

## The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

### *The Sinner*

Luke 7.31ff.

February 14, 2016

*Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, <sup>38</sup> 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.*

<sup>39</sup> *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, that she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup> "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. <sup>46</sup> "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> "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." <sup>48</sup> Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

We're looking at Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (mostly Luke this year) – the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and especially how the secondary characters intersect with the Main Character. In all the interviews and contact Jesus Christ has with other people we see those people in a new way (like the real person comes to the surface) AND we see Him; HE IS revealed in the context of relationship with others.

Last week, we noted that TWO CLASSES of people were really interested in Jesus of Nazareth – really good, respectable, religious and moral people AND ALSO, really bad, disreputable/desperate, fringe-people.

BUT, at the end of the sermon we pointed out that there's really only ONE CLASS of people – i.e. sinful people who need grace. Some people SEE their need for grace and forgiveness...some don't.

Today's text opens with Jesus saying to the religious folks, "You people are like children who

forgot the rules of the game... You hear, 'Simon says touch your nose'...and you just stand there... unresponsive and oblivious to what's happening... seeing but not really...perceiving."

Then, Jesus Christ is invited into the home of a religious scholar (kind of like a pastor or elder) and in comes a sinner (Guess Who's Coming to Dinner) – and it turns out – Jesus Christ is the FRIEND of sinners. He not only tolerates her bad manners but He applauds her and defends her suggestive behavior as a contrast to the Pharisee's.

And what becomes central in this episode is SEEING. It's a conflict at a luncheon that brings out the whole matter of perspective...how we SEE life. (Christianity has been described as a way of seeing.) And this encounter introduces a way of seeing that goes way beyond religion or spirituality or rules of morality. It opens up an approach to life that's un-self-conscious, joyous and fearless.

First, we'll see an OLD WAY of SEEING, then a NEW WAY of SEEING and finally, HOW TO START SEEING THIS WAY AND KEEP SEEING THIS WAY.

The OLD way of seeing is embodied in Simon the Pharisee who invites Jesus Christ to this meal. And that's a good thing to do – I've sometimes not-so-subtly urged us to eat together...because we don't. The numbers tell us that families don't eat together. A lot of people eat at their desks or in their cars. Alone.

But, Simon the Pharisee DOES eat with people... so far so good. And He is apparently interested in Jesus Christ – and since eating with people in that culture was a sign of acceptance and friendship, we could assume that Simon thought highly of Jesus, even respected Him.

And yet, Simon's way of seeing is essentially superficial. He does indeed show Jesus hospitality but why? And Simon may have insisted, "It doesn't matter WHY – it only matters THAT...i.e. THAT I invited Him in and let the record show THAT I DID!"

But that's the old way of seeing; it's shallow. It only looks at surface behavior and not the motives and the reasons FOR the behavior. It has no HEART (it's Valentines Day...have a HEART!) And when you scratch below the exterior you notice that Simon's invitation lacked depth/HEART.

At a deeper level, he wasn't only inviting Jesus; he was interviewing Jesus ("requesting", v. 36 suggests a bit of force ...more like "summons"). He was examining Him.

And when that sinful woman came into the courtyard where this dinner was being held (and we'll get to HER in a moment) but BY Jesus Christ's response to her, Simon concludes, "Ah ha! This man IS NOT the prophet some people think He is! He fails the test...rookie mistake...He can't see the obvious!"

But the obvious is ALL Simon can see – he's obviously hospitable, but inwardly he wants expose

Jesus and to reject Him! Secret motives...

Who wants to go to that kind of luncheon where you're being interviewed and where you have to measure up? I'd rather eat in my car.

SECOND, this OLD way of seeing is not only shallow; it's smug. He sees things in easy-to-manage neat little categories. Just like we saw last week – sinners and righteous, us and them, good and bad. This woman is in the bad category and Simon is in the good. If Jesus can't see that, He obviously has no insight, no discernment; He's NOT a prophet!

THIS way of seeing is black and white. He's unable to see any nuances or extenuating circumstances or shades or degrees.

"I take the few things that I can do well and THOSE SKILLS become THE CRITERIA for everyone else."

THIS way of seeing insists on its own neat little definitions of morality – skills that I have mastered. And everyone else is judged by those categories.

The Pharisees had those areas down pat...Sabbath observance ...prayer/Bible-reading...tithing...self-discipline ...sexual ethics... but other huge categories (like justice, mercy, compassion) they'd forgotten.

Same today with people who are good with diet and exercise and convince themselves that THOSE are the main things (and then judge others on that basis) and don't see other glaring faults in their lives...or being debt-free or refraining from pop-culture or ensuring that their kids have certain achievements or knowing particular writers/thinkers or doctrines.

It's a way of judging ALL right-ness by what I have been able to accomplish... and that's the very human...but OLD WAY OF SEEING.

Thirdly, this old way is essentially ungenerous. If asked whether he was a generous person Simon would have pointed to the evidence, how he had opened his doors to Jesus Christ and put food on the table...and he'd be right.

BUT...he was NOT a kind person. He was calculated and wooden in doing the right thing... not for the sake of the guest but so that HE could further his own agenda.

I recently read a psychological profile in which a person admitted: If a family member dies, my primary concern is what suit I will wear to the funeral. I thought "YIKES! How often do I do the right thing...for ME?! To be proper or avoid a social faux pas."

There was no effusive, genuine openhearted sharing. And that's what's so hard about seeing

this in ourselves: we're able to point to evidence. "Of course I'm listening! 'want me to repeat the last sentence you said?"

And it's VERY hard being around this kind of person (and we all this kind of person to some degree!). You can't prove that they are stingy because they have some evidence to the contrary.

Jesus, however, points to these other, not strictly obligatory gestures but signs of sincere, heartfelt, spontaneous kindness – a foot-bath, a kiss, cologne. These were unforced expressions of welcome.

And that brings us to the title character, the uninvited guest, "the sinner". Many people think that she was a prostitute but she may have gotten that label other ways; she could have been a shoplifter...or who knows?

She gains access to the dinner party/luncheon, which wouldn't have been too hard (big meals were often held in these open-air courtyards).

She'd apparently had previous contact with Jesus Christ and learned that He's there (at the judgment house).

She expresses herself NOT in a "Hospitality By the Book" way. Probably the guests are laying on mattresses (like a futon) and perpendicular to the table – i.e. with head by the table and feet stretched straight out.

She's weeping (which is awkward!). She comes to Jesus Christ's feet and begins to cry tears onto His feet. Then she uses her hair as a towel (to let her hair down in public would've been suggestive). She's crying, wetting then drying His feet, kissing his feet. She's a hot mess.

So, WHY is she carrying on this way? AND WHY does Jesus allow it... WHY is Jesus so naïve... WHY doesn't He put a stop to this?

Well, it's because of what she sees AND what He sees AND what Simon does not see. In fact, Jesus makes "seeing" the whole point of the luncheon. He says to the host (v.44) "Simon, do you SEE this woman?"

I'm sure Simon wanted to say, "Are you kidding me!? She's ALL I see! She is dominating the whole lunch. She is ruining the whole lunch!"

But Jesus is actually saying, "WHAT do you see when you look at her? How do you see the world? I see a woman who sees herself, sees others and sees God in a way that YOU don't see."

She's a woman who sees herself as a great big sinner. That was the point of the little parable: "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they

were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them 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." (One is forgiven a month and a half's salary...the other a year and a half's salary.)

Simon replies, literally, "I TAKE it...the one whom he forgave more..." You feel the smugness in his answer. And Jesus Christ says, "you take it rightly and this woman is aware that SHE is a big debtor – she has an accurate self-image. BUT YOU, Simon, YOU see yourself as a small debtor – you have an inaccurate self-image. And it colors the way you SEE everything."

Now, we can laugh at Simon here...but the truth is: it's difficult to see your own flaws. It's very difficult to see yourself truthfully. Just look at one of the talent shows, the contestants may be utterly convinced that they are "the next American idol" and sometimes they're shocked to find that they're not! And Jesus pointed to this difficulty in moral and spiritual people – very hard to see ourselves... but SHE DOES.

Secondly, she sees others accurately. She is not afraid of what people will think – she doesn't seem bothered at being judged. She's in love.

I had a dad tell me that his son was acting really strange. He was getting up early. Showering and spending a long time in front of the mirror, working around the house to do his chores without being told...turns out – the young man was in love.

Same with this woman: her love made other people NOT so powerful over her life. In the past, she would probably have avoided Simon and other moral people but now – something bigger was here.

And she had a new way of thinking about God. It wasn't that she simply feared God – which IS a good thing and which IS a motivational factor. But she is really moved to this expression of joy and generosity NOT by fear but by forgiveness.

She knows the God who forgives big sinners and little sinners – (v.42) "HE GRACIOUSLY FORGAVE THEM BOTH." And the One whose feet she washes, Jesus Christ, was the very embodiment of God's grace and forgiveness. He was there to pay debts – and somehow this woman knew that about Him.

He came into the world to live the perfect expression of self-giving, effusive love to His Father. He came to obey like neither the Pharisees nor the sinners had ever obeyed. And He came to die so that religious sinners like stingy, smug Simon could be forgiven AND that this hot mess of a sinful woman could be forgiven – came to pay a debt that they owed but could never repay. She somehow saw that ...and it changed how she saw everything else! Forgiven MUCH, she loved MUCH...and that gave her a new way of seeing everything.

So... how do you get this new way of seeing and how do you maintain it so you keep seeing this way?

Well, truth IS: God has to give you eyes to see YOUR need and HIS grace. The apostles prayed this way for the early Christians, e.g. Ephesians 1.17 "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling..."

St. Paul prayed this for Christians...the whole prayer (starts in Ephesians 1, gets interrupted and ends in Ephesians 3) it's amazing (but also typical). It acknowledges that Christians...well...we see...but we don't see.

We...perhaps at one time...perhaps even recently we saw with greater clarity than we do NOW... I once saw that I WAS FORGIVEN MUCH...and that sense of relief was so overwhelming that it left me thrilled. I got a glimpse into my own guilt...(as Emmylou Harris put it) "all the damage I have done" ...my own sin and this sins of others that have damaged me... and THEN I saw, clearly, like an eye-opening...I saw, "Oh, how HE loves us! OH, HOW HE LOVES US...He paid the price to nullify the damage...forgive my guilt and heal me from the guilt of others...and HE, GOD IN JESUS CHRIST forgave this mountain of guilt...He loved Me and HE LOVES ME...and seeing that, tasting that...it frees me."

When I get this look/view...this clarity on the Gospel...this awareness...that I AM FORGIVEN...and forgiven much...when I see it, the sight crushes smugness...and shallowness...and stinginess. It enables me to forget about the painful self. I forget myself and I fall in love with Him who loves me. I become aware.

Manning, Brennan wrote, "Living in awareness of our belovedness is the axis around which the Christian life revolves. Being the beloved IS our identity, the core of our existence. It is not merely a lofty thought, an inspiring idea, or one name among many. It is the name by which God knows us and the way He relates to us."

When the eyes of my heart are opened to that...it frees me to get past mechanical, surface remedies or just changing my behavior so I won't get caught...or out of fear or out of a desire to just complete the check-list so I can collect a reward/recognition... I can hear criticisms and respond with repentance (not just roses – read that Valentine's Day illustration in the bulletin...do it for your wife).

SO...we pray...we seek...at whatever stage of the spiritual life you are... "Lord, give me a new view...a crushing view of my BIG DEBT...and an exhilarating glimpse of Jesus Christ's finished work... may that view free me to forget myself...even laugh at myself...and love much...for I AM MUCH LOVED.

Consider this situation: a contemptuous husband has received some advice to change his ways toward his wife. Instead of criticizing her, he is to give his wife flowers every day for a week.

The implication is that as he does this, his heart will change. He will become a better person and his marriage will improve. The husband will readily agree to this plan. ... he wants the easy way out, "Give me something to do, so I don't have to repent." Anyone can do sacrifices. We suspect that this husband would only become worse. He would just incorporate his "doing" into his life of disobedience and would become more proud. This husband is still in "god-mode": You must serve me; I must control my circumstances; I have a right to judge. When challenged about his life, he now replies to his wife, "Look what I have been doing for you." If this wife had a choice, what do you think she would prefer: flowers or a repentant heart; roses or humility? When I consider my own heart, I will think of every excuse in the book before I will repent before my wife. I would rather spend a month's salary on gifts than humble myself.

- *Gospel Transformation* (2006) - a comprehensive course on the Christian life; World Harvest Mission ([www.serge.org](http://www.serge.org))