

A Tale of Two Women (not named *Mary & Martha* or *Euodia & Syntyche*)

Bible characters teach us many great lessons- some by being role models of great faith and courage (cf. Hebrews 11), and some by being... well, to put it bluntly, negative examples (cf. 1Corinthians 10:1-13). Sometimes, the lessons are heightened by comparison of two of them. Consider **Lot's Wife** of Genesis 19 and the **Penitent Woman** of Luke 7:36-50.

Neither is named. One, in infamy, is known only by comparative association with her husband and her own personal failure(s), cp. Luke 17:32 and 2Peter 2:7-8. The other, though remarkable in so many ways, is forever memorialized anonymously. Though some say she is "*Mary*" of John 12:3, it cannot be so because: John 12:3 was in *Bethany* shortly before Jesus' crucifixion, whereas this is apparently much earlier in Galilee, Luke 7:1ff; the *Mary* of John 12:2-3 is a *righteous* woman, whereas this woman was evidently a well-known *sinner*, Luke 7:37,39; the feast in Bethany was at the home of a *leper*, Mark 14:3, which seems not to fit at all with the *Pharisee* of Luke 7:36. The point is that to be exemplary, either positively or negatively, having or becoming a famous name is not required, cp. Mark 14:8-9.

Neither one spoke any recorded words. Why is this important? Perhaps it isn't, but we often fail to appreciate examples of those who *acted* negatively without explanation or any self-justification, or positively without trumpeting their own penitent deeds, cf. Matthew 6:2; James 3:13; 1Peter 3:1. Our *example* is much more important than what we say, cf. James 1:26-27; 3:13. There are no recorded words of Abel, but the Word says of him "*though he is dead, he still speaks,*" Hebrews 11:4. What do our lives say about us? What will they say about us long after we're gone?

One had one sin; the other had many sins. Though not specified along with her husband in 2Peter 2:7-8 as being *righteous*, or even *tormented* with the *lawless deeds* of their neighbors- perhaps for the reasons we suspect, only *one sin* is actually charged against Lot's wife, Genesis 19:26; Luke 17:31-32. But *one* was enough not only to condemn her, but also to relegate her forever to spiritual infamy. By remarkable contrast, the woman at the feast in Galilee was apparently well known for her *many sins*, Luke 7:37,39,47. One sin can definitely change our eternal destiny- especially when indicates a *friendship* and a *longing to be with the world,*" cf. James 4:4; but even many sins can be forgiven, cf. Luke 23:40-43. Will *one sin* ruin your destiny? You can be forgiven and overcome even *many sins*, if you will but come *in faith* to Jesus!

Both apparently had one chance to be saved. Lot's wife was given the same opportunity of salvation as her husband and daughters- yet they were spared and she was lost, Genesis 19:12-17,24-26. By contrast, it is *possible* that the penitent woman had heard and seen Jesus previously to the occasion recorded in Luke 7:36-50, but if such was the case, it is not recorded. What is documented is her taking advantage of the opportunity given her in this instance, cf. v.37. At such a gathering, women- especially a notoriously *sinful* one, would not have been invited to sit *at table* with the men. Instead, she probably stood near the wall, apparently close to where Jesus' feet extended away from the table as He reclined. If not, then she positioned herself close enough that her tears fell on His feet. Likely noting that He did not shoo her away, she further knelt to wipe them clean with her hair and anoint them with the perfume she brought. These specifics of her actions, however, are not really the point just now. Instead, it was that she took the opportunity afforded her by Jesus to come to Him and manifest not only her sorrow for sin, but also her knowledge of and love for Him. This *faith*, said Jesus, *saved her*, v.50. Whether *one* or *many sins* are tallied against us, what are we doing with our opportunity to be saved?

Both had regrets- one for her future, and one for her past. Lot's wife had *repentance with regret* for what she was required to *leave behind*. She couldn't imagine her future without her past, and longing *looked back*, Genesis 19:17,26. The penitent woman also had regret regarding her past, but in a very different way. Her regret was not for what she *left behind*, but for **how much of it** there was to leave! What kind of "repentance" do we have? With longing *regret* for what we leave behind, or only that there is *so much of our past* to leave, cf. 2Corinthians 7:9-10?

There is much to be learned from both of these women! Whether our names ever become well known or not, what is important is that they are recorded in the Book of life, cf. Luke 10:20; Revelation 21:27. Whether our words are recorded and memorialize or not, our *deeds* determine our destiny, 2Corinthians 5:10. And, whether we have *one sin* or *many*, what is important is how we *feel* and *do* about it/them. We can *longing look back* and in hearts or ways *look and turn back*, Acts 7:39; or, we can *regret our past* but *press on to our future* in Christ, Philippians 3:12-14. Which will it be for you? (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)