

CAPITOL STUDIES

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LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS

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Theme Verse

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



Of Doubts and Debts



A CCEPTANCE. IT MEANS YOU ARE VALUABLE just as you are. It allows you to be the *real* you. You aren't forced into someone else's idea of who you really are. It means your ideas are taken seriously since they reflect you. You can talk about how you feel inside and why you feel that way—and someone really cares.... You feel safe. No one will pronounce judgment on you, even though they don't agree with you. It doesn't mean you will never be corrected or shown to be wrong; it simply means it's safe to be *you* and no one will destroy *you* out of prejudice. – Gladys M. Hunt¹

Jesus never compromised when it came to right and wrong, yet He accepted all people regardless of their lifestyle. It was His acceptance that often won them to Him in repentance and faith. That is clearly illustrated in the story of the woman “who was a sinner” in Luke 7.

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INTRODUCTION

“As Jesus’ ministry expanded, that of John the Baptist suffered literal confinement. Straight-shooting John was in prison because he had the moral courage to condemn Herod’s marriage to Herodias, Herod’s one-time sister-in-law (cf. Luke 3:19, 20). John was incarcerated in the dungeon of Machaerus, the desert fortress-palace perched on a desolate high ridge by the Dead Sea, where today the remains of the castle’s dungeons can still be seen, complete with iron hooks.... As John languished at Machaerus, he became increasingly perplexed by the reports he heard of Jesus’ ministry because they didn’t jibe with the two-fold prophecy he had preached about what Jesus would do (Luke 3:16-17).”²

I. JESUS IS QUESTIONED

Luke 7:18-20

The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. ¹⁹Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?” ²⁰When the men came to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, ‘Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’”

A. Was John the Baptist Doubting?

Scripture tells us of great leaders who questioned or doubted what God was doing in their lives. Moses was ready to quit (Num. 11:10–15), Elijah wanted to die (1 Kings 19), Jeremiah wished he had never been born (Jer. 20:7–9, 14–18), and even Paul felt it would be good to die (2 Cor. 1:8–9). Do you ever doubt what God is doing?

B. Is Doubting Wrong?

“There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind: we cannot understand what God is doing or why He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will: we refuse to believe God’s Word and obey what He tells us to do. ‘Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong,’ said Oswald Chambers; ‘it may be a sign that he is thinking.’ In John’s case, his inquiry was not born of willful unbelief, but of doubt nourished by physical and emotional strain.”³ John had preached that the Messiah would judge this world. He likely felt, as many did, that Jesus would be the One to overthrow the kingdoms of this world, specifically oppressive Rome. John did not see that happening. He was in a Roman prison, probably a very dark, miserable place. Why? This wasn’t how he thought the Messiah would rule, so he needed confirmation. It was like he was saying, “You really are the Messiah, right?”

C. Jesus’ Message to John the Baptist

Luke 7:21-23

At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind. ²²And He



answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them.”²³ Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

“Jesus did not give the two men a lecture on theology or prophecy. Instead, He invited them to watch as He healed many people of many different afflictions.... He had not established a political kingdom, but the kingdom of God was there in power.”²⁴ Jesus specifically told John’s disciples to tell John what they saw: “the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them.” These were in clear fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1. John and his disciples would have been very familiar with those passages.

Jesus ended His message to John with a beatitude of sorts: “Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.” The phrase “take offense” can also be translated as “come to ruin” or “fall away.” Jesus gently sends confirmation and encouragement to John, as if He is saying, “Blessed is the one who does not fall away because of Me. Remain strong, John. I have not forgotten you.” “A special blessing rests on those who are trapped in a situation they cannot get out of, when it looks as though the world has abandoned them and they are treated unfairly. Blessed are those whose faith is not destroyed under such difficult circumstances.”²⁵

D. Jesus’ Message to the Crowds

Luke 7:24-25

When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”²⁵ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces!”

Jesus questioned the crowds about why they went to see John. “Did you go out to check the scenery? Did you go to see a weak nobody? Did you expect a rich person living a life of ease out in the wilderness?”

Luke 7:26-28

“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet.”²⁷ This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.’²⁸ I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

“No, you went out to see a prophet.” John had introduced Jesus as the fulfillment of OT prophecies. Now Jesus was introducing John as fulfillment of OT prophecy. He loved John. John was His cousin and friend. “John was greater than the OT prophets because he actually saw with his eyes and personally participated in the fulfillment of what they only prophesied (vv. 10,13; cf. 1 Peter 1:10,11). But all believers after the cross are greater still, because they participate in the full





understanding and experience of something John merely foresaw in shadowy form—the actual atoning work of Christ.”⁶

E. Jesus’ Message to the Pharisees

Luke 7:29-35

When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. ³¹“To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? ³²They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ ³³For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ ³⁴The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

The people who had been baptized by John agreed that God was just in judging their sin. They were repentant and trusted in God for forgiveness. The Pharisees, who were not baptized by John, rejected the thought that they were sinners who needed to repent. “They only pretended to care about God’s rules. In truth, they cared only for their own. The only kind of obedience the religious experts in Israel wanted was obedience to *their* authority.”⁷ Jesus compared them to little children playing their own little games with rules that changed all the time. They didn’t like John because he didn’t fit the mold of a Jewish Rabbi teaching in the synagogue. He owned few earthly goods. He fasted. He called for repentance in preparation for the Messiah. He lived apart, refusing their authority. But neither did they like Jesus. He taught in the synagogues. He feasted with rich and poor alike. He forgave sin and healed sickness as only the Messiah could. He ministered in their cities, in their presence, but without their authority, and this made them angry. Jesus declared that time would vindicate both John and Him. “People who want to avoid the truth about themselves can always find something in the preacher to criticize. This is one way they ‘justify themselves.’ But God’s wisdom is not frustrated by the arguments of the ‘wise and prudent.’ *It is demonstrated in the changed lives of those who believe.* This is how true wisdom is ‘justified.’”⁸

II. JESUS IS WORSHIPPED

Luke 7:36-38

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. ³⁷And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, ³⁸and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.



This story is very similar to the one in the other Gospels which took place in Bethany, but this incident took place in Galilee. Simon, a Pharisee, had invited Jesus to his house for a meal. From the story we see that Simon did not have a high opinion of Jesus. It appears that he was looking to find fault in Him. The description of the woman as one “who was a sinner” most likely meant she was involved in some habitual sin, probably sexual. It was not unusual for dinners with dignitaries to be open to the public, but it would have been very shocking to see a prostitute come into a Pharisee’s house. This woman showed a great deal of courage. Her desire to forsake her past and seek forgiveness from the One Who had showed her so much love and acceptance compelled her to do so.

A. The Woman Could Not Pay

She Sacrificed Security: She brought an expensive jar of perfume to Jesus. John and Mark call it nard, a highly prized, imported extract from India. The flask was of *alabaster*: a very light, translucent stone, named after the town in Egypt, where it was chiefly found. An alabaster jar with the perfume was worth a year’s wages (John 12:5). Opening this was like sacrificing her life savings.

She Shed Tears: She was deeply penitent and had come to the One Who offered forgiveness for her sin. “Martin Luther called the woman’s tears ‘heart water.’ Tears of gratitude soaked the Lord’s feet as she sobbed uncontrollably, lost in wonder, love, and praise.”⁹ She was ashamed of her *past*—but not of her *tears* nor her *Savior*!

She Served Jesus: What made her wash Jesus’ feet? Possibly without realizing it, she had wet them with her tears as she worshipped at His feet. Looking down, she may have noticed little rivulets from the dust of the day and realized His feet had not been washed. This was something she could do for her Savior, her Master. Humbly, she continued the “washing” and used what she had (her hair) for drying. The perfume she had likely brought to anoint Jesus’ head was poured out on His feet along with her kisses.

These three actions indicated a heart transaction had already occurred. This outcast woman was changed. She believed on the One on Whom she was lavishing love. Her service to Jesus was an extravagant expression of an inward heart change. **Faith shows itself in love and worship!**

B. Simon Could Not Understand

Luke 7:39

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”

While the woman was washing Jesus’ feet and worshipping Him, Simon the Pharisee was watching with contempt. Outwardly, he kept his composure as a good Pharisee should do, but inwardly he was thinking: “If Jesus were the Messiah, He would not let this woman of the world touch Him.”





C. Parable of Two Debtors

Luke 7:40-43

And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

Jesus knew Simon's thoughts and chose to teach him as He often did with others, using a parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning). Two debtors owed money to the same man. One owed the equivalent of 500 days' wages and the other the equivalent of 50 days' wages. Obviously the ten-fold debt was much greater. Out of kindness, the lender forgave both debts. Jesus pointedly asked Simon, "Which of the two debtors will love the lender more?" Simon responded, "Probably the one that had the larger debt forgiven." Simon could accurately judge this simple contrast, but he did not want to relate it to Jesus' forgiveness of sin. Part of this was because Jesus did not fit the preconceived notion he had for the Jewish Messiah—someone who was a lot like the Pharisees.

D. Simon's Pride

Luke 7:44-47

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. ⁴⁵ You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Now Jesus called out Simon's lack of consideration for the guest in his house. A gracious host provided water for his guests to wash off the dust of the road. If the guest was one of high status, a slave or servant would be asked to wash his feet. Simon had not considered his guest. The obvious lack of common courtesy was so great most would feel this was a deliberate action and attitude of contempt on Simon's part. However, this woman took on the task of the menial slave. She washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus' feet in the most humble, loving, serving way. She loved much because she had been forgiven much.

"Jesus didn't excuse the woman's sins or minimize the truth. He never denied... that they offended God and required forgiveness. He nevertheless accepted the woman—not in spite of her sins, but with them." Without directly saying so, Jesus put Simon in the category of those who loved little. Pride made him think he had little to be forgiven, so consequently his love for God was little.



E. The Woman's Peace

Luke 7:48-50

Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." ⁴⁹Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Now Jesus turned and spoke directly to the woman, "Your sins have been forgiven." This caused quite a stir among the other guests. Who was this Man that presumed to forgive sins like God? If He were really God, He would know how wicked this woman was. The religious world rejected her as a "sinful woman," which was why she had not gone to them in her need. Jesus, on the other hand, accepted her. His acceptance "not only prompted her repentance, but it provided what she needed most: divine pardon for her hopeless dept of sin. Grace superabounds!"¹⁰ Now her faith rested in Jesus. Her past was behind her. Her sins were forgiven. She could go in peace.

CONCLUSION

What is our response to "sinful" people? Are we quick to judge or do we accept them as people who need our love as well as the love of Jesus? Are there those who could say, "If you're a Christian, I want no part"? When is the last time someone could say, "I saw the love of Jesus in you"?

Chaplain Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Gladys M. Hunt, "That's No Generation Gap!" *Eternity*, October 1969, pg. 15. Quoted in Chuck Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, Zondervan, 2012, pg. 185.
2. R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Crossway Books, 1998, pg. 267.
3. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Volume 1, Victor Books, 1996, pg. 196–197.
4. Wiersbe, pg. 197.
5. Swindoll, pg. 178.
6. John MacArthur, *MacArthur Study Bible*, pg. 1412.
7. Swindoll, pg. 182.
8. Wiersbe, pg. 197.
9. Swindoll, pg. 186.
10. Swindoll, pg. 190.





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