

### **Back to Luke: A brief catching up**

- ◆ It's been a few weeks (actually one month) since we covered anything from Luke in class. In that lesson we covered the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.
  - The fame of Jesus' spread throughout the land (Luke 4:14-15).
  - Jesus' reads the scriptures in the synagogue and proclaims that He is the Messiah (Luke 4:16-21).
- ◆ Luke 5: Jesus performs many miracles: the great catch of fish, the healing of the leper, and healing and forgiveness of sins.
- ◆ Luke 6: This chapter includes Jesus selection of the twelve, and the Sermon on the Plain. There is a significant amount of overlap between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain.

### **Jesus, The Pharisee, and the Woman Who Was a Sinner: Structure**

- ◆ The pericope seems to be structured around three different instances of narration/report followed by a statement of judgment or evaluation by one of the characters in the narrative:
  1. The Anointing (vv. 36-39)
    - a) Report: Jesus is invited to dinner.
    - b) Report: The woman anoints the feet of Jesus with oil.
    - c) Judgment: Simon judges both the woman and the Savior (incorrectly).
  2. The Parable (vv. 40-43)
    - a) Report: Jesus (responding to thoughts) asks for an audience and Simon agrees (v. 40)
    - b) Report: The parable of the two debtors (vv. 41-42)
    - a') Judgment: Simon judges and Jesus agrees with his judgment (v. 43)
  3. Revisiting the Dinner and Anointing
    - a) Report: Jesus revisits the woman's anointing in light of the parable.
    - b) Judgment: "Her sins which are many are forgiven."
    - c) Judgment: the pharisee own judgment judges him.
  4. Epilogue: Jesus addresses the woman: "your faith has saved you, go in peace."
- ◆ *What does the preceding structure tell us about the themes or focus of this story?*

### **She Anoints His Feet**

◆ Read Luke 7:36-39

(36) And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. (37) And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, (38) And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. (39) Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

◆ *Notes:*

- The setting is clearly a dinner scene with a pharisee. Luke is the only gospel that reports that Jesus dined with the pharisees. He does it three times: Luke 7:36, Luke 11:37, and Luke 14:1. In each case the Savior scandalized his host in some way.

- The meal scene, table fellowship scene, or symposium scene was a Greek literary genre:<sup>1</sup>

The symposium as a social institution was, of course, the second course of the traditional banquet, or the drinking party that followed the meal proper. It was during the drinking party that the entertainment of the evening was usually presented. In the philosophical tradition, this tended to consist of elevated conversation on a topic of interest.

Luke may be purposely trying to place this story within that tradition so that his reader will have a better awareness of the setting. It certainly emphasizes Jesus' role as a great teacher.

- Scholars point out that Jesus was likely more than sitting. He was probably reclining with his head towards the table and his feet away from the table.<sup>2</sup>

◆ In the verses we are introduced to two people that play prominent roles in this pericope: (1) The Pharisee (Later identified as Simon) and (2) the woman who in the pharisee's eyes is a sinner.

- *These two people represent contrasting roles and Luke emphasizes the contrast. How are these two people contrasting? What can we as readers learn from the contrast?*
- *Do you think these two people represent types. Why do you think the story centers around the actions of a pharisee and the actions of a sinner?*
- *Notice that in the introduction of the story the characters are not named. Jesus, later mentions that the pharisee's name is Simon, and the sinner woman is never mentioned. Is this an important narrative device? How does it change the focus or how we should understand the story?*
- I think this is a key. At the beginning neither the pharisee or the woman identified as a sinner are personalized by mention of their names. To me this suggests that we should think of them as types.

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<sup>1</sup>see Smith, Daniel, 1987, Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 613-638.

<sup>2</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 354.

- *Do these types or groups show up at other times in Luke's account or in the other gospels? What other groups or types of people are also connected with these two contrasting type or groups?*
- Actually, we see this contrast in other parts of chapter 7. The story that precedes this one involves the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. In the midst of this we find a narrative insertion from Luke explaining the crowds differing reaction Jesus' comments about John the baptist and his ministry. Read Luke 7:29:30:
 

(29) And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. (30) But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.
- Let's skip verses 31-33 and read Luke 34:34-35:
 

(34) The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! (35) But wisdom is justified of all her children.
- *Notice how both the pharisees and sinners get mentioned in the these verses. Does this change the way we view the sinner woman in our present story? Is this an important backdrop to understanding the following story?*
- *What about the other stories in Luke 7? Are they an important backdrop for this climactic episode?*
  - ◆ A centurion shows great faith and Jesus' heals the centurion's slave (Luke 7:1-10).
  - ◆ Jesus' heals a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17).
- *Are these events an important backdrop for the climatic event of chapter 7? Why would Luke arrange these events together or maybe why would he include them together in this section? Do you think the the centurion and widow have commonality with the woman in our story?*
- ◆ *The woman is identified in an interesting way: "behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner." Why would Luke use the phrase a "woman in the city?"*
- ◆ It might suggest that she was well known as a sinner. Scholars point out that the underlying Greek word for "sinner" here is not a generic description or a word that would be used to suggest that all people are sinners. This is why it is often suggested that the woman was a prostitute. However, I think worrying about her exact sin misses Luke's narrative point. Identifying her as a sinner connects her to the previous verses involving John, Jesus, and the reception of baptism.
- ◆ *Why didn't the woman anoint Jesus' head, which is the norm in Jewish custom of the time and also the behavior we observe in the other anointing stories in the gospels?*
- ◆ There are some parallels to anointing of feet: "a domestic custom in which a man's feet would be anointed by his wife or daughter."<sup>3</sup> Certainly, these parallels and maybe more particularly the intimate imagery have fueled much speculation about the exactly what is going on here and the relationship between the woman and Jesus and the identity of the woman (by both

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<sup>3</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 355.

Mormons and non-Mormons). However, to me the most likely explanation is that she doesn't want to disrupt the dinner so she anoints in a way that will hopefully cause the least amount of disturbance. I think the fact that the narrative emphasizes Jesus' position as sitting or reclining is a detail that suggests that his head is inaccessible to her. Why is it important that she anointed anyway? To me, it emphasizes the purity of motives, her humility, and her need to express gratitude in whatever way possible.

- ◆ *The pharisee calls the woman a sinner. Is there anything ironic about this charge given the backdrop of the rest of chapter 7?*
- ◆ *The pharisee and the woman provide contrast, but might there also be similarities? Do the similarities ultimately contrast?*
- ◆ One similarity is that they have both sought out and invited Jesus into their lives to some degree. But there is also a contrast here. The woman has sought out and invited Jesus into her life as the Messiah (She has accepted His servants and His baptism). The pharisee has really sought him out as a great teacher and for good conversation. He asked and received, but it pales in comparison to her asking and receiving.
- ◆ *Do you think it is important that the woman's actions are a mix of planned and spontaneous actions?*

## **The Parable**

- ◆ Read Luke 7:40-43:

(40) And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. (41) There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. (42) And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? (43) Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

- ◆ **Notes**
  - Simon's address of Jesus as Master is probably better understood as "teacher." Non-disciples always describe or address Jesus this way in the gospel of Luke. "Teacher" is for Luke an objective description (equivalent to 'rabbi') and indicates the societal rank and role of Jesus without prejudice to the personal attitude towards him or the one who uses the title.<sup>4</sup>
  - Modern translations don't use pence as the unit of currency. They tend to use denarii which was a silver coin used in the Roman Empire. The average wage of agricultural laborer in Palestine during this time was around a single denarius per day.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ *Why would the master forgive the debts? Could these point to a year of Jubilee as a part of the parable's setting?*

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<sup>4</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 355.

<sup>5</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 355.

- ◆ The notion of remitting debt and forgiving sins has a natural metaphorical correspondence. Could this refer to a jubilee situation? I don't know, but the year of Jubilee is an important metaphor for Christ's Ministry in the gospel of Luke. Jesus begins His public ministry in Luke by quoting from Isaiah and the verse specifically references a year of Jubilee. The Savior coming and ministry is a time of Jubilee; it ushers in a time of forgiveness for those who accept him as the Messiah.
- ◆ *What does the parable teach us about the woman's actions?*
- ◆ The parable seems to suggest that her actions are in response to having a debt remitted and not to achieve remittance. If we think of John's baptism as a backdrop than this makes a lot of sense. She is expressing gratitude (love) for forgiveness she has received from her acceptance of the message of Jesus and her baptism by his servant, John.
- ◆ *What does the parable teach us about the pharisee's action?*
- ◆ *In what way does the parable capture the situation of the characters in the story?*
- ◆ *In what way does it not capture the situation or maybe accurately represent the differences between the pharisee and the sinner woman?*
- ◆ The parable seems to fit the woman well in the sense that she is a forgiven and then shows gratitude. However, this is not true for the pharisee. He has shown no gratitude nor has he sought forgiveness.
- ◆ *Does the parable help us understand or give us insight into why the pharisees didn't accept John's baptism?*
- ◆ *What do we learn about Simon from his response at the end of the preceding verses?*
- ◆ *Is Simon's reluctant passing of judgment ironic in light of his earlier judgment of the sinner?*
- ◆ *The parable is presented very briefly without much narrative color. It is very sparse. Do you think there is a reason for this? Is it for Simon's benefit?*

### **Revisiting the Anointing**

- ◆ Read Luke 7:44-47:

(44) And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. (45) Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. (46) My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. (47) Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

- ◆ The KJV version is a bit misleading here in verse 46. The underlying Greek is in the perfect tense.<sup>6</sup>
  - NRSV: **(47)** Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."
  - NIV: **(47)** Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."
  - It makes sense to me that Jesus would use the perfect tense if she was one of sinners who accepted John's baptism.
- ◆ People often suggest that the pharisee was rude to Jesus and didn't offer the proper hospitality. Providing water for the feet is very common in the Old Testament (Gen 18:14, Gen 19:2, and 1 Kings 25:41,) but scholars have suggested that it might not have been mandatory.<sup>7</sup> Also, scholars have suggested that a greeting kiss was not mandatory. Neither was anointing the head of the guest with oil. Both of these are probably better understood as courtesies rather than requirements of the host.<sup>8</sup> Finally, probably the most important clue is that Jesus doesn't suggest or say that He was treated differently than the rest of the guests.
  - *Let's suppose that these scholars are correct. Why does Jesus contrast the pharisee's actions with the woman's actions?*
  - *What does this teach or confirm to us about Simon?*
  - *Why does Jesus cast her in the role of the hostess?*
  - *Does this backdrop give us some insight into that nature of her "love" for the savior?*
  - *Does this backdrop give us insight into why the pharisees didn't get baptized?*
  - *Suppose, I am right about the idea the forgiveness happened previously through coming unto Christ and baptism. What does this suggest about what accompanies those who come unto Christ? How are they changed by the experience? How does that change manifest itself?*

## Epilogue

- ◆ Read Luke 7:48-50:

**(48)** And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. **(49)** And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? **(50)** And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.
- ◆ *Is there anything ironic about the guests reaction to the Savior's pronouncement that the woman's sins have been forgiven her?*

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<sup>6</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 355.

<sup>7</sup>Nolland, John, 1989, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9*, Word Books, 357.

<sup>8</sup>Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 937.