Chapter 8

Kindness

The Parable of the Two Debtors
{Luke 7:41,42}
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One Main Thing

If we will remember that we are sinners who have been saved by the grace of God it will cause us to treat other people with kindness and respect.

Introduction

The Parable of the Two Debtors is a short and often overlooked parable of Jesus.

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" (Luke 7:41–42, NKJV)

Jesus loved to teach through object lessons, illustrations, and stories. We see it again and

again in scripture that when Jesus needs to teach a lesson He uses something in His current situation as an illustration. Usually He does it to show people some hypocrisy that they are blind to and do not want to see.

In Luke 7, a Pharisee asked Jesus to eat with him in his home. The Pharisees were very religious. The word "pharisee" even means "one who is separated," indicating that they wanted to make themselves more holy than others. In the middle of the meal a sinful woman comes in and makes a spectacle of herself by weeping and wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair.

Setting

We have to remember they did not sit at a table the way we think of sitting at a table. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* certainly does not represent the way a meal actually took place, and not just because in the painting they are all seated on the same side of the table. They would actually recline around the table and prop themselves on their left arm and eat with their right hand. (This is how John leans back on Jesus' chest to ask Him a question in John 14:25.)

As they all lay reclining around the table at this

Pharisee's home, a woman comes in that is known as a sinner. In verse 37, the Bible says she was a sinner and everyone knew it, including the Pharisee. I do not know what her sin was. Each of us can make our guess but it was something that gave her a reputation as an undisputed and well known sinful person. This has to be utterly appalling to the Pharisee. He is an extremely religious person who is very concerned about his own reputation. He has invited Jesus to his own home for a meal and this woman comes in and makes a scene by washing Jesus' feet with her hair and tears. In my mind, Jesus and the Pharisee are most likely across from one another so they can talk. Because they are reclining (basically lying down) the woman is able to come in and wipe the feet of Jesus while He looks at his host, and the host watches this horrifying scene play out in front of him.

As the revolted Pharisee is watching this he thinks to himself, "If Jesus were a prophet, He would know that this woman is a sinner." It appears that he believes that if Jesus knew what this woman was He would be just as disgusted. He thinks Jesus should have rebuked her and sent her away because she is vile. But Jesus does not. In fact, Jesus calls the Pharisee by name and says, "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon says, "Say

it"—something I bet he later regrets having said, since what Jesus has to say is not at all what Simon was expecting. Jesus tells the Parable of the Two Debtors and calls for Simon to be a judge over the two debtors. This is interesting because so much of what has just happened in the gospel of Luke is about judging. Look back over chapter 6 and especially notice verse 37. Here we find the famous section on "do not condemn" and the "beam in your own eye" passage. Then in 6:43 we have the "tree is known by its fruit" section that ends with "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Jesus knew the judgmental heart of Simon before he even spoke it.

Jesus gives this parable as a way to set Simon up as a judge over the two people in the story. Simon judges that the the one that will love more will be the one that was forgiven the most. Jesus responds with, "You have rightly judged." I think in that statement Jesus is pointing out that in the parable Simon judges rightly, but in the situation between the "sinful" woman and himself he has not judged rightly at all.

Interpretation

I find it fascinating that in verse 44 Jesus turned to the woman. He looks at her but Jesus keeps talking

to Simon and asks, "Do you see this woman?" All this time Jesus has been looking at and talking to Simon while Simon has been watching this weeping woman wipe the feet of Jesus with her hair. Now Jesus turns away from Simon but continues to talk to him and asks, "Do you see this woman?" What a strange question! Yes! That is all that Simon has seen. There could have been an elephant beside Simon and he would not have seen it because he was watching every move this sinful woman made! He has watched her make a horrible scene at his house, at his meal, in front of Jesus!

"Do you see this woman?" In fact, the answer is, he did not see the woman. What Simon saw was a worthless sinner. What Simon saw was an interruption and a nuisance. He only saw a vile person that destroyed his special moment. He did not see a woman. He did not see a person. Jesus saw the person. Jesus saw the woman. Jesus saw someone of value, someone He was going to the cross to die for.

In 2 Peter 1:9, Peter mentions those who are "blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins." I think this is what Jesus is telling Simon. Simon has forgotten that he also has to be forgiven. He forgot that in God's eyes, he is a sinner and no more or less valuable then the woman he was looking down on.

Application

Imagine that one Sunday morning everyone in your congregation has invited several members of their friends and family to come to worship and for the first time they have all agreed. The building is packed and while the congregation is singing the first song you hear someone in the back openly crying. You turn your head and see a person who is known in the community as a drug dealer, prostitute, or the town drunk walking up the aisle. As they pass by your row you can smell the acrid aroma of last night's binge drinking still clinging to their dirty, disheveled clothing. The person passes by your row and, weeping, kneels at the communion table. How hard is it to imagine that some of the people in that scenario would be watching in horror?

What does real Christianity look like? It looks a lot like showing kindness and mercy to those that you think are beneath you. It looks a lot like seeing people and not just their problems. It looks a lot like remembering we are sinners who need to be saved by the grace of God, just like everyone else. It looks a lot like loving people more than we love our cultural or social norms and it looks a lot more like Jesus' response to sinners than Simon's.

Conclusion

I love how in verse 48, Jesus stops talking to Simon and talked to the woman for the first time. He says to her, "Your sins are forgiven." How amazing that must have sounded to her! I honestly cannot think of anything better than to have Jesus say to me, "You are forgiven." It is not the super religious Pharisee that gets that moment with Jesus, but the sinful woman.

Most of the time when we hear this story we imagine ourselves as the woman. In reality we may have been the woman at one time in our spiritual lives, weeping at Jesus' feet and begging forgiveness, but once we are forgiven, we forget that we were once vile sinners. As we mature, if we are not careful, we become the Pharisee. We become harsh and judgmental and look down on people we deem sinful.

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I am found; was blind, but now I see!" Jesus tells the woman to go in peace, but Simon has a lot to think about... and I believe we probably do too.

Discussion

1. Is the church for the saved or the sinners?

2. Does the church want real sinners? Or just, "people who would fit in well here"?

3. Who in our society (or church culture) do we not "see"?

4. Discuss the similarities between Simon the Pharisee and the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32).

5. Read the Beatitudes in verses 20–26 of the preceding chapter of Luke. Can you read each verse and see either Simon or the woman contrasted? How much of chapter 6 do you see relating to this story?

6. What very interesting and important information is given to us in John 11:2?