



That was awkward

Luke 7 v 36 to 50

Jesus is asked to dinner and accepts the invitation. It is an invitation from those who oppose him so he would not have expected a comfortable evening. In common with the culture of the day the guests would recline on cushions often around a three-sided table called a triclinium. As Jesus was a public figure the door to the meal might well have been open so that interested people could sit on the edge of the room and listen to what was said. Forget the traditional pictures of the Last Supper – that would be a meal with a similar format.

The central themes of this account are linked to the main characters.

1. The woman illustrates the gratitude, boldness and humility of faith
2. The Pharisee illustrates the opposition Jesus experienced from the established religious leaders of the day. Their attitude is unforgiving and ungracious in sharp contrast to Jesus.

The woman arrives in the room – she is called ‘a sinner’. She clearly has a reputation so ‘sinner’ is used not in the general sense (which we all are) but to say she has done something to be condemned by society. But her gift to Jesus is some lavish perfume which suggests she is making a great sacrifice. It shows how important she considers Jesus to be. Some have estimated the cost to be equivalent to a week’s wages.

Are there dangers in being too respectable so that people who have been deeply embedded in a sinful lifestyle find it hard to be accepted?

Do we sometimes condemn people who have a ‘reputation’?

How do we ‘modernise’ the pouring of ointment on Jesus’ feet?

The Pharisee begins to think that Jesus cannot be a prophet if he allows such a woman near him. He is not only shocked. He has locked his thinking into defining a ‘man of God’ as someone who is respectable and follows the societal rules of the time. Jesus reaches out to a 1st century untouchable and receives her love and worship.

Do we have stereotypes about how a Christian should look and behave?

Has the church created these stereotypes?

Jesus tells a parable to make his point clear. There are 2 debtors. In 1st century terms their debts amount to 2 months and 20 months of basic wages. The debt collector discovers that neither can pay and, surprisingly, writes off the debt. Jesus asks the unanswerable question that he so often used. Who is more relieved? Unlike the Pharisee who can only dwell on the woman’s history, Jesus sees the possibility of someone released from the bondage they are in. He mentions the washing of his feet, the greeting and the anointing. She has taken more steps than she needs to greet Jesus

Why do you think the Pharisee host didn’t like what the woman did?

Was he jealous?

Did he realise he should have done something similar?

Do you think it’s possible for us to lose the wonder of Jesus’ forgiveness after years of being a Christian?

How can we change that?

But there is a key element which should not be missed. Because of her devotion to Jesus her sins are forgiven. The one who is forgiven little, on the other hand, loves little. Forgiveness for our sins should produce a response of love to the Saviour who granted it.

Forgiveness is a wonderful gift from God?

Do we constantly ask for his forgiveness (1 John 1 is worth a read)

Do we sometimes carry a burden of sin when all we need to do is ask God to forgive us?

There is a pointed remark directed at the Pharisee who probably sees himself as a 'little sinner'. Perhaps he had not realised the significance of his forgiveness because he thought of himself rather too highly. Jesus tells him that he did none of the things the woman did.

Is it ever possible that we drift towards a similar position?

Do we ever get short on humility? You might say to yourself 'I'm really quite a nice person'.

What is the most important lesson we can learn from this encounter?