

Seeing
"Flower Petals"
Reveal Themselves
Slowly



A Guide to Understanding and
Interpreting the Parables of Jesus

JAMES MALERBA

There are underlying messages in the parables of Jesus that go beyond the words themselves. This book explains each parable and leads the reader to a better understanding of the immortal parables of the Lord.

**Seeing "Flower Petals" Reveal Themselves Slowly:
A Guide To Understanding and Interpreting The
Underlying Messages in The Parables of Jesus**

By James Malerba

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64718-872-6

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64718-873-3

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64718-874-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Malerba, James F.

Seeing “Flower Petals” Reveal Themselves Slowly: A Guide To Understanding and Interpreting The Parables of Jesus by James F. Malerba

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020916384

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James F. Malerba is a writer and editor who worked in the corporate and healthcare industries for more than 35 years. He also published dozens of feature articles in newspapers and magazines across the country on a variety of topics ranging from healthcare and political issues to interviews with noted Catholics. He is a graduate of the Yale University Divinity School with a master's degree in Religion and a concentration in New Testament Studies. Earlier this year, he published a book entitled, "God is Everywhere – Even in Nursery Rhymes!" That work not only presents beloved and timeless rhymes, but also has commentaries showing how God is in each one. Thus, both children and adults can benefit from its contents. Malerba lives in the New Haven, Connecticut area.

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Section I – Introduction and Background

Over the past 100 years or so, theologians and New Testament scholars have devoted themselves to the various meanings contained in the parables of Jesus. Almost unanimously, they agree that the parables describe the kingdom of God and prepare people to enter heaven through good works during their lives on Earth.

One such expert, C.H. Dodd, saw end-times messages, or eschatology, as the central message in the parables. In fact, many in the early Church were convinced that the *Parousia*, or end of the world, would occur in their lifetime. Obviously, that did not happen. Dodd suggested that Jesus preached a *realized* eschatology; in other words, fulfilling the word of God through the Son.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._H._Dodd)

As we will soon see, the eschatological, or matters of end times, message in some parables, such as the wicked tenants, the unprepared wedding guest, Lazarus and the rich man, and others, comes through all too clearly: To those who believe, eternal life beckons. To those who do not believe or lead lives of unrepentant sin, no salvation comes to them. Yet, as in all parables, there are underlying, subtle messages for us to unpeel that shed even greater light and understanding on those immortal sayings of the Lord in the gospels.

That view was underscored by Leander Keck, professor emeritus of New Testament Studies at the Yale Divinity School. Like C.H. Dodd, Keck saw the parables as extended metaphors. He said this about interpreting them: “Jesus introduced a strange way of being in the world, a way that could be grasped only through the indirection of stories of familiar life which were both and were not ‘the kingdom.’”*

*From Professor Keck’s lecture on September 25, 1991.

Though reward and punishment permeate many of Jesus' parables, others contain messages containing hope or instructional messages that serve to enlighten one and all. Each has a richness peculiar to itself that must be uncovered through reasoned study and interpretation. All parables in the synoptic gospels present this challenge to the curious reader. A casual reading produces a basic understanding of the meaning of a given parable but does not delve too deeply into the wonderful "hidden" messages it contains.

Just as flowers "awaken" by opening their petals slowly when spring arrives, so it is when we enhance our understanding of the timeless messages in the parables of Jesus. We do not experience a thunderbolt of sudden enlightenment; rather, we open the petals of our minds slowly, and greater understanding comes in good time.

Becoming enlightened, then, is a process. Jesus Himself noted this when he said, "Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not placed on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light" (Mark 4:21-22). That was a message not only for the disciples, but also for all people, then and today. We who have been given the wonderful gift of faith must not keep it to ourselves but are to spread it to all through our Christian love and words and deeds.

Characteristics of the Parables

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a technique that became known as form criticism became a popular method for biblical scholars to look at books of the Bible, including the gospels, and interpret the structure of their messages. The biggest proponent of form criticism was Rudolph Bultmann, a German biblical scholar, who used this method to note theme and literary patterns in the parables and other sayings of Jesus. According to Bultmann, the following are common characteristics of every parable of Jesus:

1. Only necessary persons appear. For example, in the Prodigal Son, there is a father but no mother. Seldom are there more than two persons, and in any parable with more than two people, only two speakers are present at the same time.
2. There is never parallel action, just a consecutive sequence.
3. Characters all possess one trait – the judge is unjust, five virgins are wise and five foolish, Lazarus is poor and the homeowner rich, and so forth.
4. Parables are usually devoid of emotion, unless Jesus is making a point requiring it. Examples are the unmerciful servant and the Good Samaritan.
5. Some parables leave the reader guessing. The rich fool, the prudent servant, and the barren fig tree's fates are not revealed.

6. Also, a detail or two might be missing. We are never told how the steward wasted his master's goods, just that he did it.
7. In most parables the most important item comes at the end. The sower, the talents, and the Pharisee and the publican are such examples.
8. Jesus invited the judgment of the listener, though he never judged the characters in his own parables. However, some judgment is at least implied – Pharisee and the tax collector, two sons, and the Prodigal Son.

(from Boltmann, Rudolph, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 1921)

A striking similarity of the forms of Jesus' parables can be found in Aesop's Fables, which also preached messages of reward and punishment, the necessity for leading a good life, and other aphorisms intended to raise the intellectual thought of his audiences. Here is an example:

"A farmer caught a fox that was destroying his vines and garden. To kill the fox, the farmer set fire to the fox's tail and turned it loose. In torment, the fox ran straight into the farmer's grain fields, setting fire to the crop, which was especially abundant that year. Though the farmer ran after the fox, he was too late. His crop was totally destroyed."

That fable, as with all of Aesop's fables, contains only one central message. In this case, the desire for revenge on the fox stands out. While Aesop did not intend to convey a spiritual message, the lesson he intended suffices: revenge does not always work, and the "reward" of killing the fox came at a very high cost to the agonized farmer.

In a way, that fable resonates in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21), where the rich man wants to tear down his barns and build larger ones, thus enjoying unlimited wealth and prosperity. Unfortunately for him, God had bad news – his life ended that very night he set up his ambitious plans. So, too, the farmer in the fable came to a bad end, at least in terms of going broke that year, while the rich fool did not account for the fact he would be called by God to answer for his life's works.

Why Did Jesus Employ Parables?

As stated in Matthew (13:10-15), the disciples asked Jesus why he was speaking to the people, including the Jewish religious leaders of the time, in parables. Jesus answered that while the disciples had been granted understanding of the kingdom of heaven, others "look but do not see and hear but do not understand."

Thus, Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (6:9-10), who said, "Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears..." So, Jesus left it to his hearers to interpret his words, interpreting parables only to his own disciples and no one else. He did promise, though, that those who heard, listened, and had a change of heart would understand (Matthew. 13:12).

Rabbinic Parables Preceded Jesus

While all Christians are familiar with the Lord's parables, there were Rabbinic parables that preceded Jesus. Some were themes Jesus used when relating parables to his various audiences. of his parables. Also, the rabbinic parables often opened with words similar to those the Lord used: "The kingdom of heaven is like (may be likened)" (Matthew 13:24). So, when Jesus drew on the similar words spoken by earlier rabbis, he was imparting to his listeners both themes and language with which they would have been familiar. Our next example uses an identical opening.

Witness this one, attributed to Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat^h 153a

Then Solomon in his wisdom said: "Let your garments always be white, and let not your head lack oil (Ecclesiastes 9:8).

Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai said:

“To what is this matter likened? This is like a king who summoned his servants to a banquet, but he did not set a time for them. The attentive got themselves dressed and sat at the door of the king’s house. They said: ‘Is anything missing at the king’s house?’ The foolish went on with their work. They said: ‘Is there any banquet without toil?’

“Suddenly, the king summoned his servants. The attentive gathered before him, all dressed up., while the foolish gathered before him all soiled. The king was pleased with the attentive, but angry with the foolish. He said: ‘Let those who are dressed up for the banquet sit, eat and drink; but let those who did not dress for this banquet stand and watch.’”

That parable is, in its theme, quite similar to the one Jesus told of the wedding banquet, in which one guest arrived without wearing proper wedding attire. Most guests arrived dressed for a wedding, one did not. He was bound and thrown out of the banquet hall (Matthew 22:1-10).

There is a similar ending in the Rabbinic parable, except those who did not arrive dressed properly were forced to stand and watch the others eat, drink and celebrate. In a way, their punishment was just as great as the man in the wedding parable of Jesus, because they could only long for the good food and drink to which the other guests were privy.

Rabbi Simeon ben Johai said:

“From this we know Israel will not face Gehinnom forever.” He proposed a parable:

“To what is this matter likened? To a king of flesh and blood who had a swampy field. Some men came and leased it for ten khors (= 60 bushels) of wheat a year. They fertilized it, watered it and harvested it. But they gathered no more than one khor of wheat during the year. The king said to them: What is this?’ They said to him: ‘You know, our Lord (and) king, at first you gathered nothing from the field you gave us. And now we have fertilized and watered it and have gathered at least one khor of wheat.’ So Israel shall plead before the Holy One, blessed be He!: Lord, you know the evil impulse incites us!”

Parables and Fables – the Differences

As we have seen, the rabbinic parables and Aesop's Fables all have moral lessons for the reader. They are cautionary tales to urge people to follow the straight and narrow. Jesus' parables also conveyed moral messages, but with heavenly or spiritual consequences or rewards.

In the same way, the parables of Jesus involved "real" people to whom all listeners could relate – the rich man and Lazarus, the Prodigal Son, and others. In fables (Aesop's and others), the people and events were pure fiction, though certainly memorable and entertaining.

We are all interpreters

We all interpret things we see or hear. Sometimes we might be spot on; other times, we might be far off. The beauty of our interpretive ability lies not in what might be right or wrong, but rather in how we see things.

Take a sporting event, for example. You and a friend go to a baseball game and see exactly the same thing. On the way home, you both compare verbal notes regarding things that happened during the game. You thought the pitcher really had is good “stuff” that day. Your friend might have a different opinion, saying he thought the pitcher looked tired and not on his game, though he won.

Similarly, look at a piece of art more than once. It is almost a certainty that when you see the same painting again you will find things you did not notice the first time. It could be the color scheme, the expression on a face, or just about anything else. The fact is that you can almost always come up with a different interpretation the second time and beyond. That is the joy of interpreting.

So, in the parables, the following might be useful in getting more out of each parable, enriching your spiritual experience.

1. Note the setting of the parable. What text precedes and follows it? To whom was Jesus addressing the parable, and why?
2. Pay attention to the wording, “plot,” and suspense, if any. Always keep in mind that parables are studies, as well as lessons. Also, where applicable, compare, where applicable, alike parables across the synoptic gospels, noting all the similarities and differences among them.

3. Be sure to read every parable in its historical context, always keeping form-critical methods in mind. In other words, don't put a modern "spin" on them, except to say how the message in a given parable would apply in today's world. Focus instead on the gospel writer's intent and his early Christian audience.
4. Who are the main "characters" in the parable, and what are their similarities and differences? Often, these characters provide clues related to the main point Jesus was making.
5. It also is important to understand there were two sets of audiences for all the parables – the original audiences addressed by Jesus, and members of the early Church to whom the evangelists were writing.
6. Do not over-interpret a parable, which is easy enough to do. Rather, note carefully what happens at the end of a parable as a clue to ascertaining its meaning. This is called the "rule of end stress" by New Testament scholars.
7. Place the message of a given parable in the context of Jesus' earthly ministry. You will discover that most of the parables deal with the kingdom of God – either its inauguration or consummation – and discipleship within the present phase of the kingdom in expectation of the consummation.

The Enigma of Q

Before addressing the parables themselves, let us examine the so-called “Q” source. Q is an abbreviation for the German word “Quelle,” which means *source*. Many modern-day New Testament scholars have spent years dissecting the parables in Matthew and Luke and ultimately concluding they contain a number of them that both gospel writers took from a source that, alas, no longer exists – if it ever did. (The Q source is not found in Mark’s gospel.) In effect, then, Q is a source that does not appear to exist. It is kind of like trying to describe black holes in deep space. You can’t see them because they absorb even light, but astronomers know they exist.

Q first came to light in 1838 when a German scholar named Christian Hermann Weisse offered a theory that beneath certain parables – most notably those in Matthew and Luke – there was evidence of another, unknown source. Then, in 1945, two brothers in Egypt dug up an earthen jar, which contained 12 books bound in leather. Experts named these volumes the Nag Hammadi Library. They contained a complete copy of the gospel of Thomas, written in Coptic. After translating the gospel into Greek, scholars made valid comparisons between sayings in the gospel of Thomas and with the sayings in the synoptic gospels.

Interest in Q continued, and in 1989, James Robinson of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, California, began a task that was to take 10 years to complete. Robinson and his staff took the parables verse by verse and word by word and ultimately published an enormous volume called “The Critical Edition of Q.”

So, scholars look for similarities in Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels to substantiate the existence of Q. In many cases, both writers used

wording that was almost identical. For example, Matthew 6:24 is the same as Luke 6:13. Also, Matthew 7:7-8 and Luke 11: 9-10 are very similar. It is perhaps no coincidence that those two gospel writers recorded the Sermon on the Mount in the same order.

Here are the Q parables found only in Matthew and Luke:

Burglar – Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39

Servant put in charge – Matthew 24:45; Luke 12:42

Leaven – Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20

Great supper – Matthew 22:1; Luke 14:16

Lost sheep – Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:3

Talents – Matthew 25:14; Luke 19:12

In addition to the parables common to Matthew and Luke, there is other material peculiar to those two gospel writers, from the preaching of John the Baptist to the many lessons Jesus taught his audiences, such as treasure in heaven, divisions in families, and settling out of court.

We can only trust the scholars' in-depth research, much of which is remarkably similar, especially in their conclusions, regarding the existence of the Q source. The following address this topic in detail:

Arthur Bellinzoni, Jr., Joseph Tyson, & William Walker, editors, "The Existence of Q", at:

<http://earlychristianwritings.com/q-exist.html>

Marliyn Mellows, "More about Q and the Gospel of Thomas," at: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/qthomas.html

James Robinson, "The Real Jesus of the Sayings 'Q' Gospel," at: www.religion-online.org/showarticle.sep?title=542

As you have seen, the Q source would appear to have had a profound influence on Mathew and Luke. Unfortunately, we will never have a definitive answer; the enigma remains.

That said, we now move along to the “main event” – our interpretation of those wonderful parables the Lord spoke for his audience and for us all. Please enjoy this journey as you enhance your understanding of the wonderful gems given to us by the Son of God.

Section V – Feeding a Multitude

Bread and Fish for All (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14)

While not a parable, but rather a metaphor, the great miracles of feeding five thousand and then four thousand people on separate occasions had a dual purpose. They were: First, to satisfy the human need for food of all those who came to listen to Jesus, and second, to presage the Eucharist for the benefit, especially, of the disciples.

The second miracle, the Feeding of the 4,000, with seven loaves of bread and fish, is found Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-9), but not in Luke or John (Wikipedia, online).

Though the disciples of Jesus questioned how they were to feed such a large throng, the Lord knew exactly what he was doing. Multiplying a tiny number of loaves and fish was more than providing a one-time meal; it was an important lesson to the Twelve that they were to feed everyone with something more than earthly food. They might not have perceived this at the time of the miracle, but they surely remembered it when Jesus sent them into the world to preach salvation, following his Resurrection.

Section VI – Parables of Reward and Punishment

The Net Snags Good and Not-So-Good (Matthew 13:47-50)

The theme in the seventh parable in Matthew is essentially similar to that of the wheat and weeds. A net cast into the sea catches fish of every kind. When the haul is brought to shore, the fishermen separate the good fish from the bad. Those they save are placed into buckets; the bad fish are thrown away.

Peter, Andrew, James and John, especially, would have related easily to this parable, having had significant experience on fishing boats in their careers as fishermen. The other disciples also would have been familiar with such a procedure, since fishing was a common occupation at the time of Jesus.

But the Lord did not stop at just saying the good fish are separated from the bad. He carried his message a telling step further, emphasizing to the disciples that the good fish gathered into a bucket are those who follow the word of God and lead worthy lives. The bad fish, conversely, are those who do not follow God's laws and are condemned. Jesus said emphatically, "Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be the wailing and grinding of teeth" (13:49-50).

In the following verse (51), Jesus asked the disciples if they understood the meaning of that and the other preceding parables. Unanimously, they said "Yes." So, the Lord went ahead with an extension of the net parable, saying, that heaven is like the head of a household who brings to his living area both the new and the old. All people are to be offered the opportunity to attain salvation, whether they

are new (people in our time) or old (those in Jesus' time). The Lord clearly meant that all human beings are offered God's grace, but only those who accept it and live by and in it will enjoy everlasting life.

As we go through this journey of uncovering deeper meanings in the parables, we will see some that provide a hope for salvation for one's good works, and also contain overt warnings by Jesus that those who hold grudges or do not forgive or help others is not the way to heaven. Perhaps one of the most dramatic parables emphasizing that theme is that of the unforgiving servant that follows

The disciple Peter, probably thinking he was being overly generous, approached Jesus one day and asked if he had to forgive someone as many as seven times. (In ancient Israel, forgiving someone three times was the norm.)

So, Peter was willing to forgive double-plus-one, not just three times. Jesus was quick to set the disciple straight: "I say to you not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (18:22). In other words, as many times as one is wronged. Forgiveness is to have no limit.

Be Unforgiving and Pay the Price! (Matthew 18:21-35)

Jesus followed that statement of forgiving others as many times as necessary with the parable of the unforgiving servant. In ancient times, servants were considered expendable and replaceable and were totally at the mercy of their masters, in this case, a king. We do not know in this parable how many servants owed the king for loans he had given them, only that there were more than one.

The servant of whom Jesus spoke owed so much money to the king that he could never possibly repay it. The king ordered the servant, his wife and children, to be sold, along with his property.

Once again, we find yet another example of God's infinite forgiveness. The king (God) gave forgiveness (grace for the forgiveness of sins) many times over to the servant, or sinner, deep in spiritual debt of sin. Past sins were forgiven, if the penitent was truly sorry. In the parable, that was not the case.

Stunned at the prospect of losing his family and never being able to pay back such a huge debt, the servant threw himself at the king's mercy and, indeed, was forgiven the debt by a most benevolent master (18:27). Lesson learned? Nope.

Despite being saved from a life of misery and deprivation and now possessing a fiendish sense of power, the servant immediately found another servant, who owed him a mere fraction of the debt for which he had been forgiven. Instead of using the spirit of human charity and telling the other servant he did not want repayment, this ingrate not only choked the other servant, but also then had him thrown into prison (18:28-30).

Unlike in the title of Shakespeare's play, "All's Well That Ends Well," such was not so for the unforgiving servant. Fearful, other of the

king's servants went to him to report what they had just seen him do to a servant begging for mercy. The enraged king summoned the servant and had him thrown into prison. Because of the size of his debt, he likely would never see the light of day again (18:34). Jesus then warned, "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (18:35). No matter how difficult it might be to forgive someone who has seriously wronged us, it is the only way to inner peace and love.

God's forgiveness for any and all sins is limitless.

Don't Cross the Boss! Matthew (24:45-51), Mark (13:32-37), and Luke (12:25-40)

“When the cat is away, the mice will play.” The parents of a teenager step out for the evening and warn their son or daughter not to have anyone over to the house. As soon as they leave, the teen is on the phone and a wild party begins. When the parents come home, and see the mess that awaits them, their teenager is not only punished – by being grounded or worse – but also is ordered to clean up everything.

Along the same lines, Jesus brought servants into his preaching in a similar scenario to the parable of the unfaithful servant. In Matthew's version, the household master puts one of his servants in charge of everything, to feed and care for others in the household. The servant does so and when the master returns from his journey is rewarded by being put in charge of all the master's property (Matthew 24:47).

Then, Jesus uses that same servant as not obedient, but wicked, thinking his master will be gone for a long time. Trying to take advantage of the master's absence, this servant beats his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards. Unfortunately for him, the master returns unexpectedly (24:50-51). Whoops! Say goodbye, disloyal servant. Surely, he was sent packing to fend for himself.

In Mark, his shorter version has Jesus proclaiming much the same cautionary theme, but with a difference. The servants are all put in charge, and the gatekeeper is to be on the alert for the master's return. Jesus says it is important that the servants and gatekeeper must not be sleeping when the master returns unexpectedly (13:35-36). (See also the parable of the ten virgins, in which five sleep and are excluded from the wedding feast. So will those be excluded who are not alert to the presence of Jesus.)

Finally, Luke has Jesus blessing the vigilant servants, who open the door as soon as he arrives home from the wedding he has attended. As a reward, the master serves them a sumptuous meal and waits on them gratefully (13:37-38). If this role reversal by the master sounds a familiar ring, it should, for a similar scene is found in John's gospel (13:1-20), in which the Son of God humbles Himself and washes the disciples' feet. Peter, perhaps deeply shocked by the Master's action, objects, but Jesus quickly reminds that disciple that if he does not allow the Lord to wash his feet, "you will have no inheritance with me" (v.10). The Lord then emphasizes that his action is "...a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (13:15). All three synoptic versions have the same meaning: Be alert, obey the laws of God, and treat others well and with love. Do not do evil things, for you never know when God will call you home to account for all your deeds during your lifetime.

As with the servant in Matthew's version, great rewards await those who are faithful to God and who do His holy will, but the opposite awaits those who ignore it and lead non-spiritual lives. Be awake always!

Nipsey Russell Would Have Approved (Luke 7:36-50)

Our next example of forgiveness involves not a servant – unforgiving or otherwise – but a Pharisee and a sinful woman. Again, God will forgive all sins; His love is endless for those who seek pardon.

The late comedian, Nipsey Russell, was one of the presenters at the Dean Martin roast of acerbic comedian Don Rickles in the 1970s. He said Rickles was at a Billy Graham revival where he (Rickles) supposedly said, “If you want to be forgiven for your sins, the first thing you have to do is sin!”

While Russell’s statement was apocryphal and told in jest, a real-life example of forgiving a great sinner is the episode Luke recorded that is yet another instance of Jesus’ command to forgive always. Simon the Pharisee had invited Jesus to a dinner at his home. During the meal, a sinful woman arrived and poured ointment over Jesus and then bathed his feet with her tears (7:38). It was not unusual for non-invited guests to enter a prominent person’s home and observe silently what was being said. The sinful woman, however, entered for a vastly different reason.

Simon was upset and thought that Jesus should have known the woman was a grievous sinner. If he did not know this, then Jesus must not be a prophet. To be charitable, let us just say that Simon was a bit naïve or obtuse regarding the stature of his special guest.

Being God, Jesus read Simon’s mind and posed a question to him in the form of a parable. As in the parable of the unforgiving servant, two men owed money to a creditor – five hundred days’ wages for one of the men, and fifty for the other. As the king in the other parable forgave the servant who owed an enormous amount, the creditor wrote off the debt both men had incurred. Jesus then asked Simon which of the two

debtors would love the creditor more. Simon correctly said that the man owing much more would also love much more (7:43).

Having proved a point to Simon, Jesus then gently reminded his host that he did not give him water for his feet or greet him with a kiss. Nor did the host anoint his guest with oil – standard procedures in ancient Israel to show respect for the guest (7:44).

As a Pharisee, Simon should have accorded such a greeting, since Pharisees were strict observers of the law and social procedures. But the Lord was not chastising Simon for violating social protocol. Rather, he was pointing out that the sinful woman deliberately sacrificed a jar of expensive ointment as she sought Jesus' forgiveness for her sins. This woman showed more faith in the Lord than Simon, who was hung up on being too rigid toward sinful people, when he might have showed a modicum of understanding in the spirit of charity.

Jesus told Simon the woman's many sins were forgiven, because she loved much. Simon did not have such a big heart, resulting in the Lord saying, "So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little" (7:47). It was a Divine "Take that, Simon!" Did that Pharisee learn his lesson? We will never know, but Jesus opened wide the door to Simon to change his life in a way that would be much more likely to earn him a place in heaven.

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