

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 7: 36-50

Brothers and sisters, peace to you. This is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord that we have come again to our time of Bible reading. We continue with Luke chapter 7; today we read verses 36–50.

Verse 36: “Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to eat.”

Luke is very direct right from the beginning—he points out this man’s identity: he is a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the elite of Jewish society at that time; they took it as their duty to uphold God’s law. When they saw Jesus not keeping the Sabbath, they began looking for grounds to accuse Him, to spy on Him. Therefore this Pharisee invited Jesus to eat at his house—it was probably with ill intent, somewhat like the Hongmen Banquet, yet Jesus actually went.

Usually in Jewish custom at that time, since people wore sandals, the first thing when a guest arrived at someone’s home was for the host to provide water to wash the feet; because the place was very dry, the host would also prepare some ointment for the guest to anoint his head. Afterward the host and guest would kiss each other on the cheek as a sign of friendship—this was the normal way of receiving guests. This Pharisee Simon invited Jesus to sit at table, but he completely omitted all these actions. Luke immediately turns to another person.

Verse 37a: “And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner,”

Luke does not specify which city, but based on the direction and center of Jesus’ work at that time, it was very likely Capernaum. Because Jesus often went in and out of Capernaum, often preaching there, and many people received help from

Jesus and followed Him. Luke specially points out that this woman was a sinner—this way of speaking is very understated; in other words, she was a prostitute. When she learned that Jesus was sitting at table in the Pharisee’s house, she took an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at Jesus’ feet behind Him.

Let us first spend some time looking at this woman. She was a sinner; prostitutes in Jewish society were extremely despised. If this city was Capernaum, she probably was not seeing Jesus for the first time; very likely she had been in the crowd during many of Jesus’ preachings. When Jesus declared, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” And when she heard Jesus say, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” This sinful woman must have heard such declarations from Jesus while in the crowd; Jesus’ words touched the depths of her heart, she repented, she confessed.

Although others still knew her as a sinner, as a prostitute, within her she had already received new life; therefore she was willing to express her gratitude to Jesus. When she knew Jesus was sitting at table in the Pharisee’s house, she came uninvited. You must know how difficult this was for her. The Pharisee’s family was somewhat like what we today call a high-class, prestigious family; while she was a woman despised and looked down upon by others. When she entered this family, people must have pointed fingers at her. She had to face everyone’s strange looks, critical looks; yet she bravely walked in and came before Jesus.

Verses 37b–38: “...when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.”

What this host, the Pharisee Simon, should have done—he completely omitted. But this sinful woman, because of gratitude, summoned the courage to enter the Pharisee’s house: with her tears she washed Jesus’ feet, with her hair she wiped

them dry, she broke the alabaster flask and anointed Jesus' feet with the fragrant oil, and she kissed His feet repeatedly.

Verse 39: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'"

The Pharisee was very self-righteous, considering himself a guardian of God's law. He was full of judgment toward people; he knew this woman had been a prostitute in the past, and now he turned the arrow toward his guest Jesus: he said, If this Man were a prophet, He would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him. For the Pharisee, the clean and the unclean could not mix, because the word Pharisee means "separated." Not only did he judge this woman; he also judged Jesus, because everyone liked to hear Jesus preach.

He said in his heart: If this Man were a prophet, He would surely know that the one touching Him is a sinner. He should immediately separate Himself from this woman. Jesus of course knew his thoughts; Jesus not only came to save sinners, but even these self-righteous people were objects Jesus came to save. Therefore Jesus did not directly answer what Simon was thinking in his heart; instead He told him a story.

Verses 40–42: "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.' '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?'"

The meaning in Jesus' words is actually quite deep; God is this creditor; every person stands indebted before God. Here He mentions two people: one owed five hundred denarii, the other fifty denarii; both were unable to repay. Before God we

are all sinners—great sinners owe fifty, small sinners owe five—all are indebted and unable to repay. The creditor freely forgave both their debts—completely by grace. Then the question Jesus asked is very interesting: Which of these two will love him more?

Verse 43: “Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’”

This is very basic logic; Simon’s answer was not wrong at all. On the basis of this story, Jesus began to preach the gospel to Simon.

Verses 44–47: “Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’”

Here Jesus points out a very basic fact: this woman knew she owed much debt; she knew her debt had been forgiven; therefore she was full of gratitude. At the same time, He was also telling Simon: Do not think you see clearly; do not think you know this woman is a sinner—but do you know her sins have already been forgiven? You think you are good because you are blind; you cannot see your own condition clearly.

Jesus directly contrasts Simon with this sinful woman. Jesus does not compare the two on a moral level, nor on their spiritual condition; instead He uses the simplest basic courtesy in human interaction. It is as if He says to Simon: You consider yourself educated and polite, a member of upper Jewish society, but when I came

to your house you gave Me no water for My feet; yet this woman with her tears washed My feet and with her hair wiped them. You gave Me no kiss; yet this woman has not ceased kissing My feet since I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil; yet this woman anointed My feet with fragrant oil. When you two are compared side by side, you are so coarse, while she is so noble—why? Because she has been forgiven much, therefore she loves much; you have been forgiven little, therefore your love is little.

Verses 48–50: “Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’”

This woman’s sins were forgiven, and she seized the opportunity to express her gratitude to Jesus. In contrast, the Pharisee clung to his past knowledge of this woman, not knowing she was now a new creation. A person who truly repents in grace will live a life of gratitude. On one hand she recognized her own unworthiness; on the other hand she was amazed at the abundant grace God gave her. A person who truly knows God and truly knows himself must be a grateful person.

Conversely, a person full of criticism toward others, full of judgment, who always feels he is better and stronger than others, is a person who does not know gratitude. He does not know God’s grace; he also does not know his own condition. Here Jesus not only forgave this sinful woman; at the same time He directly told this Pharisee Simon: You too are a debtor; your debt has also been forgiven; you must learn to live a life of gratitude.

We are not certain whether Simon repented and was saved that day, but we can ask ourselves: Are we like this sinful woman, full of gratitude toward Christ, or like this Pharisee Simon—full of self-righteousness, full of criticism, and not knowing God’s grace?

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You place such an example before us once again to remind us that we are a people who have received grace and blessing, whose sins are forgiven. On this foundation, help us live a life of gratitude. Every morning when we wake up to this new day, we first offer our thanks and worship. Use this day's time to let me know myself more, experience Your grace more, and be more willing to break the alabaster flask and anoint You with the fragrant oil. May my life this day be a life full of fragrant aroma. Thank You! We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.