

A Woman Who Loved Jesus

Luke 7:36-50

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846. There's more to the story.

In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply.

After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.

Man is often unforgiving, but God delights to forgive his children. The Bible has been called "God's Love Letters" to us. Let's consider this incident from the Bible in Luke 7:36-50.

Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman—Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil

on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

VOCABULARY:

Pharisees: a Jewish religious party during the time of Jesus. They were strict in obeying the Law of Moses and other regulations which had been added to it through the centuries.

Alabaster: a soft stone, usually of light creamy color, from which vases and jars were made.

Denarii: a Roman silver coin, a day's wage for ordinary workers.

QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe the setting of this story (the place, the people present, the atmosphere, and so on)?
2. In what ways does the woman demonstrate lavish devotion to Jesus (v. 36-38)?
3. Imagine yourself at the dinner table. What might you feel during this woman's interruption?
4. Why do you think her actions offended Simon the Pharisee (v. 39)? Why do you think she did what she did?
5. What story does Jesus tell to Simon?
6. What point does Jesus make in his story to Simon (v. 40-43)?
7. Why does Jesus compare Simon's actions with that of the woman?
8. What does Jesus tell the woman? (v. 48 & 50)
9. What do the other guests say and what do you think they were thinking about Jesus?
10. What do you think Jesus wants us to know from this story?