

A MUDDY MESS

Many things are not really as they seem from outward appearance. The generation of people who experienced the person of Jesus Christ revealed a great contrast: some received Him, while others rejected Him. Why did they let surface presumptions direct their decisions?

In Luke 7:36-50, a Pharisee invited Jesus to a meal in his home and He accepted. Leading citizens liked to have traveling celebrities enhance their standing in the community. Religious people often hosted study groups with their meals, so perhaps this Pharisee was curious about Jesus' teaching. But what happened at this meal only added to the controversy about Him.

SINFUL WOMAN - Luke writes, "*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, 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 ointment.*"

Most scholars regard this as a different event than the similar story in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and John 12. Regardless, as a known sinner, this woman would not have been welcome, even though such a meal was an open house, as people not invited to the meal could see or hear the honored guest. She brought a flask of alabaster, a beautiful translucent rock used for oils and perfumes.

MESSY MUD - "This woman was sophisticated, worldly, rich enough to afford expensive perfume, but a sinner. And until Christ she had no peace, which only Christ can give," observes RC Sproul. Apparently overcome with emotion, she began to weep over Jesus' feet, perhaps as Isaiah 52:7 says, "*how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.*"

Jesus' feet were dirty from traveling in this hot, dusty climate. Her tears, mingled with her ointment, would have made a muddy mess. Having no towel, she let down her hair and wiped His feet with it. In that culture, her actions were a shocking public display, totally inappropriate.

SELF-RIGHTEOUS MORALIST - The Pharisee who had invited Jesus had planned this dinner to impress others. Now everything was going horribly wrong. When he saw this, he said to himself, "*If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman is touching Him, for she is a sinner.*" Recall that Pharisees were a minority group of moral people.

They were all about obeying God's Laws, and regarded themselves like a public conscience. With the scribes and lawyers, they were guardians of people's lives. Many were suspicious of Jesus, who didn't seem to ascribe to their man-made traditions, which protected God's law.

PUBLIC DISPLAY - This woman had made an open exhibit of emotion, let her hair down in public and, gasp, touched a man, something only a prostitute would do. The Pharisee likely spit out the words in his mind, "*this woman who is touching Him is a sinner.*" Like 1 Samuel 16:7, the Pharisee saw only her outward deeds, not what was in her heart, which only God can see.

"This Pharisee was blinded by self-righteousness. But the woman was illumined to her need by her sin," notes RK Hughes. "The Pharisee saw the woman perform an act of repentance and devotion, and called her a sinner. But Jesus knew her heart, and He knew the Pharisee's heart."

MORAL LESSON - Jesus knew the Pharisee's thoughts. He said, "*Simon, I have something to say to you.*" Simon answered, "*Say it, teacher.*" His honored guest was addressing him personally and he was ready to listen. Jesus called him by name and answered his thoughts. This should have shown Simon that Jesus certainly was a prophet, perhaps even the Christ.

Jesus told him a story: "*A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?*" Simon answered, "*The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt.*" Jesus said to him, "*you have judged rightly.*" A denarius was equal to a day's wage.

ARE YOU FORGIVEN? - Could you repay 50 day's wages? How about 500 days? This moneylender forgave both. Did Simon get the point? This woman may have ten times the outward sins that he did, but both were sinners who could not pay their debt to God. JC Ryle observes, "The Pharisee showed so little love because he had no sense of debt to Christ, and had no consciousness of having obtained forgiveness from Christ." So, what about you? □