

## “The Sinful Woman and Simon”

### Luke 7: 36 - 50

**36** One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. **37** And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, **38** and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. **39** Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” **40** And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” **41** “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” **43** Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” **44** Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. **46** You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. **47** Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” **48** And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” **49** Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” **50** And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Why isn't the name of the “Sinful Woman” written? Furthermore, if she was known to be a sinful woman, why is it that the specific sin is not mentioned? What we know from the Word is that, whatever her sin was, it was a serious one. And we also know that Jesus forgave all her sins. For Luke, the gospel writer, it was not important that her name be known nor was it for Jesus. I will be mentioning it later on, but briefly I want to say that to become a Christian is being freed from the value system of this world such as distinguishing people by their ability, or

influential people controlling those who are in weaker positions. Yes, we might do something important that our names might be remembered on earth, but, that is not important.

What is important is that our Lord is not interested in our worldly accomplishments. What matters is how the Lord looks at us. This story occurred in the house of Simon, who was a Pharisee. Simon, the Pharisee, had invited our Lord Jesus for a meal. At this point, the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees was not as bad as it became later on. However, Jesus was showing signs of being critical of the Pharisees, and the relationship was becoming awkward. Our Lord pointed out how the Pharisees considered themselves right in everything they did and how they looked down on others who were not living up to their standards. On the other hand, the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for their lifestyle and actions that seemed to be ignoring the Jewish teachings.

Let's take a look at some previous verses: Luke 7: 31 to 34 **31** "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? **32** They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep." **33** For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' **34** The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' **35** Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

Why did Simon invite Jesus for a meal even though he was a Pharisee? As I mentioned before, most of the Pharisees had not accepted Jesus. And that was because, compared to their way of life, Jesus' and His disciples' lifestyle was too free and it looked as if they were ignoring the old traditions. And yet Simon, who invited our Lord, accepted Jesus' social status. He might have thought that it was not right to prejudge Jesus as other Pharisees did, and maybe he wanted to show his repentant heart and directly apologize to Jesus. Or, maybe his motive was not only apologizing, but also flaunting his social status by inviting the "man in the limelight" to a meal. And we want to remember that even though Simon was a Pharisee, he was not excluded from God's Kingdom, either. Instead, Jesus wished

to invite Simon to the Kingdom of God. Our Lord's teaching was open to all people without distinction, both for the Pharisees and for those who were called "sinful men".

Luke 7: 36:38 **36** One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. **37** And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, **38** and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

The style of eating meals at Simon's place was very different from the ones we have in the Japanese or Western culture. Sitting around in a circle, lying down with your legs stretched out would be considered bad manners in Japan. In the Jewish culture that was the norm. The men would lie down using their elbows to support themselves and then eat with their right hand. That was the comfortable and proper way of eating. The woman "stood behind him at his feet, weeping, began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment." The action the sinful woman took was very much related to this style of eating. It was the woman's behavior that Simon couldn't understand rather than her sudden intrusion to the dinner party. She was a stranger and she came in uninvited. It was unconceivable and even distasteful. Furthermore, it was Jesus' accepting the woman and her actions that surprised him rather than the woman's behavior itself. Simon's motivation to invite Jesus to a meal might have come from his desire to advance his social status and to influence others with his power. He saw Jesus as a way to show the world that he was connected with Jesus who was becoming famous and influential. His desire was to flaunt his relationship with Jesus as a medal. Simon's ambition and wish was to be included among the successful and privileged class of his world. So, when he saw Jesus accepting and affirming this "sinful woman", Simon was disillusioned. **39** Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." Simon welcomed Jesus as a friend and tried to be as hospitable as he could, but these words showed his true Pharisaic

nature. Firstly, Simon had a heart that despised this woman with a bad reputation. Secondly, he was judging Jesus using his own moral standard. He just couldn't accept Jesus' actions because they didn't fit with his standard. In Simon's mind, if Jesus was on God's side, He would never interact with such a "sinful woman". Jesus, who knows the thoughts of men, tried to make Simon understand the actions that He took towards the woman. Even though Simon's motivation to invite Jesus was not out of love but to advance his own social status, our Lord loved Simon, accepted him, and desired for him to mature. There are some books written by businessmen that say, "If you want to succeed internationally in the world of business, it is advantageous to read and study the Bible". Such motivation or invitation to read the Bible is, of course wrong, but our Lord accepts even those who will come to Him with such wrong motivations.

Luke 7: 40-47 **40** And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." **41** "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" **43** Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." **44** Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. **46** You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. **47** Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

According to the Lord, the woman's actions were the results of the huge forgiveness that she had received from Him. Firstly, it was an act that came from a thankful heart. "I don't have anything to give back, but I just want to express my thankfulness." That was in the woman's heart. The "sinful woman's" actions came from the overflowing thankfulness of her heart. Those who are forgiven much love much. This is the Biblical principle. According to the Bible, love is not an abstract idea but an action. If you say you love your neighbor, you need to show it through action as a token of your love. If you say you love God, what have you done for Him? That is what we are asked to show. What have you done for the person whom

you love? The biblical principle is not that we will receive forgiveness in exchange for an action. It doesn't mean that just because we do meaningful acts of love, we will receive God's forgiveness. Even though our Lord had declared her forgiven, the "sinful woman" still seemed to have thought that she had to continue doing good in order to remain forgiven. Maybe she was afraid that her forgiven state would be taken away or declared invalid if she did not continue doing something worthy. It seems that the "wound" was completely healed, but since the scar was still there, she was anxious that the wound might come back. Her past sins were so grave that even though she was completely forgiven, the scars of sin in her heart were still there. Maybe she was trapped in her fear and was not freed from it. Forgiveness is not given in accordance with the amount of action. We can see in the Japanese Kyodo Translation that much love is expressed where there is much forgiveness. The Japanese Kyodo Translation of Chapter 7:47 says: We can see that this person was forgiven of much sin by how much love she has shown to me. There are instances in our lives when we are convinced that we are acting in love. God's forgiveness is not in exchange for such action. God's forgiveness is unconditional. The forgiveness God gives is not because God decided that our action was worthy of forgiveness. God's forgiveness is not based on whether the sin was big or small. All sins are sins in God's eyes. There is no exception. We have to be forgiven by God from all our sins. Viewed from men's standard, there are "light" sins that can be forgiven. And furthermore, there might be unforgivable sins committed under pardonable circumstances.

"Crime and Punishment" is a novel by the Russian writer Dostoevsky. The main character Raskolnikov's life changed when he met the prostitute Sonya. Sonya's father, a drunkard, had squandered the family's wealth on drinking. Sonya had become a prostitute in order to help her family. From a human point of view, Sonya is someone who is to be pitied. However, even though she couldn't help but sin because of the circumstance she was in, this doesn't mean that the forgiveness she needed to receive was small. In God's eyes, any sin, no matter how small, must be forgiven. It became clear that the "sinful woman" was forgiven for her many sins by "the actions of love that she showed to our Lord". The action of love by the sinful woman just took place right before Simon. It was a product of her experience of receiving forgiveness for a far greater sin than the forgiveness Simon himself had ever experienced. Simon did know that he was forgiven, but his realization

was not as deep as hers. In His parable, the Lord compared the actions of Simon and the woman. We need to keep in mind that loving actions in the Lord are hardly noticed or remembered by men.

**48** And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” **49** Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” **50** And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

What could have been the fear that controlled the woman’s heart? Let’s think about this. For one, it is the trace of sin that was lingering in her heart. This trace of sin will be erased completely as time goes by. That is when complete healing occurs. And for another, people called her a sinful woman, and she was despised by all. She feared people’s eyes and was living in constant shame. She was freed from all this when the Lord declared the forgiveness of her sins. The Greek tense used in the verb here is the present perfect construction, which means that the action was already completed, and we are seeing the result of the act. The forgiveness of her sins was not in exchange for her action at Simon’s house. She was already forgiven and was free from all her sins. “Go in peace”: what a huge impact the Lord’s words must have had on her. This promise of peace was given by the authority of our Lord. Let’s say a doctor tells you to be at ease after looking at the results of your health check up. You would feel a complete relief, wouldn’t you? That is because the doctor said those words by his authority as a professional doctor. Our Lord Jesus speaks not with the authority of mere man but of God Himself. What kind of fear did this woman have to be freed from? She had to be freed from “bad reputation”. Even if you were surrounded by bad gossip or reputation, there is nothing that will influence your relationship with the Lord.

Let’s read the apostle Paul’s words from the Letter to the Romans, chapter 8: 38-39: For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The declaration that our sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ is as if our debts are paid, and there is no longer any payment to make. It means that our “debt “ that represents our sins are written off by our Lord. Even if we had a debt we don’t need to be controlled by it. Our Lord will redeem us from this debt as we ask Him

to do so. There is a ransom that needs to be paid in exchange for your life. Jesus is the One who has paid for that ransom with His precious life. Do you still feel guilty for your past sins? You need to be saved. Our Lord accepts our repentance, and He frees us from the residue of our guilty feelings. Jesus has freed us from the power of sin. We don't need to live under the guilt of our sins. We don't need to live under such burden. Dear Brothers and Sisters! Today, accept our Lord's words "Go in peace."