

Hidden Treasure

How do you view people as you walk through this world? One day I stopped by North Arundel Hospital to visit somebody. I had picked up a friend from work and was giving them a ride home and they went in with me to use the restroom.

I had on a tie, they had on old blue jeans and a work shirt. My hair was shot and combed, theirs was long and shaggy.

As we walked side by side past the front desk a voice rang out very forcefully, "Excuse me can I help you? Excuse me!" When I turned to look, I saw that the person at the desk wasn't asking me. She was just going to let me walk by, but she wasn't going to let the other guy get past.

Now I could have been a mass murderer and he could have just come in from helping build a house with Habitat for Humanity but the lady at the desk made a judgment on the basis of how we were dressed.

I don't tell that story to put the woman at the desk down. If I were in her shoes I might have reacted in the same way. But it brought home to me the precarious situation that we all operate in. We constantly have to make judgments based on the way people look. I believe that because we're so quick to judge people by the way they look that sometimes we miss the opportunities God gives us to serve Him.

Tony Campolo wrote of a college class he once taught where one of his Jewish students commented that, Jesus never met a prostitute. Campolo said, "I jumped at the opening; here was my chance, I thought. I could show this guy a thing or two about Jesus and about the New Testament. "Yes, He did," I responded. "I'll show you in my Bible where-" The young man interrupted me. "You didn't hear me, Doctor. I said Jesus never met a prostitute." Once again I protested. Once again I reached for my New Testament. I started to leaf through the pages of my Bible searching for those passages which showed Jesus forgiving the "fallen woman." I searched for the place where He gave the woman at the well a chance for spiritual renewal. Once again, my Jewish student spoke out, this time with a touch of anger in his raised voice. "You're not listening to me, Doctor. You aren't listening to what I am saying. I am saying that Jesus never met a prostitute. Do you think that when he looked at Mary Magdalene he saw a prostitute? Do you think he saw harlots when he looked at women like her? Doctor, listen to me! Jesus never met a prostitute!"

He was right, wasn't he? Jesus didn't excuse sin, but He didn't categorize people either. The people He met weren't religious, irreligious, good or bad. They were just people.

For one of the most striking examples of the way Jesus dealt with people turn with me to **Luke 7 pg 1000**

Read vs 36

Most of us find it very hard to be comfortable around a wide variety of people. We tend to associate with people that are somewhat like us.

Jesus was a master at spending time with a diverse assortment of people. In chapter 7 alone there's been a Roman Centurion, a Jewish widow, disciples of John the Baptist, and now he's eating in a Pharisee's house.

The Pharisees were a major religious order in Judaism at the time of Christ. They had good beginnings. In their battle against Greek education, pious Jews began around the end of the second century BC, to develop a national system of education. To the old scribal schools were gradually added a network of local schools where, in theory at least, all Jewish boys were taught the Torah.

Israelites avoided, as far as possible, all contact with non Jews. By the time of Christ the Pharisees had gone a step further. They separated themselves from everyone who wasn't a Pharisee.

These guys were strict. There was even a group called the "bruised & bleeding Pharisees" who went around with their eyes closed lest they should look at a woman and have a wrong thought. Since their eyes were closed they inevitably bumped into walls and ended up bruised and bleeding.

The Pharisees turned out to be some of the greatest opponents of Jesus. We've already seen them in Luke chapter 5 where they called Jesus a "blasphemer" and then complained against His disciples, saying, "*Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*"

Luke 6:7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.

Yet when He was invited to a Pharisees house for a meal Jesus went.

I'm not totally sure just what the motivation was behind inviting Jesus to this dinner. We're going to find out that this Pharisee named Simon didn't provide any of the customary greetings like washing Jesus' feet.

He may have invited Jesus there to try to get some dirt on Him to take back to the other Pharisees to condemn the Lord. What ever Simon's reasoning, Jesus went.

In the providence of God someone else showed up at Simon's house. Some one altogether unexpected.

Read 37-38

It was customary in that day for outsiders to hang around outside during banquets so they could watch the "important people." Since everything was open this was easy to do.

If you use a harmony of the Gospels to put this event together with Matthew chronologically you find that Jesus had just given a public invitation; *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Now this woman walks in to the banquet and immediately goes to Jesus.

Everyone was shocked. First of all Pharisees didn't have much to do with women. A rabbi would not speak to any woman in public, not even to his own mother.

Devout Jewish men prayed three times a day, "God I thank you that I was not been born a slave, a Gentiles or a women! One of the daily prayers still said by Orthodox Jewish men today is, "Thank God I was not born a woman."

But here's a woman walking right up to Jesus. Verse 37 is very emphatic in Greek; "Behold a woman!" And not just any woman. She was a known sinner.

We don't know her name and we don't know her sin. From Simon's response it's been assumed she was a prostitute. We're not told. But we do know this, what ever she's done was pretty bad and the whole town knows about it.

Lenski writes; No name is given; someone has said well: "Put your own name down for hers."

Whatever her sin something we can deduce about this woman -- that she has been battered down. She is the continual object of cutting criticism in insults by the women of the town. She has been spat upon. She is the example many mothers in town use to warn their daughters. She is brunt of nasty jokes. She is shunned by the best people. She's a woman in the city who is a sinner!

Inwardly, she is broken and bleeding. Her spirit is wounded. Perhaps you've felt like that; perhaps you feel like that right now.

You've failed miserably, and though time has passed, you still are humiliated and unsure, and feel too weak and fragile to pick yourself up and move on.

For her to come to the banquet at Simon the Pharisee's house is hard, too. She is viewed as a sinner, one who conveys uncleanness by her very touch, almost as if she has a communicable disease. She knows that Simon won't be happy to see her in his house.

But the sinful woman has heard of Jesus. She has heard his teaching. She has heard his gracious words of God's love and forgiveness and healing and restoration. She has heard him speak of his Father's Kingdom in words so plain and compelling that she can see herself as forgiven, a full citizen in this Kingdom of Love. She's still broken, but now she can see light and hope.

The woman weeps and each tear makes a brown wet mark in the dust of Jesus' feet, until his feet are wet with her tears.

She unfastens her hair and lets it fall free. She kneels down and begins to wipe his feet with her hair. To go about in public with her hair down was considered a shameful thing to do, yet she does it. Her hair wipes his feet after her tears have washed them.

Next, she begins to kiss his feet. In her culture kissing the feet might be considered a common mark of deep reverence, especially to leading rabbis.

Finally, she pours scented oil onto his feet out of an alabastron, or perfume vial, such as Jewish women commonly wore around their neck. The Greek words translated "wiped," "kissed," and "anointed" are all in the imperfect tense. In

English we use verb tense to show time. In Greek tense shows type of action. The imperfect tense implies repeated action. She kept on doing this.

I am sure that once the flask of perfume was opened, it was almost immediately detected by everyone in the room. While Jesus has been the center of focus up to now, all eyes turn to the woman now kneeling at Jesus' feet, weeping, wiping, caressing his feet with her long black hair, kissing his feet with her lips, and pouring perfume upon them.

The very intimacy of her attentions appear to many of the guests as shocking. Add to that the woman's reputation in the community and this is downright scandalous, at least that is how Simon the Pharisee interprets it.

Read vs 39

What ever else Simon thought of Jesus up until this point he's sure of one thing now. Jesus is no prophet. He might be a teacher, which he's going to acknowledge in the next verse, but Jesus is no prophet. If He was He'd know what kind of woman was touching Him and make her stop!

I don't know about you, but I probably would have tended to side with Simon the Pharisee at this point. What would you have thought if you were in his place watching this whole thing unfold. Be honest now. My natural inclination would be to say, "Woah, Jesus, this is really inappropriate."

Jack Haberer, senior pastor of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church in Houston, has written a book entitled, *Godviews; The Convictions that Drive us and Divide us*.

The book is mainly about divisions with in his denomination but the point he makes can be applied inn so many other areas. Haberer sees the 21st century church living in a tension between Carmel and Caesarea.

Carmel was the place where Elijah the prophet had a showdown with the prophets of Baal. Elijah stood his ground for God's truth and wouldn't budge. Most of Israel was caught up in the worship of the false god Baal but Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."

Elijah was bold, brash, and unbending.

Caesarea, on the other hand, was the place where God sent Peter to take the Gospel to Gentiles. Baal was a non-Jewish god and the Jewish people were going after him.

When Jesus came He died for all people, Jew and non-Jew alike. But all the first Christians were Jews who couldn't believe that a non-Jew could be part of the family of God.

To them, Gentiles were dogs, uncircumcised, pig eaters, unworthy of God's grace. They would shake the dust off their feet when crossing back into Israel from Gentile areas.

Now God was telling Peter to go to a Gentile's house and bring him the Word of God. God had to push Peter to get him to go.

Haberer says, "Here's the tension we face. We have to stand unwaveringly for God's truth in a world that denies that truth, while carrying God's love to that very same world. We have to stand for God's truth and at the same time love people with a genuine Christ-like love."

Simon wanted to stand for truth but didn't have love.

This despised woman demonstrated to everybody there that day an invaluable lesson on love.

You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

Read vs 40-43

I have to admit that I have always read this parable as if it dealt with the amount of sin a person had committed. Like if you sin more you love God more because you've been forgiven more.

But as I read through here again I realized that this isn't about how much a person sins, it's about how aware they are of their sins.

It wasn't that the woman had more sins that needed to be forgiven therefore she loved Jesus more. It was that Simon was blind to his own sins but the woman saw her's plainly.

If we'd see ourselves as we really are before God we'd see how much has been forgiven and we'd love God all the more. Instead we don't see our own sinfulness so we self-righteously judge others. We're OK with Carmel, but Caesarea is out.

I have to believe this is why people struggle with the exclusivity of the Bible. The Bible says *Jesus the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him. It says, Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. It says He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

The Bible is clear that Jesus is the only way to heaven. The reason is simple but so misunderstood.

God is perfect. He is righteous. His standard isn't goodness, it's perfection. Hab 1:13 *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.*

God's standard is perfection and that's something that none of us can provide. But we don't see that. We think, "I'm not so bad." We're so much like Simon looking around at others and seeing their sin but not our own.

Jesus is the only way to forgiveness because only Jesus was the sinless sacrifice for us. Jesus is the only way because the Bible tells us , *There's none righteous, no not one.*

Jesus Christ died in our place to pay for our sins. Galatians 2:21 *"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."* In other words, if people could get to heaven by obeying God Jesus died for nothing. If it didn't matter what religion you were just so you were sincere then Jesus' death was a waste of time.

What gives Jesus death full value is our inability not to sin. we can't do it. We need Him. He's the only way.

But Simon the Pharisee didn't see that. He saw his own righteousness and the woman's sins.

So Jesus explains, the one who's forgiven of the bigger debt is more appreciative. the person who realizes just how far they are from God is the one that is most appreciative for God's grace.

That was this woman. She loved Jesus because she understood who she was and she understood who He was.

Warren Wiersbe writes: The parable does not deal with the amount of sin in a person's life but the awareness of that sin in his heart. How much sin must a person commit to be a sinner? Simon and the woman were both sinners. Simon was guilty of sins of the spirit, especially pride, while the woman was guilty of sins of the flesh. Her sins were known, while Simon's sins were hidden to everyone except God. And both of them were bankrupt and could not pay their debt to God. Simon was just as spiritually bankrupt as the woman, only he did not realize it.

I imagine when Simon looked at himself he thought, "God, you're lucky to have me on your team. I'm pretty special. I have memorized the law. I pray beautiful prayers. I do many significant things for You. I'm a Pharisee & I have mastered the art of being a Pharisee. God, I'm a pretty special guy."

But now catch Jesus' application here:

Read vs 44-46

Hospitality is a very strong value in the Near East, with much fuss made over guests. For example, a basin would typically be provided and a servant would wash the dust of the road from the guests' feet. Scented olive oil was sometimes offered to anoint a guest's hair. And beloved guests would be kissed as they were greeted just like you see Middle Eastern people do today.

Simon did none of these things. He may have been outwardly religious and moral but since he didn't see his own sin he didn't love Jesus.

The woman did these things in love.

A. Her loving response was to give what was precious. Many Jewish women of this period wore alabaster vials of fragrant oil around their necks. The perfume they contained was very expensive. Love makes you want to give something of value - and you don't even grudge it!

A woman missionary in the South Pacific Islands was explaining to a group of children the custom and significance of giving gifts at Christmas. "Giving gifts," she said, "expresses love and reminds us of the perfect gift of love we received from God: Jesus."

Later that week, a young native boy came to the missionary's side and said, "I love you and want you to have this." He pulled from a straw basket the most beautiful shell the missionary had ever seen. As she admired its beauty, she recognized it as a special shell only found on the far side of the island, a day's walk from the village. When confronted by this, the boy smiled and said, "Long walk part of gift!"

B. Her love made her give from the heart. It was not mechanical or grudging. It was the outpouring of her love for Jesus.

C. She gave because she loved Christ for accepting her, for forgiving her. Simon gave nothing because he didn't recognize he even needed forgiveness.

D. Her love made giving a form of worship. a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Finally Jesus draws a conclusion: Read 47-50

This is the second time we've seen Jesus telling someone their sins are forgiven, and the second time people are miffed that He'd say such a thing.

There's two misinterpretations we could come up with here if we're not careful.

The first would be that this woman was forgiven of her sins because of her tears and her actions. Jesus made it clear in verse 50 it was her faith that saved her. No amount of good works can atone for our sins.

The second would be that sinners are forgiven because of love. We're not forgiven because of our love for God or God's love for us.

John 3:16 says, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...* God loves everyone but the whole world isn't forgiven automatically.

The verse says: *He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Grace is love that pays a price and that price was the death of the Son of God on the cross. This woman's tears and actions were a result of what God had done in accepting and forgiving her.

So how did the woman know for sure that her sins were forgiven? She had Jesus' word on it!

How can we be sure that we're forgiven? The same way. I John 5:13 *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Believers have God's Word on it.

Early on in this chapter when Jesus healed the centurion's servant, it was a great miracle. An even greater miracle was His raising the widow's son from the dead. But in this chapter, the greatest miracle of all was His saving this woman from her sins and making her a new person. The miracle of salvation has to be the greatest miracle of all.

It meets the greatest need, brings the greatest results (and they last forever), and cost the greatest price.

Simon was blind to the woman and blind to himself. He saw her past, but Jesus saw her future. I wonder how many rejected sinners have found salvation through the testimony of this woman in Luke's Gospel. She encourages us to believe that Jesus can take any sinner and make him or her into a child of God.

But God's forgiveness is not automatic; we can reject His grace. In 1830, a man named George Wilson was arrested for mail theft, the penalty for which was hanging. After a time, President Andrew Jackson gave Wilson a pardon but he refused to accept it! The authorities were puzzled: should Wilson be freed or hanged?

They consulted Chief Justice John Marshall, who handed down this decision: "A pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon George Wilson must be hanged."

If you have never accepted God's pardon, now is the time to believe and be saved.

I believe that Jewish student in Tony Compallo's class was right. Jesus never met a prostitute, or a thief, or a drunkard. He met people. Valuable people. Hidden treasures from this world, but of infinite value to God.