

Luke 7:36-50. A Pharisee had invited Jesus to his home; many others along with 'a woman of the city' entered as well. She had believed in Jesus as her messiah, He had forgiven her sins, and she arrived with a heart overflowing with gratitude. Who was the real sinner that night—the pious Pharisee or the repentant prostitute?

“The quest of the Inner Ring will break your hearts...” – C.S. Lewis. To an audience of students at the University of London, he warned about a certain danger in life.

A ring could be a social circle or clique at work or church. It could be a handful of movers-and-shakers or prominent leaders in the city. Perhaps you're drawn to them, the appeal of being in-the-know or being seen by others rubbing shoulders with *this* group. You'd like to be one of them, but you're not. You're on the outside looking in.

Lewis warned the students that this desire to be “in” will “break your hearts” time and again throughout life. What does he advise? Rather than giving all you are to be part of a ring, pursue real friendships. Build these instead.

The first-century Pharisees were a kind of a religious ring. I saw this because friendship wasn't the tie binding these men together or even a love for God. To be a Pharisee was to be at the center of religious life. Men would praise you for your piety (Matt 23:5-7), respect your authority in the synagogue, even fear you (John 9:22). The Pharisees were a ring many would've wanted to enter. They saw themselves as God's teachers—God's *only* teachers. *How could anyone be of God who isn't of us?* A spiritual arrogance formed this ring.

Jesus was in Galilee teaching when He said to a crowd of religious leaders and commoners, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John [the Baptist]” (Lk 7:28). The people loved it, because John had baptized many of them. *We were baptized by the greatest prophet ever!* As for the Pharisees, John wasn't one of their own. They didn't believe he should teach or baptize anyone.

For a time, John the Baptist kept an austere lifestyle out in the desert away from society. He didn't have the education or etiquette of a Pharisee. He didn't look the part, so the Pharisees concluded, “He has a demon.” Jesus came after John, and what did the Pharisees say of Him? He's “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” (Lk 7:29-34). They accused Him of being demonic as well (John 10:20).

The Pharisees wouldn't listen to John or to Jesus. In fact, when the Lord healed a blind man they interrogated the poor man for being healed (John 9). Though John's message of repentance resulted in changed lives, and Jesus' ministry changed many more, none of this mattered. What mattered to the Pharisees? Their ring. John and Jesus weren't one of them.

Luke 7:35—“Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

Luke 7 tells us about Simon, a Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner. Simon wasn't a truth-seeker, but a religious lawyer building a case. He wanted time with Jesus that he might catch Him off-guard, find fault, and put an end to His ministry. That's what he hoped would happen, but dinner didn't go as expected.

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

(LUKE 7:36-39)

Luke 7:36—“One of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.”

It's hard for us to grasp the scene, because all of it will seem out of place to us. We might picture Jesus seated with the Pharisee around a dining table set with silverware, glasses, and napkins.

Jesus would've entered the Pharisee's home to recline on a few floor cushions around a low U-shaped table. He and the Pharisee would've conversed as they reclined upon their left arm with their right free to reach for food. Servants would've walked on the inside of the 'U' to wait upon the men. Though Simon and Jesus might have been the only two at the table, others were free to enter the home, stand at the walls listening, or even receive scraps.

Coming and going, men and women would enter and leave during the evening. The whole scene is odd to us, but what's truly out of place is a prostitute daring to enter the home of a Pharisee (Lk 7:37). Like a tax collector on the temple mount or a leper in the market, she wouldn't be welcome. And not only did she enter, she spoke.

So overwhelmed with emotion, protocol didn't matter to the woman. She heard Jesus would be there, arrived with a flask of ointment, and burst into tears at His feet (Lk 7:37-38). Nothing could've been so undignified, but it gets worse. She interrupted dinner, drenched the guest's feet with her tears, wiped them clean with her hair, even kissed and poured perfume on them.

Debt Forgiveness

Only the lowest of servants would wash feet, and even these used water and a towel. Yet, here's a woman who used her tears and then wiped Jesus' dirty feet with her own hair. It's shameful in every way, but what truly shocked everyone was Jesus: He accepted this woman.

Simon didn't like Jesus, but he didn't question Jesus' moral integrity. The scene disgusted him, and he expected Jesus to be surprised, to denounce this sinner and be done with her. Rather, the woman kept pouring her heart out at the Lord's feet. He let her.

If Jesus were a real prophet... A real prophet would know this woman is a prostitute and rid the room of her... or so Simon thought (Lk 7:39). The woman was a notorious sinner who in the cold religious system of the Pharisees would never be restored. That's the message Simon would've taught, and it's what she believed until the day Jesus reached out to her. This prostitute had spoken with Jesus prior to this meal, had believed in Him, and turned from her past. For the first time in her life she understood God to be a friend of sinners, her friend. So overwhelmed, she couldn't stop thanking Him.

A PARABLE APPLIED

(LUKE 7:40-48)

Luke 7:40—"And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.'"

Knowing Simon's thoughts, Jesus told a parable. He said one man owed 50 denarii while another owed 500 (a denarii was a day's wage). One sum might be repaid; the other perhaps unpayable. One is a small debt; the other quite large. If the lender forgave both debts, which debtor would love him more? The man with the larger debt.

The principle is that great forgiveness produces great love. Simon understood the principle. *But what's that to do with this sinner in my house?* He didn't understand anything until Jesus confronted the issue.

Simon hosted, but he didn't show any hospitable warmth towards Jesus. After walking barefoot or in sandals on the dirty roads of Galilee, who could enjoy a meal without washing? Hosts prepared a basin of water (Gen 18:3-5, 24:32-33), commonly gave their guests perfume to alleviate the smells of the day, and always welcomed with a kiss on the cheek.

Meals were a time for fellowship and relaxation, but what did the Pharisee offer? Nothing. Not a single kindness. The Lord reclined with dirty feet and the smells of the day on Him without the slightest greeting to show He's welcome.

The issue was simple: Simon didn't love Jesus. He viewed dinner as a chance to humiliate Jesus, a game of gotcha. Any other rabbi might have left deeply offended, but Jesus stayed. In contrast to Simon was this prostitute who fell apart at the Lord's feet. She washed His feet, poured oil upon them, wept, and kissed them.

Only something life shattering would move a person do this. A great change had taken hold of this woman, hope flooded her heart, and she returned to Jesus having been forgiven her sins. Forgiveness isn't usually where love begins between people, but it's *always* where love begins with God. She understood she hadn't met some rabbi in the streets but God Himself. God had forgiven her (Lk 7:48).

John 7:24—"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement."

The real sinner that night wasn't Jesus or even a former prostitute. It was Simon. In his ring of self-righteous holy men, he couldn't see how desperately he needed his own sins forgiven. His lack of love for Jesus proved He didn't know himself. He didn't know Jesus or even the God he told others about in the synagogue. In the darkness of his heart Simon dined with the Son of God unmoved, unforgiven, confused, and condemned.

INTO GOD'S SHALOM

(LUKE 7:49-50)

Luke 7:49-50—"Then those who were at the table with Him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?' And He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

To be forgiven an immeasurable debt against God, to have all your sins wiped away, to receive mercy, to truly live—is it any wonder the prostitute wept and worshipped Christ? Having been forgiven much, she loved much. The Pharisee, however, didn't love God. He didn't understand his sin, his need to be forgiven, or believe in his guest's ability to forgive. Lack of love is proof a man doesn't know God.

The crowd in Simon's home was stunned. *Jesus forgave sin?* It was a blasphemous claim, punishable by death. No one, not even the high priest, ever forgave anyone's sin on behalf of God... but that's exactly what Jesus did here. He forgave sin, because He is God.

"Your faith has saved you; go in peace." *Your faith has saved you; now go into God's shalom, and live there forever.* It wasn't the depth of her love that saved her, but faith. She believed in Jesus, He forgave her sins, and her heart overflowed with love for her Savior.