



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

When Good Men Sin

Luke 7:36-50

David Anguish

Introduction

1. Michael Moss tells of a student he taught at Lipscomb University who was several years older than the others and “had gone through all sorts of difficulty. He had been a drunkard, a drug addict, a drug dealer.” As they studied Luke, he asked probing questions, usually about God’s grace and its real meaning. Another student noticed, and one day stayed after class to say, “I wish I had the appreciation for God’s grace that he (the older student) has.”
2. The next day, Moss asked the older student to tell his story which prompted another question from a fellow-student: “Is it better to be bad and then be good than to always be pretty good? You know, I’ve been raised a Christian, and I’ve never been bad. . . . Since I was never really bad, I’m not sure I appreciate the grace of God like this other fellow does....”
3. Moss comments, “His question was very interesting. Perhaps by the providence of God, the text that we were to study the next day in the class was the parable of the two debtors.”¹

Body

- I. Luke’s Preparation for This Parable.²
 - A. In 6:20-49, Jesus presents principles that are the essence of kingdom living.
 - B. Chapter 7 relates a series of events that set the stage for our text.
 1. In 7:1-10, he has moved on to Capernaum where he receives a centurion seeking healing for his servant; the man had faith unlike any Jesus had seen in Israel.
 2. He then went southwest to Nain (7:11-17) and came upon the funeral procession for the only son of a widow; Jesus raised him and the people declared, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” (7:16).
 3. Having heard about these things, John sent disciples to confirm that Jesus was the messiah; Jesus answered by showing his messianic concern for outcasts (7:18-23; see Isaiah 35:5-6).

¹ C. Michael Moss, *When God Reigns: A Study in the Parables of Jesus* (Web City, MO: Covenant Publishing, 2004), 41-42.

² Our text, unique to Luke, is a stand-alone story, but appears in a context he chose and which prepares us to better hear it.

4. The presence of John's disciples led him to ask the people what they thought about John (7:24-35); varied responses showed childishness and fickleness.

II. The Interrupted Dinner (7:36-50).

A. Invitation: a Pharisee (named Simon, v. 40) invited the celebrity Jesus to dinner (36).

1. "He reclined at the table" – meaning his feet were not under it.
2. "... open doors provided access to courtyards or to special banqueting rooms, enabling other onlookers to view the festivities."³

B. Interruption (37-38).

1. Literally, v. 37 says of her, "in the city a sinner."
 - a) The text does not indicate why; for many Pharisees, all she needed to be was a non-Pharisee (i.e., not as devoted to keeping the law).
 - b) "... when she learned" is literally "and having known/found out" (καὶ ἐπιγνοῦσα, *kai epignousa*); it's an aorist tense participle suggesting the possibility that she had prior knowledge he would be there (see below).
 - c) "... having brought ..." (κομίσασα, *komisasa*, another aorist participle) something to give Jesus great honor: "The use of an alabaster jar of perfume by definition makes this a luxurious anointing" (Blomberg, 133).
2. She created a scene, as the verbs in v. 38 show.
 - a) They "stress the repeated, ongoing nature of each stage of the woman's actions" (Blomberg, 134).
 - (1) She was weeping (present participle).
 - (2) She began to wet his feet (an aorist verb, "to begin," with a present infinitive; "indicating she continued to do so" - Blomberg, 134).
 - (3) She was wiping his feet and was kissing them (both imperfects).
 - (4) She was anointing (imperfect) his feet with the ointment.
 - b) What she did was at the least culturally inappropriate, and may have been viewed as worse (see Blomberg, 133).⁴

C. Interrogation (39-40).

1. Simon's question is unspoken, and asked in light of Jesus' reputation: "If this man were a prophet . . ." (see v. 16).
2. Jesus asked his question against the backdrop of a statement and then a story.

III. The Challenge for Good People.

A. A short, yet powerful parable (41-42).

1. The denarius was the wage for one day's work by the common laborer; we do well to translate into minimum wage terms.
 - a) 500 denarii = (\$7.25 x 8) x 500 = \$29,000.00.
 - b) 50 denarii = (7.25 x 8) x 50 = \$2,900.00.
2. "It is important to see that both men had debts they could not pay" (Moss, 44).

³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, in D. A. Carson, ed., *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 19 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 133.

⁴ "In this instance, Jesus' fellowship obviously goes beyond a casual association with the ritually impure to a scandalous intimacy with the profoundly immoral. That the woman is actually touching Jesus specifically in the ways described in verse 38 merely magnifies the offense" (Blomberg, 133-134).

3. It is also important to see that Jesus did not ask which one *should* love more, but which one *will* love more?
- B. Simon's correct answer led to the teaching moment (43-50).
 1. He understood that the one who had the larger debt cancelled would love more.
 2. Jesus then compared what the woman had done with what Simon had not done.
 - a) It was customary, but not mandatory, for a host to graciously greet his guest with a kiss, and arrange to have his feet washed and head anointed with oil (see Moss, 44; Blomberg 135).
 - b) Simon had done none of those things; she had gone well beyond them.
 3. Her love was great because her forgiveness had been great.
 - a) The tense of the verb "forgive" (perfect passive) in v. 47 suggests a prior forgiveness: "'I tell you, her sins – and they are many – have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love" (NLT).
 - b) The same tense is used in Jesus' statement in v. 50: "Your faith has saved you" (another perfect tense).⁵
 - c) It fits with Jesus' parable and point that this woman displayed her love as she did because she knew she had been forgiven.
 4. "But he who is forgiven little, loves little" (47b)
- C. The lesson from this parable is not hard to fathom.
 1. The point is not that Simon was really a bad man who thought he was good.
 2. Simon was like many Jews of the time who were often quite self-confident about their standing before God, oblivious of [at least the depth] of their own sin (see Phil. 3:4-6; Lk. 18:9-14), and expectant that the sins they did commit would be treated differently from those of the Gentiles.⁶
 3. "[Simon] was a good man. The problem was his inability to see his own sinfulness. Because he did not see his own sinfulness, he saw no need for a savior" (Moss, 45).

Conclusion

1. "Is it better to be bad and then be good than to always be pretty good?" No. It is always better to do good than evil. But, what matters is that we all see ourselves as sinners with a debt that we cannot handle, that we must give over to God and the saving blood of his Son.
2. For he forgives all sinners – the shamed woman who was known for such, *and* the Pharisee who thought he was above it all.

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www.davidanguish.com*

⁵ Of interest is the fact that this "refrain ... appears three other times in the Gospels, in each case with individuals for whom Jesus has also provided physical healing (Mark 5:34 pars; Mark 10:52 pars; Luke 17:19). It is not impossible that Jesus had already also healed this woman of some malady, but obviously we cannot be sure" (Blomberg, 136). Could she have been among those about whom Luke summarized in vv. 18-23? Or elsewhere? Again, we cannot be sure, but the verb tense is suggestive.

⁶ See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), 91; and Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 126.