

“It’s who you know”

Luke 7:36-50

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Simon knows something that Jesus doesn’t know. That is the entry point to this profound parable. Simon, the Pharisee who has invited Jesus into his home, knows that the woman anointing the feet of Jesus with her tears is a sinner. Simon also knows that Jesus does not know this. How do we know this? Because Simon knows that if Jesus did know what type of sinner the woman was, Jesus would not allow her to even touch him, much less wash his feet with her tears.

But Jesus knows something that Simon doesn’t know. Jesus knows exactly the type of sinner this woman is. And Jesus knows that Simon knows. More importantly, Jesus knows that Simon thinks Jesus does not know. And Jesus knows because Simon thinks that Jesus does not know that Simon thinks Jesus must not be a prophet.

The woman knows a few things herself. She knows that Simon knows she is a sinner. In fact, she knows that everyone in town knows what type of sinner she is. And undoubtedly, she knows that she is a sinner. She knows that Jesus knows just what type of sinner she is. Simon didn’t know this, but she knows this. She also knows that not only does Jesus know that she is a sinner, but she knows that Jesus has the power to forgive.

The other guests at the dinner don’t know much. Thankfully, you might say. All this knowing and being known can get awfully confusing. The other guests at the dinner don’t know who Jesus is. He tells the sinful woman that her sins are forgiven, and all they can ask is a question, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” They don’t know who Jesus is.

Do you know? Do you know who this is who even forgives sins?

To truly know Jesus, it seems that we need to know that Jesus knows. Knows what? He knows everything. Jesus knows everything. Simon starts off on the wrong foot because he thinks he knows more than Jesus. Simon sees Jesus welcome a sinful woman and assumes that Jesus does not know who, and what sort of sinner this woman is. We are on dangerous ground whenever we think we know more than Jesus...especially when we use our knowledge to judge and condemn others. Jesus knows about others. He knows all their deep and dark secrets.

We also find out that Jesus knows about Simon. Simon has never said one word. He has only thought these things to himself. But Jesus knows the thoughts that Simon is thinking. Jesus knows that Simon has judged the woman. Jesus knows that Simon has judged him and determined that he is not a prophet. And Jesus knows that Simon does not love him very much. Simon did not give Jesus any water to wash his feet, he did not give him a kiss, and he did not anoint Jesus with oil on his head.

To know Jesus is to know that he knows everything. Jesus knows others, and he knows us. Intimately. Personally. Completely.

To know Jesus is to know what he does with what he knows. Jesus knows that the woman is sinful. Simon expected that if Jesus knew, he would cringe when the woman approached him. Simon expected Jesus to rebuke the woman, to condemn her, to cast her out, to humiliate her. But watch what Jesus does with his knowledge. Jesus accepts her. Jesus receives her. Jesus defends her. Jesus forgives her. Jesus even holds her up as an example of one who loves much. Then Jesus sends her out in peace.

To know Jesus is to know how much you need him. For the woman, it was obvious. She needed forgiveness. She had found it in no other place. She found it in Jesus. It is important to realize that a central point in this encounter is that Jesus truly does have the power to forgive sins. The fact that he knows everything serves as a reminder that this isn't simply a kind and compassionate man who has pity on a rejected and scorned woman. This is the all-knowing and all-powerful Son of God who has been given authority to forgive sins. Jesus has that power. Jesus has that ability. If you are looking for forgiveness, here is where you need to come. You will not find forgiveness anywhere else. Only Jesus has the power and the authority to forgive sins. The woman knew how much she needed Jesus. She found forgiveness in him, and that forgiveness changed her life.

The parable of the two debtors tells us that Simon did not know how much he needed Jesus. One debtor owed 500 denarii and the other fifty. The one who owed 500 would have been keenly aware that he could not repay the debt. But what about the one who owed fifty. Maybe he still thought he could pay it back. If he worked harder. If he cut corners. Or maybe he thought that fifty was a small sum, a sum so small it wouldn't be noticed...especially when there were others who owed 500. They were really in debt. His debt, well, that wasn't so bad in comparison.

And yet the parable is about more than forgiveness. To know Jesus is to know how much you need him. Forgiveness is a central part. But the true heart of the parable is to know that we need Jesus all the time. If we only needed Jesus for forgiveness, when we received forgiveness, we would leave him. If we need him for everything, we will stay with him.

The woman knows how much she needs Jesus. She has had the debt of 500 forgiven. And yet now she stays. In one of the most poignant and touching portrayals of worship and adoration, she comes to him in the home of the Pharisee, this man named Simon. Seemingly oblivious to all that is going on around her, she is focused on Jesus. She knows him. She knows him well. She knows that he has looked deep into her heart. He has seen the sin, the shame, the sorrow, and the sadness. She knows that he has looked with the piercing and powerful light that meets sin head on...and conquers sin. She knows the most wonderful sense of relief. He has forgiven her. He has set her free. She knows him. She comes to him with an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. Then she begins to wet his feet. Not with the perfume. That comes later. Instead, she wets his feet with her tears. Tears of...sadness? Yes, she must have been crying from the knowledge of how great her sin was. Tears of...gladness? I think so. She had been forgiven. The overwhelming joy of having her debt cancelled came out in buckets and buckets of tears. With her hair she wiped his feet. With her lips she kissed his feet. And then, finally, the perfume. With the perfume she anointed his feet. She had been loved by Jesus in an extravagant way. He had forgiven her great debt. Now she loved him, in an extravagant way.

To know Jesus is to love Jesus. Do you know Jesus?

Luke has given us a beautiful example of who Jesus is. He has allowed us an intimate glimpse at a woman truly in love with Jesus. You don't have to have been forgiven 500 to find your heart stirred by the compassionate love he has shown the woman, and the tearful love she has returned. You don't have to have been forgiven a great debt...but maybe seeing how kind our God is to his children, you will sense within yourself a genuine and humbling realization that you too are indebted, deeply indebted to your God. Maybe the worship of this woman, the adoration, the heartfelt hunger she had to wash the feet of our Lord with her tears,

to dry those feet with her hair, and to anoint them with perfume,
will spark within you a desire to give your full love to God.
Unashamedly. Unabashedly. Unreservedly. Unconditionally.

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