

Small Group Questions | March 17, 2019

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The Great Explorers — Jesus at Table with a Pharisee – The Manner of Forgiveness

Focus Passage: Luke 7:36–50

Context:

Other Passages Referenced:

Sermon Recap: Jesus' experience at table with a Pharisee and a "sinful woman" reveals that another of His table manners is his readiness to forgive. Alignment with Jesus happens when we recognize our need for forgiveness, understand the cost of our forgiveness, and forgive others. We respond in freedom—freedom from sin, shame, and how others may judge us. Jesus stated that the extravagance of our love and thanks to God is proportionate to how much or how little we understand the magnitude of our debt He forgave.

Introductory Comments to Group Leaders: Our passage this week has a major theological thrust; Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins in a way that went beyond forgiving people for sins they had committed against him personally to declaring people forgiven of all their sins. That was a prerogative belonging only to God. The God-fearing religious people who heard him naturally asked, "Who is this guy who says he can forgive the sins of others?"

Beyond its Christological significance indicating that Jesus was God, the passage has some practical truths about forgiveness that may be liberating to some of your group members. The woman's actions were a beautiful picture of extravagant gratitude for forgiveness. Yet, her actions put everyone in an awkward position—Simon was uncomfortable, Jesus was put in a bind by allowing her to continue or rejecting her for "propriety sake." We can imagine that everyone at the table felt uncomfortable. Likewise, giving and receiving forgiveness can both awkward and beautiful for us.

It is not unlikely that some of your group members struggle to feel forgiven by God; some of them feel pain knowing they have a loved one who has yet to forgive them for something they have done or not done in the past. Some may genuinely believe that God has forgiven them through Jesus, but they haven't been able to truly forgive themselves. There may be some, who in their most honest moments, know they have not forgiven others for offenses and injustices they have inflicted. If you find any of these cases come up in your discussion time, I encourage you to try to meet with the individual(s) outside of group time to examine together what the Bible says about their particular struggle. Walk with them in their search for forgiveness. I will be happy to coach and resource you before you meet with them if that would be helpful. Without having assurance of God's forgiveness and without learning to forgive ourselves and others, we get stuck in our growth as disciples.

I remind you of the short article, "All of Life is Repentance." It might be timely to mention it in light of this week's discussion.

Background Helps

4 Different Anointing Accounts – "Each of the Gospels has an anointing story (also Matt 26:6–13; Luke 7:36–50; John 12:1–8). Despite differences in detail, it is reasonably certain that the ones in Matthew, Mark, and John reflect the same event. It is much less certain that the one in Luke does, not merely because he placed it much earlier in Jesus' ministry

but because of his description of the woman as a prostitute.”¹ Luke’s account is the only one that doesn’t mention the price of the ointment and the disciples’ concern that it was wasteful. Instead, Luke emphasizes that the Pharisee did not have enough insight to recognize Jesus as a prophet and more, as the Messiah.

Significance of Anointing – “Procedure of rubbing or smearing a person or thing, usually with oil, for the purpose of healing, setting apart, or embalming ... The Hebrew verb *mashach* (noun, *messiah*) and the Greek verb *chrio* (noun, *christos*) are translated “to anoint.” From ancient times the priests and kings were ceremonially anointed as a sign of official appointment to office, and as a symbol of God’s power upon them.”² “It was also a kind gesture to anoint the head of one’s guest with olive oil.”³

A Woman With Hair Showing in Public – “Letting down one’s hair in public was shameful and even a ground for divorce, but in her deep gratitude toward Jesus the woman forgot social propriety and used what was available to wipe Jesus’ feet—her hair.”⁴

Love/Thankful – “Since there is no specific word for ‘to show gratitude’ or ‘to thank’ in Hebrew or Aramaic, such words as ‘love, praise, bless, glorify’ were used to express thanks or gratitude. Thus ‘love him more’ probably means ‘was more grateful/thankful.’”⁵

Hook: *Pick a Question to Help Ignite Conversation*

If you could have dinner with anyone in history, other than Jesus, whom would you choose?

Would you rather have a prostitute come to a church dinner and begin washing and kissing your feet or would you rather get food poisoning from the meal?

Look—Observing and Interpreting:

READ Luke 7:36–50

1. What two assumptions does the Pharisee make about Jesus’ interaction with the woman who anoints Jesus’ feet that lead him to conclude that Jesus is not a prophet?
2. How did Jesus confront the Pharisee’s inaccurate assumptions?
3. How did Jesus compare the woman’s extravagance with the Pharisee’s less-than-overwhelming hospitality?

¹ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 221.

² Mike Mitchell, “[Anoint, Anointed](#),” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 70.

³ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 237.

⁴ Ibid. 236. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 237.

⁵ Ibid.

4. Jesus declares to the Pharisee, “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much.” Was Jesus saying she was forgiven because she loved much (or perhaps “was very grateful”) or that she loved much (was very grateful) because she was forgiven?

Illustrations:

Illustrations and quotes can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org

Took: *Applying the message to our lives.*

1. With which of the three elements of alignment discussed in the sermon do you most need adjustment in order to align yourself with Jesus—recognizing our need for forgiveness, understanding the cost of our forgiveness, or forgiving others?
2. Jesus stated that the extravagance of our love and thanks to God is proportionate to how much or how little we understand the magnitude of our debt He forgave. How do you tend to respond to the forgiveness of Jesus?
3. Is there something for which you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to ask forgiveness? ... Is the Spirit bringing someone to mind that you need to forgive or ask forgiveness?
4. Although God doesn’t sin, that doesn’t mean we like everything He does. In fact, we can sometimes find ourselves getting angry with God or resenting what He has allowed to happen in our lives. When that happens we are less likely to want to be close to Him. Have you ever needed to “forgive” God and trust that His plan is best even if it is painful and the very opposite of what you would have chosen?

Prayer: Please spend time praying for one another.

What we hope members glean from the passage.

1. That Jesus does not know that the woman anointing him is a woman of ill-repute or else Jesus does know and allows her to do it anyway. The Pharisee believed either of those options disqualified Jesus as a prophet.
2. Jesus told a parable to the Pharisee that indicated that Jesus knew what the Pharisee was thinking—a demonstration of a prophet. Jesus also noted that he was well aware of the woman’s “many sins.” Finally, Jesus declared that the woman’s sins were forgiven, which goes beyond being a prophet and enters the realm of what only God can do.
3. The Pharisee did not give Jesus water to wash His feet, nor a kiss of greeting, nor oil to anoint His head. In contrast, the woman washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, kissed his feet, and anointed his feet with ointment.
4. We are forgiven through trusting Jesus in faith, not simply for loving/being grateful. Jesus explicitly tells the woman, “Your faith has saved you.” Her love/thankfulness was evidence of her faith rather than the cause of her forgiveness. We can’t know for sure when the woman placed her faith in Jesus. The fact that she brought the ointment with her indicates a pre-planned act and a faith that existed before the meal.