

My name is Simon

Luke 7:41-47

January 6, 2008

Hi. My name is Simon.

I have a good life. I have a good job and a loving family and I enjoy the respect of my neighbors. I am a Pharisee. But that doesn't mean much to you, does it? Let me see if I can explain it to you ...

You must know some folks who set an especially high moral standard for themselves, folks who have a reputation for clean living, for doing the right thing, for not cutting corners; folks who are willing to make sacrifices and even to endure pain and suffering just to do the right thing; folks who don't just go to church, but are the backbone of the church; folks who take their religion seriously and try to live a good life every day and in every way; folks who know the Bible and the commandments as well as or even better than the minister!

Well, that's me. I am committed to living a righteous, god-fearing, law-abiding life, and I am committed to encouraging as many people as I can to do the same. Our salvation depends it!

Our salvation, not just mine. It's not a "me" thing. It's about us and about our world. Just look around. The world is falling apart! Our culture is demoralized and debased! Crime and violence, divorce and infidelity, drinking and snorting and shooting up, lust and greed and envy, poverty and homelessness and disease.

And it's our fault! It's all our fault! The problem is not political or social. It is moral and spiritual. We need to get our act together. We need to obey God's law. We need to be pure and good and holy and then -- and then -- maybe God will hear our prayers and heal our land!

Now you know something about who I am and what I care about, but I want to tell you about the time I invited Jesus to come to my house for dinner.

You've heard of Jesus? Well, I had, too. I saw him a couple of times in church. Lots of folks hung around afterwards asking him questions, wanting to hear what he had to say. And I wanted to hear what he had to say, too. Like I said, I am committed to living a righteous and god-fearing life and I'm always ready to hear what a good teacher has to say about how best to do it.

So I invited him home for dinner, and I invited some of my friends and neighbors, too. The food was good. The hospitality was first rate, if I may say so myself! And the conversation was getting interesting. All was going well ... until she came!

I didn't invite her. I never would have invited her, but she came anyway. And she made such a scene, fawning over him, petting him, kissing his feet (can you picture that?), all the time sobbing and crying.

I was embarrassed. Not just for me. I was embarrassed for him. How could he let her do that? Can't he see what kind of woman she is? Hadn't he heard of her reputation?

Has that ever happened to you? You're at church and some stranger walks in, wanting some money or wanting something else. And you can tell, just by looking at them, what kind of person they are.

Or maybe somebody comes to worship dressed sloppily or provocatively, or says bizarre things or makes you feel creepy just by the way they look or act.

Well, that's how it was. But he let her go on and on, crying and touching and ... ugh! He could have at least stepped outside and spoken to her privately. Me, I would have just told her to leave. And I was going to, when he said, "Simon, I have something to tell you ..."

"Go right ahead," I said.

"There were two men who owed money to a moneylender ..."

That's the way he began his story, but let me tell it to you in my own way. You have two children and you loan money to both of them -- \$5000 to one child and \$500 to the other. Neither of them can pay you back, so you tell them both just to forget it. Which one of them will love you more?

Duh! The one who got the \$5000 will love you more and will come back again and again asking you for more!

The one who borrowed \$500 will make a fuss and say you're not being fair, that they only borrowed a little bit because of an unexpected bill and that they can take care of themselves and that their sibling should be able to care of himself, and that you're being much too soft, much too easy ... and it's just not fair!

It's clear, Jesus! The one who was forgiven the most will love him more.

"You're right," Jesus said. "Her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven just a little, loves just a little."

OK ...

OK. But why is Jesus still looking at me? Why is he talking just to me? Why doesn't he say something to her? She's causing the problem here.

And what's the point? What is he trying to say to me? Two men owed money to a moneylender. One owed a whole lot of money and the other just a little bit. And neither of them could pay him back.

Neither of them could pay him back! Neither of them could pay him back ...

And he cancelled the debt of both of them. He forgave both of them ...

Which of them will love him more?

Jesus said, "You are right" ... but was I right? Will the one who was forgiven so much love him more? Or will they both love him because both are forgiven whatever it is that they owe? Will they both love him because he is such a generous man?

What was Jesus trying to say to me? "Whoever has been forgiven just a little loves just a little." Loves just a little. Just a little love. Little love.

Do you know? Is your name Simon, too?