

## October 27 Lesson 9 (NIV)

### GRATEFUL FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 13:3–11

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:36–50

#### LUKE 7:37–48

<sup>37</sup> A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. <sup>38</sup> As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

<sup>40</sup> Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

<sup>41</sup> “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

<sup>43</sup> Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

<sup>44</sup> Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

<sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

#### KEY VERSE

*As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. —Luke 7:38*

### RESPONDING TO GOD’S GRACE

#### Unit 2: Responses to God’s Faithfulness

## LESSONS 6–9

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Saying “Thank You”
- B. Lesson Context
- I. The Sinful Woman (LUKE 7:37, 38)
  - A. Arrival (v. 37)
  - B. Breakdown (v. 38)
- II. The Host and His Guest (LUKE 7:39–43)
  - A. Pharisee’s Thought (v. 39)
    - An Unexpected Answer*
  - B. Jesus’ Parable (vv. 40–42)
  - C. Simon’s Response (v. 43)
- III. The Guest (LUKE 7:44–48)
  - A. On Hospitality (vv. 44–46)
    - Blindsided*
  - B. On Forgiveness (vv. 47, 48)

#### Conclusion

- A. Showing Gratitude
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### HOW TO SAY IT

alabaster *al-uh-bas-ter*.

Bethany *Beth-uh-nee*.

Capernaum *Kuh-per-nay-um*.

Judea *Joo-dee-uh*.

Nain *Nay-in*.

Pharisees *Fair-ih-seez*.

### Introduction

#### A. Saying “Thank You”

Why is it so hard to say “thank you”? If you think it is not, then you are not the parent of a high school graduate who has received gifts of congratulations. If you are such a parent, you probably recall begging, pleading, cajoling—perhaps even threatening—to get the appropriate thank-you notes written!

Some people see a distinction between nongratitude and ingratitude. Robert Emmons, for example, makes a distinction between two attitudes that do not say thank you. Nongratitude is mere forgetfulness, but ingratitude is actively negative and meant to punish another. Others like Gina Barreca, however, see no gray areas: a person who is thankful says so, and one who isn't, doesn't. She considers laziness in saying "thank you" a symptom not of forgetfulness but of a lack of thankfulness. This in turn reveals deeper character flaws.

This debate can go on, but there is no question that showing gratitude is a virtue that befits the disciple of Jesus. When Jesus healed 10 men with leprosy, he was disturbed that 9 of them never thanked him (Luke 17:11–19). Jesus' obvious implication was that all 10 should have given thanks. So who is more likely to thank Jesus for his work: a religious leader or a notorious sinner?

## **B. Lesson Context**

Jesus was invited to dine in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36). The Pharisee's motive for this invitation is not given immediately (see commentary on 7:40). He may have wanted a time of quiet conversation with Jesus (compare the Pharisee Nicodemus in John 3). More likely, the Pharisee had less than honorable intentions. By this time in Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees have already shown themselves to be hostile to Jesus' work. Luke 6:1–11 records two events in which they opposed Jesus. We might be surprised that Jesus accepted the invitation in the first place knowing the potential hostility of his host. If so, we'll be even more surprised to learn that he went on to accept at least one more such invitation (Luke 11:37).

The Pharisee's invitation in today's lesson does not mention any other guests, not even whether Jesus' disciples were invited. But apparently others were included in the invitation, perhaps additional Pharisees, since "the other guests" judged what they saw and heard while eating (Luke 7:49). Their presence as well as their attitude adds to our suspicion that Jesus was invited to this dinner as an occasion to mock or question him in some way (see on Luke 7:44b, below).

This dinner party occurred not long after the centurion's servant was healed (see lesson 8). The location is not stated; it could have been in Capernaum since that city was something of a headquarters for Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4:13; Mark 2:1). While the healing of the centurion's servant did occur in Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10), we know Jesus left there and was in Nain, where he raised a dead man to life (7:11–17). The dinner in the Pharisee's home happens sometime after those events (7:36). Following today's text, Jesus toured "from one town and village to another" in Galilee (8:1), so the anointing in the Pharisee's home could have been in nearly any of them.

Each of the Gospels reports on an anointing of Jesus by a woman while Jesus was attending a dinner. As a result, some believe each reports on the same event. While showing some similarities, the anointing recorded in the other Gospels (see Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–8) is almost certainly a separate, later event (see John 12:1). Each of the other accounts locates the event in Bethany in Judea (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3; John 12:1), while Luke's account belongs to the Galilean ministry (Luke 4:14–9:51). John specifically identifies the woman as Mary of Bethany, whose reputation is certainly not that of a notorious sinner (compare Luke 7:37 with John 11:1–5, 28–32).

## **I. The Sinful Woman**

(LUKE 7:37, 38)

### **A. Arrival (v. 37)**

**37. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.**

Dinner parties, often hosted in a courtyard, frequently include people the host has specifically invited and others who come to listen to or see a guest of honor. Uninvited people are allowed to come and participate as spectators. This custom emboldens the *woman* to come to the dinner, even though she is known as leading *a sinful life*. This suggests that she is a prostitute or adulteress. Likely there are several uninvited guests, and she is able to slip in unnoticed. She does not come out of curiosity or boredom; she comes on a mission to see *Jesus*.

The woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany (see the Lesson Context) also had *an alabaster jar* (Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3). This is one of the similarities that has led to the confusion of one event with the other. Such containers are appropriate containers for various oils, though other materials are also used.

Mark 14:3–5 establishes both the nature and value of the *perfume* in the other account. But no such specifics are noted in the scene before us. Even so, this may be a great sacrifice on her part.

Host and guests adopt a posture of reclining while sharing a meal, the custom of the day. Low tables require that guests lie on their sides, leaning on their elbows and eating with their right hands. The significance of these facts is seen in the next verse.

## **B. Breakdown (v. 38)**

**38a. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping,**

Because the guests are reclining around the table, the woman has an opportunity to stand *behind Jesus at his feet*. The reason for her emotion is not readily known (see commentary on Luke 7:47, below). But her reaction to Jesus' presence is obvious to everyone in attendance as she stands *weeping*.

**38b. she began to wet his feet with her tears.**

After an unspecified length of time, the unnamed woman changes posture from standing to kneeling near Jesus. That's the only way for her to be able to be in a position to *wet his feet with her tears*.

**38c. Then she wiped them with her hair,**

There's more than meets the eye here as the woman uses *her hair* as a washcloth. Women's hair of this era is meant to be bound up. Therefore this woman's letting her hair down is quite a departure from propriety. This act further suggests that she is lost in the moment with Jesus. She does not consider what anyone else might see or think.

**38d. kissed them and poured perfume on them.**

Perhaps the woman has come intending to anoint Jesus' head (compare Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3). But for reasons unknown she does not do so. Instead, she anoints his feet, as Mary also will do (John 12:3; see Lesson Context).

This act of anointing Jesus recalls the definition of *Messiah*—"anointed one." Priests, prophets, and kings experienced anointing in Israel. Jesus fulfills all these roles (Matthew 21:11; 27:11, 37; John 4:44; 18:37; Hebrews 7:23–28). Thus this anointing is more appropriate than anyone in the room (other than Jesus) realizes!

## **II. The Host and His Guest**

**(LUKE 7:39–43)**

### A. Pharisee's Thought (v. 39)

**39. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”**

The Pharisees frown on associations between “good” and “bad” people. A frequent complaint of theirs about Jesus is that he spends time with sinners. That was the issue after the calling of Matthew/Levi earlier (Luke 5:29, 30; compare 15:1, 2; 19:1–7). Shortly before this event in the Pharisee’s home, Jesus himself confirmed that he has a reputation as “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (7:34).

The host (whose name is Simon, per the next verse below) makes a mental note of Jesus’ “failure.” Likely Simon wants to discuss it with his Pharisee friends later, though all other Pharisees in attendance no doubt have noticed as well.

This criticizing thought betrays the Pharisee’s ulterior motive for inviting Jesus: Simon doesn’t want to learn; he wants to find fault. Perhaps Jesus’ *Pharisee* host was not present at the time when Jesus acknowledged being friends with sinners. Otherwise, Simon would know that Jesus does indeed spend time with sinners, even eating with them.

Because Jesus allows this woman to touch his feet and anoint him, the Pharisee thinks that Jesus must not realize that this woman *is a sinner*. Since Jesus does not know her character, so Simon’s thinking goes, then he cannot be *a prophet*. A prophet would know such things! But Simon the Pharisee operates from a false premise: he cannot establish what Jesus knows or does not know about the woman because Jesus has already demonstrated a willingness to associate with sinners (see on Luke 7:47, below).

### B. Jesus’ Parable (vv. 40–42)

**40. Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”**

**“Tell me, teacher,” he said.**

The name of the Pharisee is delayed until this point. In other Gospel accounts of an anointing, the host is also named Simon (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3; contrast John 12:1, 2). Though this could lead to the conclusion that these are the same events, one very significant detail sets Luke’s account apart from those of Matthew and Mark. In the latter two accounts, Simon is referred to as a “leper,” not a Pharisee. The fact that he is called a leper and yet is able to host a social occasion suggests he has been healed by Jesus. Such a person would be unlikely to treat Jesus as will the host of this dinner (see on Luke 7:44–46, below).

Jesus’ attention-getting *Simon, I have something to tell you* serves to rouse the man from his faulty chain of thinking. Jesus wants the man’s full attention, and he gets it.

**41. “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.**

One denarius represents a day’s pay for a common laborer (see Matthew 20:2). *Five hundred denarii*, then, represents about a year and a half’s wages. Even so, the lesser debt is still significant.

To repay the debt, either borrower would have to make substantial sacrifices. The one owing *fifty* denarii could perhaps make enough such sacrifices to repay the debt. The other borrower, however, is certainly beyond his ability to repay; he will never scrimp and save enough.

**42a. “Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both.**

The parable ends with a dramatic surprise. For one borrower, this goodwill produces a convenience: he no longer has to worry about being extra frugal for a few months to save up the

50 denarii he owes. For the other, it is lifesaving. Hopelessly in debt, he and his family faced the specter of being sold into forced servitude to repay the debt (see Matthew 18:25).

**42b. “Now which of them will love him more?”**

The lender shows love to both borrowers by forgiving the debt. Such generosity expects a response of *love* in return. The question assumes that one or the other will feel greater love.

**C. Simon’s Response (v. 43)**

**43. Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”**

**“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.**

*Simon* recognizes that greater forgiveness inspires greater love. He may not yet see that he is about to be rebuked for his own evil thinking in regard to *Jesus* (see commentary on Luke 7:39, 47).

**III. The Guest**

**(LUKE 7:44–48)**

**A. On Hospitality (vv. 44–46)**

**44a. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?”**

Of course *Simon* sees the *woman*! He has just been regarding her with contempt (see Luke 7:39). Simon might realize now that Jesus is about to turn the tables.

**44b. “I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.**

Jesus calls attention to Simon’s own failures as a host. He has not accorded his guest the usual comforts demanded by cultural mores of hospitality. The host must provide *water* and a servant to wash his guests’ *feet*. Simon has not done that, at least not for Jesus. (One wonders whether the others at the table have received this kindness.) Jesus’ feet would have remained dirty and dusty were it not for the actions of the woman.

The Pharisee’s failure to extend the usual courtesies of a host to a guest gives credence to the idea that the host has no intention of honoring Jesus. In contrast, the sinful woman has corrected Simon’s inhospitable reception by honoring Jesus in a most humbling way.

**45. “You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.**

Customary hospitality includes a greeting with *a kiss*. It shows a measure of affection, as one would expect from a well-intentioned host to his guests.

Once again, the *woman* has supplied what was lacking on Simon’s part. *Kissing Jesus’ feet* and not his cheek demonstrates her humility and devotion.

**46. “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.**

To *put oil* on another’s *head* goes beyond the normal treatment of a guest. It is reserved for very close friends or someone whom a host especially wants to honor (compare Psalm 23:5.) This contrast demonstrates the point of the parable. The woman has supplied not just what is lacking in

the treatment of Simon's guest. She has added a special blessing that shows great love. She is not able to anoint Jesus' head, but she has done what she could with the resources she has.

## **B. On Forgiveness (vv. 47, 48)**

**47. “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”**

Jesus here proves that he knows exactly what kind of woman has been attending him. She has *many sins*, to be sure. But she shows a great measure of love that suggests she knows she has been *forgiven*.

Jesus' declaration refutes Simon's unspoken thought that Jesus does not possess the divinely given awareness of a prophet (see commentary on Luke 7:39, above). Jesus' parable serves as a rebuke to Simon's objection that Jesus should not allow a “sinner” to touch him. Simon never voices that contention aloud, so how does Jesus know that Simon objects to Jesus' allowing a “sinner” to touch him? Jesus shows he not only knows who the woman is; he knows what Simon is thinking!

Just as likely is that the woman has come in faith. Her gracious acts of anointing and kissing Jesus' feet are done with some manner of expectation on her part. Simon, on the other hand, feels no need for anything from Jesus, least of all forgiveness. Simon believes himself to be righteous—more righteous than most people. Thus he *loves little*.

**48. Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”**

*Jesus* not only accepts her gift; he stands up for her. He exonerates her before the scolding crowd. He sends her home with a blessing!

One wonders whether Jesus says this as much for the benefit of the others at the table as for the woman. We can only guess what the woman feels as she leaves Simon's house. She must have come with considerable fear and trepidation. But her awareness of her need had driven her to seek out Jesus personally (compare Matthew 9:20). She must have known that she would be scorned by the Pharisee and many, if not all, of his other guests. To be able to honor Jesus is enough for her to face them all.

Luke 7:49 (not in our lesson text) records the reaction of those guests. It's along the lines of, “Who does this Jesus think he is?” This is the second time Jesus has declared forgiveness of sins for someone (see Luke 5:20). The witnesses' response is the same both times (5:21).

On the earlier occasion, Jesus defended his authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:22–26). Here he seems to ignore the critics. It's the woman who is important. He turns back to the woman and says, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:50).

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Showing Gratitude**

How do we say “thank you” to Jesus? Today's text suggests we do so by acts of kindness. Of course, we cannot minister directly to Jesus, as the grateful woman did at Simon's house. But we can minister to our peers. We express our gratitude to God by kind acts to others (Luke 10:25–37; James 1:27; 1 John 4:20, 21). At least, we do if we are truly grateful! If God's grace and forgiveness

toward us have produced in us the kind of love they produced in this woman, then that love will show in our treatment of other people. We will show our gratitude by being gracious.

### **B. Prayer**

O God, thank you for forgiving our many sins. May we show our love and gratitude by our loving treatment of one another. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Thankfulness may consist merely of words.

Gratitude is shown in acts.