

Explore the Bible: February 21

Loves • Luke 7:40-50

By Ann Maniscalco



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If you were asked to give examples of the word, “contrast”, what would come to your mind? Cold and hot, shy and outgoing, rich and poor, spicy and mild... these are a few. In trying to describe the word, we’d obviously think of two things as different as, well...night and day!

Today’s lesson is a study in contrasts. Just as cold is the opposite of hot, so cold hearts are miles apart from those warmed with gratitude for Christ’s love and forgiveness.

Much has transpired between last week’s lesson and today’s. Jesus has healed the sick, raised the dead, chosen His inner group of twelve apostles, engaged in some teaching, and continued ruffling the feathers of many of the Jewish leaders. However, in this week’s passage, we see one of the Pharisees has invited the Lord to his home for dinner. We’re not told what Simon’s motive for the invitation was, but the condition of his heart was quickly revealed.

As those gathered reclined around the table, enjoying the meal, an uninvited guest (of ill repute) unexpectedly appeared. Heading toward Jesus, she stood at His feet,

lavishly displaying deep love and gratitude. The woman's copious tears poured over the Lord's feet. Wiping them with her hair, she knelt to kiss them. Bringing forth an alabaster flask of ointment, she then lavished it on His feet (vs. 37-38). Observing this display, a disgusted Simon thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who was touching him, for she is a sinner (v. 39)."

As we've seen in previous lessons, Jesus could discern what people were thinking. Using this as a teachable moment, the Lord told Simon He had something to say to him. Calling Him "Teacher", the Pharisee invited Him to proceed. Describing a generous moneylender, Jesus said the man had pity on two debtors who couldn't pay what they owed. One's debt was five times as much as the other's: 500 denarii (the equivalent of well over a year's pay for a common laborer). The compassionate moneylender then cancelled the debt of both men. Probably letting that sink in a minute, Jesus then continued, asking Simon, "Now which of them will love him more?" The obvious answer was the one with which Simon responded: the one whose larger debt was cancelled. "You have judged rightly", the Lord replied.

Now here's where the contrasts become glaringly evident. In Luke 7:44-46, Jesus compares the minimal treatment that, as a proper host, Simon should have displayed toward his guest. However, we see that for each example, the woman displayed a lavish counterpart, showing humble, worshipful devotion.

The Lord then added what seems an unusual statement, saying, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much" (v. 47). It appears to be saying the woman is being forgiven because she showed love. But consider the next section of the verse, representing the other side of the coin: "he who is forgiven little, loves little." This clarifies the Lord's intent: the woman had already experienced Jesus' forgiveness, and her lavish love evidenced that fact. Author Warren Wiersbe

compares the two people: "The sinful woman trusted Christ and He saved her; now she wanted to express her love to Him. True faith cannot be hidden, and true faith shows itself in love and worship. Simon the Pharisee was blind: he could not see himself, the Lord, or the woman. He did not know the debt he owed!" Simon's cold heart demonstrated his lack of love for Jesus.

Turning to the woman, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven", telling her to "go in peace", as she'd experienced salvation through faith. This public proclamation surely comforted the woman; it also again established Jesus' claim to be the sin-forgiving Savior-God, to the amazement of those gathered (v. 49; also, Luke 4:16-18 and 5:19-25).

We see this combination of faith, peace, and love portrayed in Romans 5:1-5: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (NKJV).

Sometimes, however, sinful actions and life's diversions (even good activities) can cause our love for Christ to wane (Revelation 2:2-4). When this happens, it's good to read Psalm 51, and pray like David, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Drifting can easily occur. Are you due for a "heart check-up"?

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