

WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK AT OTHERS?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

I learned a valuable spiritual lesson once while having lunch with two of my favorite friends. We were in a seaport restaurant, and when our waitress came to take our order we introduced ourselves. She told us her name was K.O. We said we were planning on a long lunch and that we would keep her in mind when it came time to pay the bill. K.O. was rightly named, we agreed. She looked a little beat up. Her face showed more age than the years she had lived on this earth. Looking at her I sensed that she had lived a hard life and it wasn't going to get any better soon. She gave us excellent service during our long lunch, however.

Finally, when we were ready to leave, one of my friends said to her, "K.O., we are Christians, and we are going out to the mouth of the harbor to sit on the rocks and pray. Is there anything you would like us to pray for?" K.O. looked at us, backed up a little, and then turned around and left. We didn't see her for several minutes. Then she returned with the bill in a leather folder, said nothing, and went back into the kitchen. We talked for a few more moments, and then my friend who had asked K.O. if we could pray for her reached for the bill folder, and opened it up to check out the bill. A smile spread across his face as he handed the check to each of us. Not only was it itemized, but on it were written the words, "Would you please pray for a co-worker who was killed in an freak accident this week? His name is Pepi." Signed K.O." The entire time this hard-working, tired and weary woman was waiting on us with a tender and broken heart over the loss of the life of her friend Pepi. We did go out on the rocks a few moments later and we prayed for K.O. and for her salvation. She had taught us that physical appearances rarely give any clues to the heart of a person.

Today, in our studies in the gospel of Luke, we will be looking at Luke 7:36-50 to see how the Lord lovingly reached out to a stumbling Pharisee in order to help him see people the way God sees them: "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). This was an important spiritual lesson for the Pharisee, and it may become an important spiritual lesson for some of us today. The question we want to consider is, what do you see when you look at others?

I. A Sinner? Luke 7: 36-39

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with Him. And He entered the Pharisee's house, and reclined at table. And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, and that she is a sinner."

Our Lord has been preaching the gospel and performing miracles in Northern Galilee at the end of his second year of ministry. As he looked out on the people surrounding him on this occasion he knew that there were some present who realized they were sinners and deserved the justice of God, but by faith they had entered into the baptism of John for the forgiveness of sins; so when Jesus arrived on the scene they became the recipients of salvation by faith. Then, our Lord had said to the people, "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me" (7:23), for in the crowd were "... the Pharisees and the lawyers (who had) rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John" (7:30). They were stumbling over our Lord's person, his authority, popularity, and His miracles. They were saying that John the Baptist had a demon, and that Jesus was unclean: "Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners" (7:34). Jesus simply put aside these charges by saying, "Wisdom is vindicated by all her children" (7:35). In

other words, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Those who have placed their faith in me as Messiah, Lord and Savior have received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life."

The Pharisees ("the separated ones") were the guardians of the Torah, the Word of God. There were some 7,000 of these shepherd-teachers who were responsible for the spiritual life of two million Jews living in Israel under the Roman occupation. Earlier on a visit to Jerusalem, Jesus found that the Pharisees had become openly hostile towards him. "For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he not only was breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." So far in the gospel of Luke the Pharisees of Galilee had not become openly hostile, but tensions had been growing; they had not been able to figure Jesus out. But they were watching him closely, seeking to find some cause to judge him. Jesus was well aware of this personal threat against his life and yet he continued to reach out to them with the gospel.

On many occasions when Jesus was invited to dinner by a Pharisee, the invitation was deliberately designed to trap or test him. In this case it appears that the Pharisee was going to test him concerning the claim that he might be "the Prophet" of whom Moses spoke of in Deut.18:15: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you...and you shall listen to him." But notice that our Lord does not avoid the individual Pharisee. Over and over he was willing to accept their invitations in order to reach out to them in love and truth for the purposes of redemption. So when the invitation was extended, our Lord entered the home of Simon the Pharisee, and "reclined at table," sitting on a pillow on the floor with his feet curled up underneath him.

In his commentary, William Barclay wrote,

"The scene is a courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. The houses of well-to-do people were built around an open courtyard in the form of a hollow square. Often in the courtyard there would be a garden and a fountain; and during warm weather, meals were eaten outdoors. It was the custom that when a rabbi was having a meal in such a house, all kinds of people came in—they were quite free to do so to listen to the pearls of wisdom which fell from his lips. That explains the presence of the women."

But Luke wants his readers to know that this person wasn't just another woman. Here is what he says, "Behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner..." Apparently this unnamed woman was well-known in the city. When she arrived at the home, all those who were full of their own self-righteousness kept saying, "Well, well, what is she doing here in a religious person's home? What is this immoral person doing? Doesn't she know any better?" The woman was a sinner (hamartolos, in the Greek), the usual term used to describe the fallen condition of man; the word is applicable to all men, according to Romans 5: 8,19. This was a term used by the Pharisees to describe the tax collectors and women of ill repute. So this well-known prostitute arrived among the guests and quietly walked up behind Jesus, who was reclining barefooted at table. This "sinner" who had recently, unknown to the Pharisee or the other guests, placed her faith in Jesus as her Savior and Lord, as we shall see. Although her sins had already been forgiven she was nevertheless still regarded by others as a notorious sinner.

Now while the conversation is flowing and the meal is being served, this "sinful woman" walks up behind Jesus, takes from around her neck a small alabaster flask of costly perfume (which most Jewish women wore), and, with great tears rolling down her cheeks, began to wet his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head. She fervently kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Barclay comments, "For a Jewish woman to appear with hair unbound was an act of the gravest immodesty. On her wedding day a girl bound up her hair and never would she appear with it unbound again. The fact that this woman loosed her long hair in public showed how she had forgotten everyone except Jesus...The kissing of the feet was at that time a recognized sign of deep reverence, especially towards honored teachers." I believe her tears, the tears of a former "sinful woman" were tears of joy, not sorrow.

The woman's actions presented a real spiritual dilemma for Simon. He struggled and thought, "If this man were (the) a prophet (Messiah), He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching

Him, that she is a sinner (an immoral woman)." Unfortunately, the Pharisees as a community had become so blinded by their sin of self-righteousness and so far removed from the common people that they could not see God's plan of redemption at work through his Son Jesus. Simon reasoned that the Messiah, the Prophet, would have absolute insight into what sort of woman this was who was ministering to him and he would have chased her away. Since Jesus associated himself with such person he couldn't be the Prophet because would have known her moral make-up and avoided her.

A few years ago my wife, Anne Marie, and I were vacationing in Carmel. We walked by a local theater that offered dinner, followed by a two-act play. It sounded like fun, and it would give us a chance to meet some new people. We were ushered to a table where a young married couple had already been seated. We introduced ourselves, and then gave our order to the waitress. As we were waiting for our meal to arrive, I asked the young man what he did for a living. He told me he was in the army, and stationed at Fort Ord. Then I asked his beautiful young wife if she worked and she said she did. "What do you do?" I asked. She replied, in all seriousness, "I'm a stripper!" This wasn't exactly the way we had planned to spend our evening, to put it mildly, but the Lord had other plans for us. We soon found our hearts filling up with the love of Christ for both of these people, as we remembered that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (and that included us at one time). Shortly afterwards we were given an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them. At the end of the play we shook hands with the husband and kissed his wife goodbye, trusting our Lord to complete the story of redemption in their lives.

What do you see when you look at others? The Pharisee, blinded by self-righteousness, saw a sinful woman, but the Lord Jesus saw

II. A Contrite Heart , Luke 7:40-50

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." And turning toward 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 she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. And He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." And those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus knew the heart of this Pharisee. Rather than acting in the same manner toward him as he had acted toward the former prostitute, Jesus chose to demonstrate the love of God to him by appealing to his sense of logic. He approached him with a common problem that would have a logical conclusion, directing Simon's attention to a case study concerning two men who were in debt.

"Simon," said Jesus, "I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher" (meaning "rabbi, master"). Jesus continued, "A certain moneylender had two debtors; one owed 500 denarius and the other 50 denarius." (One denarius was worth 18 cents in silver, equivalent to a day's wages.) Thus, one man owed 500 days of labor, and the other 50 days of labor. Now the day of reckoning arrived, and the moneylender approached the men for payment, only to discover that neither man was able to repay his debt. This was a serious matter in the Roman culture. The usual result of failure to pay one's debt was either jail or slavery. Jesus continued, "Although neither man was able to repay his creditor, he freely forgave them both. Here is my question: Which of them will love him more?" The Pharisee answered, with an air of supercilious indifference, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." The difference in the weight of the debt was great. The first debtor surely realized that he would probably never be able to repay the debt, while the other man

could at least see the light at the end of the tunnel. Jesus said to Simon, "You have judged correctly." He understood the principle that the man who had been forgiven most would love the most in return.

Then, turning toward the woman, Jesus said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Jesus' words must be regarded as more on the order of a command, not a question, to consider the woman more carefully. She was no longer what she once was, a woman weighed down by the burden of sin. The heavy debt that was hers due to sin had been forgiven, and the proof of that forgiveness was demonstrated in her act of love toward the Lord. It was obvious that Simon could see the woman physically. He looked at her, and he was well aware of her reputation, but what he saw was clouded by his self-righteous eyes. The log that was protruding from his eye had reduced him to the status of a one-eyed judge-and a poor one at that.

A second factor that had blinded Simon was his heart attitude toward Jesus. He had invited him to be his guest at dinner yet he never treated him as a guest, but rather as someone to be tested or tried as to his credentials as "the Prophet." And in his blindness he put aside all common cultural practices. Since the roads were extremely rocky and dusty, and sandals were the common footwear, when a guest entered a home, cool water was immediately poured on his feet so as to cleanse and comfort him. Then the host would place his hand on the shoulder of the guest and give him the kiss of peace as a mark of respect. In the case of a distinguished rabbi, that custom would certainly not be overlooked. Finally, a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned in the home, or a drop of attar of roses was placed on the head of the guest. But Simon did not bother to fulfill any of these common courtesies.

Now Jesus goes on to contrast the actions of the so-called immoral woman with those of the self-righteous Pharisee. She bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with her hair-a sign of respect and honor. Then, from a heart overflowing with love and thankfulness, she kissed his feet, knowing that her many sins had been forgiven. Finally, she anointed his feet with perfume, not common rose water or oil.

Jesus' words to the Pharisee must have astonished everyone present: "For this reason," said the Lord, "I say to you, her sins, which are many (present tense) have been forgiven (perfect tense-she had been forgiven sometime in the past and would continue to be forgiven), for she loved (agape, self-sacrificing love) much..." Jesus was saying to Simon, in effect, "All three of us know that this woman has been sexually immoral in our community. She was not only a sinner, but her sins were many-sins that separated her from Jehovah and left her spiritually barren. But I have come into this world to save sinners, among whom this woman was once included, for her sins were many. But then she heard the gospel and placed her faith in me as her personal Lord and Savior, her Redeemer, Messiah, and Prophet. She repented of her sins and I have forgiven her. Her heavy load, her debt, has been lifted. She who was once known as a sinner is forgiven, made pure and whole, because she has been born again. Simon, didn't you just agree that when a debtor has been freely forgiven a large debt, he will feel a deep gratitude and love towards his creditor who forgave him?"

Jesus is saying that the woman's outpouring of love was the result of a sense of having been forgiven. Not that she was saved and forgiven because she loved much-not salvation by works, in other words--but love coming out of a forgiven and new heart. A commentator writes, "Simon regarded himself as righteous, forgiven, and looked upon the woman as a sinner, unforgiven. Jesus shows that it is Simon who by his lack of love proves that he is the sinner who has not been forgiven-this inference mercifully attenuated to 'has been forgiven little,' which the woman can rejoice in the freedom from guilt she has received as a gift God's grace."

"...but he who is forgiven little, loves little," says Jesus. Simon had invited Jesus into his home but spent very little on his guest, in contrast to the woman's gift of expensive perfume. Because of his self-righteousness and blindness to his own sin he could have never experienced the wonderful forgiveness of God. He could not see his sins, and so never had the experience of loving much, thus he would remain in his sin and love very little. He was unaware of his dire need, thus he felt no love and so received no forgiveness. Simon thought of himself as a good man in the sight of men of God. In his self-righteousness he considered that he required forgiveness from God for only a few sins, and for this reason his love for Jesus and for others was slight.

Then, turning to the woman, Jesus said, "Your sins have been forgiven." Jesus used the perfect, not present, tense-her sins had been forgiven sometime in the past, with continuing results. Thus he was fulfilling his ministry which he began by saying, "I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance" (Luke

5:32). "Simon," he was saying, "I have come to call all sinners to repentance, this woman as well as you. But you must place your faith in me as the Son of God and Savior of the world." The teaching of Jesus had previously brought her to repentance, conversion, and to an assurance of forgiveness. This assurance had inspired her to serve our Lord's needs with a heart of love and gratitude. Jesus now confirmed her assurance and publicly declares her forgiveness, thus lending his authority to rehabilitate her with society.

Here is how the other guests reacted to these astonishing words of Jesus: "And those who were reclining at table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" Earlier, Jesus had healed the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof of the crowded house in Capernaum, and said to him, "Your sins are forgiven." He then asked them, "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven, or to say rise and walk? But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." "And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The key to this woman's new life in Christ was that she had placed her faith in Jesus as the only one on earth within her religious community who could forgive her sins. She had come to an understanding that Jesus was the Savior of the world as well as Israel, and yet he could also become her personal Savior. It wasn't her love that saved her but her faith. First faith, then forgiveness, then salvation, resulting in acts of godly love, resulting in peace. "Go in peace," said Jesus to the woman. The rabbis always addressed these words "Go in peace" to the dead, but here Jesus offered these same words as a greeting to the living. The woman had made her peace with God (Romans 5), and now she could enjoy the peace of God.

A few years ago I was invited to Pine Cove Conference grounds in Tyler, Texas, to teach at a singles conference. During a morning session I noticed that a young nurse began to cry. I went over to her and handed her my handkerchief. Later that day I found her and we went and sat under a shade tree. During our conversation I discovered that the reason she had cried in our morning session was because her life was filled with the sin of immorality. Within the hour she heard the gospel and invited Christ into her life. Then she began to cry again, only this time her tears were the result of a new-found joy in Jesus. We put a mark on that tree as a memorial stone of her new birth. That evening she shared her new faith in Christ through tears of joy. Next day, we baptized her in the lake near the campground, and again she had tears of joy in her eyes. I have seen her some three times since that wonderful afternoon under the shade tree, and each time we meet she cries tears of joy because of her new life in Christ which all began under a shade tree in Texas when her heavy burden of sin was forgiven.

What do you see when you look at others within your family, community, or work place? "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). What do you see when you look at others? Sinners, or men and women who need to be redeemed? And some are willing to be redeemed if someone will share with them the good news that Jesus Christ loves them and was willing to die for their sins, and if they will but place their faith in him as their only Savior and Lord they too will receive the forgiveness of their sins and the wonderful gift of eternal life, as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit who will empower them to go and tell other sinners about Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul entered the corrupt city of Corinth in 52 A.D., and there saw sinners at every hand. After ministering in that city for some 18 months he was able to say "...do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicator, nor idolater, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:9-11).

Here is the spiritual principle: To the degree you appreciate the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus Christ, you love him and are willing to love other sinners who also need a Savior. What a high calling we have! We have been forgiven a heavy debt so we should be willing to love all those around us who are weighed down with the same heavy debt of sin and offer them the love of Christ as the only one who can forgive them and cancel that heavy debt.

Luke 7:35-50
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