

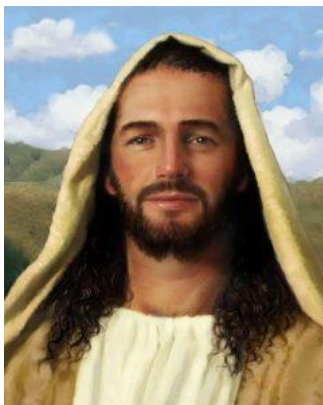
SIMON THE PHARISEE

Luke 7:37-48

Life is all about credibility.
And this Jesus of Nazareth is certainly building his!
He is becoming the rising star of the region.
Teaching in the synagogues, by the shore of Galilee,
preaching about the kingdom of heaven being here!
How would he know? I've been around longer than he has,
and I've never seen it!
What's worse, he's healing people, not just of their diseases,
but claiming also of their sins!
How does a carpenter get to do that!
By all accounts he's a dangerous man,
Upsetting the order of things,
Challenging what we do, what we've always done.
I suppose I'll have to invite him to my home,
Check him out.
I feel a mixture of arrogance and intrigue.
He's on my patch, I need to know what he's up to,
But I'm also interested...
What's he got that's making people follow him rather than us?
Is he just some new fad, or is there something more real?
The healings *seem* genuine.
What if they are?



I complete my ritual of afternoon prayer, making sure I am seen of others.
I have a responsibility to maintain appearances.
It's a comfortable routine, and I feel the better for it.
There's time now to go out into the street and see this man for myself.
I watch from a distance, catching the odd word.
He's in preaching mode.
I begin to make my way towards him through the crowd.
How they are listening!
I need to gently push my way through,
Minor irritation gives way to acquiescence when they see who I am.
Slowly and surely I reach to the front.



He is younger than I expected, and obviously less experienced than me.
Yet he has an authority about him that is somehow ageless,
A meekness and knowledge that speak of a higher power,
An effortlessness in every word and movement as he unveils the scriptures.
I can see why he is attracting crowds...
My earlier thought returns. Is it just novelty, the age-old hope of the new Messiah
attaching to any thing original and different? I feel within myself it is something far
deeper and suddenly resent his preaching and teaching and healing. That's our job, our
duty. Even though we can't heal. We've all rather left that to the older prophets, - that
was their special role. So, what's this Jesus doing? I will find out for myself, invite
him to my home, be seen with him.
It makes me feel uncomfortable, but I shan't show or admit it!
Jesus has seen me approaching. I feel in that one glance he has dissected my very

thoughts, yet he continues untroubled and confident.
No wonder my fellow Pharisees hate him! He's more dangerous than I imagined!
He finishes his parable, leaving the crowd thoughtful, and turns to me, expecting and granting my request.



And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

This wasn't the plan! How did she get in! All the kudos of his presence ruined by this harlot! He must know what manner of woman it is who is touching him! He read my thoughts readily enough!

"Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee."

He's reading my thoughts again! His meekness against pharisaical pride! Love against my surprising hatred of his superiority. Everyone is listening. I must be careful. I bid him continue.

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

The question is too easy, but I phrase the answer with due caution. "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." Where's he going with all this. I am nervous... He looks at me and responds with calm assurance.

"Thou hast rightly judged"

He looks at the harlot, - how does he get away with that! And I feel a sinking premonition of his wisdom putting me to shame...

Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

His rebuke is harsh and uncompromising. I cannot fault him. My disdain in sharp contrast to the genuine repentance of the harlot woman. Yet who is the real prostitute? Aren't I selling my pharisaical robes for my own purpose, getting money for worn out creeds and empty blessings?

Aren't I putting myself before God!!! All the time!! Jesus doesn't care what I think about him. He knows what God knows, and that's all that matters to him. What does God know about me? He turns again to the woman:

"Thy sins are forgiven."

She looks at peace while I am in turmoil. I have heard of Jesus' demand that we should repent. Dare I change the habits of a lifetime? I ask myself the desperate question, do I really want to! I am too comfortable, too well set. I am a Pharisee! Yet she is forgiven, she has repented, she has loved much.. Who do I love more, - myself or God? Who did she love more? The first commandment rings through my consciousness, - how many times have I said it out loud in the synagogue and in the streets? If Jesus hadn't come, I wouldn't be having this battle. Do I hate him or love him?

Jesus looks at me again. Despite his damning words there is such tender love in his eyes, the promise of redemption. His love is constant. Tangible. I can feel it. And my love is variable.

Am I really prepared to put God first? All the time? Before me?
The choice is mine.