

**Luke 7:36-39**  
**March 17, 2019**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Who was the person in your life who believed in you and saw beauty in you before you believed in yourself? [Let people engage]

Q: How did this change your life? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** All of us, by God's grace, had a special person or persons who believed in us and loved us enough to point us to Jesus. And though our journeys are not exactly the same, there is a similarity. All of us discovered **the road to forgiveness** with the help of those who loved us. As we go through today's study, let's reinforce what the **road of forgiveness** looks like so that we can help others move toward Jesus. Let's begin.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.36:

- Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

V.37:

- When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,

V.38:

- and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

V.39:

- When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.36: Let's set the scene for the first three verses. Who are the three main characters in this story? [Jesus, the Pharisee, and the sinful woman]

Q: Where are they? [At the Pharisees home]

Q: Pharisees didn't generally try to bring Jesus into their homes. So why do you think the Pharisee decided to invite Him? Moreover, why do you think Jesus accepted his invitation?! [Let people engage; perhaps to entrap Him; perhaps to be a learner since Jesus showed such mastery of the Law.]

Q: Do Pharisees typically invite women into their home for supper? [NO!]

Q: For our trivia buffs, how did this woman get access to Jesus? [It was customary in that day for outsiders to hover around during banquets, so they could watch the “important people” and hear the conversation. Since everything was open, they could even enter the banquet hall and speak to a guest. This explains how this woman had access to Jesus. He was not behind locked doors.]

Q V.37: How does Luke describe the life of this woman? [Sinful]

Q: Why is she there? [She heard that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house.]

Q V.38: As soon as she sees Jesus, what does she do? [She stands behind Him at His feet weeping. Her tears cause Jesus’s feet to get wet, so she uses her hair to dry His feet and then pours perfume that she brought.]

Q: Why do you think the woman was weeping? [Perhaps she knew she had led a sinful life and that Jesus could help her]

Q V.39: What does the Pharisee observe and think to himself? [If Jesus were truly a prophet, then He should know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is – a sinner.]

Q: Why is the Pharisee bothered by the fact that a sinful woman is touching Jesus? [He secretly revolted at the sight of a poor contrite sinner being allowed to wash our Lord’s feet. In general, Jewish rabbis did not speak to women in public, nor did they eat with them in public. A woman of this type would not be welcomed in the house of Simon the Pharisee.]

Q: Let’s pause. Since we’re trying to get a handle on what the road of forgiveness looks like, let’s start with the woman. What do you observe about her so far that tells us she is well on her way to being forgiven? [Let people engage. First, she came to Jesus with faith, not works. She had a broken heart expressed through weeping. She exuded humility by wiping Jesus’s feet with her hair. She expressed her love and respect to Him by putting perfume on His feet]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus so far? [He’s approachable. He’s open to receiving anyone who desires to receive salvation.]

### **LOOK:**

The road to forgiveness starts with a decision to come to Jesus. Just as Jesus was accepting, open and accessible to anyone who desired forgiveness, we need to be the same to help the lost discover the love of Jesus and the forgiveness He offers.

### **Close in Prayer**

### Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 198). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

### **A Sinful Woman: His Response to Love (Luke 7:36–39)**

Jesus not only accepted hospitality from the publicans and sinners but also from the Pharisees. They needed the Word of God too, whether they realized it or not. We trust that Simon's invitation was a sincere one and that he did not have some ulterior motive for having Jesus in his home. If he did, his plan backfired, because he ended up learning more about himself than he cared to know!

*The repentant woman (vv. 36–38)*. It was customary in that day for outsiders to hover around during banquets so they could watch the "important people" and hear the conversation. Since everything was open, they could even enter the banquet hall and speak to a guest. This explains how this woman had access to Jesus. He was not behind locked doors. In that day women were not invited to banquets.

Jewish rabbis did not speak to women in public, nor did they eat with them in public. A woman of this type would not be welcomed in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Her sins are not named, but we get the impression she was a woman of the streets with a bad reputation.

Do not confuse this event with a similar one involving Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–8), and do not identify this woman with Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2) as many continue to do.

The woman admitted she was a sinner and gave evidence that she was a *repentant* sinner. If you check a harmony of the Gospels, you will discover that just before this event, Jesus had given the gracious invitation, "Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28–30). Perhaps that was when the woman turned from her sin and trusted the Savior. Her tears, her humble attitude, and her expensive gift all spoke of a changed heart.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 223-224)**

### 3. JESUS'S MINISTRY TO A SINFUL WOMAN (7:36–39)

This passage illustrates the principle Jesus laid down in verse 35. A Pharisee named Simon is contrasted with a sinful woman, who received forgiveness (v. 47) and salvation (v. 50).

7:36–38. Simon (v. 40), a Pharisee, invited **Jesus to ... dinner**, perhaps to trick Him in some way. It was the custom of the day when one had a dinner party to provide for the guests' feet to be cleaned before the meal. Because most roads were unpaved and the normal foot attire was sandals, it was common for people's feet to be dusty or muddy. As pointed out later in the episode, Simon did not provide for Jesus' feet to be cleaned at the beginning of the dinner party (v. 44). For special dinner parties recliners or couches were provided for the guests to use while eating.

**A woman** arrived at the dinner after she **learned that Jesus was eating** there. She **had lived a sinful life**, and was probably a prostitute in the community. Her life was known enough for the Pharisee to characterize her as a sinner (v. 39). She was not an invited guest at the dinner gathering, but came in anyway with a **jar of perfume**. Her presence was not unusual for when a Rabbi was invited to someone's house others could stop by and listen to the conversation. As the woman **stood behind Jesus**, **her tears** began to fall on **His feet**. It was a normal sign of respect to pour oil or **perfume** on someone's head. Perhaps the woman felt unworthy to anoint Jesus' head, so she anointed His feet. Such an act would have amounted to a large financial outlay for the woman who

apparently was not wealthy. She also bent over Jesus and **wiped** her tears off **His feet ... with her hair**. She constantly **kissed** His feet (the Gr. verb *kataphilei* is the imperfect tense suggesting continuous past action), a sign of the utmost respect, submission, and affection. Jesus pointed out later that the host, in contrast, had done none of these things to His head (v. 46) or even given Him water for His feet (v. 44), whereas the woman was constantly anointing His feet.

The passage does not state why she was weeping. It may have been because she was seeking repentance. Or she may have been weeping for joy at the opportunity of being around the One she obviously considered to be the Messiah.

7:39. The host thought that Jesus could not possibly be **a prophet**, for if He were **He would** have known that the **woman** was **a sinner**. And He then would not have let her touch Him, for a touch by a sinner brought ceremonial uncleanness.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 234–236). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### **Context**

The exact relationship of this account to the preceding material is uncertain. Some suggest Luke placed it here as an example of Jesus' friendship with tax collectors and sinners (7:34). Others suggest he placed it here as an example of Jesus' prophetic role (cf. 7:16 and 39). Still others suggest this account exemplifies how wisdom is proven correct by its children. In the context of chap. 7, Luke included this passage primarily due to its Christological content, so that it too seeks to help Theophilus understand "Who is this Jesus?" Earlier in the chapter Jesus is portrayed as a healer (7:1–10), one who raised the dead (7:11–17), and the Coming One promised in the Scriptures, who like John the Baptist would meet with rejection (7:18–35). In this account the question of "Who is this?" is again raised, and the answer from the present account and what has preceded is clear. Jesus of Nazareth, prophet-Coming One-Christ-Lord, is the one who has divine authority to forgive sins. Thus, this account serves as a Christological conclusion for the chapter.

The existence of two close parallels to this account in Mark 14:3–9 (Matt 26:6–13) and John 12:1–8 raises the difficult issue of how these three accounts are related. The similarities between Mark and Luke are quite striking. Note that, whereas Luke used Mark as a source in writing his Gospel, he did not include the account in Mark 14:3–9. Probably he did this to avoid two very similar accounts. There are also some significant differences between the Markan and Lukan accounts. The Johannine account has similarities with both these accounts. It is quite possible that these accounts go back to two separate incidents in Jesus' life (Luke and Mark/John). As they were told and retold during the oral period, a certain standardization of terminology might have taken place between the stories, and this might explain some of the similarities and differences between the accounts. This seems more likely than the explanation that these are three different accounts of the same incident.

### **Comments**

**7:36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner.** For "Pharisees" see comments on 5:17. For Jesus eating with Pharisees, note also 11:37; 14:1.

**And reclined at the table.** That they reclined at the meal indicates that it was a banquet or Sabbath meal. Concerning the latter, it was quite common to invite a visiting rabbi or teacher to

the Sabbath meal after he had taught in the synagogue (cf. Mark 1:29–31). If it was a banquet meal, Jesus may have been invited because of his reputation as a prophet.

**7:37 When a woman.** She is unnamed as in Mark 14:3, but compare John 12:3.

**Who had lived a sinful life.** Literally *who was a sinner*. The character of the woman is important due to 7:39, 47 (cf. 7:34; 19:10). This woman could have been a sinner because of her occupation. Tax collectors, tanners, camel drivers, custom collectors, among others were considered ceremonially impure because of their occupations and could be labeled “sinners.” In this instance, however, this woman’s sinfulness involved moral not ceremonial matters (note 7:47–50).

**An alabaster jar of perfume.** In Mark 14:5 and John 12:5 the cost of the jar of perfume is given—three hundred denarii. (A denarius was the equivalent of a day’s wages.) Alabaster is soft stone that frequently was used to make perfume containers (so Pliny the Elder, 13.4.), and thousands of such containers have been found.

**7:38 And as she stood behind him at his feet weeping.** We are not told why she was weeping. It could have been due to her remorse over and repentance for sin or to the joy over the forgiveness of her sins. The interpretation of 7:47–48 will determine this. Since the guests were reclining at the meal and facing a short table upon which the food was placed, the woman had easy access to Jesus’ feet.

**Then she wiped them with her hair.** Letting down one’s hair in public was shameful and even a ground for divorce, but in her deep gratitude toward Jesus the woman forgot social propriety and used what was available to wipe Jesus’ feet—her hair.

**7:39 If this man were a prophet.** This is a contrary-to-fact condition, which assumes that Jesus was not a prophet. Whether Simon was repeating a popular view among the people or his own previous view is uncertain. The Pharisee assumed that Jesus was not a prophet because of two false presuppositions: (1) a true prophet would not allow a sinful woman to do this (note the scandal of Jesus’ behavior in 7:34), or (2) Jesus did not know that this was a sinful woman and thus was not a prophet. Luke would show in 7:44–47 that both presuppositions are wrong. It is uncertain whether we should read “a prophet” or “the prophet,” but “a prophet” is more likely.