

Women in the Gospels

Seeing Jesus from their perspective.

October 29, 2024

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The woman with the alabaster jar and the woman caught in adultery

Introduction

We again are telling the stories of two nameless women—we don't know their names, but we do know that they both had led or were still leading a sinful lifestyle when they met Jesus. And their sin was known to all. They were women "of the night" we might say or "women with a past."

But then—they met Jesus.

The woman with the alabaster flask

There is a story of a woman with an alabaster box or jar in all four Gospels. Are they all telling the same story about the same woman? No, there are significant differences.

The event recorded in Luke 7 and that recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and John 12 are different events, and the context of each account makes the differences clear. Here are the notable differences:

- In Luke's account, Jesus enters the home of a Pharisee named Simon. In Matt/Mark/John, the scene takes place in the home of a leper named Simon. These two Simon's must be different men.
- In Luke, the scene takes place somewhere near Nain, in the Galilee. In Matt/Mark/John, the scene takes place in Bethany near Jerusalem.
- In Luke, the dinner is attended by unbelievers. In Matt/Mark/John, the dinner is attended by Jesus' disciples, Lazarus, Martha and Mary.
- In Luke, the woman is called a sinner, while the woman in Matt/Mark/John is identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.
- In Luke, the woman pours oil only on Jesus' feet, while in Matt/Mark/John the woman pours oil on both Jesus' head and feet.
- In Luke, the woman is crying and using her tears to wash Jesus' feet, but in Matt/Mark/John the woman is never said to be crying and only anoints Jesus with the perfume.

These differences make it impossible to reconcile the two accounts into a single event. Luke alone recorded an early moment in Jesus' ministry when a prostitute came to Jesus in repentance.

This is a woman that most people would have nothing to do with, an outcast.

The Plight of Prostitutes

What is your opinion of a prostitute today?

Prostitutes in Jesus' time, along with tax collectors, were considered the worst of sinners. In the Roman world, men saw it as their right to have females and slaves at their beck and call to take care of their sexual desires. Prostitutes were seen as truly worthless. Nobody cared about prostitutes beyond the services they could provide.

Jesus introduced two heretofore unheard-of shifts in that culture. First, he continually made it clear that he valued all women as individuals and gave them respect and honor. Second, he made it clear that sex was intended between one man and one woman who were married, and men were to be faithful to that one woman. Jesus' teachings started a sexual revolution in his day that was even more daring than the sexual revolution that occurred in our country in the 60's.

You can see how Satan, the great enemy of anything good, cleverly has made sexual freedom acceptable in our culture and anyone who thinks differently is considered extremely old-fashioned and truly weird. And what has that "sexual freedom" done for women?

There is "a growing body of evidence to suggest that commitment-free sex does measurable harm to women's happiness and health even when it is freely chosen. Jesus' sexual ethics truly lead to human flourishing" (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, pg. 130).

While Jesus made it clear that prostitution was wrong, he openly accepted prostitutes who looked to him for forgiveness and a new beginning. And this was revolutionary and totally unacceptable to the religious leaders of his day. Jesus told this parable to the religious leaders and it was truly scandalous to them.

Matthew 21:28 – 31:

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 29 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 'Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. 31 'Which of the two did what his father wanted?' 'The first,' they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you."

The Woman with the Alabaster Jar

Luke 7:36 – 50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 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 people 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 forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

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

"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—as her great love has shown. But whoever 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."



“At special feasts, it was common for the guests to recline and for the doors to be left open. Folks who weren’t invited could sit around the walls of the room, listen to the conversation, and perhaps get scraps of food. So, the entry of a nonofficial guest is not remarkable” (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, pg. 132).

So, Jesus is invited to a Pharisee’s home for dinner; his name was Simon. And he finds Jesus’ treatment and acceptance of this woman totally baffling and inappropriate. “From Simon’s point of view, Jesus should know that contact with this sinful woman will contaminate him morally...” (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, pg. 133).

Can you imagine the courage it took for her to come to Simon’s house, walk right up to where Jesus sat, and start washing his feet and pouring perfume on them? Why does Jesus allow her to do this?

Jesus pins Simon to the wall, so to speak, and Simon had to admit that the one who was forgiven the most would love the most. Jesus went on to say: “*Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown*” (Luke 7:47). And he tells the woman that her sins are forgiven.

Her sins have been forgiven. The most wonderful words we can ever hear—to know that our sins are forgiven. Do you know that? Have you come to Jesus to find his love and forgiveness?

The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:2 – 11

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11 “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

At dawn on the next day Jesus is teaching with crowds all around, and the Pharisees think they have found a way to get rid of him. They get this woman caught in the act of adultery and bring her to Jesus. They declare to Jesus that the Law said she must be stoned. Then they try to set him up: “Now what do you say?”

The Old Testament law stated that if a man and a woman were caught in adultery, they should both be executed:

Deuteronomy 22:22: *If a man is found sleeping with another man’s wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.*

These religious leaders didn't drag the man in, only the woman. Wonder why?

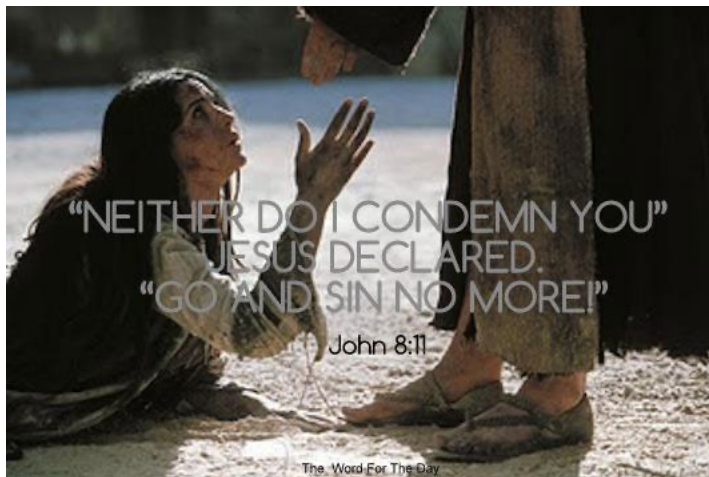


What does Jesus do? He writes with his finger on the ground. They continue to shout questions at him and he just quietly writes on the ground. What did he write? We are not told, so we can only imagine. What do you think he might have written?

Whatever he wrote, it must have been visible to those standing around. Then he stands up and says, *"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"* (John 8:7).

When all the men have left and only the woman is left standing, Jesus says, *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"* *"No one, sir,"* she said. *"Then neither do I condemn you,"* Jesus declared. *"Go now and leave your life of sin"* (John 8:11).

This is the third time Jesus has addressed someone as "woman" in this Gospel. First, it was his mother at the wedding in Cana, then it was the Samaritan woman at the well. So, this is not a term of contempt or disrespect.



This woman who thought she would be stoned this day for her sin, a debt that the Law prescribed for this sin—now she hears words she never expected: *"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."* (John 8:11)

Romans 8:1: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Instantly, in a moment, Jesus declares that she is no longer condemned. That's what Jesus did. And that's what Jesus still does. He is the only One who can do it—the only qualified Savior.

"Jesus does not minimize our guilt. He takes it from us. We talk today about forgiving ourselves and learning to love ourselves. But if that's your focus, you risk missing out on the forgiveness and the love that Jesus offers you. It's not too late for you to say you're sorry. You don't have to call him a thousand times. He welcomes you with open arms" (*Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, pg. 144).

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest."*

Matthew 11:28



References are from the book, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women* by Rebecca McLaughlin