

GOSPEL OF LUKE

How Much Is Too Much | Luke 7:36-50 | October 18, 2020

The story of the woman with the alabaster jar is a beautiful love story that paints a rich picture of what the Kingdom of God is all about. But it also begs the question: How much is too much? The story has three main characters: The woman, Simon, the Pharisee and Jesus.

The Woman

- Luke describes her as a “certain immoral woman”. Likely a prostitute.
- Because of her profession she was known by many in the town she lived in and was despised by all of them. Everywhere she went she was treated like she was the scum of the earth. She was, no doubt, the target of disgusting jokes and the object of constant criticism. In the eyes of society she was nothing more than a notorious sinner underserving of love and respect.
- We don’t know the circumstances that led her to becoming a prostitute in the first place. What we do know is that at some point she wanted something different for herself. She no longer wanted to live a life of sin and was looking for a way out.
- Then one day she has a life altering encounter with Jesus in which she experiences a powerful love and amazing grace that not only freed her from sin but filled her with a tremendous amount of love and gratitude for Jesus.
- As Jesus is reclining at the table, the woman kneels behind him and as she’s preparing to anoint him she starts sobbing. Her tears wet Jesus’ dusty feet. With no towel in sight she lets down her hair and dries his feet with it.
- Two things: 1. It was shameful for a woman to let down her hair in public. 2. the most glorious part of a woman’s body was her hair; the feet was considered the most dishonourable part of one’s body.
- She uses her hair, the most glorious part of her body, to dry the feet of Jesus the most dishonourable part of his.
- She doesn’t stop there - she then repeatedly kisses and anoints Jesus’ feet with the expensive perfume.

- What we see here in her expression of love toward Jesus is what happens when the good news impacts a human situation. Humility and joy are always present.
- How much is too much? Did she overdo it? Was she overly expressive? Did she embarrass those around her because her outpouring was inappropriate?

Simon, the Pharisee

- Unlike most of those in his religious sect who strongly opposed Jesus, Simon was actually willing to give Jesus a shot.
- But as he's watching this scandalous scene unfold he's beginning to regret his decision.
- Simon thinks, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"
- Two things we learn about Simon: 1. He had a certain expectation of Jesus and what he should do. 2. He seems fixated solely on *her* sin.
- Sometimes we have the tendency to make God in our own image. We expect God to respond the way we would respond. But God doesn't look to us as the standard of behaviour; He invites us to look to Him.
- There's a danger when we feel free to walk around pointing out everybody else's sin without acknowledging our own. We develop an attitude of superiority, the belief that we are better than everyone else. We fall to pride.
- Simon was clearly disapproving not only of this woman but how Jesus responded to her outpouring of love and affection. It was too much for Simon that Jesus was in the same room as her. It was too much that Jesus interacted with her. In fact, it was too much that she even existed as far as Simon was concerned.
- So...how much is too much?

Jesus

- Jesus responds to Simon's thoughts.
- In his response he does two things: 1. Confronts Simon 2. Comforts the woman.
- Jesus confronts Simon's lack of love for him and the woman
- Jesus says, "A person who is forgiven little shows only a little love."

- Blinded by his pride, Simon was unaware of how much he needed the grace and forgiveness of Jesus. His denial resulted in him not getting to experience the forgiveness of Jesus in his own life, which in turn caused him not to appreciate it.
- One author writes, "We will love God to the degree that we recognize the magnitude of our sins and the immensity of God's grace to forgive them."
- By contrast the woman humbly come to Jesus in her brokenness fully aware of her need for forgiveness.
- The woman wasn't forgiven because she loved Jesus. She loved Jesus because she was forgiven.
- Her extravagant act of love was commended by Jesus, while Simon's lack of love was confronted.
- Matthew 5 - the Beatitudes - first thing he says, "God blesses those who are poor (in spirit) and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."
- Simon invited Jesus to dinner because he wanted to know who Jesus was and what he was all about. The woman showed up because she had found out who Jesus was and what he was all about and she was convinced that she couldn't get enough. Through Simon's interaction with the woman Jesus paints a picture; a picture of the Kingdom of God where there is a magnificent amount of grace and forgiveness for all those who seek it.
- The last thing Jesus says to the woman is, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" - powerful statement because up until that point the woman never experienced true peace. Simon had never experienced true faith. Jesus gave them both a gift; a gift of new life, of a blank slate, of freedom - all they had to do was accept it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story calls for self-reflection. Each character tells us a little bit about ourselves, but which character tells us the most? In what ways are we like the woman in this story? In what ways are we like Simon? How can we conform to being more like Jesus?

2. Who would you say are the hardest people to show God's love to? Is there a line, when it comes to how much grace you extend to them? If so, where's the line? How much is too much?
3. When was the last time you felt an overwhelming sense of God's love and forgiveness for your sins? How did you respond?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (if applicable)