

FORGIVENESS

The Worship of an Unnamed Woman

Luke 7:36-50

Introduction: The story of the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and her hair is one of the most moving accounts in the New Testament. My fear in teaching this passage is that I (we) will over-analyze it, and in the process lose the thrust of this great text. It is something like telling a joke, which is not immediately understood. The more we seek to clarify the details, the more we lose the impact of the joke.

In the laboratory, one must often kill the object being studied in the process of seeing its parts. Frogs, for example, do not come to or from the lab living and jumping. So, too, I fear that as we look at the parts of this very moving story, we might miss the thrust of it for having considered its details. In biblical words, I fear that we might "strain the gnats" of this text, but "swallow its camels." Let us open our hearts as well as our minds to the message of this text for us.

There are three principle characters in this story, all of which are relevant to us. **The Lord Jesus** is, of course, the star of the story. He, unlike the others, deals with this woman in love and forgiveness. **The woman**, who is never named, is the recipient of our Lord's forgiveness. She represents the "sinners" who are strangely attracted to Jesus. **The host, Simon**, was a Pharisee, and as such he represents at least the perception which many "sinners" have of the church and of Christians. It is from these characters and their relationship with each other that the message of our story is to be found.

The Structure of the Text

The structure of our text can be outlined as follows:

- The Setting--vv. 36-38
- Simon's Thoughts and Jesus' Response--vv. 39-47
- Jesus' Response to the woman--vv. 48-50

1. The Gracious Experience of Forgiveness

- Jesus needed None
- Simon Missed It
- The Woman Got It

2. The Great Extent of Forgiveness

- No sinner that can't be forgiven
- No sin that can't be forgiven
- No limit to forgiveness from God

3. The Glorious Expression of Forgiveness

- Not expressed by Simon
- Greatly expressed by the woman
- Freely given by Jesus

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The Uniqueness of this Foot Washing in the Gospels

Each of the gospels has an account of the washing of Jesus' feet by a woman. Let us briefly consider these other accounts:

Matthew 26:6-13 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Mark 14:3-9 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. 6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

John 12:1-8 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a

dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

It is my personal opinion that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John all deal with the same washing, but that Luke's account is a unique incident, recorded only in his gospel. John's account initially seems to differ from those of Matthew and Mark, primarily due to the fact that the dinner appears to happen at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. While John's account tells us that Martha served, it does not specifically indicate that the meal was served at her home. If the home of Mary and Martha was too small to entertain a large group, then Simon the leper (a former leper, healed by Jesus, I assume) may well have volunteered his home. Martha would likely have insisted that she serve.

The similarities between the three gospel accounts and that of Luke are superficial. The name Simon is was common in the ancient world as "Smith" is in our phone books. "Simon the leper" is hardly synonymous with "Simon the Pharisee." In fact, a link between the two would be unthinkable to a Pharisee. Luke's incident appears to occur much earlier in Jesus' ministry than that of the others, which occurs just prior to our Lord's death (thus serving as a preparation for His burial). In Luke's account, "Simon" silently protests; in the others' accounts, the disciples protest (John narrows the protest down to Judas). Simon the Pharisee could not grasp how Jesus could let such a sinful woman touch Him, while the disciples were troubled by the waste of the perfume, which could have been sold so that the money could help the poor.

All things considered, I believe that the incident described by Luke in his gospel is different from that described by Matthew, Mark, and John.¹ Let us seek to learn from Luke what it was about this event which made it worthy of so much attention.

The Setting **Luke 7:36-39**

We are not told precisely when this incident occurred, nor the name of the city. The principle characters are Jesus, Simon the Pharisee, and the woman with a soiled reputation. It is interesting that Luke gives us the name of the host, but not of the woman. Omitting her name is, in my opinion, a gracious act, purposely done.

At first look it would seem that there are two people equally zealous to see Jesus: Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Simon could easily converse with Jesus in the comfort of his home, around a meal. For the woman, getting close to Jesus was no easy matter. Her sinful life, known to all who lived in her town, made it difficult for her, a woman, to seek out Jesus, a man. If she owned a home, she could not invite Jesus there, for this would be inappropriate, especially if she were a harlot, for this would be her place of business.

Reports of Jesus' ministry and teaching had somehow reached this woman, and she was most eager to see the Savior. When she learned that Jesus was to have dinner at the house of Simon, the woman knew it was her opportunity to see Jesus. From our Lord's words, it would seem that she arrived at Simon's house before Jesus: "*You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet*" (Luke 7:45).

If the dinner were to begin at 7:00 P. M., the woman seems to have arrived at 6:45. She was there, ready and waiting. With her, she brought a container of perfume.² It is my opinion that this woman came prepared to anoint the feet of Jesus, the humble task usually delegated to the lowest servant. Perhaps she would be permitted to do this.³

The washing of Jesus' feet can best be understood in the light of our Lord's words of rebuke to Simon, and when compared to the Lord's washing of His disciples' feet as recorded in John chapter 13. As the Lord entered the house of Simon, custom and normal hospitality would have it that Jesus would have been greeted with a kiss, His feet would have been washed, and His head anointed with oil.

The woman no doubt waited near the door for Jesus to arrive. She probably expected that Jesus' feet would have been washed by one of Simon's servants. After His feet were washed, the woman would then likely have planned to anoint His feet with the perfume she had brought. Imagine the look on her face when she realized that Jesus' feet were not going to be

washed. She did not let the dirty feet of our Lord keep her from what she had intended to do. She dared not kiss Jesus on the face, as Simon should have done, but she could kiss His feet, His dirty feet. She had come with no basin, no water, and no towel. Nevertheless, as she began to kiss His feet, the tears began to flow, something most unusual for a woman of her profession.⁴ As the tears began to flow, the woman must have noted that the little streams of tears carried the dirt of the road as well. She used the water of her tears to wash His feet, something she could hardly have planned in advance. Since there was no towel available to her, she used her hair to dry Jesus' feet. Imagine this, the woman used her hair, the most glorious part of her body (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15), to dry the feet of Jesus, the most ignoble part of one's body! She did not do her duty quickly, so as to quickly finish an unpleasant task. She persisted at kissing the feet of our Lord (cf. v. 45).

This woman's worship of Jesus was at a great cost to her. It cost her the expensive vial of perfume, and the humility to kiss, wash, and dry the dirty feet of the Lord Jesus. But there was a higher price than this paid by the woman. In my opinion, the greatest price which she paid was facing the scorn and rejection of the self-righteous Pharisees and other dinner guests at that meal. Jesus did not give her a "dirty look," but it is inconceivable to think that all of the others did not. Simon's disdain, revealed by his inner thoughts, must also have been evident in his eyes, and so too for the other guests. "What in the world are **you** doing here?" must have been etched on the faces of the guests. It could hardly be otherwise for a Pharisee, whose holiness was primarily a matter of physical separation from sin and from "sinners." The woman's desire to see and to worship Jesus was greater than her fear of these guests. Their scorn was a high price to pay, but to the woman it was worth it.

Simon's Thoughts and Jesus' Teaching **Luke 7:39-43**

No doubt a great part of Simon's motivation was to "check out" Jesus. Was this man really a prophet? Was His message to be believed? And how did His message compare with that of the Pharisees? Was He a threat, or an ally? Just who did Jesus claim to be and what was to be done about Him? Should He be resisted, opposed, put to death, or should be ignored? Could He be recruited to their side? These may have been some of the questions in Simon's mind, suggesting some of his motivation for having Jesus over to dinner.

Simon's reasoning is most illuminating. It went something like this:

Premises:

- If Jesus were a prophet, he would know people's character
- If Jesus knew this woman was a sinner, He would have nothing to do with her

Conclusions:

- Since Jesus has accepted this woman, He does not know her character
- Since Jesus does not know this woman is a sinner, He cannot be a prophet
- Since Jesus is not a prophet, I/we can reject Him, His message & ministry

Simon, like many of us, was being very logical about his thinking and his response to the Lord Jesus. The problem with logic is the same as the problem with computers: your output is only as reliable as your input. To put it differently, there was nothing wrong with Simon's logic, other than the fact that he based his conclusions on a faulty premise. His first premise--if Jesus were a prophet, He would be able to discern the character of those around Him--was correct. Jesus, in fact, went beyond Simon's expectations. Jesus was not only able to detect the woman's character ("... her sins, which are many," v. 47), He was also able to know the thoughts of Simon, His host (v. 39). By conveying to Simon that He knew His thoughts, Jesus proved that He was at least a prophet.

Simon's second premise was entirely wrong, a reflection of his erroneous thinking as a Pharisee. Simon, like his fellow-Pharisees (remember that the word Pharisee means "separate"), assumed that holiness was primarily a matter of separation. Holiness was achieved by keeping oneself separate from sin and from sinners. According to this view, Jesus would have to shun this sinful woman in order to remain holy. Simon concluded that either (1) Jesus didn't know this woman's character, or (2) that whether or not He knew about her sinfulness, He was physically contaminated by her, and thus could not be holy.

Our Lord knew exactly what Simon was thinking, as well as why his thinking was wrong. Jesus' words to Simon in verses 40-47 expose the error of Pharisaical thinking, and explain why the "Holy One of Israel" would draw near to sinners, even to the point of touching them and being touched by them.

A Story for Simon Verses 40-42

The question which best expresses the issue which caused the Pharisees to draw back from Jesus is found early in the gospel accounts:

"Why do you eat and drink with the tax-gatherers and sinners?"
(Luke 5:30; cf. Matt. 9:11; Mark 2:16).

Simon could not conceive of Jesus knowingly allowing this woman to touch Him by washing His feet. Why would Jesus possibly associate with sinners? Jesus gave the answer by telling a story and then extracting a principle.

The story was a simple one. A money-lender loaned money to two different individuals, neither of which were able to repay their loan. The one had borrowed ten times more money than the other. The money-lender forgave the debt of both men. "Which of the two," Jesus asked Simon, "would love the money-lender more?" Simon's cautious answer was that the one who owed the most would love the man the most. Jesus confirmed the truth of his response.

Underlying it was the principle, **THOSE WHO ARE FORGIVEN MOST LOVE MOST.**

Jesus now takes the principle and applies it to Simon and the sinful woman. Simon shunned the woman because she was a sinner, and expected Jesus to do likewise. Jesus rebukes Simon by showing that in every respect the woman has outdone Simon in her acts of love and devotion. Simon did not show Jesus even the minimum courtesy of washing His feet. This woman not only washed His feet, she did it with her tears and her hair. Simon did not bestow a kiss on Jesus' face; the woman did not cease to kiss the feet of Jesus, which, at first, were dirty feet. Simon did not anoint the head of Jesus with oil; the woman anointed His feet with expensive perfume. The woman outdid Simon in showing love to the Lord. The woman was, at least in Simon's mind, a greater sinner. The woman was, as Jesus pointed out, the greater lover as well. From both the story which Jesus told and from the supper which Simon held, the one who was forgiven more loved more.

There is a problem here, which has troubled theologians and Bible students over the years. In verse 47 it would appear that Jesus is telling the woman that she is forgiven because she loved much. It is not difficult to accept the statement that those who are forgiven much, as a result love much. It is difficult to accept the statement that those who love much are forgiven much. To love because you are forgiven is a natural response to grace. To

be forgiven because you love is works. There are thus some who would teach that on the basis of this text we must love in order to be forgiven.⁵ This makes forgiveness the product of our works, rather than a gift of God's grace.

It may be over-simplistic, but I think that the problem can be resolved by taking note of who Jesus is speaking to, and the issue which He is addressing. In verse 47, Jesus is speaking to Simon the Pharisee. He is answering the question, "Why does Jesus seek out and associate with sinners?" The Lord's answer is found in His response to Simon:

"Simon, I seek out sinners and associate with them because they love me more than 'saints' like you Pharisees do."

Think about it for a moment. If God's purpose for the incarnation was to be loved by men, whom would you expect the Lord Jesus to associate with if it were true that "he who is forgiven much loves much"? If the principle is true, then we would expect our Lord to seek out those who were the greatest sinners (and in the minds of the Pharisees, this woman qualified as one of the city's great sinners).

Jesus is therefore addressing the question, "Why does Jesus seek out sinners?" rather than the question, "How is one saved?" The relationship between forgiveness and love is the basis for our Lord's actions in seeking and receiving sinners.

The body language of our Lord in verses 44-47 is most significant. All through the dinner, Jesus' back was to the woman, who was anointing and kissing His feet. He was, at the same time, facing His host, Simon. Now, once Simon's rejection of Jesus is revealed, in contrast to the woman's worship, Jesus turns His back on Simon and faces the woman, even though He is still addressing Simon (cf. v. 44). Jesus is, by His actions, rejecting Simon and accepting the sinful woman. What an incredible statement is being made here!

Jesus' Words to the Woman Luke 7:48-50

When Jesus speaks to the woman in the final verses of our passage, He now makes clear to her the basis for her forgiveness: "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace*" (Luke 7:50).

Let there be no doubt as to the basis for one's forgiveness. It is not works. It is not the work of loving others, even God's Son. Forgiveness is the gift of God, granted to those who have faith.

The question is this: "What was it that the woman believed by faith?" If the woman's faith saved her, what was the substance of her faith? What did the woman believe that saved her? I believe that the text strongly implies the answer: **THE WOMAN BELIEVED THAT IF SHE CAME TO JESUS AS A REPENTENT SINNER, JESUS WOULD NOT SEND HER AWAY.**

The "bad news" of the Pharisees--"Jesus associates with sinners"--was good news to this woman, because she acknowledged that she was a sinner. The only people who will bristle at the thought that Jesus has come to seek and to save sinners are the self-righteous, those who do not think they need saving. This woman did not dispute the fact that she was a sinner. She rejoiced at the reports that Jesus received sinners. She came to him as a sinner, believing by faith that He would not send her away--and she was right. Of all those who went to the dinner, only this woman is said to have left forgiven. Oh, the marvelous grace of God toward we sinners!

Conclusion

The first lesson of this incident is that Christ came to seek and to save sinners. A woman who was considered a great sinner by her peers⁶ was forgiven by our Lord, while those who thought themselves righteous went away unforgiven. There is a strange attraction to Christ for those who will admit they are sinners, and who wish to turn from their sins. Jesus is never more approachable than He is to sinners. In John's gospel we read these words of great encouragement to every sinner:

"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

While it is true that Jesus is the sinless Son of God, who hates sin and who will ultimately judge sinners, the message of the gospel is that in His first coming Christ came to save, not to condemn. Jesus thus said to the woman caught in adultery, "*Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more*" (John 8:11).

This is because in His first advent, Jesus came to bear the penalty for man's sin Himself, and to save men from eternal damnation. All who come to Him for forgiveness and salvation will be saved. None will be turned away. But there is yet another coming of Christ, when He comes to judge. At that time,

it will be too late. Those who come to Him then will tremble in fear of Him, and rightly so.

My admonition to you who have never come to Christ as this woman did is that you come now. Come, trusting that He will receive you, that He will forgive you, that He will save. No one is more accessible to sinners than Christ. No one is more repulsive to the self-righteous than Christ. May each of us be like this woman, rather than like Simon the Pharisee.

The second lesson which we can learn from our text is to recognize the characteristics of self-righteousness as evident in the life of Simon the Pharisee. I cannot dwell on the evils of Pharisaism here, so suffice it to mention just a couple of characteristics of Simon which are evident in our text, which could be true of us as well. Simon was more interested in passing judgment on God than he was on God's judgment of him. Simon felt that his home would be more righteous by keeping sinners, like this woman, out, than by inviting sinners in. Many churches feel the same way. Simon was inclined to see some sins as greater than others in the eyes of God. Sexual sin was unforgivable, but pride was acceptable.

Simon thought of religion as something to be preserved; Jesus thought of true religion in terms of penetration. Simon wanted to keep sinners out, Jesus went out to sinners. Some of Simon's error is the failure to grasp the change from the old covenant to the new. The Old Testament dealt with sin as incurable, and thus the principle defense was simply to avoid contact with sin and sinners. The new covenant came with a solution for sin. The new covenant could change hard hearts to soft ones. Thus, Jesus did not feel compelled to deal with sinners the way the Old Testament taught--seek to destroy or to avoid them.

The Pharisee looked at sin something like the way we look at AIDS. It has no cure, and thus the best course of action is to avoid any and all contact. But, you see, the gospel teaches that Jesus is the cure for sin. Thus, Jesus did not need to avoid sinners, He could seek them out, just as we could aggressively attack AIDS if there was a foolproof cure.

Somehow Simon and the other Pharisees of the New Testament found it difficult to be "touched" by those they would not touch. In all of the New Testament I fail to see one incident in which a Pharisee was touched by the misery, the sin, the shame, the grief of another human being. It is little wonder that the Old Testament prophets had to speak so often about mercy and compassion. I see none of it in the Pharisees in the gospel accounts. To have compassion obligates one to minister to others. To lack compassion

allows one to use others for one's own personal gain, at their expense. Jesus, who did not hesitate to touch or be touched by sinners, was constantly "touched" (emotionally) by them. May we be like Him.

The painful reality is that our churches often reflect the mood of Simon's house than they do of Jesus Himself. We ought to welcome sinners, if they acknowledge themselves as sinners, and if they seek to be saved from their sins. All too often, sinners are shunned by the church, more than they are sought by it. May we learn from our Lord to be more like Him and less like Simon.

Lastly, we learn a great deal about worship from this woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears. It is true that we do not have the opportunity to wash the feet of Jesus, as the woman in our text did, but we can learn a number of principles pertaining to worship from her actions. Consider these principles with me as we conclude.

(1) WORSHIP IS FOR SINNERS. The woman who worshipped Jesus was a sinner. Our Lord neither denied this, nor minimized it. It is important to recognize that sinners can worship God. As you think through the complex rules and regulations of the Old Testament law, it becomes evident that God established worship for sinners. Otherwise, it would not have been necessary to have all of the intricate rules and rituals and sacrifices. Worship, in the Old Testament, was for sinners.

So, too, in the New Testament. As our Lord said, it is our awareness of our own sinfulness, in conjunction with the knowledge of our Lord's perfection, which stimulates worship. Those of us who are most sensitive to the magnitude of our sin, should also recognize the magnitude of God's forgiveness, thus stimulating our worship.

I sometimes get the impression that when we come to the Lord's Table we think that we have to reach some kind of momentary sinlessness before we can worship. How foolish. Even momentary sinlessness is impossible. When Paul warns against observing the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11: 27) he is referring to the inappropriateness of the drunken excesses in the Corinthian observance of communion. There is a world of difference between an "unworthy manner" (and adverb, "unworthily") and an unworthy state (being a sinner). While we will be sinless when we worship God in heaven, we worship as sinners on earth.

(2) WORSHIP TAKES PLACE AT THE FEET OF JESUS. The proper position for our worship is at the feet of Jesus. It suddenly occurred to me that the

feet of our Lord are very frequently mentioned in our text. While Simon did not even do justice to our Lord's head, the woman was only comfortable at Jesus' feet. She kissed them, washed them, and dried them with her hair. She did not feel worthy to do otherwise. Particularly in Daniel and the Book of Revelation, men find themselves falling at the feet of Jesus, when they recognize Him as God. Worship at the feet of Jesus acknowledges His greatness and our unworthiness; His perfection, and our sinfulness. Worship that exalts man is not true worship.

(3) WORSHIP IS PREOCCUPATION WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST.

The woman who worshipped at the feet of Jesus was preoccupied with Him, and Him alone. The fact that there were those present who disdained her did not matter, for she cared only about what her Lord thought about her. The fact that many present were hypocrites did not prevent her from worshipping, for her worship was focused on the Savior.

(4) WORSHIP IS NOT CONCERNED ABOUT RECEIVING SOMETHING FROM OUR LORD AS GIVING SOMETHING TO HIM.

Jesus was approached by many people, most of whom wanted something from Him. I do not wish to minimize this or to condemn it. If I lived in Jesus' day and were blind, I would want to come to Jesus for Him to restore my sight. But this woman's worship was expressed by her giving to Jesus, not getting from Him. Too often, our prayers are like a wish list for Santa, at Christmas time. Too seldom, our prayers are praise and adoration alone, without any request, where our only desire is to be in His presence, forever.

(5) WORSHIP INVOLVES THE EMOTIONS. The tears of the woman who worshipped Him by washing His feet are most significant. The worship of this woman was, may I say, emotional. Those of us in our tradition tend toward a very intellectual worship. We could use a good deal more emotion. Remember that we are to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Worship should involve the mind and the emotions.

(6) THE WORSHIP OF THIS WOMAN WAS WITHOUT ONE WORD. It took me a while to realize that while our Lord spoke to this woman, Luke did not record so much as one word which she spoke to Him. It is possible that she spoke to Him, but Luke does not find it necessary to record the fact if she did. I make a point of the silence of her worship because some women seem to chafe at the fact that their leadership in public worship is forbidden in the New Testament Scriptures. I also would point this out for the benefit of those men who think that they can only worship when they speak publicly. The best worship may be wordless.

(7) FINALLY, WORSHIP IS NOT EASILY HINDERED. There were many reasons why this woman could have stayed away from Jesus and not worshipped Him. She was not invited. She was not wanted. She might be expelled. She would be scorned. There would be hypocrites there. But in spite of many difficulties, the woman did what she desperately desired to do—she worshipped Jesus. Why is it that a couple drops of rain, a late Saturday night, and we find worship too difficult.

May God enable us to worship as this woman did, to the glory of God, and for our delight.

*1*Morris writes, "Each Gospel has a story of an anointing of Jesus by a woman (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Jn. 12 1-8). There are good reasons for thinking that the other three are describing one and the same incident, but Luke a different one. They refer to an incident in the last week of Jesus' life, Luke to one much earlier. The 'sinner' of Luke's account wet Jesus' feet with tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and anointed them, which is different from what the others describe. And the ensuing discussion is different. In Luke it is concerned with love and giving to the poor. There is no reason for holding that the woman in the other Gospels was a 'sinner' (John says she was Mary of Bethany). Some have held that Luke's 'sinner' was Mary Magdalene, but this is sheer speculation." Leon Morris, *The Gospel According To St. Luke, The Tyndale Bible Commentary Series*, R. V. G. Tasker, General Editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 146.

*2*From Proverbs 7:16-17, it would seem that perfume may have been part of this woman's tools of her trade. With it, she may have adorned herself and her bed. Now, she was eager to employ it for the most noble purpose, anointing the feet of the Savior.

*3*Some have puzzled as to how his woman would have been permitted to enter Simon's house and to be present during this meal. The explanation is to be found in the culture and customs of that day:

"That a woman, uninvited, and of such a character, should have pressed into the chamber, and should have been permitted to offer such homage to the Saviour, may at first sight appear strange; but it can easily be explained when we [remember] that in the East the meals are often almost public. We must remember her present earnestness, too." R. C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House [reprint], 1948), p. 104.

"At a dinner at the consul's house at Damietta, we were much interested in observing a custom of the country. In the room where we were received, besides the divan on which we sat, there were seats all round the walls. Many came in and took their places on those side-seats, uninvited and yet unchallenged. They spoke to those at the table on business or the news of the day, and our host spoke freely to them. We afterwards saw the same custom at Jerusalem." --Narr. of a Miss. of Inquiry to the Jews from the Ch. of Scotland in 1839, as cited by R. C. Trench, p. 204, fn. 2.

"In the East the door of the dining room was left open so the uninvited could pass in and out during the festivities. They were allowed to take seats by the wall, listening to the conversation between the host and guests. Then Jesus sat at table with Simon the Pharisee, a woman of the city entered. Instead of sitting by the wall and listening, she lavished her affection on Jesus: (a) she wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head; (b) she kissed his feet; and (c) she anointed his feet with ointment (vss. 37-38). That Jesus permitted the act evoked a negative response from his host (vs. 39)." Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), p. 86.

4If this woman were a prostitute, she would have tended to become "hard" and would never have intended to show her emotions, especially in front of a man. I have not dealt with such women, but I have dealt with many men in prison. Crying is not something which a prisoner ever does in prison, for it shows "weakness" (at least in the minds of prisoners). I believe the same is true for women like the one we find in our story. Her tears are thus especially significant. If one wonders how a few tears could wash the feet of our Lord, I suggest that the many bottled up tears of her past flowed in abundance on this occasion.

Talbert writes, "B and B' involve explanations to two questions: first, why is the woman known to be forgiven by her display of affection and second, how can Jesus pronounce the confirmation of her forgiveness? These questions will shape the discussion of the passage which follows. . . There are two possible ways of reading vs. 47. (1) "Because of her conduct her many sins have been forgiven." Here the sinful woman's love is understood as the cause of her forgiveness. (2) "Her many sins have been forgiven, as is evidenced by her conduct." Here the woman's love is viewed as the evidence of her forgiveness. (2) "Her many sins have been forgiven, as is evidenced by her conduct." Here the woman's love is viewed as the evidence of her forgiveness. The second reading is linguistically possible (e.g., 1:22; 6:21) and is demanded by the context. The New English Bible's reading is to the point: "And so, I tell you, her

great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven; where little has been forgiven, little love is shown." Why is the woman known to be forgiven? The answer is that her display of affection is evidence of it." Talbert, p. 87.

Plummer also says, "This is a verse [v. 47] which has been the subject of much controversy. What is the meaning of the first half of it? We have to choose between two possible interpretations. 1. "For which reason, I say to thee, her many sins have been forgiven, because she loved much" . . . Her sins have been forgiven for the reason that her love was great; or her love won forgiveness. This is the interpretation of Roman Catholic commentators (see Schanz), and the doctrine of *contritio caritate formata* is built upon it. But it is quite at variance (a) with the parable which precedes; (b) with the second half of the verse, which ought in that case to run, "but he who loveth little, wins little forgiveness;"; (c) with ver. 50, which states that it was faith, not love, which had been the means of salvation; a doctrine which runs through the whole of the N.T. This cannot be correct. 2. "For which reason I say to thee, her many sins have been forgiven (and I say this to thee), because she loved much" . . . This statement, that her many sins have been forgiven, is rightly made to Simon, because he knew of her great sinfulness, he had witnessed her loving reverence, and he had admitted the principle that the forgiveness of much produces much love. This interpretation is quite in harmony with the parable, with the second half of the verse, and with ver. 50. There were two things evident,--the past sin and the present love,--both of them great. A third might be known, because (according to the principle just admitted) it explained how great love could follow great sin,--the forgiveness of the sin." Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel According to S. Luke, The International Critical Commentary Series*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), pp. 213-214.