

**The Wisdom of Christ**  
**Amazing Grace: The Parable of Two Debtors**  
**Bible Study 2 - Luke 7:36-50**

**Goals:**

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

**Expectations:**

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

**Note:**

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

**Suggested Homework:**

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 7:36-50 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the passage three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

**Introduction Questions:**

DISCUSS: Tell your God-story. How has God impacted your life thus far?

DISCUSS: What does grace mean to you? What does giving grace look like today?

**Review:**

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: **Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic mid-eastern artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within.

#### Review Questions:

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.

#### Literary Background- Read the passage before working through this section

#### Reminder: (this section taken from Bible Study 1)

#### Inverted Parallelism

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen below in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

My silly example of an inverted parallelism

- A I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*  
B Their *chocolate chips* are delicious  
C My tummy is filled with *warmth* when  
D I think of my mom and the times she made them for me  
C' I am *warmed* by the memories as  
B' The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth  
A' and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

### **Introduction:**

When asked what the parable of the Two Debtors means, the reader can often debate over nuances and what this or that phrase means, but discovering the author's intent can be somewhat difficult with such a small text, such as we observe here. My main goal in this study is to show how context and format can help us to understand the exact meaning Jesus was steering the hearer toward. In this study, the majority of the information will relate to the context surrounding the parable, but as we saw with inverted parallelisms, **the middle section is accentuated and helps us to understand both the main point of the entire discussion, as well as the details giving a fuller light to the main idea as well.**

This text is an inverted parallelism and below is a summary view of the outline of this chiasm. The last page in this study is a full view, where all the verses are presented to show the parallelism.

Once again, my goal for this study is that you understand how the context and structure of this passage helps us to understand the gravity and core message of the parable itself. Notice that the parable is the center of the chiasm presented, and therefore the focal point Luke wants us to understand. The cultural setting and the details surrounding it further illuminate the parable's main point, which is the parable Jesus taught.

Format of the text: (summary view- see last page for the full text laid out this way)

Introduction (The Pharisee, Jesus, the woman)  
    The Outpouring of the Woman's Love (in action)  
        A Dialogue (Simon judges wrongly)  
            A Parable  
            A Dialogue (Simon judges rightly)  
        The Outpouring of the Woman's Love (in retrospect)  
Conclusion (the Pharisees, Jesus, the woman)

### **Cultural background:**

There are often times when our twenty-first century American mindset gets in the way of us seeing some of the richness of the exchange at hand, and this section is no exception. There are several cultural things that we as the reader need to be clued in on.

**The Feast:** The first cultural key to this story is the notion of this dinner invitation. Throughout the Middle East, even today, it is common for men to invite a teacher or friend to continue a conversation or discussion which had been raised elsewhere, or to hear him weigh in. This is the likely setting for our story. Jesus is known and the community has heard him. He is invited to a banquet for further discussion. At such scenes in the traditional Middle East, the doors are open and the uninvited are free to wander in. Jesus and the other guests are reclining on low couches for the meal.

However, something is terribly wrong and missing from the account and tradition of such a meal. As reflected in Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, the guest, upon arriving, would receive the kiss of greeting and have his feet washed by the servant of the host. In every cultural setting there are phrases and actions that are common. For instance, it is common in America for the guest to stand outside, knocking or calling, until host opens the door and invites the guest to come into the house. Then it is also common for the host to designate where coats and shoes should be placed. Often, the host invites the guest to place them anywhere, but the guest still feels the need to be told these things. If a guest came to a house and rang the doorbell, but the door wasn't opened and no one bid them "come in," they would eventually enter, although feeling insulted and ignored. In a similar, but more significant way, the guest who enters and does not receive the kiss of greeting or the washing of feet will feel ignored and insulted in the Middle East.

**QUESTION:** How does this cultural information change the atmosphere of the event?

**The act:** So, as we have seen earlier, Jesus has been invited to dine in Simon's house, yet he has been ignored and insulted by the withholding of cultural hospitality. It is possible that this insult is the compelling factor for the woman to demonstrate her affection. And yet, as we dig deeper into the act itself, we see that it is far more than just affection, but repentance over the person and likely, the message, of Christ.

The first thing of note here is the literary structure of this particular part of the story. There is a mini-inverted parallelism at work (A, B, C, C', B', A') thematically. This structure is highlighting that she does three distinct and important actions. Notice that washing his feet is at the center of the chiasm, kissing his feet second, and anointing them mentioned first and last.

*Bringing an alabaster flask of perfume,  
And standing behind him at his feet  
Weeping she began to wet his feet with her tears  
And she wiped them with the hair of her head,  
And kissed his feet,  
And anointed them with the perfume*

Notice that the three actions are a reflection of the cultural prerogative of the host, which, in Jesus' case, were neglected. She washes Jesus feet, kisses them and anoints them with oil. The last action she takes is also significant. The first two are common courtesy, but anointing was indicative of acknowledging a teacher or great man. She not only does the actions which lacking would have been a public insult to Jesus, but adds the third to honor him all the more. **As you move in through the chiasm, the action neglected is a greater insult because it is more common for the host to practice.** It is a great honor to anoint a Rabbi's feet, but not all receive this treatment. The kiss of greeting is also significant, but not as crucial is washing someone's feet. Here, the parallelism/chiasm is designed to highlight three specific ways Jesus was shamed by the host and honored by this woman, in order of how common those honors should have been given.

**The perfume:** The perfume also carries extra weight in this context. When we are introduced to this woman, we are told that she was an immoral woman from the city. The "from the city" part will indicate that Simon as well as the onlookers is very aware of this woman's sordid, immoral profession.

How do we know that this is not just some crazed fan trying to touch her idol? How do we know that it is not the seductive caress of a prostitute to this great man? The answer lies in the perfume.

Perfume was the most valuable asset any prostitute carried. A flask with this perfume was worn by women around the neck and hung down below the breast. Such a flask was used to both sweeten the breath and perfume the person. It does not take much imagination to understand how important such a flask would be to a prostitute. **What this brave action displays above all else to the Middle Easterner is repentance.** If she does not have this perfume, she can make little money as a prostitute. Few women had perfume due to the sheer expense and extravagance of it, and to pour it upon the Savior was to turn completely from her profession. She would not have the means to purchase another, nor could she continue this lifestyle without it.

Another piece of this puzzle is the humility and degradation the woman shows by letting down her hair. The Talmud indicates a woman can be divorced for letting down her hair in the presence of another man. Also, the rabbis considered uncovering the bosom and loosening the hair to be acts that fall in the same category. In a concern to protect the officiating priests from unchaste thoughts those two acts *alone* are mentioned. This woman humiliates herself in the presence of Jesus. Why? It is because she is so moved by the forgiveness she has received, the repentance that she is acting out and the insult her Savior has been given.

**QUESTION:** How do this woman's actions compare to your response to God's forgiveness? What ways can our responses to Christ mirror this woman's? How are humility and repentance related? How does that change the force of this story?

**The parable:** Jesus uses a simple parable here, but it is certainly the focal point of the entire discourse. Two were indebted and could not pay. The one who loved more is the one forgiven most. What Simon fails to understand about this parable is not that he was forgiven less, but that he senses his forgiveness less. Had Simon committed sins deserving of death? Yes. Could Simon pay his debt that he owed God? No, he could not. Jesus shows us that the one who was forgiven little, loves little. I think it is accurate to also say that **one loves to the degree that he or she recognizes they have been forgiven.**

#### Discussion Questions:

- 1) **DISCUSS:** Describe the main point of the parable in one sentence. (hint: look to the center of the inverted parallelism for help with meaning) How is God's grace demonstrated in this tale?
  
- 2) **DISCUSS:** How does this fit into the picture of what Luke is trying to accomplish in this gospel? How is a close look at this person motivating to other Christians?

- 3) **DISCUSS:** Do you think most American Christians are like Simon or this woman? Why do you think so?
  
- 4) **DISCUSS:** What would it look like to repent like this woman?
  
- 5) **DISCUSS:** Respond to this statement- Simon was forgiven no less than this woman, but because she sensed her forgiveness more than Simon, she was far more grateful. All of us have committed travesties against God, yet not all of us realize how much we have been truly forgiven.
  
- 6) **DISCUSS:** How much has God forgiven you? How does that change your day to day?
  
- 7) **DISCUSS:** How can you take steps to respond to this truth? Write out one way you can keep your focus on God's grace this week. Then write out one way you can practically live out God's grace and love toward someone else.

**ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)**

- 1) God's grace and our response. The story is focused on a person that has been impacted by God's grace in such a profound way that she acts in such a way as to honor the Christ and to lower herself.
- 2) Luke is showing that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to redeem people who need Him desperately. These people are sinners, and their acts of radical devotion to Jesus should spur us to follow him more avidly.
- 3) Answers will vary. My intent here is to see how our culture may have made us into many more Simons than repentant, humble sinners. I fear that maybe our love for Christ does mirror what we perceive we have been forgiven, which is not very much.
- 4) Answers will vary, but what I hope to accomplish with this question is to show how repentance may mean destroying/selling the things that cause us to sin. This is not always the answer, but sometimes we may fall back into the same sins simply because we have not guarded our minds and our hearts. My intent is not to say that you should get rid of everything that could possibly cause you to sin, but that you would consider whether that kind of step is necessary.
- 5) Answers will vary.
- 6) Answers will vary.
- 7) Answers will vary.

Format of the text: full view of Luke 7:36-50

- 1 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him,  
And he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined.  
And behold, there was a woman who was a sinner in the city.
- 2 And when she learned, "He is dining in the Pharisee's house!"  
Bringing an alabaster flask of perfume,  
And standing behind him at his feet,  
Weeping she began to wet his feet with her tears  
And she wiped them with the hair of her head  
And kissed his feet,  
And anointed them with the perfume.
- 3 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself,  
"If this were a prophet, he would have known  
Who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him,  
For she is a sinner."  
And Jesus answered and said to him,  
"Simon, I have something to say to you."  
And he answered, "Teacher, speak up!"
- 4 And Jesus said,  
"Two debtors there were  
To a certain money lender.  
The one owed fifty denarii  
And the other five hundred.  
They not being able to pay,  
He freely forgave them both.
- 3' Which of them will love him the more?"  
Simon answered,  
"The one, I suppose, to whom he freely forgave the more."  
And he said to him,  
"You have judged rightly."
- 2' Then turning to the woman he said to Simon,  
"Do you see this woman? I entered your house!  
You gave me no water for my feet,  
But she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair.  
You gave me no kiss,  
But from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.  
You did not anoint my head with oil,  
But she has anointed my feet with perfume.  
In consequence I say to you,  
Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven,  
Therefore she loved much.  
But he who is forgiven little, loves little."  
And he said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."
- 1' Then those who were reclining with him began to say to themselves,  
"Who is this who also forgives sins?"

And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."