PARABLES

The Two Debtors

Luke 7:36-50

Introduction

There are seven scenes in this story:

1. The introduction (the Pharisee, the Lord Jesus, the woman)
   2. The outpouring of the woman's love in action
      3. A dialogue (Simon judges wrongly)
         4. The parable
      3* A dialogue (Simon judges rightly)
   2* The outpouring of a woman's love in retrospect.

1* Conclusion (the Pharisee, the Lord Jesus, the woman)

The structural flow of the drama in the seven scenes is clear. It is in a parabolic structure. There is a significant difference between 1, 2 & 3 and 1*, 2* & 3*. The parable occurs in the climactic centre. We will look at each of these seven scenes in turn.

Scene 1: The Introduction

"One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined and there was a woman who was a sinner in the city."

In this scene all 3 major players in the story are introduced to us. **The Pharisee** (soon we are told his name is Simon), **the Lord Jesus**, who accepted the invitation, and **a woman**, ***"who was a sinner in the city"***. We aren't told the specific occasion that gave rise to this invitation from Simon to the Lord Jesus. We can surmise that possibly the Lord Jesus had preached to a crowd the city. The 'city' where this happened isn't named. The last 'city' named by Luke in the sequence in chapter 7 is Nain a small town about 25 miles from Capernaum. What Jesus said impressed a number of people including Simon (who probably didn't agree with what he heard) and some of his Pharisee friends and this woman. After the Lord Jesus has finished speaking, Simon invites Him to come to 'dinner'. The invitation is accepted. Simon and the Lord Jesus and some – If not all – of the disciples, move off towards Simon's house with some of the crowd following including this woman.

Pharisees, unlike the Essenes at Qumran, didn't eat their meals only in their own community. Pharisees ate with anyone! But all meals required ritual purity and specific food restrictions. This set them apart from other people. Luke mentions the hostility of the Pharisees toward the Lord Jesus 28 times in his Gospel. So Jesus enters into this kind of world when He accepts the invitation. Muslims, Hindus, Jews and others have similar rules of ritual purity and we too can enter 'their world'.

At this time in the first century 'dinner parties' for religious discussions were very common, especially if there was a 'teacher' visiting the town. This banquet may have been such an occasion with the Lord Jesus as the visiting Rabbi. He was expected to lead a discussion on a theological topic of mutual interest.

We are told, he ***'went in'*** and ***'reclined'***. It was a formal occasion and we are told there were other guests present. Banquets like this were public affairs. The door was open to all. There would be a long low table in the centre of the room on which large wooden dishes would be placed. Low couches or mattresses would be placed on either side on which the guests would be placed in order of rank. The guests reclined leaning on their left elbow with their feet pointing away from the table. You eat with your right hand – never your left hand as it is

used to deal with dirty things in your life. As the guests come in they take off their sandals and leave them by the door. Servants stand behind the couches. As the guest sits, a servant puts a shallow bowl under his feet and then pours water over the feet. To omit this courtesy would imply that the guest was an inferior rank. Behind the servants the crowd of uninvited guests stand along the walls, watching and listening to the conversation. This was probably how the woman got to stand behind the feet of Jesus.

Feet have an unclean connotation in Middle Eastern society. To throw your shoes at an American president is a very great insult! In the Old Testament the ultimate triumph of a victor and an insult to the vanquished is to "make the enemy into a footstool" (Ps. 110:1). The bitter hatred of Edom was shown by, ***"On Edom I toss my sandal."*** (Ps. 60:8; 108:9) Moses is told to take off his unclean shoes at the burning bush because of the holiness of the ground. (Ex. 3:5) John the Baptist illustrates his unworthiness in the presence of the Lord Jesus (his cousin) by saying he is not worthy to untie the laces of His sandals.

So the host fails to ensure that the feet of the Lord Jesus are washed and this must have been deliberate. In addition, the Lord Jesus received no kiss of greeting! To receive a guest today without kissing him on both cheeks as he enters is a mark of contempt. Formal greetings in 1st century Palestine were very important – as they are now!

A 19th-century English diplomat at a banquet in Tunis was not greeted with honour! He was warned by his Arab (non-Tunisian) interpreter that something was very wrong. He refused to eat and just as well for the food had been poisoned.

So there was no washing of feet, no common greeting and no anointing with oil. These common courtesies were all omitted by a judgmental host. The insult was unmistakable. (Deut. 28:40; Ruth 3:3; Ps. 23:5)

Arabic translations of this passage imply that this 'woman of the city' was actively engaged as a 'sinner'. The word is a synonym for a prostitute. So we are given crucial information about her lifestyle. She was a sinner, plying her trade in the city. She lived in the city. As we will see, Simon knew perfectly well who she was. She was part of the community but an outcast from the religious/moral part of the community. Simon was probably shocked at what he would have said was the invasion of the sanctity of his house by the woman.

Scene 2: The Woman Acts

" … and when she learned He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head and kiss His feet and anoint them with ointment." (v. 36-38)

The woman does 3 things to the feet of the Lord Jesus.

- She entered and standing at his feet, she began to wet them with her tears.
- She wiped them with her hair.
- She kissed his feet and anointed them with perfume.

Let us look at these actions in some detail.

The woman seems to find out the location of the Lord Jesus after He entered Simon's house. But Jesus said her dramatic action began ***"from the time I came in"*** (v. 45). So the story assumes that the woman heard from the community where He was to be entertained. So bearing a gift, she goes <u>before Him</u> to Simon's house. This must have taken a huge amount of courage! For her to enter a Pharisee's house was to run the gauntlet of abuse and ridicule.

Now we can begin to reconstruct what triggered her amazing and shocking action! Clearly, she was present at the time of His entrance – probably as one of the crowd. Simon calls the Lord Jesus 'rabbi' (or teacher) and the crowd clearly accepted that He was a Rabbi.

In the Middle East all guests are treated with great deference. Remember Abraham's hospitality to his three visitors in Genesis 18:1-8. But in this case, Simon treated the Lord

Jesus with studied insolence and rudeness. Simon violated every rule of hospitality in front of the community. No kiss of greeting! Usually for an important guest all the male members of the family would wait at the entrance and kiss his hands. Once in the house, the first thing to attend to was the washing of the guest's feet.

Perhaps the woman had heard Jesus proclaim to the crowd in the market place the freely offered love of God for sinners – even those like her! Perhaps this had overwhelmed her and triggered in her a deep desire to respond. The ointment/perfume was in an alabaster flask and possibly was around her neck. It was an important part of her 'trade'. She watched the Lord Jesus being insulted and knew the insult was intentional. The atmosphere must have been electrifying. War had been declared and everyone waited to see the response of the Lord Jesus. At best He is expected to offer a tight-lipped response and leave. But He absorbs the insult and all the hostility behind it and He doesn't leave. This is another example of, ***"He opened not His mouth"***.

This woman is totally overcome! They didn't even welcome Him with a kiss! Her devotion, her gratitude and her anger get all mixed up. She forgets where she is! She can't greet Him with a kiss for that would be far too presumptuous. So she goes to kiss His feet. Rushing boldly forward, she breaks down and literally washes His feet with her tears. Now what? She has no towel and Simon and the servants certainly wouldn't give her one if she asked for it!

She lets down her hair and uses it to wipe His feet after smothering them with kisses. Then she pours out her precious perfume on the feet of the One who had told her of God's love for her and who is here being abused by this Pharisee. She is offering her love and trying to compensate for the insult Jesus had just received.

The watching crowd were again deeply shocked. She had let down her hair! This intimate gesture in an ordinary Palestinian home would only happen in the presence of a woman's husband. Jewish law (the Talmud) says that a woman could be divorced if she let down her hair in the presence of another man. In conservative Muslim homes everywhere women cover their hair outside the home. The Talmud gave rules about stoning immoral women to death. One of the rules was that a woman's hair should not be uncovered in case it caused the priests officiating at the execution to have immoral thoughts. In Saudi Arabia, where they still stone immoral women, they always put a sack over them before the stones are thrown.

This scene of the woman at the feet of the Lord Jesus must have been a second electrifying shock. The proactive nature of what happened from her gestures is clear and Simon noticed them!

So the kissing of His feet and the washing and wiping was a spontaneous response to what she had seen in Simon's house. But she did come prepared to anoint His feet with perfume. A visiting "prince" or major political leader until the late 19th century may have been anointed with perfume on the head when visiting another king/prince. It was much more common in times of the Caliphate and earlier.

For this woman to anoint anyone on the head would have been extremely presumptuous. But she can, as a servant, anoint His feet and so show honour as to a "prince". Simon treated the Lord Jesus as an inferior worthless man. The woman treated the Lord Jesus as a King!

Kissing the feet of the Lord Jesus was not only a compensation for Simon's rudeness; it was also a public gesture of great humility and abject devotion. So in summary, this woman's actions were triggered by observing the hostility that the Lord Jesus received from Simon. This outcast woman bursts into three dramatic gestures:

- She washes His feet with her tears and, in an amazingly intimate gesture, she lets down her hair to wipe them.
- Unworthy to kiss even His hands, she repeatedly kisses His feet.

- The costly perfume, ordinarily used to make her attractive to customers, is poured out on the feet of the Lord Jesus as a tribute to a king. She loved the Lord Jesus and she thought nothing too much to do for Him.

All this dramatic action is carried out without any language. Words would be useless in the presence of such costly and tender expressions of devotion and gratitude and perhaps repentance, demonstrated by the breaking of a 'tool' of her trade.

How would Simon react? Clearly his calculated snub of this young Rabbi was not going to plan! His deliberate attempt to humiliate the Rabbi triggered an extraordinary act of devotion. If he had been sensible, Simon would have humbly apologised to the Lord Jesus and thanked the woman for having compensated for his rudeness.

Scene 3: Simon makes the Wrong Judgment.

"Now when the Pharisee, who invited Him to saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man was a prophet He would know who is touching Him and what sort of woman she is – for she is a sinner'. Jesus said to him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you'. 'Tell me Teacher he said'."

So we get Simon's reaction to this extraordinary scene. He doesn't come over as a humble man confessing to the Lord Jesus his failures as a host, but rather as critical of the validity of this young Rabbi's claim to be a prophet. The woman's moving drama of thankfulness leaves him cold. All he sees is an immoral woman who has let down her hair and who, by her touch, is defiling one of his guests – a guest who is stupid enough not to know it.

Simon then starts on what Shakespeare calls 'an aside' – a soliloquy. This is very revealing.

- We discover his real intent in inviting the Lord Jesus to his house – to test the claim of the Lord Jesus that He is a prophet. He is already contemptuous for he calls Him, 'this man'.
- He uses the word "touch". In Greek the word used means both "to touch" and "to light a fire'. The word "to touch" is used in the Bible for sexual intercourse (Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29; 1 Cor. 7:1). This is not intended here, but Simon's use of this word in this context implied that what he was watching seemed to him a sordid sexual performance that was all very improper. He felt that the Lord Jesus, if He was a prophet, would know the sort of woman she was and would have protested about such behaviour but He didn't, He accepted it.

So Simon completely misjudged what was happening. The Lord Jesus <u>does know</u> who the woman is (v. 47) and He knows her actions are not the defiling caresses of an impure woman, but an outpouring of love from a repentant woman. Simon doesn't rejoice at this evidence of her repentance and he definitely doesn't feel any remorse as she compensates for his failure. The result is Simon's greater hostility towards the Lord Jesus.

One wonders why the Lord Jesus accepted the invitation to go to Simon's house in the first place. This is speculation but it is a possible reason:

- The Lord Jesus knew this woman was in the crowd when He was preaching.
- She repented of her sins and her former life and the Lord Jesus knew what was going on in her heart.
- The Lord Jesus knew she was going to Simon's house to show her gratitude for the gift of forgiveness.
- The problem was that she was well-known in her community. How can the religious people, including Simon, accept the authenticity of her repentance? Without this there could be no restoration to the community as an upright moral woman.

In the teaching of the Lord Jesus restoration is important:

- The lost sheep is brought back into the fold.
- The prodigal son is returned to his family.
- Zacchaeus is called "a son of Abraham" and so can no longer be rejected as an outsider.

So Simon must be led to believe in the authenticity of the woman's repentance and so help her to be restored to fellowship in her community.

But at this stage Simon still thinks of her as an unrepentant "sinner" (v. 39). Probably there are many grim faces in the room from the other Pharisees present. So what is to be done? Jesus tells a parable that is a deliberate attempt to break the rigid attitudes of the culture towards "sinners" and "the righteous" in that community. The purpose of the parable is that this woman should be welcomed back into a loving, caring and accepting community. "Righteous" people – especially "religious" righteous people – were condemning the lifestyle of this woman and some probably wanted to stone her to death. The Lord Jesus accepts her expressions of love with the full knowledge that they were being misunderstood by Simon and his other Pharisee friends.

So the Lord Jesus says, ***"Simon, I have something to tell you"***. Interestingly, this exact phrase is used today in the Arab World and it is always used to introduce a blunt speech that the listener won't want to hear!

Simon indirectly confesses his own failure as a host by calling the Lord Jesus a Rabbi. If He is worthy of the title, He is worthy of the honour that is due to the title. But this honour Simon had withheld from Him. So the Lord Jesus tells this story.

Scene 4: The Story of the Two Debtors.

"And Jesus said, (a literal translation in word order in Greek)

Two debtors there were	debtors
To a certain moneylender	money lender
The one owed 50 denarii	one debtor
and the other 500	2nd debtor
They not being able to pay	debtors
He freely forgave them both."	money lender

The story has a simple structure. The debtors and the moneylender appear in the first two lines and the second two lines – but with a difference. The two centre lines point out the difference between the two debtors. The verb translated "freely forgive" is the Pauline verb "to offer a grace". The two debtors are level in their need and neither is able to pay. Both were bankrupt. The same grace is extended to each. One owes more than the other – 10 times more! But both have an inability to pay and both need grace. Both debts are cancelled (forgiven).

Wordplay heightens the dramatic impact of the story. We miss this in translation. In Aramaic:

a sinner woman	= *hayyabhta*
a creditor	= *mar hobha*
debtor	= *bar hobha or hayyabh*
sin/debt	= *hobha*
to love	= *habbebh*

In Aramaic the word *'hobha'* means both 'debt' and 'sin'. This can be seen in the versions of the Lord's Prayer. (Mt. 6:12; Lk. 11:4) So we have ***"forgive us our sins"*** or ***"forgive us our debts"***.

The Lord Jesus uses this wordplay to compare and contrast the sinful woman (*hayyabhta*) with her sin (*hobha*) and Simon, who was socially in debt (*bar hobha*) and has failed to love (*habbebh*). The clear inference is that both the woman and Simon are sinners. The contrast is the fact that one loves the other doesn't. This becomes the focus of the continuing conversation.

Scene 5: Simon Judges Correctly

(Jesus said) ***"Now which of them will love him more? Simon answered, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled'. 'You have judged correctly' Jesus said."***

With a modified form of the Socratic Method Simon is led to reason out for himself the conclusion Jesus wanted him to arrive at. Simon is pressed with a question and seeing he is being trapped, he can only lamely try to escape with, "I suppose … ." Simon clearly saw the woman as the greater debtor, but probably didn't want to admit that he had any debts at all. But by implication, he admitted that he had the smaller debt. Although Simon totally misunderstood the human scene in front of him, the logic of the parable is inescapable. In the story, 'love' is the response to unmerited favour – the only possible response to pure grace. ***"He who is forgiven much, loves much."***

So the Lord Jesus establishes this principle and then proceeds to apply it to the actions of this woman. In so doing He shocks His audience and us with its boldness! There is a tender satire in this for the Lord Jesus was accepting Simon's valuation of his degree of guilt – a 50 denarii sinner. In fact there are no degrees of sin. Sin is rebellion against God – against His laws, His will and all that contradicts the nature and heart of God.

Scene 6: The Woman's Acts Reviewed

"Then He turned towards the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house! You did not give Me any water for My feet, but she wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give Me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I came in, has not stopped kissing My feet. You didn't put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'."

In Luke's Gospel there are a number of interesting pairs involving one man and a woman.

- Lk. 4:25-27: Two heroes of faith are given as illustrations of faith in God – the widow of Zarephath and Naaman
- Lk. 13:10-17: A woman is healed on the Sabbath and in Lk. 14:1-6 the same thing happens to a man on the Sabbath. In both cases the conversation revolves round the treatment of a family ox and ass.
- Lk. 11:5-8: A man in difficult circumstances has his prayers answered. In Lk. 18:1-5 a similar story is told of a woman.
- Lk. 15:3-10: Two people diligently search for that which they have lost. One is a man looking for a lost sheep. The other is a woman looking for a lost coin.

In all these cases both the man and the woman have noble characters. But in this story it is the woman who is the one depicted as noble (inspite of what all the men in Simon's house think of her) while the man is seen as ignoble (even though he has a very high opinion of himself).

Middle East culture then and now is male dominated. So this scene is a profound statement about the worth of women in society – as are all the parings in Luke's Gospel. We must understand how deeply shocking this was to the original hearers! The Lord Jesus is praising a despised woman in male company! Let's look at the cultural <u>expectations</u> of what the people watching and listening would have expected.

Guests are expected to show appreciation for hospitality in every culture. In the Middle East these expectations of guests are solidified into an unwritten law of cast iron dimensions. There are basically two rules:

- The host downgrades the quality of the food and shelter as poor and inadequate for the rank and honour of his guest and apologises for not treating the guest with sufficient honour.

- In return, the guest must say over and over that he is totally unworthy of the magnificent hospitality shown to him.

A host would blush with shame to point out to you any faux-pas in your conduct. The laws of hospitality oblige him to supply every want of a guest. So what the Lord Jesus did on this occasion is unthinkable! To attack the quality of the hospitality offered, regardless of the circumstances, is almost unknown. But the Lord Jesus makes what to the people in Simon's house must have seemed an unprecedented attack on the inferior quality of Simon's hospitality and He expresses it in uncompromising terms. Let's see how Jesus spoke with clarity but with gentleness to Simon.

Notice that Jesus, ***"Turned towards the woman and said to Simon"***! So the speech is addressed to Simon, but it was delivered facing the woman. It is a speech of praise to her for her kindness and her worth. If the Lord Jesus had faced Simon and said these things, it would have been a double shame. But facing the woman, it has a tone of gratitude expressed to this daring woman in desperate need of a kind word. The speech rises to a climax in which the Lord Jesus tells her that her sins have been forgiven.

So the Lord Jesus starts this speech with a question for Simon, ***"Do you see this woman?"*** Simon had been concentrating on collecting evidence for a negative judgment on Jesus. Now Jesus asks him to pay attention to the woman and her actions. Now Jesus begins the confrontation, ***"I came into your house."*** You were responsible to extend the traditional forms of hospitality to Me, but you refused! The details are stated clearly: this woman who you so despise as an immoral woman who should be stoned, magnificently compensated for your failure.

- ***"You did not give me any water for My feet."*** The Lord Jesus doesn't say, *'You didn't wash my feet'*. That would have assumed that Simon should have taken the role of a servant. No, Jesus is kind and speaks only of water. If Simon had provided water, Jesus could have washed His own feet. But Simon didn't even provide any water. But the woman herself washed His feet, not with water, but with tears and wiped them with her hair – her crown and glory.
- The Lord Jesus continues, ***"You did not give me a kiss!"*** Just what Simon was expected to kiss isn't mentioned to save Simon further shame. [The feet and the head of the Lord Jesus are mentioned.] But what should Simon have kissed? He had three options:
  - equals kiss each other on the cheek
  - a student kisses a rabbi's hand and a son kisses his parent's hand
  - kissing the feet

  In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the prodigal is prevented from kissing his father on the hand because his father hugged him and kissed him on the neck. It was a sign of reconciliation and done to prevent the son kissing his father's hand.

  Simon addressed the Lord Jesus as Rabbi, so he should have kissed the Lord Jesus on His hand. But Jesus is gentle with Simon and merely says there was no greeting at all. But in contrast, the woman covered His feet with kisses. So two contrasts are made:
  - Simon: not one kiss ___ the woman many
  - Simon failed to kiss even His head ___ the woman showed her supreme devotion by kissing his feet
- In the third action there is also a double contrast. Olive oil was commonly used to anoint the head of a guest. It was cheap and plentiful. The head, being a person's crown, is considered worthy of anointing. But the woman anointed his feet! No one thinks of anointing them even with olive oil, but she used **expensive perfume**!

So in three clear actions this woman demonstrated her superiority to Simon. In the end the Lord Jesus says in effect, *"In the light of this exposure of your many failures, I say to you …".*

Now we come to a much debated final pair of couplets:

"Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven
(for) therefore, she loved much.
But he who has been forgiven little,
loves little."

The Lord Jesus doesn't actually forgive her sins at that moment in Simon's house. Rather He announces a forgiveness that has already taken place. He is misquoted by the hostile guests in the next verse.

The Greek is in the perfect passive, ***"Her sins … have been forgiven"***. The passive is used to avoid using the Divine Name and the perfect tense indicates a present condition that results from a past action. So the Lord Jesus announces what God has already done for this woman and confirms it to the woman. Then comes the much discussed phrase, ***"Therefore she loved much"***. There are two typical translations:

"Therefore, she loved much."

"For she loved much."

The question is which is first – forgiveness or an outpouring of love? Are you forgiven first and realising this, you have an increasing love for the Lord Jesus? Or do you have an increasing love for the Lord Jesus until a point comes when you are forgiven? Which comes first – forgiveness or love?

The translations are divided. The AV, The Living Bible, Phillips, RSV, NIV, English Standard Version have ***"for"***. Today's English Version, The Jerusalem Bible and the New English Bible have ***"therefore"***.

The Greek word is *'hoti'* which can mean 'for'. But when it is used consecutively it means 'therefore'. Theologically from the rest of the Bible and the first two couplets it makes sense to choose 'therefore', for *'hoti'* is used a number of times in this passage.

If so, what the Lord Jesus points out is that in Simon's house this woman is **not** a defiled sinner, but is forgiven by God who knows well the extent of her sins, but now she has experienced something of God's grace freely given to her. This awareness has motivated her lavish outpouring of grateful love.

Then, speaking to Simon, the Lord Jesus says, ***"He who has been forgiven little, loves little"***. There are two ways of reading this.

- *"Simon, you are a righteous man and your sins are few. So very little of God's grace is needed to cover these 'debts'. So you have loved little."*
- *"Simon you have many sins. We have recounted some of them. You have little awareness of them and haven't repented. I could mention not only your inadequacies as a host, but your deep levels of pride that really defile as well as your rejection of sinners, your insensitivity, your misunderstanding of the nature of God's forgiveness and your sexism. So you have repented of little and so been forgiven little and naturally love little."*

Simon had witnessed the woman's dramatic action and still labelled her a "sinner" (v. 39). So he was refusing to accept her repentance. In his eyes she was forever condemned as a sinner. The implication is that God never really forgives sins!

Clearly, the two debtors refer to two types of sinners – one a great sinner like the woman and the other a small sinner like Simon. By thinking himself 'a small sinner' Simon deceives himself in the conceit of his own perfection. This conceit robs him of any awareness of his own sin and hardens his rejection of all those he considers sinners. Sadly, Simon sees in himself only a few spiritual 'debts' that he can easily handle with a few good works and so he doesn't need God's grace. So having received little grace, he shows little love.

The Lord Jesus speaks of this 'hardness of heart' in other places such as the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Does the Lord Jesus really think there are 99 that need no repentance? I think He is quietly laughing at this Pharisaical mentality that also affects so many evangelical Christians.

Simon asked Jesus to come to his house to test if He really was 'the prophet' of Deut. 18:15. [The Codex Vaticanus gives this reading in Lk. 7:39.] In Simon's mind, the test is the ability to know the inner nature of people. I wonder as he reflected afterwards and realised that Jesus demonstrated full understanding of the inner nature of both the woman and Simon himself? If he did, then he must have realised that Jesus is God's unique agent through whom He announces forgiveness of all our sins and to whom all our love, thankfulness and joy is appropriately directed. The woman is praised for showing love to Jesus in response to the forgiveness she has received.

Scene 7: Conclusion – the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus and the Woman

"The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in (into) ***peace'."***

All the principal people introduced at the beginning are here at the end. The Pharisees round Simon's table were not impressed with the Lord Jesus. They didn't voice their criticisms of Jesus aloud having just witnessed the withering attack Simon endured. They just spoke among themselves. When Jesus announces God's forgiveness of the woman they are outraged, ***"Who is this who even forgives sins?"*** So, in their eyes, Jesus not only lacked discernment about the moral life of the woman, but was extremely rude to their host – Simon – and now, to cap it all, He was acting as if he was God!

In every parable the Lord Jesus told, it is helpful to try to identify the decision/response the original hearers were being pressed to make. The original participant was Simon. He was pressed to understand and confess, *"I am as great a sinner as this woman. I haven't realised this. I haven't repented, nor have I heard the offer of the grace of God as this woman has. I have been forgiven little and so I have loved God/the Lord Jesus little. If the Lord Jesus wants to avoid sinners, He should avoid me, not this woman whom I have despised."*

The scene closes unfinished – like other parables such as The Two Lost Sons – we are not told what Simon's response was. Will he re-evaluate the nature of his own indebtedness, repent and offer expressions of grateful love or will his hostility harden in his heart?

Luke's Gospel was written to Theophilus. Simon's name is given so Theophilus could check out the story. How did Luke know what Simon was thinking – his soliloquy? This is pure supposition on my part. Luke had met and talked to Simon who told him the story. Can we assume that Simon did repent some time after the Lord Jesus had left? I think we will see both Simon and the woman in heaven!

A Summary of some of the Major Themes in the Parable

1. Forgiveness (salvation) is a freely offered, unearned gift of God. Salvation is by faith. We all need forgiveness for we are all debtors and we have nothing with which to pay. We can never meet our obligations, but there is forgiveness for all.
2. When we accept it, this salvation by faith immediately triggers costly acts of love. These acts of love are expressions of thanks for grace received. They are not attempts to gain more grace. No one who is not conscious of God's cleansing power from sin knows what it is to love the Lord Jesus. All through this story the word for 'love' is *'agapao'* – a love that is intelligent, informed and devoted. The woman is mercifully sent away from the presence of her despisers in the peace of her reconciliation to a loving Heavenly Father whose Son must continue to endure hostility in the proclamation of reconciliation to sinners like this woman and like Simon.

3. The Lord Jesus is God's unique "agent" through whom forgiveness is announced and to whom a grateful response of love is appropriately expressed out of awareness that through him the believer has been forgiven much (completely). Each listener must bring his own response.

4. The offer of forgiveness involves the Lord Jesus in a costly demonstration of unexpected love. Within the story we can detect something of the meaning of the Cross.

5. There are two kinds of sin and two kinds of sinners:
   - Those who are self-righteous because they keep all "rules"
   - Sinners who don't keep "the rules of morality" – like the woman

   Sinners like the woman know they are sinners. Sinners like Simon don't! So repentance comes hardest for "the righteous" who often maintain a cold civility towards the Lord Jesus, but no love.

6. In a man's world and at a banquet of men, a despised woman is set forth as a heroine of faith, repentance and devotion. She is the champion in these areas over a man. The inherent worth of women and the fact that the ministry of the Lord Jesus is for both women and men is powerfully affirmed.

7. In a confrontation with the Lord Jesus our options are faith or offence. There isn't any middle ground! For Simon, either Jesus is a rude young man who insults his host, fails to show any gratitude for a meal prepared in his honour and, worst of all, presumes He is God(!) **or** He is in fact God who truly mediates forgiveness and appropriately expects the response of humble and costly worship and devotion to His person.

8. The Lord Jesus accepts Simon's invitation without hesitation. He is known as "the friend of sinners", but this also involves a deep concern for the "righteous" as the outcasts. He loved Simon as much as he loved the woman. The atmosphere in Simon's house with its smug self-complacency was probably just as repugnant to the Spirit of Jesus as the atmosphere of a brothel! But he went just the same!

9. That we believers should be doing "more" is a universal demand in all churches – more good works, more self-denial, more practical obedience, more prayer! But what will produce these things? Nothing but love! We will never do "more" until there is a greater heart-felt love for the Lord Jesus Himself. The world tends to sneer at "feelings" in our belief system. However false or unhealthy feelings can become, the great truth still remains behind the feeling and it is the secret of doing.

10. It shows that the Lord Jesus notices neglect and He appreciates devotion. He notices it! So in our daily lines what are our normal reactions to situations? Are we giving the Lord Jesus worshipful adoration and sacrificial service? Or are our reactions more like neglect? He does notice!