

The
DINNER
PARTY

FOR ONE

*You're Invited to
the Most Extraordinary Event
of a Lifetime*



You're Invited

From:

To:



The Dinner Party for One: You're Invited to the Most
Extraordinary Event of a Lifetime

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Introduction



Throughout time, stories have touched us. They sometimes instruct, challenge, entertain, and even scare us.

Rare is the story that reaches out and tugs at the divine, opening the curtain just enough for us to peek into heaven. Better yet, it brings the eternal to earth for a snapshot we can treasure.

The story you are about to read actually happened. Though written nearly 2,000 years

ago, no serious scholar doubts its authenticity. And no honest reader questions its motive—to contrast us standing in the shadow of God.

The author's illumination of this story is intentionally crafted to encourage both the imagination and personal participation. It is done without changing or compromising the original story, which is included in its entirety at the end.



1

The Invitation



The invitations have been sent. The chatter commences. Who has been invited? Who has not? The table has limited seating but the doors will be open to all, as is the custom. Word travels quickly throughout these dusty roads. Words flow freely, especially when it comes to the Teacher.

Most in the community are fascinated. He is so different than anyone before him.

And he seems to have gotten under the skin of the Religious—making him all the more appealing to those who would never dream of receiving such an invitation. Whether they admit it or not, they all love a good scandal.

The “separated ones” will soon fill the house of a man named Simon. Some warn Simon, a part of this ancient sect, that his invitation to dinner will bring lasting scandal to his house and name. Others surmise Simon’s real intentions are to expose this man for the fraud that they consider him to be. This much is certain: Simon wants to investigate for himself the Rabbi many believe to be a prophet.

But in this they all agree—the itinerate teacher, this Rabbi, cannot be trusted. After all, didn’t he once call them “snakes” to their

faces? And who can trust someone preaching against self-righteousness? The people seem to love him, but what do the people know?

Your invitation has arrived. One of Simon's servants has come to you and requested your attendance. You will be one of the select few to recline at the table. Like Simon and most everyone else, you too are intrigued. Who is this man?

Your heightened sense of excitement goes way beyond the anticipated food and atmosphere. You sense the tension building in the community. Everyone expects a showdown—two opposite opinions on how to live life.



THE GUEST LIST

This dinner party will be full of the pious—not exactly known for small talk, full-throated laughter, and party games. What won't be missing will be the gossip. Some vices transcend time and culture.

It's easy to spot the religious, not just by their distinct, dark, full-length clothing, but also by the rigidity of manner and movement. Years of both study and practice of thousands of priestly laws can do that.

You are not sure where you fit in. At times you feel like one of the uninvited, standing by the wall, looking in. Other times

you blend in well with all the black robes. You're not particularly religious, at least you think not. But this Rabbi, whom you have read about, studied, and even talked to, at times seems distant. It's as if he's standing outside your house but won't come in. You can't help but think that maybe it's you who neglected to open the door.

The religious elites are interesting in their own curious way. They try so hard to keep the rules, and yet at the same time seem to miss it altogether. Rules are necessary for any community, aren't they? After all, even this Rabbi once said that he would not change even the smallest point of punctuation in the Law. But you've never been particularly

good at keeping rules, even when you really try. Strangely, that makes you respect the religious who seem to succeed where you have failed.

Maybe this dinner will sort it out. Maybe you'll gain some kind of enlightenment. You hope that this party will be more than just eating and drinking. Didn't the Rabbi once say, "Is not life more than food?" But a good meal never hurt anyone.



THE GUEST OF HONOR

Ironically, the guest of honor once introduced himself as someone who "comes eat-

ing and drinking.” That would seem to be the last person Simon would invite into his home. The religious view him more like that rude relative you only see at the holidays and try hard to avoid. That is the last thing you want to do. You hope to get as close as you can.

There’s an air of uncertainty with this Rabbi. Just when you think you have him figured out, he does something that shocks your religious sensibilities. He seems to relish the gossip that surrounds him, “a glutton and a wine bibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” And those are *his* words. Mix in the miracles with his prophetic side, add that with what everyone else says about him, and

you can't wait for the party to start. He is the perfect dinner guest.



THE PREPARATIONS

What to eat? What to drink? Should there be music? Probably not, too many sectarian sensibilities.

Simon's servants scurry about making last minute preparations. The Rabbi accepted his invitation and there are only hours to prepare.

With certain kinds of guests come specific types of party protocols. Invite a high priest, rich lawyer, or even someone from the royal palace, and you know how and what to

prepare. But this was a poor prophet from a small village that some questioned if “any good could come from it.” At least he wasn’t John the Baptist. There are only so many ways to prepare the sweet and sour of honey and locust.

The invitations were sent via social media—word of mouth. And, of course, the message got out to the masses who were interested enough to make their way to Simon’s. If they couldn’t find a wall inside to lean against they would congregate outside and surmise among themselves what was being said.

Simon’s preparations consisted of considering what questions he would ask the Rabbi: How could he investigate without provoking

like a lawyer? Should he at least be cordial? Would this be an opportunity to really learn his mission? “What should I ask? How should I ask it? What will others think if I am too kind or too harsh? The Rabbi was tough on us,” he thought, “shouldn’t we be tough on him?”

Simon stroked his rather ample beard.

Whatever Simon’s motives for this dinner, it took a certain amount of courage to invite this prophet. The prior exchanges the Rabbi had with fellow clergy were memorable. Word was out that they usually skulked away after such an encounter.

Like Simon, you have been thinking, ever since you received your invitation, what you would ask the teacher. You review questions in your mind, most of which you dismiss

quickly. You will be near enough to ask a question or two if you can muster the courage.

Strangely, you find yourself not so far from Simon's dilemma. You have some hard questions but you don't want to display disrespect. After all, this is a once in a lifetime event. And no time for small talk. "Been fishin' lately, Rabbi?" will not do.

What should you ask? And do you really want his answer? This Teacher never pulls his punches, although he may answer you with a story, a parable. And you might become the center of it.



2

Let the Party Begin



THE ARRIVALS

The crowd begins to arrive and stirs about outside Simon's home. Servants hustle to set the table, light lamps, fill pitchers, retrieve wine, and of course, finalize the preparations for the main meal, lamb.

One by one the religious glitterati arrive early so as not to miss the Rabbi's entrance.

The walk was easy, everyone lives close together for reasons of protection and convenience. As they enter, servants pour water over the extended hands of each guest. Water splashing on the basin below is the only sound you hear. Other servants remove sandals and do the same to their dusty feet. They are all strangely quiet as they make their way to the long, low table. Inside, it all seems less like a dinner party and more like a funeral. The quiet is interrupted when Simon makes his entrance.

He embraces, with a kiss, each of his guests as they enter, looking over their shoulders hoping to catch a glimpse of his, yet to arrive, guest of honor. A few of the Rabbi's

disciples decided to attend, wanting to watch the event inside. They have seen their Master win these debates before and they expect no less tonight.

Then the Rabbi walks into the house. Simon, ignoring his other late arriving guests, greets the Teacher who warmly smiles and slightly bows his head. Breaking with even common courtesy, Simon fails to kiss the cheek of the Teacher. No servant offers water for his feet, and you wonder if this is on purpose. An anointing of sweet olive oil to the head, granted to special guests, is not given. The Rabbi takes notice but says nothing. Simon leads him to his place at the table.

You watch it all, through the flickering light of the many lamps: the body language, facial expressions, the reaction of others who stare intently at the Teacher's arrival. Most of all you hope to catch his gaze. Will he acknowledge you? Your heart races, but you work hard to project a veneer of calm; yet, the Teacher, the object of so many of your past hopes and dreams, is merely feet away.

Sitting near the feet of the Rabbi, you feel both pleased and perplexed. Pleased to be in his very presence, perplexed because you know how often you have ignored him before. Too many times you have chased some other agenda. This very teacher had once extended to you an open invitation to

become one of his disciples. You wonder if he still does.

“What does it mean to be a disciple?” you ask yourself while the bread is being passed. You recall hearing once that a disciple is someone who is learning by going through the process of change. “I am probably just a follower,” you self-confess. Comfort too often trumps the choice to change. Being near him seems to encourage honesty. Guilt begins to grow, but something, someone, happens to snap you out of self-reflection.

A woman, weeping, is at the feet of the Rabbi.



THE CRASHER

As she walked through the courtyard, past the crowd lingering outside, and into the house, barely anyone noticed. Her gait showed purpose as she carried an item cradled in her arms.

“Isn’t that an alabaster jar?” “She’s a little late, isn’t she?” “The dinner party has already been seated,” a few outsiders mused. “I’ve seen her before. She’s a...I don’t believe it, a woman like her entering a house filled with holy men! What is this world coming to?” the more observant say to the less aware.

She moves quickly before Simon’s servants can act. Finding the Teacher and falling

on her knees at his feet, she grasps his ankles as she bows her head. Tears begin to pour from her eyes. The original language elegantly describes her tears as rain. A torrent of tears covers his dusty feet. Simon and everyone in the room are stunned. It's the kind of shock that leaves you temporarily motionless and speechless.

The Religious recognize her now. She is a city woman with a reputation. And the reputation is not good. She is making the whole event unclean—her very presence contaminates the room. The Rabbi must do something; after all, he is the object of her ungodly attention. There is a collective gasp as she lets her long hair down and uses it to wipe his feet. Surely now the Rabbi will scold her. Any

woman, with her hair down in the presence of anyone but her husband, is an abject sinner and brings shame to her family.

You just noticed that you've been holding your breath. What you are witnessing stuns you like everyone else. What will Simon say? And the Rabbi, can he allow this defilement to continue? The public display of affection is a bit uncomfortable even for you. Yet you are strangely envious.

Do I have such affection for the Teacher? Do I feel that strongly about anything in my life? Then the answer hits you...hard. You are more concerned about the breach of social decorum than the display of lavish love. You feel the social unease that fills the room more than the feeling of pure devotion. Why is it

you're so easily distracted by the things that are not important? You've let them wear you down and steal any passion you once knew. You are starkly aware of your heart's condition in contrast to this poor woman who is the object of everyone's scorn except the one who matters most.

In a moment of true clarity, a reflective thought finds its way to you: *Seek that which brings him pleasure.* Look at the teacher, a holy man for sure, joyfully receiving love from such an unholy woman. What could give the Creator greater joy than to see one of His creations reclaim that which the world had stolen?

And another truth comes to mind: How we think about, and especially treat others

we view very differently from ourselves, exposes what we really know about God. It seems as if you know very little.

“Dear Master,” you say audibly to yourself with remorse. You wonder if he hears you.



THE ENCOUNTER

The woman is in no hurry. She is seemingly unaware of all of the commotion that now swirls about her. In a moment that will be recorded for all history, she finds that perfect intersection between past and future. And she keeps it to herself. No words are necessary, only passionate and pure emotion.

She is at the feet of the man who has made her clean again, and she has returned to him out of gratefulness.

There must be a better word than grateful. It barely describes her depth of feeling. Her hair, now moist from all of her tears, covers his feet completely because she is kissing them. Still, no words. Not even the teacher speaks. He too is moved. Then she removes the ornate lid from the alabaster jar and pours the oil onto his feet—it spills onto the floor.

The smell of this fragrance overwhelms the room, blending with the other scents and candle smoke. The guests begin to talk among themselves. Simon is heard speaking to no one in particular, but loud enough to be heard,

“This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.”

Maybe Simon said it to appease his other guests. Maybe this encounter so confused his concept of religious order that he was honestly troubled. Maybe both.

In Simon’s world, the Rabbi had broken many laws, both religious and social. His actions, or lack thereof, were inconceivable for any religious person. The Law and the thousands of laws that were created to expand and explain the Law were designed to help men live a separate and righteous life. How could anyone be expected to live holy if they weren’t given clear laws and regulations? Yes, some could argue their rigidity; but after all,

man is desperately wicked and how can he expect to please a Holy God unless he too becomes holy?

This Rabbi, a so-called prophet, is ignoring the strict application of those laws. He's allowing himself to be both humiliated and adored. Simon's face furrows.

There is absolutely nothing in Simon's background or culture that has prepared him for this encounter, and it shows. He straightens himself, preparing the right words for his guest. But it is the Rabbi who speaks first, momentarily delaying the confrontation to tell a story.

Your emotional equilibrium is broken. Your eyes go back and forth from Simon to the Rabbi to the woman. In fact, your focus

is really on her. Would you have done whatever it took to get to the feet of the Master? Or would you let your pride and fear stop you? You know the answer. This woman has done more than interrupt a party; she has crashed into your comfortable world. You glance quickly around the room at the faces locked in various forms of astonishment. At least you're not alone.

You have always believed that the scales of life are just. If more good on one side of the scale outweighs the bad on the other—you will be fine. Yet this woman, and God knows all of the things that she has done, wipes away that logic. The Master gazes at her with a mixture of astonishment, forgiveness, and love you think she does not de-

serve. She doesn't. And she knows that better than anyone. Life, that long, unrelenting sequence of days and hours does not play fair. Her life has unraveled into sheer survival.

In a moment of mercy, you wonder if she ever knew the real love of a man, even her own father, before she had encountered the Teacher. You know your own story; it too is filled with enough hurt and disappointment to numb you at times. But you also know there are those in the world whose lives are true horrors. They deserve all the grace and mercy the world should give, yet rarely does.

You study this woman. The lines on her face deceive her true age; but her eyes, they do not deceive, they are full of life. She has

chosen to make what the Master did *for* her greater than what others have done *to* her.

Could it be that the God of the universe makes no mistakes? Even this woman's life? The very thought fills you with a combination of fear and hope, fear that you could even combine the words *Creator* and *error*, but hope that he will take everything broken in you and use it for his purpose, even his pleasure. But the fact remains that this woman has tenaciously pursued the Master and is finding healing in his presence and you remain seated, only a few, eternal, feet away.



3

The Party of a Lifetime



THE RELIGIOUS

Simon spoke to no one, yet everyone. Those around the table, including his special guest, heard his words. Unfortunately for Simon, they would chase him throughout history. But his words captured the essence

of his soul and the souls of the other religious leaders around him.

You remain still. You have wondered to yourself if at times these religious ones were simply misunderstood. Maybe they are the fall guys for the masses who hate the burdens of righteous living. Yet, why is the Rabbi's wrath so focused on them? Isn't righteousness, right living, the way we are all to live? Hypocrites, yes, but aren't we all?

But no law can replicate what you are watching. You see two people alone in a crowded room. She is kissing his feet. And the young Rabbi does not stop her. It is as if he knew, each kiss is resurrecting a dead place in her heart. What is beautiful and pure elicits whispers of defilement and disgust.

You barely hear the words, they are drowned out by the love. Love so real that you try to imagine its feeling, but you can't; and you want it, but don't even know what it is. The love in this moment is holy.

Love has no real boundaries. Does God have limits? Is God not love? Whoever does not love does not know God and you are sitting in a room full of them. It absolutely astounds you. How could anyone view, in front row seats no less, the purest act of love in their lifetime and completely miss it?

What Simon and his friends lacked in love they filled with their laws. They believed it was there to teach, to tutor, and to guide us back to holiness. But you know, and you suspect that they know, that the same Law de-

manding righteousness was powerless to provide it. Only someone perfect could do that. And that *someone* must be love incarnate. The Law can only point to love, it can never substitute for it.

What the scholars in the room failed to comprehend was that the Law was never intended to be divorced from the Lover. Yes, the Law is a guide; it defines sin and brings protection and blessing when it is kept. The Lover of our souls gave his Word to point the way we should live, but never in lieu of his love—never to take his place. That is what they were all missing. They loved the Law more than the Giver of that Law because their hearts were closed to a love relationship that the Law demanded.

Love the Lord your God and serve him with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind.

Simon held closely to the Law as he spoke, even as he was confronted by the power of love and mercy. He chose that which he knew, that in which he found comfort and control. Yet, he ignored the curse that the Law brings to those who cannot keep it.

Self-righteousness always leads to a slow death and Simon was full of its poison. That he watched the poor woman's outpouring of love and felt no mercy exposed the shallowness of his understanding of God. He chose instead to sacrifice at the altar of dos and don'ts. Actually it was the sanctuary of self,

and Simon worshiped in its temple, and it was as much idolatry as Aaron's golden calf.

The Rabbi's wrath toward the religious ones now made more sense than before. He was angry because he saw how they destroyed lives. Their casualties were men and women deceived from embracing the freedom that forgiveness brings and opting to sell themselves into the slavery of self. And now, here at this very table was the greatest example of holy love. A woman free to love and to be loved. To never sin again? Of course not. But free to always find mercy at the feet of the forgiver.

Unspeakable joy meets unbendable judgment. Simon was not moved.

The evening is far from over, yet it's becoming clearer to you. You have enjoyed being neutral at times, being quiet, keeping to yourself, staying seated. At first you thought the evening would be an instructional contrast between the world-views of two very different teachers. One represented by Simon: Follow the rules and keep separate from evildoers. And the other by the Rabbi who seemed to do neither.

But the slight flicker of light that reflects off of her tears tells you differently. She is teaching you all you need to know. You look within yourself, trying to wipe away at the memories, like cobwebs, that cling to your soul. You are tempted to join the woman at his feet. What others may think of you

crosses your mind, but you are paralyzed by the fear that he might reject you.

It's not easy. It never is.



THE PARABLE

The Rabbi was fond of telling short stories. They were more precisely parables with a single meaning. Some were obvious, others were not. He often told them as a way of refocusing everybody, getting them off their agenda and on to his. They also had a way of softening the confrontation, as Simon would soon find out.

“Simon, I have something to say to you.”

Simon was immediately captured, “Teacher, say it.”

“There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more?”

No doubt Simon’s mind raced back through the past encounters the Rabbi had with others. It probably caused him a moment of self doubt. “I suppose...,” he began, “...the one whom he forgave more.” Maybe Simon felt an uncharacteristic relief, feeling like a new student in a classroom, when the teacher re-

sponded, “You have rightly judged.” But he certainly wasn’t going to let anyone know.

Simon exhaled. Unwittingly, he just pronounced judgment on himself, and unfortunately, for him, the Rabbi was not finished. He glanced back at the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman?” In all actuality Simon hadn’t, not really. He had observed her from afar, but like so many other sinners that crossed his path, he’d rather look away and ignore. He didn’t discern the compelling example before him; he certainly didn’t see his own sins in her reflection.

“I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet

with her tears and wiped them with the hair on her head.”

For the first time since she entered Simon’s house she was self-conscious of her surroundings, but the Master’s words made her feel safe. She stayed at his feet.

“You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in.”

Simon glanced down.

“You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil.” The Teacher paused, wanting the truth of the moment to penetrate their darkened souls. Anointing anyone’s feet with oil was an extreme luxury and the highest honor.

“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” He finished by saying something he knew would test their religious hearts. He turned, looking at her as no other man had ever looked at her before, and said, “Your sins are forgiven.” The weight of his last statement catches you off guard.

Immediately you are surrounded by whispers. They grow louder and bolder, “Who is this who even forgives sin?”

The Rabbi has one more tender moment with the woman. You focus on her face, still red from tears. She looks up to the Master with an innocent adulation. Standing, he cups her face

in his hands and speaks to her; you can barely hear him for it is their private moment.

“Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

She obeys his loving command, places the lid on the empty jar, wipes the remaining tears from her cheeks, and leaves. The room explodes with talk. Loud, even coarse, talk. Simon is busy conferring with his friends. He doesn't even notice that the guest of honor has also gone.



THE LOVED

The rage in the room continues. At least it seems like rage to you. Loud shouting dom-

inates any attempt at thoughtful conversation.

Servants clear the table. You are the last to rise to your feet, full of thoughts and emotions. Everyone around you is engaged, so you think it not impolite to leave without saying a word.

The stars are especially bright tonight. They cast a slight glow silhouetting the surrounding hills. It's cooler than when you arrived, but you don't mind. The fresh air pushes out the candle smoke still in your lungs. It is a good night to walk home. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." You recall the words and relive the images. You think to yourself

the converse. *He who is forgiven much loves much.*

It seems clear to you that the woman, even before she entered the room, had been touched by the Master. Maybe she had heard him teach before? Maybe she met him while he passed by? But her tears, that flood, would not be produced merely by sorrow. They came from joy—cleansing joy mixed with tears pouring from the deepest, darkest, pain. Yes, she already knew that kind of forgiveness. She must have. And the Rabbi both acknowledged what she knew in her heart and lovingly reminded her once again. You can never be told too often that you are forgiven.

The ancient scripture comes to your mind, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us.”*

As you walk, your breath becomes shallow. It is not the brisk walk that taxes your lungs; it is the deepening realization of your own failings. It has been a while since you contemplated sin, let alone your own. Life is hard enough, why burden yourself with something you probably cannot change? Yet there is something inside you that craves the forgiveness the woman knew.

What you do understand is that the woman’s outpouring of love was the consequence, not the cause of her forgiveness. Her tears were merely the evidence. The Rabbi was not saying that her forgiveness was conditioned

on her display of love. That would contradict the parable and his entire message and ministry. Her love is the fruit of her experience with the Master. She loved the Master much.

You want desperately to feel what she felt about him. Do you love him much? Or is the uncomfortable truth that you love him little? The condemnation that begins its slow creep inside is not from the Master.

The woman, whose actions pound in your heart and mind, speaks to you again. You have never really considered yourself a great sinner, certainly not like a prostitute. A stunning thought causes you to stop your walk. "I am no less a sinner than that woman. I am no less a sinner than Simon."

Something else staggers you. A paradox. Being in the presence of the Master confronts you with your sin; yet, that very same presence, and only in that presence, can you experience complete forgiveness. And it seems to you to feel as this woman felt about the Master; nothing can substitute for being at his feet.

How, you wonder, can one live such a life?



4

The After Party



Good parties should leave you with good memories. This dinner did much more. The Master's last two sentences to the woman are packed with meaning. You sense that they hold the truth to helping you stay close to him. There are three potent words within the two statements that demand your attention: faith, saved, and peace. They are even more powerful when they are spoken to you by the

Master. You must never forget that fact, you think to yourself.



FAITH

It was her faith in him that brought her back to his presence. You will always be drawn to the object of your faith. Some have faith in destiny, others in themselves, or even faith in faith. The woman's faith was solely in him and that kind of steely-eyed focus challenges you. Remember the woman who was healed of the issue of blood? She could have concentrated on her health, but instead she focused on him.

Her faith told her healing was within the grasp of his garment.

Simon's faith was really centered on himself. He believed that his righteousness came from obedience to the Law—self-effort. It's a nasty habit to overcome. We are taught from the beginning to take care of ourselves, to rely on no one. Exchanging faith in self for faith in the Master will not be easy.

Simon unquestionably believed in God; but in his limited understanding, God's relationship with him depended on his observing the Law. The woman's actions painted a deep contrast to that belief. The Master offered real, personal relationship based on mercy and grace. She had lived under the Law and had

broken it many times; it served its purpose—driving her to the savior. Even in thinking these thoughts you know that, at times, your faith has looked more like Simon’s than the woman’s.

The lack of relationship has caused you to strive in the past, even “fake it” for others. How many times have you prayed or sat through a sermon and felt so far from being real. Faith comes in rest, rest in him, not in self-effort. Striving creates a counterfeit. And counterfeits seem more plentiful than the real thing.

The woman rested in his presence, at his feet. That is where you must live, not striving, because he’s invited you there too. It is your place as one of his disciples, as one of his children. You remember when the Master invited

the little children to join him on his lap and in his arms. Even the disciples didn't understand. You are his guest of honor; he wants you at the honored seat, to break bread with him and share your life—to be truly loved.

“How do I detect his hand or his voice when he is not here?” you wonder. *But he is here*, you think, in your waking thoughts, in the whispers throughout the day, speaking to you in the silence.



SAVED

Saved. So many misunderstand the word. You have been confused at times as

well. In the original language it is rich in meaning. Her faith saved her spirit eternally, but it also touched her body and soul. She was delivered from the destruction that her old life brought her—from bondages, self-hatred, and deep pain. Her tears came from a heart that, for the very first time in her existence, experienced freedom from the past. Like the Rabbi's friend, Lazarus, she emerged from her personal tomb. The Master, with his graceful acceptance of her tears, removed the bandages that would have kept her bound.

You recall that he didn't walk her through a formula, a ritual of renouncing and confessing. He simply received her love. She was saved in that love. Saved in the fullest sense of the word. You remember a

portion of the Psalm, “*Because your love is better than life...*”

The Master, soon after his encounter with the woman, would be betrayed by someone from his inner circle. He would be beaten, nearly to death, only then to be forced to carry a portion of the instrument of torture and to be crucified between two convicts. To the uninspired it might seem like random madness.

The scripture says he endured that suffering because of the “*joy set before him.*” You wonder about that type of joy. Did that same kind of joy bring the woman to Simon’s house? We settle for so much less, grasping for bits of happiness, content with scraps of

pleasure. The Psalmist captures the essence of the transport of joy with his poem.

*“Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfall
All your waves and breakers
Have swept over me.”*

Before the resurrection must come death. The Master’s death did not simply involve the stopping of a beating heart; it included the weight of something more painful than the nails that penetrated his hands and feet.

Simon would often tell the story from the ancient texts, where once a year the priests would take two goats and sacrifice one and send the other into the wilderness. Both

carried the symbolic sins of the people. The goat sent away would not only take away all of the sins, but even the fear and presence of sin. The people's sins were to be utterly lost as though they had never been.

The Master, while on the cross, experienced the sin of the world, for all time. He carried it like a horrific disease. He experienced, as if it had happened to him, both the sin and the pain of the woman who wept. Even Simon's judgment and self-righteousness infected him. He knew your sin too.

You feel the need to spend time at the feet of the Master. However, this time his feet are hanging from the cross. It is a sacred time to recall of all that you have been forgiven. It is not a time for morbid condemnation, but

for the deep appreciation that your sins, too, were utterly lost and as though they had never been. It is a strangely wonderful thing to feel deep gratitude for forgiveness while remembering that which was forgiven.

Nevertheless, you know that you must come often, if not daily, to this holy place to receive the joy that comes from acknowledging your sin and the price paid for total, complete forgiveness. We all have sin enough to destroy our souls, but so many of us fail to allow the love of God to pour into and over us because of our insufficient sense of sinfulness. The woman did not make that mistake. You hope you will never forget that lesson from the dinner.



SHALOM

If the words *faith* and *saved* are rich in meaning, the word *peace* or *Shalom* is pregnant. The Master could have spoken to her as he did to the woman caught in adultery, or to the leper he healed, “Go and sin no more.” But he didn’t, and it was on purpose. He pronounced the powerful word, *Shalom*, over her as a command, not a suggestion, “Go in peace.”

Shalom, the Hebrew word, at its root means restore, wholeness, completeness, well-being, and harmony. She encounters the Rabbi and finds *Shalom* in its fullness. It’s

that same Shalom he commands his newly sent followers to speak over any house that receives them. It is the same Shalom when he told them later, “Shalom I leave with you. My Shalom I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.” And then again after his resurrection, the Master, after walking through the door, tells fearful men two times, “Shalom be upon you.” Then he breathed on them the Holy Spirit.

In their most desperate and fearful time the Master brought Shalom into their lives, restoration and hope. God’s Shalom, contrary to the world’s peace, which is fleeting, temporary, and inconsistent, is eternal.

The woman, like these disciples, then received her commission to “Go.” But she and the disciples would be going in the fullness of peace and in the power of the resurrection.

You recall watching one of the religious ones walk into Simon’s house full of anger. They didn’t have to say a word, but you knew it immediately. In the same way someone walks in full of Shalom, like the Master, you can sense that too. You saw the woman leave full of Shalom. Not just peace for personal satisfaction, but Shalom to take to others. Her commission to bring Shalom on earth as it is in heaven was as real as the alabaster jar she held closely to her chest.



MEMORIES

You think often about the dinner party. The simple smell of a candle or the sound of splashing water can bring it all back. You wonder about the woman at the dinner. What was her life like afterward? Surely she devoted herself to him. Her life, you imagine, continued to be poured out like her tears, touching everyone around her.

Her encounter with holy love made her the greatest lover of life. She could speak from a past place of pain that few others knew, but then offer a hope everyone desired. She brought Shalom. And she did it with a disarming honesty, not religious pretense.

Her laughter was as real as her tears. People called her blessed. She loved to give hugs and then talk about the Master. How he freed her from the prison she had built around herself.

You wonder if she ever danced like David danced in the presence of the Lord. Pure and uninhibited, sometimes alone but also in front of others. She wouldn't allow the Michals of the world to shame her. For it was the daughter of Saul who tried to shame King David and ended up rebuked and barren. Barrenness in spirit is a natural result of despising true worship. It was the woman's extravagant worship at the Master's feet that taught her a life lesson: Let your worship be a fearless pursuit of his presence.

You are beginning to experience such freedom. It is in the shadow of the cross where you bring your unvarnished life, unafraid to hear the Master's voice, because you are learning that voice will never whisper words of guilt or shame.

“The truth shall set you free,” the Master has reminded you time and again. And before truth sets you free he helps you recognize which lies have been holding you hostage. Life's scales fall, one by one, some clinging harder than others.

Simon's memory just brings you sadness. He came to represent all the potential we have that never overcomes our self-centeredness. All the wealth, the education, and respect from the world cannot replace the

touch from the Master's love. A touch we were created to receive.

He saw it for himself. He was but feet away. He too could have fallen to his knees and the Master would have embraced him. You wonder if Simon looked back with regrets at the dinner party he hosted. Or did his pride block the memories and follow him to his grave?

Most of all you are grateful, thankful beyond words that you were invited to attend. You came unsure and full of questions in your heart. You left shaken but placed on a journey. But this time the path is straight. Some have called it the road less travelled. It is a sojourn that you cherish.



THE NEXT PARTY

That's it!

You decide to throw your own dinner party. After all, the last one was pretty spectacular, though the atmosphere may be hard to reproduce. You consider the theme, the type of food, and of course, a special guest. Who better than the Master who has promised you, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. I'll be with you to the end of the age." For the first time in your life, you really believe that.

Your guest list will be different than Simon's—more diversity you hope. Religious types can ruin a good party. Yet you under-

stand this party is not about you, it's about your guest of honor. Who would he want you to invite? That neighbor who offends you? Please no. But it's his decision and he never shies away from those we would like to stay away from.

It seems to come with the package. Invite the Master into your home and he will attract all types of guests. We only cheat ourselves when our homes and our pews are filled with people just like us. The Master taught us that at the dinner. He goes wherever he is invited, even if the room is filled with hate. And wherever he goes he brings Shalom, and Shalom has a way of shutting up hate. He never misses a party, when he is the invited guest of honor.

You could have missed it. The very thought sends a chill. The purpose of your life has been redirected and this new purpose came from his presence. Acquiring possessions, attaining status and achieving success have grown, like the old hymn, “strangely dim.” Life is about loving God and all the people he sends your way. Yes, you still struggle. There are moments you entertain the past. But you know that if you had failed to learn the most important lesson in life, made flesh and blood in Simon’s house, unashamedly loving God and others, you would have missed the very reason why God created you.

You stop planning and set down that hot cup you have been sipping. A smile finds its way to your face. You are at peace. You are at

his feet. You love him very much. Thank you, Jesus.

Let the next party begin.



THE ORIGINAL STORY

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her

head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same

loves little.” Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

(Selected from Luke 7:36-50)



AFTER DINNER CONVERSATION

Here are a few questions regarding the story to consider, both in private and in a small group.

1. You've been given an invitation to a dinner with the Master. What are the most important questions you want to ask him?
2. Truthfully, would you react to his presence more like the woman or more like Simon?
 - What keeps you from responding like the woman?
 - What in your life reminds you more of Simon?
3. What are the things in your life that keep your focus from the Master?
4. What does it mean to be in the presence of the Lord?
 - What can we do to make that happen?

- What do we do to stop that from happening?
 - Should worship bring us to the feet of Jesus? How?
5. Do you love the Master much or a little? Why?
 6. Consider that God created you for fellowship (and his pleasure), like the woman, in a way that only you can uniquely give Him. That He is able and willing (like the woman) to take all of your mistakes, pain, and brokenness and take great pleasure in you, which ultimately leads to great purpose for you. Do you believe this?
 7. What is the meaning of the Master's parable?

- Does it serve as a reminder of our debt to Him?
 - Why is it critical to recognize our sin?
8. You've been invited to a party with the Master. You can only take five guests. Whom would you invite for this once in a lifetime experience? Why?
- What do your selections say about you?
9. The Master commands you to "Go in peace." What does that mean?
- What do you walk more in, Shalom or fear?
 - Where is the first place you would go?



AFTER DINNER PRAYER

The story would have an entirely different outcome had the woman not received love from the Master and then acted on his words. Take time to be in his presence and to hear his voice.

- The words you have read have caused you to want to follow the Master. You're not sure if the word "saved" applies to you. Take a few minutes to read "An Introduction to the Master" on the next page and then talk with him. Allow him to speak lovingly back to you.
- Prayerfully consider the cross, his suffering, what he did for you, how much you have been forgiven.

1. Have you forgiven yourself for your past?
 2. Do you need to forgive someone else?
- Spend time being quiet at his feet. Let him love you. Don't ask him for anything; simply be still and allow him to be your God.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MASTER

Maybe after reading this story you have come away with many questions. Good. It's never wrong to wonder, to seek truth, and to pursue holy love.

Please allow for this succinct presentation of the gospel message. Of course, nothing supplants the Bible. Also, turn to its pages and read with an open heart and mind. Starting at the Gospel of John is a good place.

Explaining, with words, such a divine encounter can make it all seem like an emotionless transaction. Nothing could be further from the truth.

“Gospel” simply means *good news*. And the Good News is that the God of the universe decided to live among His creation, us, in the person of His son, Jesus. The scripture says that Jesus relinquished his rights as God to become one of us. The difference, and this

is critical, is that He never sinned, He lived a perfect life. He lived the Law to perfection.

But for you and me to come to know God in a real, relational way, we need to overcome sin: all the wrong, the evil, and the selfishness we all inherently know that lives inside of us. Yes, of course we are also capable of great love and kindness, yet our sin leaves us separated from the holy. But becoming holy on our own is impossible; and as God is holy, we cannot fellowship with Him, be with Him, as a loving Father.

That was the dual mission of Jesus—to live a life we could model: A life of love, grace, and forgiveness. And to live a life of sinlessness that would be the ultimate sacrifice, al-

lowing us relationship with that which is holy. His motivation is pure love.

Jesus was, is, the perfect sacrifice for us. He had to die so that we might live. But if He had remained in the tomb, that sacrifice would not have reached through time and space to bring us to the way to know the Father through the Son. He rose again. Good Friday is only *good* because of the resurrection.

The Word of God, the Bible, shows us very clearly what our part is in this dramatic, cosmic, real life drama. We can choose to accept this gift that God has offered us: A life full of love, if we believe and trust in Jesus who loves us so much that He willingly suf-

ferred and died for us. And our believing in Him must come with a heart, a mind, wanting and willing to ask for forgiveness of sin. If you never have before, simply ask Him to come into your heart and soul—to dwell in your spirit and make you a new person.

Talk to Him, He is listening and wants, more than you know, to enter into a love relationship with you. Ask Him to forgive you, to fill you. Remember, He is love, so when He fills you, love comes too.

Remember, this is an act of the Spirit; this transaction is of the divine. You may weep like the woman or you may simply know peace in your soul—either way, if you believe in Him, He will be faithful to come to you no

matter what emotions you may or may not experience. You can always trust in that.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20 (NKJV)

This is His invitation to you for a private dinner. You simply have to open the door.

“Dear Lord, I open my heart and life to you. I confess my sin and my need for a savior. Thank you Jesus for dying on the cross and for your resurrection giving me hope in this life and for eternity.

I will follow you.

I will grow in love with you. I receive you and all of the love you are into my life.

In Jesus name, Amen.



About the Author



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