

Some of Jesus' parables are stand-alone stories/teachings

Others are buried amid a larger teaching or as part of a narrative account

This parable occurs in the middle of the story about a woman who washed Jesus' feet with tears

Luke 7:41-42 – The parable about a creditor and two debtors

Uncharacteristically, I'm going to look at the parable first—then consider the context

We have 3 characters in this parable—2 people owe a creditor money

One owes 10 times the other—but neither one can pay

The footnotes in the Bible, tell us that a denarius is the usual day's wage for a laborer

At Seattle's \$15/hour minimum wage, that would be \$120

According to the internet, the average wages for a laborer in Seattle is...

\$16.70/hour or \$133.60 for an 8-hour day

The first debtor owed 500 denarii

According to the average wages for a laborer in Seattle, that was \$66,800

The second debtor owed 50 denarii or \$6,800 in today's calculation

Neither debtor could pay back the money they owed

In that sense, both debtors were in exactly the same place—

It didn't matter how huge the amount owed—they simply could not pay it back

Owing less doesn't help if you have no ability to pay the debt

In both cases, they would be sent to debtor's prison for inability to pay the debt

They stand leveled in the same place—in debt beyond their ability to pay

Knowing that neither could pay the debt owed, the creditor canceled the debt for both of them

Some translations use the words "freely forgave" the debts, others cancelled the debts

They both owed nothing!

Jesus then switches from parable to application when he asks, *"Now which of them will love him more?"*

Jesus asks that question of Simon, a Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner

Simon was critical of the woman from town who came to the dinner

She has a reputation as a sinner from town

She brought an alabaster jar of ointment to anoint Jesus

Crying, she washed Jesus feet with tears, drying them with her hair, while anointing him

Simon judged the woman a sinner and condemned her indiscretion in touching Jesus

He implicated Jesus in the crime—if he is a real prophet, he would know she is a sinner

No true prophet would allow such a sinner to touch him as he becomes unclean

It is at this point that Jesus tells the parable of the two debtors

He then asks, *"Now which of them will love him more?"*

By implication, the woman from town is the debtor who owed 500 denarii—an overwhelming debt

But Simon is the debtor who owed 50 denarii—he too is in debt

Jesus faults Simon for not giving him water for his feet or a kiss when he arrived

Simon failed to do the simple courtesies of hospitality in that culture

This snub was done to humiliate Jesus and put him in his place

By contrast, the woman has done them continuously, making up for their lack

When confronted with the question from Jesus, *"Now which of them will love him more?"*

Simon grudgingly answers, *"I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt."*

He set a trap for Jesus—but in the end, he's the one caught and exposed

Both the woman, a sinner and Simon, a Pharisee are in debt and neither can pay the debt owed
Yet, the creditor forgives them both!

We recognize that the creditor is Jesus and he forgives both the woman and Simon!

The woman for her many sins

Simon for his rudeness to his guest

Jesus responds in grace and freely forgives everyone, no matter the offense

By responding with grace and forgiveness, Jesus welcomes the woman, receiving her gratitude and love

He tells her that her sins were forgiven, then says, *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

It was not her bold acts of gratitude and love that changed her life

It was the simple trust and acceptance of Jesus' forgiveness—given freely to her

We have all fallen short of God's goodness—either in committing sins or in our refusal to be gracious

Yet, God does not hold those against us in judgment of our shortcomings and failures

Like the two debtors in the parable—none of us can pay the debt—we can't fix it

Nor can we muster up the ability to be consistently good

Inevitably, we let others down and do or say things we regret

But Jesus' response to that is this incredible gift of forgiveness

It is there for all of us—no matter who we are or what we have done

Grace comes all the way to us and welcomes us into the Kingdom of God

Every one of us!