

Just As I Am

Luke 7:36-50

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for November 14, 2021

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Summary: Jesus has just been invited to the home of a prominent religious leader in first-century Israel, but someone else is on His mind. Sitting among the VIPs and honored guests of Simon the Pharisee, an uninvited and thoroughly unwanted woman shows up, a local town prostitute, and all eyes turn to Jesus, to see how He will respond. His response is an awesome example of God's grace, and a powerful reminder that all sin, great and small, comes with the same judgement and requires the same cure.

Charlotte Elliott was a resentful, bitter, agnostic who lived more than 200 years ago. Although we're not given the details, she had become disabled somehow and because of her broken health—and her broken heart—she had hardened her mind against any thought that God could possibly love her.

She developed a violent temper and made it nearly impossible for anyone else to be around her.

On May 9, 1822, as a young adult, her parents, with whom she was living, invited a pastor to have dinner with them, hoping he might have some insight to help their resentful and embittered daughter.

Over dinner that night, Charlotte lost her temper and railed against God, her family,

and even this visiting minister. Her parents left the room, hurt and embarrassed, leaving her and this pastor alone.

He looked at her and said, "You're tired of yourself, aren't you? You're weary of who you've become. You're holding onto hate and bitterness and because you have nothing else to cling to."

She sarcastically asked him, "And what is your cure for me?"

He said, "Faith in the Person you are trying so hard to despise."

As he talked to her about the gospel, Charlotte softened some and then said, "Suppose I wanted to become a Christian like you—what would I have to do—surely

I would need to cleanse my life before God would love me?”

He said, “No, He cleanses your life; all you do is come to Him, just like you are right now—and He will love you and forgive you.”

She laughed— “Come to God like I am right now? And He will love me?”

“Yes—Jesus said, ‘Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out’ (John 6:37).”

Charlotte did just that and trusted Christ as her Savior.

Adapted from Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), p. 113

As I read that, I couldn’t help but think of all the people I’ve encountered over the years who were tired of their lives; weary, resentful, bitter, both religious and non-religious.

Clinging to whatever they could in hopes that it would satisfy their heart and bring them peace of mind. Refusing to believe the cure—Jesus Christ—who alone could bring them peace.

I also read some time ago of the ministry of a counselor who had encountered hundreds of young adults, filled with guilt and remorse and resentment over life itself.

He wrote of one encounter with a young woman who had been raised in a wealthy suburban home. She had rejected the gospel and tried everything else. And everything else only deepened her guilt and resentment and sorrow. In one session together, this counselor wrote,

the young woman admitted that she was tired of her life; she was weary, the counselor wrote, she pulled back her sleeve to show me where she had taken a blade and cut into her forearm the word “empty.”

Adapted from Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege* (Harper Perennial, 2008), p. 3

Empty.

One of the most dramatic encounters between Jesus and two empty lives is about to take place during a dinner engagement.

The Lord has accepted the invitation to eat at the home of a self-righteous Pharisee; and who would show up but a prostitute from town.

And let me tell you before we dive into this scene, both the Pharisee and the prostitute have this same word—empty—written across their hearts and their lives.

But one of them will leave this dining room with peace of mind and a new life.

This dinner is described in the Gospel by Luke, chapter 7 and we are now at verse 36:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table.

Luke 7:36

Down in **verse 40**, we’re told that this Pharisee’s name was Simon.

Now you need to keep in mind that Jesus and the Pharisees weren't exactly bosom buddies.

No group of men was more consistently hostile to Jesus than the Pharisees.

John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 127

Luke will mention them 28 times in his Gospel and every time he does, they are antagonistic toward the Lord.

Simon isn't inviting Jesus to dinner because he's on the verge of becoming a disciple. He's inviting Jesus over to find something to use against Him.



Have you ever started a conversation with someone and realized that they don't want to hear what you say? Have you ever tried in good faith to share the gospel, but the person wanted to debate you? How did you respond to them?

And he thinks he just found it.

Verse 37:

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment.

Luke 7:37

Luke calls her “**a woman of the city, who was a sinner.**”

This is not a general statement. This was first century synonymous terminology for a prostitute.

G. Campbell Morgan, *The Great Physician* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937), p. 139

When I was growing up, they were called “street walkers;” she's in the city and she's been walking the streets and everybody in this town knows her reputation.

And here, she just walks into the dining room where dinner is already underway. I imagine everybody stops eating, forks hang in midair—although they used their fingers, but you get the point—conversations stop as people turn and stare.

And now, all that's heard in the room is the sound of muffled sobbing as this woman stands behind Jesus, weeping.

Now before we go any farther here, you might wonder how she got in here. This isn't her kind of neighborhood; this isn't the kind of house she would ever go near, much less inside.

One New Testament scholar described a large home like the one Simon the Pharisee would have had. It would have included a courtyard with rooms surrounding it; one of them being a dining room. Evening meals were often noisy public affairs; doors were left wide open, and even people who weren't invited to eat could still wander in and take part in the lively dinner conversation.

Curious people would have been nosing around everywhere, especially since Jesus—the Healer, Teacher, Prophet—was the special guest.

Let me also point out that when an invited dinner guest arrived, three aspects of hospitality would take place.

First, the host would place his hand on their shoulder and give him what they called the kiss of peace, a kiss on both cheeks.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 94

Secondly, a pinch of sweet-smelling incense or a drop of perfumed oil would be placed on their head, bringing a sense of freshness to the guest.

Sort of like when you perhaps traveled overnight on an airplane, and after a night of trying to sleep sitting up, which didn't work, the attendant came by with scented hot cloths and you wiped your face and felt immediately refreshed.

This was all a part of first century hospitality.

Thirdly, and most significantly, once the guest reclined—which usually involved lying on cushions, with their heads toward the food, propped up on one elbow—a household servant would unlace the guest's sandals and wash their dusty feet.

Simon did none of this for the Lord. There was no hiding it; Simon was openly and

obviously unkind and ungracious to Jesus and everyone in the room knew it.

Now, let's take one more look at Luke's description of this uninvited woman here in **verse 37**; again, Luke describes her as **a woman of the city, who was a sinner.**

The word Luke uses here for **sinner** is a word that refers to someone devoted to sin; someone who made sin their way of life.

Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 159

And that's her and she knew it. She's had the word "empty" carved all over her life for years.

And here she is. But why now? Why here? Why is she professing such love for Christ?

Well, if you put the Gospels together chronology, just prior to this encounter Jesus had just preached a sermon in town where He had given this invitation: **"All you who are weary and heavy laden, come to Me, and I will give you rest . . . take My yoke upon you and learn of Me—for My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11).**

She evidently heard His message, and we can say that because the tense of the verbs later in this text indicate that she had already believed and is now arriving here to declare her allegiance to Christ.

Verse 37 tells us that she's got an **alabaster vial of perfume.**

That wasn't unusual at all. In these days, these small vials of perfume were often worn on a necklace by a woman who would need it while traveling or before some event.

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke](#), (Tyndale, 1997), p. 188

But for this woman, this vial had been a vital part of her trade, so that she could stay perfumed for the next customer.

But now look at **verse 38**:

And standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Luke 7:38

Now to us today in our culture, this show of affection might appear to be too intimate or indiscreet. But not in this day.

One Greek manuscript written thirty years before this event took place here in Luke 7, a novel that has survived, described a woman who was so grateful that her husband had returned home safely, she went to the temple of her goddess Aphrodite, let down her hair in veneration to the goddess as she knelt at the feet of her idol and wept and repeatedly kissed the feet of the statue of Aphrodite.

Adapted from Garland, p. 326

That's the idea here. She's kneeling in worship, kissing not the feet of a man, but the feet of her Messiah and Lord.

Her life had a been a life marked by the words "empty; weary; heavy laden with sin." She had accepted the invitation to find rest and peace and forgiveness in her Savior.

Martin Luther, the Reformer, commented on this text saying that her tears are water coming directly from her heart; tears of gratitude bathing the Lord's feet as she sobs, lost in godly sorrow; lost in wonder; lost in genuine love and praise.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 186

Now you can imagine, at this point, dinner comes to a screeching halt; nobody's getting more coffee or Baklava. All you hear in this dining room are the sobs and sniffles of a woman whose emptiness is evaporating.

And don't miss this point: she's pouring out this entire vial on Jesus' feet, which is another way of saying, "I won't need this anymore; this was my old life; Jesus is my new life."

Now, as you can imagine, Simon the Pharisee isn't thrilled with this interruption.

But in a twisted way, he's glad it happened, because we're told here in **verse 39**:

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Notice: he's thinking to himself; he doesn't say it, but he's thinking that if Jesus were a true prophet of God, He'd be able to know who this woman was and that she was ceremonially defiling Him by her touch.



Is there a type of person you view the same way Simon views this prostitute? Is there a political ideology, an occupation, a lifestyle that you proudly look down on? How can you reach those people with the gospel, rather than look down on them?

But if Jesus can't spot a big sinner like her, He's not a prophet after all. He thinks, *I've got Him! Wait until the other Pharisees hear about this; we've got Him!*

What he doesn't know is that Jesus can read his mind. So, He says to Simon here in **verse 40**:

"Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

Luke 7:40b

Now, you need to understand that this phrase, "***I have something to say to you***," is an expression used in this culture to introduce a blunt speech the listener isn't going to want to hear.

We use it in a similar way today. "***I have something to say to you ...***" This is your boss calling you into his office, "There's something I want to say to you." That can't be good.

Or the doctor calling, "We got your test results back and there's something I want to say to you." And you hold your breath.

When I was growing up, if my mother called upstairs from the kitchen where she was cooking dinner and said, "Stephen, come down here to the kitchen, there's something I want to say to you," I knew it had nothing to do with dinner.

Men, when your wife says to you, "Honey, there's something I want to say to you; we need to talk;" that doesn't mean *you're* going to talk; you likely won't say anything at all if you're a wise man.

You get my point.

Simon, there's something I want to say to you, and Jesus now gives Simon a parable—**verse 41**:

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty."

Luke 7:41

A denarius was one day's labor for the ordinary workforce of this generation.

So, one man owes a moneylender two-year's worth of his salary. The other guy owes him two months of his salary.

Frankly, they're both in a lot of trouble.

We know from history that the average person living in Christ's day would be giving as much as 40 percent of their earnings back to landowners and moneylenders and religious tithes and Roman taxes.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Luke (Zondervan, 2002), p. 389

It was easy to get into debt, just as it is in every generation.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian recorded that when the Jewish Revolt against Rome took place—30 years after the Lord's ministry here—one of the interesting things the Jewish rebels did was burn all the banking archives, the ledgers, and all the bank records of debts they owed.

Ibid

Everybody knows the weight of debt.

And these two men are being crushed under debt they cannot repay, but then something unexpected happens—verse **42** tells us:

*“When they could not pay,
he canceled the debt of
both.”*

Luke 7:42a

He just burned the ledger. There's no more record of debt.

And with that Jesus asks:

*“Now which of them will
love him more?”*

Luke 7:42

In other words, “Who will be the most grateful for having their debt erased?” The guy who owed two-year's salary or the guy who owed two months?

Now, Simon is a bright man. He's already connecting the dots and he knows that the Lord is comparing him and the prostitute with the two people in debt.

And he also knows that the debt relates to sin; and in this case, the prostitute would be the big sinner and he would be the little sinner, which is why he's not nearly as grateful to God as she is.

“Who will love him more?” And Simon hems and haws here, it says in **verse 43**:

*Simon answered, “The one,
I suppose, for whom he
cancelled the larger debt.”*

Luke 7:43a

What does he mean, “I suppose; I can't say for sure; I suppose the one with the larger debt.”

No, no, no. Simon knows!

And he also knows that in this parable, the big sinner and the little sinner are equally unable to pay their debt; they are both in deep trouble; they are both bankrupt.

They both have the word “empty” written across their lives and in their hearts.

But Jesus isn't finished yet—verse **44**:

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

Luke 7:44a

What kind of question is that? Do you see this woman? Are you kidding? Simon hasn't been able to see anybody else but this woman. *Everybody* sees this woman. "Obviously I see this woman!"

This question is filled with sarcastic humor.

Do you see her? Simon, do you really see her?

In other words, "Do you see how she recognizes her sinfulness, and you don't. Simon you can't even see the sins of selfishness and pride you've committed against Me this evening, so let me set the record straight."

Verse 44 again:

"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 ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she

loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Luke 7:44a-47

The point Jesus is making here really isn't about the *amount* of sin, but the *awareness* of sin.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 80

In the eyes of God, Simon and the prostitute are equals; prostitution was no more sinful than pride.



How does this truth—that we are all equal in sin before God—impact the way we share the gospel?

In the eyes of God, all sin is simply sin.

And whether someone considers themselves a little sinner or a big sinner, we are equally in debt to God. We are all in deep trouble with God; we are all in need of forgiveness.

In a Christian journal I subscribe to, a pastor's wife wrote a devotional on this event here in Luke 7. She writes, "For most of my life, I have read this passage and come away sad. My sad thoughts have sounded like this: 'I've never been a prostitute like this woman, so I guess I can never love God as much as she did.' But if I realize the total wretchedness of my sin—not the sins I could commit and the sins I used to commit, but the sins I commit every hour of every day—then I

begin to understand the depth of my Savior's forgiving love. When I think little of my sin, then it's not a big deal that Jesus died for me, and I love Him little. But when I'm gripped by the horridness of my sin and the forgiveness and freedom through Christ's sacrificial death, I become like this prostitute and bow in worship at His feet."

Bible Study Magazine, adapted from Christa Threlfall, *Which One Will Love Him More?* (Sept/October 2021), p. 5

The verb tenses in Christ's words to this woman indicate that this woman had already placed her faith in Christ before arriving at this home; she had already believed the gospel she had heard preached.

R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 432

She was here to openly profess her love for Christ and that she was leaving her empty life behind.

Verse 48:

And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

Luke 7:48-49

Jesus just ignores them all. Let me tell you, you get the clear impression that Jesus accepted this dinner invitation not for these pious Pharisees, but for this converted prostitute.

And she desperately needs to hear what Jesus now declares to her in **verse 50**:

*And he said to the woman,
"Your faith has saved you."*

Luke 7:50a

Notice, Jesus didn't say: "Your tears saved you; that vial of perfume saved you; leaving the streets saved you; your humility in washing my feet saved you." No, "Your faith saved you!"

"Your trust in Me; your belief when you heard Me preach, 'If you are weary and heavy laden—if you're empty—come to Me, and I will give you rest.'"

With that, He says some words she's never experienced in life on the streets; she never imagined she would ever feel this; Jesus said to her:

*"Your faith has saved you;
go in peace."*

Luke 7:50b

Literally, **go into peace**; go into a life now of peace.

That word, carved on your heart and mind that has haunted you, "empty; guilty; unwanted; unforgiven;" all of that is now replaced with peace with God, peace with yourself, peace with your past, peace with your future, peace that will last forever.

On May 9, 1822, when Charlotte Elliott realized that she didn't have to clean up her life first before placing her faith in Christ—the cleaning up would be the

work of Christ—her gratitude for His grace and peace never left her.

She would live an invalid life, unmarried, until she died at the age of 82. Along the way she wrote dozens of poems that were turned into hymns for the church. Many of them were included in what was originally called The Hymnal for Invalids.

And the most famous poem of all in this Hymnal for Invalids would become a hymn from her own testimony of coming to Christ as a sinner—empty—just as she was.

Some of this poem reads:

*Just as I am without one
plea*

*But that Thy blood was
shed for me,*

*And that Thou bidst me
come to Thee,*

Oh, Lamb of God I come.

*Just as I am, and waiting
not,*

*To rid my soul of one dark
blot;*

*To Thee whose blood can
cleanse each spot,*

Oh, Lamb of God I come.

*Just as I am, Thou wilt
receive,*

*Wilt welcome, pardon,
cleanse, relieve;*

*Because Thy promise I
believe,*

*Oh, Lamb of God, I come . .
. I come.*

Morgan, p. 112

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