

## CONTRASTING CHARACTERS TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7:40-47, *“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.”*

Luke 7 contrasts a self-righteous Pharisee named Simon and a guilt-ridden woman whom John identifies as “Mary” (John 11:2). Earlier in the context we learn that Jesus has been invited as a guest to Simon’s house (Luke 7:36). While visiting in Simon’s home a woman washes the feet of Jesus with her tears, dries them with her hair and anoints them with an expensive, fragrant oil (Luke 7:37-38). The illustration of Jesus is provoked by the snobbery of Simon towards this gracious woman and his contempt for Jesus (Luke 7:39).

Thus, Jesus compares the two involved individuals and from his comparison we learn...

**Both Simon and Mary were sinners.** Perhaps Simon’s sins were not as public and numerous as those of Mary’s. However, the illustration of Jesus points out that both debtors owed something they cannot repay (Luke 7:41-42). Indeed, we have “all sinned” and sin (no matter its quantity) is a debt we are unable to repay (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

**Both debtors were in need of forgiveness.** It is quite common to view our sins with blind-

ers while we view the sins of others with a magnifying glass. It is usually an easy task to find someone with more embarrassing and numerous sins than our own. Yet, the fact that others have sinned more does not release us from our own debt. Both debtors needed forgiveness and to both debtors forgiveness was available (Luke 7:42).

**Mary possessed a greater sense of sin than Simon.** There are many great sinners who never realize or admit to their sins. Thus, the beauty of Mary is not that she had committed many sins. Instead, she is admired for realizing she had committed many sins and those sins had ruined her relationship with God! Simon had no sense of personal sin, but he could do a great job of pointing out the faults of this horrible sinner who was, in the meantime, displaying a grief and sorrow for her sins that Simon never did.

**Mary’s greater sense of sin led to greater acts of love for her Savior.** As Jesus asks the question, “...which of them will love him more?” Simon dryly answers with an indictment of his own character. He says, “I

suppose the one whom he forgave more.” Immediately following Simon’s answer Jesus illustrates how this Mary had actually shown greater acts of hospitality than the true host, Simon. She offered Jesus “the most priceless of waters” (Bengel). She kisses the feet of Jesus, not his cheek (as was customary in salutations). She uses no towel, but counts it an honor to use her own hair to dry his feet. She anoints the feet of Jesus with a “fragrant oil” that was rarely seen in the hands of the poor. She offers all of this and Simon offered nothing to the Savior of mankind.

May we never forget the love God is due for the grace He has given. Joshua R. Welch

