





Forgiven Much

Matthew 26:6-16

Mark 14:3-11

Luke 7:36-50

John 12:1-11

Life of Jesus: Miracles

This is a story that is found in all four gospels of the Bible. Different scholars have varying views on the accounts told in each gospel. Matthew and Mark are very clear that it was the same event, and the occurrence in John seems to be the same story, although some say it is a third occasion. Some scholars believe that the story told in Luke is a separate narrative because it seems to come at an earlier time in Jesus' ministry.

However, this lesson is taught here as a one-time occurrence. Looking at the similarities in the stories, it can be reconciled to the telling of one event. Also, taking into account that are separate events in Luke's gospel that are not chronological and quite out of order. This particular story is so significant and unusual that it seems more than coincidental that it would have taken place twice, let alone three times. Also, Jesus says in Matthew 26:13, and Mark 26:9 that wherever this gospel is preached, that the story of what this woman has done will be told for a memorial of her. So, it would stand to reason that the account in all four gospels would be one and the same, and speak of the same woman, Mary. Additionally, John 11:2 states that the sister of Lazarus was the same Mary that anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

With this view, let us examine the story. When you teach the story to the students, teach it from John and also with a bookmark in Luke as further explanation. Take notes and bring in the other points from Matthew and Mark.

To get an idea of the time frame of the ministry of Jesus, this story takes place shortly after Lazarus was raised from the dead, and only days before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. The following day after this event is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus is in Bethany.

This is the same town where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived, and where Lazarus was raised. Bethany was about a thirty-minute walk, or a little over 2 miles (3 kilometers) from Jerusalem.

Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus is in the home of Simon, the Leper. Reconciling this with Luke, we see that he was in the home of Simon, who was also a Pharisee.

Discuss:

Do you think that Jesus healed this man?

Is it possible that he was formerly known as Simon the Leper?

If he was still a leper, would he be entertaining people in his home?

We can assume that this man was no longer a leper. Lepers were not allowed to be near other people. Especially if the man was a Pharisee, he would have definitely been abiding by the law, and lepers were outcasts of society, and not allowed to live near other people, let alone have them in their home. We can guess that this man was either healed by Jesus, or his leprosy went away, or into remission, but that he would not have been leprous at the time of this dinner.

Jesus has been invited for dinner to Simon's home. Lazarus, Martha and Mary must have known Simon well. Martha, Mary's sister, was serving the meal, and Lazarus was one of the people who was sitting at the table with Jesus. We also know that there were a lot of people at this dinner.



Forgiven Much

Many of the Jews came not only to see Jesus, but they were curious because they knew that Lazarus would be there, and he had been raised from the dead (John 12:9-10).

When the people in this region would eat, they would sit very low to the ground, on a cushion or directly on the ground, and almost eat in a reclining or lying down position with a low table. You can sit on the ground to illustrate this, and show the students how the table would have been fairly low to the ground.

While Jesus is sitting down eating, a woman comes up to Jesus holding an alabaster box. The gospel of Luke says this lady was a “woman of the city.” She did not have a good reputation, and was known as a “sinner.” She knew that Jesus would be at this Pharisee’s house (which would make perfect sense if her sister were serving.)

Discuss:

Everyone is sitting at dinner, and someone walks in that everyone knows, but they don’t want her there. Everyone knows who she is, and they have heard about all the bad things she has done.

But as far as we know, no one tells her to leave. There could be different explanations for this.

Maybe because it was her sister and brother that were welcome there, and that is why she wasn’t asked to leave.

Or maybe because she come in with a very expensive jar in her hand. Possibly they think it is a hostess gift for Simon?

She has come in with an alabaster box. What is alabaster?

Alabaster looks similar to marble, but it is a softer stone, and you can almost see through it. It was very expensive, and what it held was even more valuable. Inside the alabaster box was a pound (almost half of a kilogram) of perfume. This perfume was highly scented, and extremely expensive. It was called nard, or spikenard, and it comes from the Himalayan mountains in Nepal, near China. This is very far from Jerusalem.

Discuss:

How would they get this all the way from the Himalayan mountains to Jerusalem?

Possible answers include walking, camels, horses, maybe boats, etc.

To get this all the way to Israel with the types of transportation they had during this time, it would have taken a very long time and that made it very costly. If you have to pay one person to take it to another person all along the way, the price is going to increase with each person that handles it or ships it. The estimated value of this perfume comes to about a year’s worth of wages.

We can also guess that it is possible that this lady has some money. Maybe her lifestyle made her wealthy; or maybe she’s taking the most valuable thing she owns and is giving it to Jesus; maybe both.



Forgiven Much

Discuss:

Jesus is at Simon the leper's house. Everyone is sitting down, eating. It is possible that Jesus is sitting on his knees, with his feet behind him. We are told in Luke that she stood at his feet behind him, and she is weeping. Then she breaks her box and pours the perfume on his head (Mark 14:3). This breaking of the box could mean that she broke the seal, or she had to break it to get it open, or she might have broken it so that it could not be used again. She's crying so hard and her tears are falling all over his feet. She washes his feet with her tears, and wipes them off with her hair. His feet were probably dirty; they traveled in the desert and usually wore sandals. Then she kisses his feet and pours perfume on them too.

This is what we might consider a very awkward situation.

Discuss:

This is quite a scene. What do you think people would do?

Mary is weeping, not just crying. What is the difference between weeping and crying?

What would you do? Would this be weird? Uncomfortable? Unusual? Strange?

Embarrassing? Was she embarrassed? Seemingly not at all.

Remember that this is very expensive perfume, and the scent is very strong. The whole house is filled with the smell of this perfume.

Everyone is probably watching Jesus to see what he is going to do. Is he going to tell her to stop?

People are talking. They're probably talking quietly, maybe even whispering, probably staring.

Even the disciples are indignant; they said, this is such a waste. Why is she doing this?

This could have been sold for 300 pence and given to the poor.

John tells us specifically that Judas Iscariot (the one who denied Jesus) was the one who said this. It is also possible that this was the home of Judas' father. We are told that Judas was Simon's son (John 6:71; John 12:4; John 13:26). Could he be the son of this man, Simon the Pharisee, Simon the leper? Maybe this was his father's house, and he was more bold to speak here?

Judas doesn't really want the money to go to the poor. He is in charge of Jesus' finances, and it is his job to keep the money bag. The reader is told that he is a thief, and he just wanted to sell it so he could steal the money.

The reader is also told what happened after this dinner (Matthew 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11). Judas is so upset that after this he went to the chief priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Money was the most important thing to him.

Jesus answers them and says, leave her alone.

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me with you.



Forgiven Much

She has done a good work on me. She has anointed my body for burial.

What does this mean?

For thousands of years, people have been embalming bodies. When someone is dead, they put oils and perfumes on the body to keep it from stinking and to try to preserve it. She seems to understand what Jesus has been telling everyone, and they did not understand. He's been telling everyone that he is going to die. She seems to know this, and is weeping because she loves him so dearly and she knows what is going to happen.

She seems to understand who he really is and what is about to take place.

Then Jesus says,

“Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, this also that she has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her,” (Matthew 26:13, Mark 14:9).

He is honoring her for what she has done for him. This would explain why all of these different accounts can be reconciled as one event. It would make sense that each of the four gospels that are preached throughout the world would have a record of this story.

The gospel of Luke gives the reader a glimpse into the thoughts of Simon the Pharisee . This is his house, and all of these things are taking place at his dinner party. He is thinking, if Jesus was really a prophet, he would know what kind of lady this is. She's touching him, and she's a sinner.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking.

Have you ever had someone look at you and then answer you because they can tell what you're thinking?

Jesus tells Simon he has something to say. Simon agrees to listen, and Jesus begins a short parable.

Jesus tells the story of a man who had two men who owed him money. One of them owed him 500 pence (over a year and a half salary) and the other man owed him 50 pence (maybe two months salary). Neither one of them could pay, so the man who loaned the money forgave them both. Which one will love him most?

Simon answered, I suppose the one to whom he forgave the most.

Jesus says, you are right.

Then Jesus looks at the lady, but talks to Simon.

He says, do you see this woman?

I came into your house and you did not give me any water for my feet;

...but she washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

You did not give me a kiss

...(it was customary in that culture for men to kiss one another on the cheek), and since the time I got here she has not stopped kissing my feet.

You did not anoint my head with oil,

...but she has anointed my feet.



Forgiven Much

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, and she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

Jesus is basically saying, if you understand how much you've been forgiven for, then your love is greater.

Then Jesus looked at the lady and said,

"Your sins are forgiven."

All the people at the table began thinking, can He forgive sins too?

But he looked at the lady and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

We do not know if Simon ever had a revelation of what really happened. Simon did not understand that his own sin was just as bad as hers in the eyes of God. He had just as much to be forgiven for, but he did not see his own failures so he did not value Jesus.

Simon was proud, and the reader does not know if he was aware of his own pride. But we do know how God feels about pride; he feels very strongly about it.

A proud look is listed as one of the things that God hates (Proverbs 6:17).

But Simon seemed blind to his own sin, because he too needed forgiveness.

This was anointing the body of Jesus for his burial. Oil was used in the Bible to signify anointing. Anointing was done on a person to call them into a specific purpose. It is possible that this sweet smell still stayed on the skin of Jesus when he was crucified days later.

Oil in the Bible was put on people when they were anointed.

Anointing was calling someone to a purpose.

Jesus in the Story



Have you ever done something really bad, and then you knew you were forgiven for it?

That's what Mary did. Some people think that maybe this is also Mary Magdalene, or the lady caught in adultery and Jesus did not cast a stone. Either way, she knew Jesus. She loved him, and she understood personally his grace and mercy. She had a personal revelation of his love for her, and that changed her life.

When you have a relationship with Jesus, your life will never be the same.

When it is personal, and you have a revelation of who He is, and what he did for you, it changes you.

She understood grace.

The people all around were judging her, but she knew that the one that mattered the most loved her in such an amazing way that she was oblivious to the people. She was completely unashamed. She poured out her worship (literally) on Jesus in such a personal way and was completely unfazed by what the people around her thought.

There were many people at this dinner with different motives. Some came out of curiosity to see Lazarus. Some came to accuse Jesus. We do not know Simon's motive; maybe he was trying to trap Jesus, maybe he was showing off, or maybe, he too, was curious. The disciples were probably just surprised and thinking how awkward the situation was. Judas just wanted money. And other people there just thought it was wasteful.

But to Mary, she gave Jesus the most valuable thing she could think of. And it did not even come close to what she was forgiven for.

She understood his love and grace, and in return, she was willing to give everything to Jesus.

Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

21. Zacchaeus

1. If you seek the Lord your God, will you find him? (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13)
2. You will find him if you do what?
3. You will find him when you do what?
4. What does Psalm 105:3 say about the hearts of those who seek the Lord?

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

22. Forgiven Much

Read John 12:1-11

1. Why did the Jews come to this dinner?
2. What did Judas want to do with the perfume? Why?
3. Why did Jesus say the woman was doing this?
4. What did the priests want to do to Lazarus?
5. Why were they upset with Lazarus?

Luke 7:47

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.

23. More Than the Others

1. Who was putting money in the treasury, or offering that day?
2. What did the rich people do?
3. How much did this lady put in the offering?
4. Jesus said the other people gave out of what?
5. Why was what she gave more valuable?

Luke 16:15

...You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

24. How Will You Understand?

1. What happened to the seed that fell on the side of the road?
2. What happened to the seed that fell on the rocks?
3. What happened to the seed that fell on thorns?
4. What did Jesus say the birds were like?

Isaiah 55:11

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.



