

# In the House Of... Part 3 (Simon the Leper)

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Previously we've visited the homes of Peter and Matthew. In Peter's home, his mother-in-law was healed of a debilitating fever and later a paralytic, lowered through the roof tiles, was forgiven and healed. In Matthew's home a great feast was given to honor the Lord, Who had accepted even a publican to be His follower, and many other tax collectors and "sinners" were invited. Jesus shared the Good News that these (those who knew their need of grace) were the very ones He had come to save.

Today we'll go to Simon's house. The name Simon was a common one in Jesus' day, being derived from the Old Testament "Simeon," meaning "He has heard." It was given originally to the second son of Leah, Jacob's wife, with the explanation, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." Genesis 30:33.

There were a number of Simons in the Bible; there was Simon Peter, of whom we've spoken. There was Simon of Cyrene, who was conscripted to carry Christ's cross. There was Simon Magus, who tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit with money. There was Simon the tanner, in whose house Peter stayed and on his rooftop was given a vision. There was also Simon the Pharisee who lived in Bethany, the town in which Mary, Martha and Lazarus also lived. It is the house of this Simon that we will visit today.

Bethany was only a couple of miles from Jerusalem, on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Jesus frequented the village often, many times resting at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. The incident at Simon's house, at which we will look today, took place on the Sabbath just prior to Christ's crucifixion.

"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him." John 12:1, 2. All four Gospel writers include this incident, with Matthew's account reading, "And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table." Matthew 26:6, 7. As with many eyewitness accounts, there is slight variation in the way it is reported. John says, "Then Mary took

a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair." John 12:3.

Luke tells us, "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." Luke 7:37, 38.

These slight variations need not concern us. Mary no doubt anointed the head as well as the feet of the Savior. She no doubt washed His feet with her tears as well as bathed them in the precious ointment.

We've seen that this was a supper given by one called Simon the Pharisee, also called Simon the leper. What can we learn from that? Obviously this was a person who was of the conservative branch of Judaism. The Pharisees were staunch defenders of the "old ways," reluctant to endorse any change from the established routine. There can be good in conservatism; there can be virtue in maintaining the "old ways." Does not the Bible say, Remove not the old landmarks? Deuteronomy 19:14. Does not the Bible say, "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls." Jeremiah 6:16.

There can be good in maintaining the "old ways," if the "old ways" are the right ways! But slavishly defending past patterns merely for the sake of continuity, when they are not based on truth, becomes dry formalism. The Phariseeism of Jesus' day had slipped into just such a lifeless routine. When Jesus came to earth, His teachings were deemed to be radical and revolutionary, through the roots of His doctrine were firmly planted in God's truth revealed in the Old Testament. The problem was that the Jews had exchanged the truths of Old Testament Scripture, which "testified of" Him, into something else, a religion of works. Now they felt compelled to defend what they thought were the "old ways," when in fact their "ways" were not God's "ways" at all. To defend the methods of the past when they are not in compliance with Scripture is wrong. In the language of Jesus' parable, the Pharisees needed more than just a "patch" on their fabric of theology; they needed a whole new garment.

Simon was a Pharisee, stuck in meaningless rituals such as precise methods of hand washings and other things. He was also a leper. Not that he was a leper at the time of the feast; that would have been impossible. He had been a leper before this, but had been healed by Jesus. It was in gratitude for the Savior's healing touch that this feast was given.

Leprosy, in their day, was a living death. It was a disease for which there was no known cure. Before Jesus came, when was the last known episode of a leper being cured? You'd have to go back to the days of the Prophet Elisha and Naaman the Syrian captain, about 8 centuries before this.

Leprosy resulted in the loss of skin tissue. Body parts like fingers would disappear. Parts of ones nose or ears would be eaten away by the disease, leaving one with horrific disfigurement. It was

thought to be very contagious, meaning that one had to separate from family and friends and live a life of isolation. When the possibility of encountering a non-infected person arrived, the leper must proclaim the humiliating call, “unclean, unclean.” It was thought that the illness represented a judgment of God, a divine indictment. The situation was hopeless!

Simon had been a leper, but was healed by Jesus, giving him new life. It was altogether appropriate that gratitude be expressed. The miraculous change in Simon’s life was undeniable. A dinner in His honor was scheduled. And yet, as we’ll see as the story unfolds, though his skin had been changed, his heart was not yet broken. Inside his chest there still beat the heart of a Pharisee, one who trusted in himself that he was righteous. As long as one retained that frame of mind, the full measure of gratitude, as exhibited by Mary in this account, would be withheld.

Mary chose this occasion to express her heartfelt thankfulness for what the Lord had done for her. Her story must be read “between the lines,” but it becomes evident from the way she is introduced by Dr. Luke, as a “sinner,” that her life contained a sordid past. She is spoken of as being one out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. What we come to see is that Mary had been involved in a life of immorality. She had become involved in a practice of harlotry that caused her to become uncomfortable in the cozy town of Bethany. She therefore moved away to a place where she wasn’t as well known, where it wouldn’t be so embarrassing for her brother and sister.

Magdala became the city of choice, near the western shores of Galilee, currently district of Migdal (“tower”). Here she should live without the fetters of Bethany and ply her trade. Hence she became known as Mary Magdalene. But Jesus didn’t give up on Mary. Seven times He prayed for her. Though she would respond but then slip back into the sinful life, Jesus kept praying! The Bible says, “A righteous man may fall seven times, and rise again.” Proverbs 24:16. Since God does not discriminate, this must also apply to women such as Mary. The seven times that Jesus cast the devil of promiscuity from her echoes the seven dips of Namaan.

Mary became truly converted, and one of Christ’s most ardent disciples. Was it not her who lingered there at the graveside Sunday morning and spoke with the resurrected Christ? She was the only one to believe that He had risen! And before that, at Calvary, all the other disciples had fled, but Mary remained close to the cross at His death. John 19:25.

Now, a week before that fateful event, Mary was compelled to express her gratitude for what Jesus had done for her. What could she do? She decided to purchase an expensive flask of fragrant oil and bathe his feet and head with it. She no doubt thought that she could do this in secret; she could just slip into the room and position herself behind her Lord and pour out her love for Him. But the laws of chemistry would not allow this act of devotion to remain hidden. Soon the aromatic vapors began to fill the room. There was a reason why this ointment was so expensive, costing about a year’s salary. It was highly potent! A little of it went a long way!

Inquisitive noses sought the source of this pleasing scent and it was quickly traced to Mary, kneeling behind the One she loved. Like what happened at the home of Matthew, when Jesus sat

with sinners, Satan tried to turn this occasion of worship into an scene of ridicule and disdain. Mark tells us, "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted?'" Mark 14:4. Matthew is a little more specific and says, "But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'To what purpose is this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.'" Matthew 26:8, 9.

It is in John's Gospel that the identity of the complainer is revealed. "Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box. And he used to take what was put in it." John 12:4-6.

Here we are told also that Judas was the son of Simon, the host of this gathering. It was therefore in Judas' house that this occurred. The spirit of acrimony and greed had influenced many of the disciples, but it had infected Judas significantly more, and when Jesus spoke words of commendation for Mary, it rankled the spirit of Judas. It was one of the nails in the coffin of his betrayal of Christ, along with the request of James and John to occupy positions of authority in the new kingdom.

In Judas, the son of Simon, we see that the "acorn had not fallen far from the tree." This same spirit of unjust censure and needless criticism controlled the mind of his father. "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this (the anointing by Mary), 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.'" Luke 7:39. How often Satan tempts us to judge unrighteously! These harsh words may not have made it to Simon's lips, but they were evidence of the cancer that was in his soul! If you are given to criticism and censure, pray that God will heal you; that the sweetness of His love will cleanse your heart from this malignancy!

This thought, coming from one who had been healed of the dreaded leprosy! Where was the charity? Where was the gratitude? Jesus had something to share with Simon. "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And 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.'" Luke 7:40-47.

Mary was a sinner, but so was Simon. In fact, we are led to believe that it was Simon himself who had influenced Mary into the pathway of sin. Simon had been healed of leprosy, but not spiritually. His skin had been cured, but not the hardness of his heart. We trust that the counsel of Jesus was heeded by Simon and he saw himself differently after that.

At the criticism offered, Jesus came to the defense of Mary. He said, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me." Matthew 26:10. Mark adds, "She has done what she could." Mark 14:8. As they were in the process of hurling their stones of ridicule, Jesus stopped them and invited them to take another look at themselves, like He did with the woman who was caught in adultery, recorded in John chapter 8. Many suppose that that woman was also Mary, and it might have been, but we have no specific indication that it was. But Jesus defended her, and her accusers had nothing to say.

Jesus indicated that Mary's act in anointing His feet was prophetic. "She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial." Mark 14:8. Although Jesus had declared at least three times to His disciples what the Jews would do in putting Him on the cross, apparently only Mary believed Him!

She came and placed her testimony of devotion upon Him when He was able to appreciate it. Just six days later Jesus would be taken from the cross and placed in Joseph's tomb. At that time, Nicodemus, who had secretly sought out Christ years before, came and brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds." John 19:39. Wonderful! Maybe someone told Christ about it later. But He couldn't smell the fragrance of those spices, because He was dead. Mary, though not bring "a hundred pounds" of ointment, anointed her Lord when He was alive and could appreciate her deed of love. What's the lesson here? Give your "flowers" to the living, not the dead!

It is true that flattery is harmful and praise for the sake of gain is evil. But honest expressions of appreciation and words of commendation have the capacity to edify and build up. How cold and heartless the home where never a word of appreciation is spoken! How often the heart of a soul could be cheered by a simple word of gratitude, an expression of devotion! Jesus Himself commended Mary in what she had done. She had "done what she could." She had "done a good work." Is there someone you love? Let them know. Don't wait for them to be lowered into the grave before you extend the flowers of appreciation. Don't wait to long before you give the flowers of gratitude.

Jesus said to Mary, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." Luke 7:50. What is faith? We know that it is a necessary part of the Christian walk. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6. What is faith? It is interesting to see how Jesus defined faith. Many times He made statements such as what He said to Mary, "Your faith has saved you."

A paralytic was lowered into His presence in Simon's house. The Bible says, "And Jesus, seeing their faith," said "Son, your sins are forgiven you." Matthew 9:2. What was faith in that story? It was belief that was translated into action. Later an afflicted woman said to herself, 'If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.'" She did this and was healed. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." Matthew 9:21, 22. What was faith in this story? It was belief that was converted into a positive act. Shortly after that two blind men followed Him and asked for mercy. Jesus said, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.'" Matthew 9:28, 29. What was faith in this story? It was following and asking Christ for help, confessing confidence in Him. Jesus said to Mary, "Your faith has saved you." What was faith in this story? It was belief that she was forgiven which was expressed in a sacrificial act of appreciation. Faith is all of these things!

Do you know that He came to die for you? Do you know that you have been healed from sin's leprosy? Do you know you have been rescued from a life of transgressions and guilt? Have you expressed your love to your Savior, by both word and deed? Have you been to Simon's house?