

# What Do You See?

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*Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*

*And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."*

*"A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"*

*Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."*

*And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 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 wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."*

*Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"*

*And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace. (Luke 7:36-50 NASB)*

The occasion for our Lord's question arises from a startling interruption in a meal where he is a guest in the home of Simon, a Pharisee. A woman has entered Simon's house uninvited. A woman known in the city as a "sinner."

That Jesus accepted an invitation to share a meal in the home of a Pharisee isn't surprising, he was inclined to go wherever he was invited. What is surprising is that such an invitation was extended, for I think it not beyond possibility that Simon may have been one of those present that Jesus had just chided for their obstinate refusal to acknowledge the identity and mission of John the Baptist and their characterization of

Jesus himself as a glutton, drunkard, and friend of sinners. A friend of sinners he most assuredly is yet the Pharisees and experts in the law had not meant it as a complement. In rejecting John's baptism of repentance they had tossed aside God's purpose for themselves as well. (Luke 7:30) There would be no change, no renewing of their minds without such repentance.

In entering Simon's home, Jesus found his arrival absent of such common courtesies of the day as water for washing his feet and oil for his head. No kiss of greeting assured him of welcome. That our Lord voiced no offense is precious instruction. Jesus was *never* offended. Sorrowed on many occasion to be sure, but never offended. For feelings of offense are the offspring of awful pride and Jesus would have nothing to do with this ancient and tenacious scourge, the downfall of men and angels. Whether the omission of water, oil, and warm greeting was intentional on Simon's part, or merely an oversight, each reader must conjecture on his or her own.

As for the intruding woman's name we are told nothing more than that Simon judges her to be a sinner. Given the Greek word used I think it presses the point to attribute any specific sin to her account. That she had missed the mark of the Law and fallen short of its demands is enough for the Simons of the city to see her as an outcast, ill-deserving of their superior company.

Why did she come? What was it that made her so bold as to enter a Pharisee's house unbidden where she was sure to meet with scorn?

Luke tells us only that she had learned that Jesus was eating at Simon's house. How she came about the information we can only guess. It is with this same attitude of conjecture that we are forced to speculate as to how she came to know of Jesus. Had she heard the Master speak words of life to those who could not get enough of the life-imparting food he had to give them? Had she found, in the face and manner of the Son of God, a perfect reflection of his Father, and in the beholding of the incarnate God, found the truth that his Father was hers as well? Or had she only wisps of rumors to go on. That there was a man who performed miracles and claimed to have the authority to forgive sins and was, in fact, the friend of every outcast society chose to abandon.

Whatever it was that drew her to Jesus as he reclined at Simon's table that day she pursued her objective with courage and focused abandon letting nothing detract her. With an alabaster jar of perfume she has brought with her the woman, speaking not a word, pours out her heart upon her Lord in acts of adoration. In humility, she kneels behind him and opens the gates of her eyes to let flow a flood of tears with which to wash the feet of her Lord, wiping them dry with her hair. She anoints his feet with the perfume she has brought, all the while bestowing endless kisses upon the members that will soon be nailed to a cross on her behalf—and that of the whole of fallen humanity.

Simon's reaction to the scene playing out before him is one of ever expanding rejection. Not only does he cast the woman outside the boundary of worth and love, he deems it impossible for Jesus to be a prophet, someone in close harmony with God, given he allows himself to be contaminated by such a person as this sinner through her very presence and touch. In coming to such a conclusion the self-righteous Pharisee fails to make the critical distinction between sin and sinners. It is true enough that God will have no part with sin. Holy he is and will brook no compromise with the least shadow of darkness! Yet with the creatures that he created, infected by sin at their very birth such as the woman weeping at his feet, God in the person of his Son is pleased to draw near. For Jesus is the sole antidote to sin and will see his brothers and sisters freed from sin's reign in their lives to the glory of his Father!

The One who knows every thought and intent of the heart knows full well what Simon is thinking and invites him to learn from him. The invitation is so gentle and subtle we almost miss it: "Simon, I have something to say to you." It is not until Simon gives his consent, "Say it, Teacher," that our Lord, through his familiar use of story, launches into a parable.

The tale is a short one but laden with a depth of truth meant, I think, to help Simon's blind eyes and hardened heart to draw a step closer to the God he mistakenly thought he knew and served. Like many in our own day, the Pharisee knew the letter of the Scriptures well but missed the heart of what they conveyed. He missed the Savior to whom they pointed and who reclined at his very table!

In the parable there are two individuals who were in debt to the same money-lender. One owed a great deal and the other only a tenth as much—but they were both in the same boat as they were both debtors and both were unable to repay their debt. Jesus went on to say that the money-lender forgave each of them then asked Simon a curious question: "So which of them will love him more?"

I say it is a curious question because of the Lord's use of the Greek word for love in the parable for it stems from the same root word as found in Matthew's gospel in which Jesus replies to another Pharisee that the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus has held up the mirror of a parable in an effort to help Simon to see that both he and the woman are of the same sort, two individuals who have missed the mark through sin's corruptive influence in their lives. Both are forgiven. Yet only one of them, the woman, sees with clear enough vision to recognize the Father's gift in the God-man before them. And with her recognition has come this outpouring of her love in unabashed worship.

"Do you see this woman?" Jesus asks his host as he turns his gaze towards her.

It is more, I think, than a rhetorical question. More of a challenging reminder to us all. Jesus goes on to point out the deficiency in Simon's actions—or more accurately stated the lack of them—by comparing those of the woman whose love was supported by her deeds as far surpassing any claim of a superior love of God Simon may have harbored in his mind.

What Simon saw when he looked at the woman was vastly different from what Jesus saw. Simon saw an outcast that he believed to be spurned by God. Jesus saw one of his Father's children, a beloved daughter made in the very image of God. Precious and of great value. Yes, she had sinned. Didn't the Lord say as much? But her sins were forgiven her, this too by our Lord's own lips, "Your sins have been forgiven."

Forgiveness flows readily to those who seek it. Jesus saw her with God-eyes and she responded by beginning the journey all of us fallen ones must make as we travel the path back home to the Great Heart of love from whence we sprang as living thoughts of God: she put her trust in Jesus and began to follow him...

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