

Defining moments...the difference between mercy and grace... (D. Mar)

1. Study Luke 7:36-48. What do you observe about the setting of this passage?

Jesus has been invited to the home of Simon the Pharisee for dinner. It was an honor to host a visiting Rabbi, and Simon the Pharisee had the means to do this in both home and money.

2. Observe carefully the actions of the Pharisee and the girl. What do you see?

The Bible does not say why the Pharisee invited Christ to his home for dinner; but others knew about the invitation, which may suggest a personal political motive. The Pharisee, with his cordial behavior, did not acknowledge Christ as being God, and perhaps perceived himself to be equivalent in spiritual stature as “a teacher.” Honoring a guest is usually shown by a) providing a basin of water to wash his feet (people wore sandals), b) offering scented olive oil for the hair, and c) greeting the guest with a kiss. Simon the Pharisee did not do any of these things. The woman behaved in a quite different manner: a) without invitation, and despite public knowledge of her reputation and social ridicule (likely a prostitute), she came early to the home of a Pharisee to wait for His arrival, b) she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, c) she stood behind Christ, d) she cried, e) she washed His feet with her tears and hair repeatedly, f) she kissed His feet with her lips repeatedly, and g) anointed His feet with perfume. By her actions, she acknowledged, loved, and revered Jesus and recognized Him as the Messiah.

3. Who is the audience and what is said in the parable? What is the difference between Grace and Mercy?

Jesus is speaking to both Simon the Pharisee and the woman. The parable is about a moneylender and two borrowers who lack the money to pay off their loan. Within the context of the time, borrowers unable to repay the lender are thrown into prison until family members can redeem the loan. The woman had a bigger debt than Simon the Pharisee, but the parable shows that the penalty is the same regardless of the loan amount. Simon the Pharisee never saw this nor saw himself as the debtor, which prompted Jesus' judgment of him. In the parable, Jesus' question of which debtor would love the moneylender more came after the moneylender forgave the debt. The woman did not come to Jesus to ask for forgiveness, she came crying knowing she was forgiven, and she was profoundly grateful. Faith in His promise of forgiveness and redemption was her salvation.

Did the woman receive grace or did she receive mercy? What is the difference? Grace is getting something you don't deserve; but divine grace includes a supreme sacrifice by the Grantor. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve. God's grace is extended to all but God's mercy is extended only to those who come to faith. Simon the Pharisee did not truly know his own spiritual state; the woman clearly understood hers and that she was a recipient of God's grace and mercy.

Remember that when reading parables, the key in understanding the parable is observing whom Jesus is talking to. Jesus speaks mostly to Simon the Pharisee (and indirectly to others at the party). Simon the Pharisee was held in high regard socially and religiously and the woman was not; he was “good” and she was “bad.” Yet, while being the most capable, Simon the Pharisee failed to recognize God or his sinful spiritual state. In God's eyes, sin is sin. However, in man's eyes, the recognition of sin is relative; sin is viewed as inversely proportional to one's indulgence of it. The less likely one has indulged with a particular sin, the greater the public rejection and recognition of it. The greater one has indulged with a particular sin, the less likely the public rejection and recognition of it. Thus, prostitution is considered a “greater” sin than adultery. Jesus is telling us that being good is not the same as being forgiven of your sins. Furthermore those who fail to recognize that 1) Jesus is God, and 2) they are sinful will not experience God's grace and mercy.

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