and her gratitude for all that Jesus had done, that she had seen Jesus do, and for not judging her or dismissing her for what she was doing. As we've read, Jesus then turns to the woman and says her that her sins are forgiven.

And that prompts the other guests to ask themselves, who is this who even forgives sins? And Jesus again speaks to the woman, this time saying, your faith has saved you.

So that then is hopefully giving a little bit of context, more context to the bare bones of the story, and having to think about some of the things that might have been or might have been going on.

And it will be easy at this point just to ask, do you realise how much Jesus has forgiven you, and how much you should love him? And that would be a legitimate approach and a legitimate question.

But I want to have a look at the different participants in this story, and maybe challenge our attitude, both towards Jesus and towards other people.

[8 : 25] Let's start with the host, Simon the Pharisee. His attitude towards Jesus would seem to be somewhat ambiguous. He clearly sees Jesus as an important teacher, and maybe having him for a meal was a way of spending time with him to see if he was more than just another charismatic rabbi.

But he certainly doesn't seem to think that Jesus is very important, because he doesn't extend to him the usual courtesies of an honoured guest. We also have the sinful woman, not afraid, if you'll pardon the expression, to let her hair down.

She's not afraid to show her devotion in front of strangers, and not afraid to be demonstrative about it. She was prepared to spend money, to buy the alabaster jar and perfume, to worship Jesus, and she was both submissive and intimate.

And then we have the other guests, about whom very little is said, apart from the fact that they ask themselves, who is this Jesus, who even forgives sins? Something which, earlier in Luke, the Pharisees and teachers taught only God can do.

And finally, of course, we have Jesus. Jesus, who on the one hand, chides Simon, without anger, for his lack of manners, and on the other, does not chide the sinful woman, for her the rather embarrassing-sounding, very personal and intimate form of worship.

[10 : 00] So, here then are the questions I believe we should be asking ourselves, having read this passage. And I think, hopefully, the slides will come up.

They may not tie exactly in time with how I've got them here, but here are the questions, and I'll run through them. Janine may or may not be able to keep up or tell where I've got to, because they're not exactly the same as what I've got written here.

So, the first question is, do you have an opinion about Jesus? Because, ultimately, the answer to that question decides your eternal fate.

Do you have an opinion about Jesus? And if so, what is it? Do you think he was just a very charismatic, first-century Jewish rabbi? Maybe you think he was deluded.

Someone who said he could destroy the temple and rebuild it again. Someone who said that he was, or implied he was one with God. Or do you believe he's someone who really can forgive your sins?

[11 : 08] Or maybe you haven't looked at the evidence properly yet for yourself. So, are you prepared to take a proper look at who Jesus is? Or are you going to dismiss him out of hand?

Maybe you have had a proper look at who Jesus is, and you've decided that, yes, he is the Messiah. He is the Saviour. Maybe you have actually already invited him into your home, or into your life.

But maybe you're not taking proper notice of him now he's there. You're not giving the proper courtesies that you should do. You're not taking notice of him in the way that you should.

Or maybe you're just on the margins, watching what other people are doing, and what their approach is, and deciding whether to follow the crowd, rather than follow what God wants you to do.

Do you recognise your need for forgiveness and mercy from Jesus, and also know that only he is the one that can give it?

[12 : 13] Are you prepared to be emotionally real in your worship of Jesus? And do you recognise your need for a close, personal relationship with Jesus, not keeping him at arm's length, like Simon did, but getting up close, like the woman did?

Do you know how to chide someone gently when they have been rude or bad-mannered? I made a little note here.

Jesus didn't start his story with, just want to speak to you in love, Simon. He actually did speak to him in love, gently.

A question that may not be so relevant in our worship services, but maybe it will be one day, or maybe in other places you go. But how well do you cope if someone near you is expressing their worship in an extravagant or emotional way?

Do you sidle away from them because you're embarrassed, or do you rejoice in the freedom that they have? What welcome would you or me give to a sinner who gatecrashed one of your meals, one of your parties, who gatecrashed, came in to one of our services, or interrupted the sermon, or interrupted quiet prayer, or the communion time, with tears or wailing?

[13 : 52] A number of different questions, depending on where you see yourself. If you've not yet decided about Jesus, I would urge you not to delay deciding.

If Jesus is present in your life already, but you are not engaging with him personally, be assured it is worth the effort. If you don't know how to deal with people who upset or embarrass you, then learn from Jesus' example.

If you don't know how to worship him, or are self-conscious about it, ask him to help you. And maybe above all else, know that Jesus can and does forgive you all your sins if you come to him in faith.

And he will set you free to know, love, and worship him in true and real relationship. Amen.