

# The Awkward Dinner Guest

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, now, if someone you knew were to ask you directly, how is your debt? Would that make you feel just a little bit anxious?

How anxious do you think Simon the Pharisee became in this story when he invited Jesus to his house, when the woman anointed Jesus with her tears and ointment, and, of course, then when Jesus told the parable of two debtors, and then also this was a very curious observation, too, in the passage, when Jesus looked at the woman but spoke to Simon.

Well, now, Jesus isn't afraid or anxious about bringing the good news to bear on every dimension and reality of life, and this one, if you look closely and read it again, has every aspect or many aspects of money, that is, the debt, sex, the woman who was a sinner of the city, and there's certainly a power dynamic that's going on as well, isn't there?

But Jesus doesn't seem to be too worried about upsetting his host, who isn't very gracious to him, and neither is the woman of the city a sinner, worried about upsetting this respectable religious leader, because she's placed all of her trust in the man who's forgiven her of her sins, that is, Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, as our title for this sermon suggests, this was kind of a really awkward dinner party, don't you think? Which makes for an interesting text in our series called Table Grace, Practicing the Hospitality of God.

[ 1 : 44 ] In Luke's story, which is called Sinful Woman Forgiven, by the ESV translators, which I think is a really good title, Jesus uses this dinner party to contrast two responses to his forgiveness, his friendship, his grace, his hospitality.

And so I'm going to look at these two contrasts with you, and I'll just give you a few images to kind of bracket these or head these. One is actually that of a head or the face of Christ, as well as the one who's hosting him, that is Simon, and then the other one is that of the foot or a toe. So from head to foot, head to toe, we actually have this contrast of a response to Jesus' forgiveness and the peace that he offers to this woman, but also to all people.

So let's look at this first one under the heading of maybe a head, or the face of Jesus. The head also, though, the one who is hosting him, and that is Simon.

Well, now Jesus makes his way into many houses in Luke's gospel. He finds himself often in the homes of tax collectors and sinners and ordinary people. And he's at peace on every occasion, but he's also in complete command no matter where he is.

[ 3 : 04 ] He brings peace and salvation upon entering the house of a host, and he offers this peace and salvation to guests that are gathered there at the beginning, as well as at the end.

This time, he's in a different kind of home, though, with a different set of guests. In this instance, unlike others, he finds himself hosted by a religious expert, a Pharisee named Simon, and he and his colleagues were masters of biblical literature.

They garnered much control and management of the life and faith of Israel. And everything and every thought had its place as far as they were concerned, and they saw that it actually stayed in that place.

Their place was at the top, these religious experts, though. They were kind of the head, and sometimes quite literally when they gathered at a table of recognition. These men were respectable and honored and feared.

They were determined and devoted and driven. They could have written the seven habits of highly effective people. They were the spiritual muscle and manipulation of Israel's faith.

[ 4 : 17 ] One can't help but wonder if this religious expert's motives for hospitality that day were somewhat covert and controlled. It was kind of the status quo for him, maybe.

Simon had a place for Jesus, and maybe that day he just wanted to put Jesus in his place. But there was someone quite out of place in this house, a woman of the city, a sinner, as she's described.

And the Pharisee soon found out that he wasn't actually in as much control as he thought. And so you know the story. In verses 37 to 38, the woman makes something of a scene.

In verse 39, Simon issues a kind of a criticism, though silently, almost underneath his breath. In verses 40 to 42, Jesus inserts a kind of a conviction and an examination.

And I wonder, do you find yourself in situations like this sometimes? Not exactly, I know, but in control of your spiritual life. You may not think of yourself like Simon, and for the record, I don't think of you in those terms either.

[ 5 : 27 ] But I'm more likely, actually, to think and act like Simon as a clergy. But while you may not have control of others' lives like Simon, you are in control of your life to a greater degree than most people.

And then all of a sudden, you lose grip on a situation. Someone or something intrudes your life. It would be okay if it were a manageable threat to your control, like, you know, an illness or a job loss or marital problems or death.

Not that those are easy things to manage. But in this story, it's not just an intrusion. It's worse than that. It's an intruder. A woman of the city. A sinner.

Sometimes in your story, it's also a sinner. Maybe not a woman of the city, but someone who requires a little bit or a lot of extra grace. He or she doesn't treat Jesus like you do.

Well, Jesus uses this intrusion, this intruder, for his and for our sake. Jesus has Simon and us in his place.

[ 6 : 34 ] And he speaks and teaches Simon's language to him and to us, which is money. It's our language too. Jesus says this. He says, A certain moneylender had two debtors.

One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. And when they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now, which of them will love him more?

This is a conviction and examination, but for the purpose of transformation. You see, debt in this case equals the consequence of sin.

And debt today isn't all that bad, or so it seems. At best, we can pay it back. At worst, we can declare bankruptcy. But in that day, it was far worse.

Debt meant imprisonment. And that's the penalty of sin. But the power of forgiveness is greater than that. Cancellation, in this case, and spiritually means forgiveness.

[ 7 : 41 ] It's deleted, forgotten, as if it never happened. And Simon gets the answer right to Jesus' question, but you wonder if he really actually got it.

It might all be in Simon's head and never actually converting his heart and his will and his soul. But there's someone else in this story who actually got it, I think, who demonstrates that she did.

And so we move from kind of the head of this man to the foot of Jesus with this woman then. In this case, Jesus with the woman draws out this clear and convincing contrast between Simon and the sinful woman who welcomed Jesus with water for cleansing and respect.

Who wondered about Jesus with a kiss of adoration and appreciation. And who worshipped Jesus with costly ointment for a king and a savior.

Simon, by way of contrast, offered nothing, nothing to Jesus. But this sinner surrendered everything for him. And Jesus is quick to point this out.

[ 8 : 59 ] And why does he point this out? Well, one reason is, and let's look at the meaning of the parable as this. In the parable, no matter how little or great the debt, debt is debt.

Debt always in prison, though sometimes shorter, other times longer. The greater the debt, though Jesus points out, the greater the love for the one who forgives it.

Jesus says, Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven. For she loved much. Jesus forgives the woman.

He cancels sin like debt. It is completely deleted on the spiritual ledger. And so the woman acknowledges her sin. She doesn't dismiss it.

She accepts the forgiveness that Jesus has for her. And then she expresses this adoration and love for the one who forgives her. The shock is that of all people, Simon, not the sinner, should get this.

[ 10 : 02 ] He has the law and he knows it completely. Which shows him how far short he falls of the glory of God. Yet he uses it to prove his perfection.

To keep control, actually, on his life and others as well. But the woman experiences the friendship or the hospitality of Jesus. She abandons all and is completely safe with Jesus.

And so she holds nothing back from him because of his forgiveness for her. She expresses this outward sign of this inward reality that's gone on in her life.

Forgiven of her sin, she is completely free at the feet of Jesus. Free to subject herself to the Lord. Safe to express her tears of contrition and joy.

I wonder, does your sin ever cause you to cry tears of contrition like this? Does your savior ever cause you to cry tears of joy for what he's done for you?

[11:08] This is the woman at the foot of Jesus. And Jesus' use of the parable to point out how much she's loved because how much she's been forgiven by him. Well, also, secondly, Jesus is doing this to make a pronouncement.

Not only to tell a parable to make his point. And so Jesus notices this woman's response and he affirms the forgiveness with this pronouncement. Jesus accepted her act of worship, her act of friendship in response to what he's done.

And so he says this, Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. What's going on here?

Jesus is pronouncing what already took place. The woman must have some kind of encounter with Jesus prior to this. Jesus was teaching and healing.

And the woman caught something of this. The woman either heard and saw it firsthand or maybe someone passed it on to her. Somehow she experienced. Somehow she believed.

[12:12] This friendship. This forgiveness. This hospitality of the Savior to sinners. And her sins, Jesus emphasized this, are forgiven.

Past, present, and future. Her nature is completely transformed. Seized by sin on one occasion. Now she is set free by forgiveness.

And gripped by the grace of God. Her condition was deadly. Now it is heavenly. A woman of the city of this world is now a child of the city of God.

Once infected with sin, she's now saturated with the spirit of Christ. And how does this happen? How does Jesus save?

This word forgiven that's used here is the same word that Jesus will pronounce from the cross later. When he says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. This woman accepted the authority of Jesus' word.

[13:15] We take it on authority of the witness of the word of God. The word of the Lord about Jesus is work on the cross in our place. Stretched and strung out on the cross is our forgiveness and our Savior.

And the result or outcome of this is peace with God through Jesus Christ. That's Christianity. This is God's cancellation policy for the penalty of our debt or sin, which results in peace.

So what does this have to do with our series on hospitality? You must admit, this is one really awkward dinner party. It's unlikely you've ever been a host or a guest at something quite like this. It's so unique that it's completely believable. We start out hostile to the grace of God and Jesus Christ. The one who is the friend of sinners or shows hospitality to people who betray or deny or dismiss him, rebel against him.

But he is the one who transforms our lives from the prison of debt to the place of peace. A war against Christ is turned into a way of peace and rest.

[14:32] So in a culture and spiritual war in which we live, the Christian way is one of peace, rest, shalom.

It comes by the promise of the Father, the proclamation in the presence of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit doing in us what we can only infinitely ask or imagine.

Well, the hospitality of the Lord is many things as we've learned, but today we learn that it is a way of biblical peace, something unique that God gives to people who are forgiven by him.

Hospitality is the expression of the peace of Christ to friends and neighbors and strangers and enemies, but always sinners, including people like you and me, because our debt, our sin is canceled by the cross of Christ, who extends this forgiveness to us and grants us peace.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.