

The Penitent Woman

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 7th Sep 2014

Intro

- Would you want to have Jesus come back to your place for food? Could be risky! We are going to go back in time and be a fly on the wall and see what happened when a guy called Simon invited Jesus back for a meal.

Read Luke 7:36-50

Here we see two extremely different responses to the presence of Jesus. The cold response of the Pharisee Simon (not Simon Peter) and the warm response of the woman (not Mary who anointed Jesus just before He went to the cross- that is another situation, perhaps inspired by this one). I wonder which characterises us the most? We will look at 3 positive things the woman did which we can learn from:

1. She **WELCOMED** Jesus

- What are you like at showing hospitality? What is the best hospitality you have had, and the worst?
- The Pharisee, Simon, invited Jesus for food, but his heart wasn't really in it, he didn't show the custom hospitality that was the custom of the time. It was the custom that when you invited someone for food first you provide:

-for their feet to be washed- servants **washing feet**, or at least provide a bowl for them to do it themselves- dusty streets, sandals.

-for them to be greeted properly, with a **kiss**- men also would greet with a kiss, it was the culture.

-for them to have olive oil **anointed** onto their heads (psalm 23- you anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows- i.e. You treat me like a special guest). Olive oil was the typical thing to use but for a special guest it would have a costly fragrance and would be very refreshing.

In our culture, making someone welcome would be- inviting them in rather than keeping them standing on the door, giving them a hug, or pat on the back or smile, perhaps taking their coat and offering for them to sit down. Offering them a cuppa.

- She made Jesus at home. Tears for washing his feet, kissing his feet, perfume for anointing his feet.
- Q. Are you living like you really want Jesus in your life? Are you making Him **WELCOME** in your life, or treating Him like a stranger? Does he only have access to some of your life? Are you a Sunday Christian?
- We are to be a welcoming people, those who practise hospitality. How we treat others and strangers is how we treat Jesus- what we do to the least of His people we do to Him.
- Why then did Pharisee invite him back? Perhaps it was because he was looking for **the status** of having a 'rabbi' come back to his house. He perhaps wanted to look good. He was a man of reputation and good image, the woman was the opposite. But Jesus accused the Pharisees of being 'whitewashed tombs' and 'unmarked graves'- they looked holy on the outside but were rotten inside. People became ceremonially unclean if they touched a dead body- Jesus was saying the Pharisees

- might look 'clean' but they are not really, they are full of sin but don't appear so.
- Q. What do you look like in Church, compared to what you look like at home? Is there a consistency with how you are with Jesus, or is it merely for show? A box ticked.
- Perhaps he invited him back because he wanted to catch him out (6:7 'Teachers of law looking for a reason to accuse Jesus and were watching Him closely'). Earlier in 7:16 after Jesus had raised a boy from the dead the people were saying a 'great prophet has appeared among us'. Moses had promised God would send a 'prophet like him' and everyone must listen to him (Deut 18:15,18). Stephen later in the book of Acts would identify Jesus as this 'Prophet', (Acts 3:22). When the sinful woman touched Jesus the Pharisee thought he had him sussed 'if this man were a prophet he would know...'. (a touch from a sinner brought ceremonial uncleanness). However Jesus answered his thoughts and proved that he was indeed the prophet- he knew what Simon was thinking, he knew Simon better than he knew himself, he knew the woman and he had the power to forgive sins against God- therefore Jesus must be equal with God. The spirit of anti-Christ we looked at last week- it opposes or denies Christ- denies His deity, does not give Christ His rightful place. This same spirit would finally manifest in the teachers of the law arranging for Christ's murder. We must stand up for truth and for Christ, and we will be persecuted for it. There is something about the name of Jesus which challenges people- we bear the name in a dark world.
- The woman was a true GOD SEEKER, the Pharisee was not. He had no desire for the presence of Jesus, the woman did. How about you?

2. She WEPT over her sin

We all need to know how bad our sin is and how good God's forgiveness is. This woman knew both, Simon knew neither.

- This woman was well known in this community, she had a reputation. We don't know that she was a prostitute, but it is likely. Perhaps she had hungry mouths to feed and no means of income and had to resort to prostitution. She was no doubt aware of how people viewed her, as illustrated by the way this Pharisee was thinking.
- Simon the Pharisee would have been an upstanding man in the community. He would have been respected by all, held in high esteem and seen as the person to emulate- the Pharisees were the godly ones, the ones who had their theology right and taught others.
- The amazing thing was that although the woman was viewed originally as the sinner, and Simon would have been viewed as the Saint, Jesus actually turned the tables and revealed that the opposite was indeed the case. Jesus gave her back her dignity, whereas Simon was left with a challenge. Who are we most like out of the two of them? Have we forgotten how bad our sin is or how great God's forgiveness is?
- Sin is sometimes compared to debt in the Bible in the sense of owing something to someone- i.e. God (forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors). We also use the same connection when we say 'I owe you an apology'. So Jesus makes use of the analogy in His parable to Simon. A denarius was a day's wages for a labourer. In the parable Jesus told both were in extreme debt. One owed 50 days wages, however the other owed 500 days wages, but both were really in the same position as neither could pay. Let's bring the picture up to date. You have run short this month so you contact Wonga.com. You've seen the advert on TV and you go to their website and move the dial to get a payday loan. The next week you do the same, and before you know it the debt has mounted up and is unmanageable. You

have a phonecall from the head of Wonga and rather than arranging for you to go to prison for non-payment of fines he says 'I'm cancelling the debt'. If you had 50 days of debt you'd be happy with his, but if you had 500 days you would be over the moon! The woman was living like she had been forgiven a great debt, Simon was living as if he was ungrateful for God's forgiveness.

- What about us? Are we living like we really appreciate God's forgiveness? Although we may each owe different debts to God the fact is none of us can pay our own debt, only He can. There are varying degrees of sin, yes, but in one sense there is no such thing as a small sin- all sin is lawlessness. Our sin is serious, it drove Jesus to the cross. The Bible is clear, the wages of sin is death.
- What are you like at saying sorry? Justification is when we make an excuse for the bad we do, it is the opposite of being sorry. Although tears can be faked these tears the woman cried were real. Maybe they were tears of joy or love, maybe they were tears of sorry for sin, but in reality they were probably both. She could not help but cry. She had come with the intention of anointing Jesus, but then out flowed the tears. The greek word used means 'to rain', or 'to cause to rain' or 'to send rain' or 'to wet'- these were gushing tears right from the belly.
- What sin are you justifying right now? Tolerating and making excuses for? If we are Christians we are Saints and not Sinners, but that should not make us complacent, or apathetic or think we need the grace of God any less- we should always remember the height from which we've fallen so that we always appreciate God's forgiveness and undeserved favour.
- The Pharisee went from this situation probably feeling ashamed he had been so self-righteous, or maybe he would have felt angry with Jesus. Contrast this to how the woman felt- 'Your sins are forgiven you'- said publicly so she should no longer be viewed by the community as a SINNER. 'Your faith has saved you- go in peace'. Rather than hiding her sin from the saviour she got it sorted – she went to Him in faith for His mercy and forgiveness and she GOT IT! Faith in Christ's goodness will cause us to confess our sins to Him- God loves us- Jesus went to the cross for us out of love- let's confess and get sorted. The woman received peace- shalom- not just peace but the smile of God, God's blessing. The key to ongoing blessing in the Christian life is never to wander from the cross and the message of God's wonderful grace.

3. She **WORSHIPPED** Jesus

- Is worship of God for you a chore or a joy? When we understand God's grace to us like this woman did, there can be no other response but worship. The job of worship leading can be an interesting one, especially when it appears no one is in the mood for worship- people might be perhaps going through their shopping list, planning their week, thinking about Sunday dinner, thinking about Facebook messages or zoning out because it was a late night last night so 'just put on a spiritual face and lift up your hands, no one will know your mind is blank'. We can learn a lot from this woman- she came ready to worship Jesus.
- She approached Jesus with a bottle in her hand and she was not afraid to use it! Did we come prepared to worship God today, or did we need coaxing into it?
- It was not uncommon for uninvited guests to come to the house if you had a dinner party on, especially if the Rabbi was there, they would come to listen to His wisdom. People would come and sit on the wall whilst invited guests would recline around the low table, usually leaning on their left arm with the right arm free to take food off the table and their legs behind them. Posh dinners would have couches for the guests. People on the walls could then listen in and observe and also interact with the guests by speaking to them.

- What was different though was that this lady regarded as sinful should be there- it must have taken huge guts on her part, as she knew she would be judged, but she just had to see Jesus to thank and worship Him.
- There is a Greek word for worship 'proskeuneo' which means to 'kiss towards'. It is used of kissing the feet of a king- humbling yourself before them. This is exactly what this woman did. The Greek tense is imperfect meaning continuous past action- i.e she continued kissing, crying, wiping his feet with her hair and anointing them. She was dedicating herself to this job and was not half-hearted. Paul was characterised by joy and encouraged us to be the same- 'rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again- rejoice!', and 'give thanks in all circumstances'.
- A typical alabaster bottle of perfume would have a long narrow neck and would need to be broken open to be used. It probably cost her a lot of money and she wanted to bless Jesus and make a sacrifice to Him. Olive oil alone could be used for anointing but she wanted to go beyond the basics. Our worship should cost us something of ourselves. David would not give to the Lord that which cost Him nothing. How much has our worship cost us today? For those in Iraq recently it has cost them their lives. What are we prepared to give to the King?
- Sweet fragrance is pleasing and the fragrance of the perfume would have been pleasing to Jesus. In the same way, in the Old Testament when someone brought a gift to God of a burnt offering the smell would be 'a pleasing aroma' to God- God is pleased with a truly sincere heart attitude of worship. Does He see this in us? Equally when people are just going through the motions it is not pleasant for God. In Isaiah 1:13 it says 'your incense is detestable to me' – i.e. They were just paying lip service and the smell of their worship was unpleasant to God. What fragrance did we bring God today?
- The tears she cried were from the heart, she was not just going through the motions. Luther calls these tears 'heart water'. Our hearts have to be involved in our worship, it should stir our emotions.
- The woman loosened her hair to wipe Jesus' feet dry. This was a shameful thing for a woman to do in public, but it was an automatic response from the woman when she accidentally wet Jesus' feet with her tears. There is an intimacy here- touch, which made those in the room feel uncomfortable, but Jesus saw the true heart in it and commended the woman. Our worship of God is not to be distant, God wants us to come close to Him- we are not strangers, but we are to lavish our love on Christ and love God fervently from the heart. What is our heart's response to Him today?

Conclusion

This penitent woman teaches us to:

- WELCOME Jesus
- WEEP over our sin
- WORSHIP Jesus

The result will be God's wonderful Shalom in our lives too!

Song: *I will offer up my life*