

# Worthy in the Eyes of Jesus

Thomas Robinson, *Worthy! 2*, August 25, 2013

## Luke 7:36-50

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> And 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, <sup>38</sup> 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 the ointment.

<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 have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

<sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

<sup>41</sup> "A certain **moneylender** had two **debtors**. One owed **five hundred** denarii (1½ years' wages), and the other **fifty** (1½ months' wages). <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, he **graciously forgave** the debt of both. Now which of them will **love him** more?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he forgave the larger debt."

And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

<sup>44</sup> Then **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 from the time I came in **she** has not ceased to kiss my feet.

<sup>46</sup> **You** did not anoint my head with oil, but **she** has anointed my feet with ointment.

<sup>47</sup> On the basis of that I tell you, **her sins**, which are many, **have been forgiven** – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, **loves little.**"

<sup>48</sup> And he said to her, "**Your sins have been forgiven.**"

<sup>49</sup> Then those who were reclining at table with him began to say among themselves, "**Who is this, who even forgives sins?**"

<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**"

## John 3:1-17 – A Pharisee named Nicodemus visits Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night .... <sup>7</sup> "Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'"

## John 4:1-29 – A Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at a well

<sup>7</sup> A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

## Luke 15:11-32 – Jesus tells the story of a Father with a Prodigal Son and his Older Brother

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' ..."

## Jesus and the Embarassing Woman

Last time we focused on God and his choice from his nature of love to create beings with freedom for both good and bad. He chose love and relationship (vulnerability) more than perfection and control. In Jesus – both God and us – we see that choice up close. It fascinated his disciples; thus Gospel stories. Jesus encountered people of all kinds: powerful, outcast, striving, sinner, sick, despairing, religious. He values/welcomes the person as he finds them, challenges them in their next step toward God. Here, a remarkable meeting: Simon, a Pharisee. Jesus. A woman of the city. An embarrassing situation. Simon: host of banquet, in control, high standards, Torah observance, separation, evaluating Jesus. Woman: outsider/intruder, bad repute, vulnerable, no boundaries/propriety, weeping, kissing Jesus. A test for Jesus and us. We can imagine the guests' surprise, suspense. Simon judges. Jesus speaks.

## Seeing Others; Seeing Ourselves – Empathy

The heart of the story is Jesus' ironic question, "Do you see this woman?" with the implied questions, "Do you see yourself?" and "Do you see what really matters?" Yes, she's a sinner, untouchable. No, she's an object. Jesus' approach to people began with seeing them in themselves, valuing them on their own terms. We imitate by learning empathy, seeing the world from another's point of view, with their feelings. The Samaritan woman at the well: Jesus knows her sense of exclusion, of a failed, option-less life. He praises her honesty, offers living water to quench the deep thirst of the heart, trusts her to tell. Nicodemus comes as a religious leader who knows he's lost any sense of God's presence. Jesus challenges him to start again with birth from above by God's Spirit, who's beyond our control. Jesus tells Simon a strange story: a gracious moneylender, forgiven debts, gratitude breaking out in love. Jesus sees both the woman and Simon, values them both. Each has told their story by their actions. Jesus interprets those stories. He wants both of them to take their next step, but surprisingly, the woman is much further along than Simon. The woman's vulnerability, tears of gratitude, generosity, extravagant expressions of love: these tell the story of forgiveness, healing, a transformed life, peace. Simon's judgment, lack of empathy, distancing, lack of commitment, his stunted sense of love, tell that in spite of his piety, he hasn't experienced God's grace in forgiveness that flows out in gratitude and love. Jesus can send the woman forth in peace. Simon needs more challenging spiritual work.

## The Stories We Tell and the Gospel

He could learn, like Nicodemus could learn. But it's a challenge. His story of himself was one of separation, comparison, perfectionism: Better than others, but good enough? Probably not. The stories we tell of ourselves (from ourselves, parents, society, etc.) are often the real blockages to the Gospel of God's extravagant self-giving love that knows us as beloved children, walking in love. Think of Jesus' famous story of the Father and two sons. Each of the sons has a self-told story that injures and could destroy his life. The parable begins with the well-known pattern of the son who sees his father not as the source of his life but as a blockage to self-fulfillment and self-expression. He escapes the confinement of home and family love for the thrill of the adventure, independence. But his self-story changes to a story of shame, defeat, lost identity, unworthiness – unforgivable, unlovable. He returns from the far country's pigpen to face discipline and long rehabilitation. The older brother at the same time has been telling himself a story of privation and dishonor. He sees himself as the responsible one, a slave to duty, a martyr to his piety, serving an irresponsible father. Jesus shows that both very human stories are destructive distortions of God's grace toward us. Yes God gives us freedom with which we can ruin our lives. But God wants something wholly different. The father welcomes the prodigal home with embrace, love and celebration as a true son. The father assures the older son that wealth is his, no scarcity, he can afford gratitude and love.