

Good morning. It's kind of nice I don't have to do any short jokes this morning because they've already been done. (Laughing) Thank you, Pastor Jack. (Laughing) It will be a blessing to have him back next week, won't it? Praise the Lord. (Applause) Keep praying.

All right. So, from this malnourished pulpit that's so low to the ground, let's get into God's Word together. We're going to be in Luke 7:36-50, so we'll start at verse 36. So Luke 7 we'll look at an account together. I love the places in the gospels where Jesus has these encounters with humanity; and some of them so direct and pertinent to our day. How many of you here know this morning that you are forgiven? I see a lot of hands go up. That's great. Hopefully, by the end of today, you'll all know with great assurance that Jesus has forgiveness for all of us and that His forgiveness flows so faithfully from His heart and the finished work - as we already sang this morning, the finished work on the cross.

But this morning we have this encounter that Jesus had with a woman, and we're not introduced to her just yet, right at the beginning. But Jesus is ministering in the Galilee area, there in the northern part of Israel, and He has been healing folks and ministering and speaking the truth of the gospel. And, in the course of that, this Pharisee named Simon approaches Him and says, "Rabbi, would You come and have dinner at my house?" Kind of an interesting request - coming from a Pharisee. A lot of them really didn't appreciate Jesus' ministry at all. But this Pharisee wanted to know more, wanted to get closer, so he kind of steps out and invites Jesus over for dinner. And, as I've mentioned before, in this day and age - in Jesus' time - when you broke bread with somebody, when you shared a meal with someone, the belief was you literally became part of one another. So it wasn't just a casual thing of, "Hey, let's go get a burger together." This was, "Let's share a meal. Let's come together at table." And Simon, this Pharisee, wanted to hear more about what was going on, what the Lord had to say and all of these miracles that he'd heard reported.

So Jesus goes, and that brings us right there at verse 36. Let's read the first three verses there together, where we see the immediate encounter that Jesus finds Himself in. Verse 36, "Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him.

And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner," (can you imagine being labeled that way - that's who you're known as, this woman who is a sinner) "when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil." So right off the bat we get this intriguing story of what's been going on. First of all, Jesus accepts the invitation to go to the Pharisee's house. (We'll learn later that his name is Simon - Jesus will address him as such). And they go into the house, and you need to get the picture here. The way things worked in those days is that the tables were low, probably around 18" or so off the ground. And they would have all kinds - and very often in a u-shape, maybe; so a table about this wide (approximately 2 feet), around the corner, that kind of thing - of pillows stacked there by the table. And what you would do is you would come, and you would literally lay down, recline, and lean on a pillow on your left elbow, with your feet kind of sticking out behind you, and then you would eat with your right hand and be able to have conversation around the table that way. So you kind of get the picture of the position that Jesus was in. Right? He's leaning, His feet are kind of off, away from the table, and they're having conversation. And, in the middle of all of this, this woman slips into the room and stands in the corner where Jesus' feet were extended into the room, away from the table.

Now, as I mentioned, this woman is identified here as a sinner. We don't know what her sin was, although we get the impression - because it's mentioned in its severity - that she may well have been a woman of the streets, a prostitute. Yet her faith propels her forward. Now, why? Why would she even enter into this kind of a situation? If she's known as a sinner, and she has that reputation, why even go? Well, shortly before this, as Jesus was there in the Galilee area, He had been ministering, and one of the things that Jesus had said (and we find it in Matthew 11:28-30) - He said this to all that were listening, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." We don't know that the woman heard this or not, but she certainly knew of Jesus because it says that when she knew that Jesus was there, when she heard that He was at this house, she took the chance to go into this place where she knew at any second she might have been rejected. She might have been....."Hey, what are you doing here, woman? Out! Stay out!"

And even, once she comes and kind of slips into the dark corner there - unnoticed possibly - or maybe some looked up and go, "Oh, what is she doing there?" and she's standing there at Jesus' feet and begins this action that we'll talk about in a second, even Jesus Himself could have glanced over His shoulder and just with one wave of His hand she'd have been rejected. That would have been it. Do you see the incredible chance, risk that this woman took to even come into this environment? Let alone what happened.

And did you notice this woman speaks incredible things in these two verses but doesn't say a single word. It's an amazing and beautiful picture. First of all, she comes in faith, right? She came to Jesus, and she stood there at His feet. It had to have been her faith that drove her there. There wouldn't be any other reason for her to be in that environment and to possibly be exposed to that kind of ridicule. So, in her heart, she thought, "He was talking about His burden being light. He was talking about those that were weary and heavy laden, that we could come to Him. I'm going to give it a try. I've got to! It really is my last and only hope." So, in faith she comes, and she stands there at Jesus' feet. So she speaks words of faith just by her being there.

She speaks words of confession. As she's standing there, all of a sudden her whole life and everything that she's gone through, and all of the sin that she knows is there in her heart, just begin to well up, and she begins to cry. It's uncontrollable. She can't help it. The tears just start flowing. That's her confession. Her tears and her weeping - she's saying with those, "I acknowledge that I'm a sinner. I acknowledge that I don't even deserve to be here." She admitted all of her offenses just by those simple tears that fell from her face. And as she's weeping and standing there, trying to be as quiet as possible, she looks down, and, "Oh, goodness, what has just happened?" Her tears have literally fallen onto Jesus' feet, Jesus' dirty, dusty feet. And those tears now have formed little rivulets of clean onto Jesus' feet. And she can't help it. She is beside herself. She's literally washing His feet with her tears. What an act of repentance. What a statement of, "Oh, Lord, I want so for it to be different." And then she leans down, in that act of contrition and repentance, and I'm sure in that moment, "Oh, goodness, what do I do?! I've just pretty much defiled Jesus' feet here with my sinful tears." And all she can think of is to bend down there at Jesus' feet and to have her hair - maybe loose already - just begin to wipe His feet down with her hair. Repentance.

But she also speaks dedication and commitment, and that was spoken even before she entered the room because she walks in, as it says, with an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, that very expensive kind of oil - could have been spikenard - that women so often would have and keep. It might have been her dowry. We know later on that Judas mentions that a flask like this is worth a year's wages. Put that in modern terms. Just an average salary for a person - that could be anywhere from 40-60-70 thousand dollars' worth. That's amazing. And she walked in with it with the full intent that she was going to break that open and use it that day. What a statement of dedication and commitment! If Jesus would accept her, she was going to leave her sinful life, and, with all that she hoped for in herself, she poured out onto Jesus' feet pretty much her future, pretty much everything she had ever hoped for for herself. Because she realized that the path that she had walked on to this point was not getting her anywhere and was not going to get her anywhere. She would get no further. She needed to have a change now.

Isn't that an amazing picture? Faith, confession, repentance, dedication and commitment without saying a word - just quietly there in the corner. Jesus noticing every single moment. Didn't miss a thing.

Well, that's not how the rest of them viewed it. Look at here, verse 39, "Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself," (so he's saying within his own mind) "saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'" "I had invited this Jesus to my house. I wanted to hear more. We're having conversation. Suddenly this woman walks in and interrupts, and He's allowing her to literally touch Him?! I had heard that He's a Prophet. I'd heard that He's a great Teacher. There's evidence of His healing. But, my goodness, if He doesn't even know what this woman is and what manner of her sin, He can't possibly be a Prophet." All this stuff is going through Simon's mind.

Look at verse 40, "And Jesus answered and said to him." What is Jesus answering? His thoughts. That's a little unnerving to me. You're sitting there thinking something, and all of a sudden Jesus is answering what you're thinking. Maybe at that point Simon might have thought, "Oh, maybe He is a Prophet. He can discern my very thoughts." And look at what Jesus does. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon,' " (I love this) " 'I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.' " "Oh, this is good. Okay. I'm going to hear from the Rabbi. I'm going to hear from Jesus, this well-known Teacher." And he might have gotten snippets of His

teaching here and there, little bits and pieces of the things that Jesus had shared along the way. But now he's going to get it straight from the Teacher Himself. "I have something to say to you, Simon." Now, I love this because this would be a great point. I think if you or I were sitting there, this would be the rebuke. Right? That finger would come out and go, "Simon, do you have any idea what's going on here?" But Jesus isn't that way.

And instead of rebuking Simon, which He had every right to do at this point, He tells a parable. He gets Simon to think, to look deep inside. And look at the situation that's going on here. Here's what Jesus says in verse 41, " 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay,' " (so neither of them could repay) " 'he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.' " So here's this conversation. Simon's thinking, "Oh, this woman. What is she doing? And Jesus, how ignorant He is." And Jesus answers his thoughts with this story. Do you see what Jesus did here in just these two little verses, very quick little story? "A certain man had two debtors." Two debtors. What did Jesus just do? He just put Simon and this woman on the same level, didn't He? "Now, one owed five hundred, the other fifty. So one had a great debt that he couldn't repay; the other a smaller debt that he couldn't repay either. But they were both forgiven by the man. He forgave both of them the debt. And which of those two do you think would be more grateful?" "Well," Simon says, "the one that owed more would naturally be more grateful." They had both sinned - Simon and the woman. He hadn't figured it out yet. You see, the woman's sin was an obvious one because it was a sin of the flesh; something she had done in her life. Like I said, more than likely ill repute, a woman of the streets - looked upon with great disdain, certainly, by the religious leaders of the day. Her sin was obvious; it was a sin of the flesh. But Simon's sin was a sin of the spirit because it was his pride. He assumed he had it all together. He assumed that his own self-righteousness was going to get him into heaven; and, as a Pharisee, he certainly believed in heaven - that there was a life after this one and that God would take him into that place called Paradise. He had it all together. But in 2 Corinthians 7:1 it says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Jesus is saying, "Simon, both of you need forgiveness as much as the other. Catch that, oh Pharisee, oh religious leader." Forgiveness is a gift, and it's a gift of God's grace. As He pointed out here, neither of them have anything to

repay this debt; neither of them could somehow ease the pain of this. It's God's grace that brings that forgiveness. Jesus, again as we sang this morning, paid the price for that sin. Ephesians 1:7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Oh, praise God for His forgiveness. Every single one of us sitting here today had no ability in and of ourselves to forgive, to be forgiven, to somehow wash our own sins away, to somehow get good enough to where we could now stand in righteousness before God and say, "You need to let me in because I've taken care of it." Not a single one of us. We were as desperate as the one owing five hundred or fifty. It didn't matter. And that was Jesus' point. It's not about the amount of the sin in a person's life. It's the awareness of that sin in their heart that makes a difference. This woman realized her sin. It caused her to weep, it caused her to do very embarrassing and very risky things - by washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair and then anointing those feet with this fragrant oil which, in an instant, would have filled the entire house. Everyone knew. "Hey, what just happened there? What is that smell? Oh, goodness, it's wonderful!" She had just anointed Jesus' feet. Neither of them could pay the debt. Jesus had done it. But like I said, the woman could clearly see; Simon could not.

Verse 44, "Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon." Now I want you to get that picture before we go on. Jesus is on His elbow, His feet are out there, the woman's there at His feet - now kneeling there at His feet - washing them, wiping them with her hair. He's having a conversation with Simon, here. He gives the parable. But now He looks at the woman, but He's saying to Simon. He looks right into her eyes. He continues to speak to Simon. He wants him to learn the lesson, but He wants her to see His eyes. He wants her to see the compassion and the forgiveness and the love that's there as He speaks these next things. Let's read it together. "Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?' " Now, in that moment, she might have thought, "Oh, here it comes. Here's the rebuke. Here's the 'Oh, I'm so terrible.' " What does He say? " 'I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you,' " (see, again, still saying to Simon) " 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' " Wow! What a moment. Only Jesus could do this, right? He's rebuking Simon left and right. I love this. As He's, speaking to him, looking to her

(there behind Him), "Simon, I was your guest. You didn't wash My feet, you didn't show Me affection - give Me that kiss of fellowship" (that was culturally-acceptable then), "you didn't even anoint My head with oil. You've got a pretty nice house here. I assume you're quite a wealthy man. I'm sure you could have afforded it. And yet this woman has just given everything she has. All of the hope that she has for her future, financially, just got poured over My feet." He rebukes Simon and yet the love that He's given this woman. And then He says, "Therefore I say to you, her sins," (as He's looking at her, saying, "Your sins, even though they're many, woman, they're forgiven because you have loved this much"). Jesus recognized the risk that she took, and He was absolutely willing to give her everything that she possibly asked for.

You see, the woman was guilty of the sin of commission. Simon was guilty of the sin of omission. Everything that he hadn't done, she did. Jesus commends her in every way. Just a bit of a hypocrite if you think about it - old Simon - wasn't he? A lot like that family that had just been in church and they had heard that message on lifestyle evangelism: you need to bring it to your neighborhood. And they thought, "You know, we need to invite our neighbors to come and have dinner with us this next Friday night." So they go and do that, and they invite them in. And they're sitting there at dinner, and of course the mom really wants to show them that this is a Christian home, and these are where we all love Jesus. And so they said, "We're going to say a blessing before the meal," and she looks over at her little son and says, "Johnny, will you say grace? Will you say the blessing for the meal?" And he kind of looks down, and he goes, "Well, I don't know what to say." And then after that awkward pause as it's just silent, the mom reassures him and says, "Well, honey, you can just say what daddy said this morning at breakfast." And very obediently, he bows his head, and he goes, "Oh, God. We've got those awful people coming to dinner tonight!" (Laughing) I'm sure Simon had been saying that all along - as that woman standing there and now kneeling in the corner. What do you do with that?

Well this woman now has an assurance in her heart because Jesus has just said her sins are forgiven. Now, we must not ever make the mistake to conclude that this woman here is saved by her tears and her gift. Because that's not it at all. Jesus made it very clear, as He will in a few statements from now, that it was her faith alone that had saved her. Right? Paul said it in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." By grace you have been saved. Grace comes

first. When we realize that grace that God has given us, that unmerited favor we have, a way into heaven because of the finished work of Jesus, then it is by belief in that, by our faith, that we are then saved. This woman came in faith. Like I said already a number of times, she took an immense risk. But she believed that if she would get acceptance from Jesus, then nothing would ever be the same from this point on. She knew it. And she was so sure of it, she was willing to pour the rest of her life and the rest of her future right onto His feet and fill the place with the fragrance of all of it.

Verse 48. Now Jesus is saying to the woman (not to Simon - directly to her), " 'Your sins are forgiven.' And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Then He said to the woman," (notice He doesn't even address their issue) " 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.' " Jesus didn't reject her tears or the gift of ointment because they were works that were evidence of her faith. You see, sometimes we can get a little hung up on that. "Oh, it's gotta be by faith." So what do we do? "Make sure you stand with your hands behind your back, 'I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe. I don't want to have to do anything.' " No. Not at all. This woman demonstrated her faith through the things that she did. And like I said earlier, without speaking a word Jesus understood everything that she was saying from the depths of her heart - recognizing her sin, wanting forgiveness, repenting of those sins, and giving and committing her life to Jesus right then and there, in that moment. That's why. Because, as James says, "Faith without works" is what? "dead." I'll try it again. "Faith without works is" (congregation says "dead"). Ah, you got it. Is dead. "You say that you have works. Well, I have faith." But James, in turn, says, "I'll show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). It's one thing for us to say we believe in God, but does the world see it? Do they have evidence of it around them everywhere they look, in our lives? Or, as I've heard it put - I think it was Greg Laurie I first heard this from, "If you were brought to court, convicted of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence against you to convict you?" That's something to think about, isn't it? Is there that evidence in our lives as it was for this woman?

Jesus forgave her. And this went, at this point - remember, against the sacrificial system. "Wait a minute. She hasn't brought a lamb to the Temple and done the burnt offering and the offering of repentance, forgiveness. She hasn't gone through all the right steps. And yet He's sitting here going, 'You're forgiven.' How can He do that?!" Well, what was Jesus saying in that statement - without saying

it? "Well, that's because I'm God! This is the Son of God sitting here in front of you. He is able to forgive sin. Absolutely is. And not only able to forgive but to be able to say, 'Your faith has saved you, woman. You can go from this place now into absolute faith and peace.'" How do we know that our sins are forgiven? God says it over and over in His Word. I love Isaiah 1:18, " 'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.' " You know, in the beginning of that verse, it's like God is inviting us to present our case. "Come now, let us reason together you and I. But bring your case to Me. Everything you're feeling, everything you're going through. And you, as an unsaved and unregenerate heart, bring all of that to Me, all of your complaints. All of that. But just before you start your case, let Me give you My side. Though your sins were as scarlet, they'll be white as snow. And though they were red as crimson, they'll be like wool. So, now, go ahead. Say what you were going to say again." Oh, Lord. Your forgiveness is amazing. Ephesians 4:32 also says that we are to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." So Jesus was claiming, here, to be God, but these words of forgiveness don't come cheap, do they? For Jesus to just say, "Your sins are forgiven," He, in that instant, is mindful of the fact of what was coming down the road for Him as our Savior. He still had to go to the cross. He still had to torturously be hung there and give His life and suffer for us as a ransom for all, for those that would believe and look on Him in faith. And the woman was able to go - where it says there, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace," it literally means "go into peace." In other words, "Begin to walk now into this peace that I have for you." She was saved not by her actions but by faith.

But even once that happened, she still needed to accept it. Right? That's the last step that she needed to take. She needed to accept Jesus at His word. "You told me I'm forgiven. I'm going to walk in that forgiveness. You say that I am saved now because of my faith and that I can go in peace, then I'm going to go in peace. I'm not going to go back to that old life. I'm not going to rely on it in any way. I'm going to now walk forward." And she may well have become one of those women that hung out with Jesus from that point on; may well have become a disciple. But we know that her life was changed for good because she did indeed accept it. It has to be accepted.

I'll close with this. In 1830, George Wilson was convicted of mail theft. You know what the punishment for it was? Hanging. So, yeah. People that take stuff out of

mailboxes? Let's see if we bring that back. (Laughing) Yeah, I know. Anyway, he had been convicted, and the punishment was hanging. President Andrew Jackson had pardoned him of this offense, but he refused it. Now it confused all the people consulted at that point - the Chief Justice who was Marshall at the time. And Marshall says this, "Pardon is a slip of paper, the value of which is determined by the acceptance of the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, then it is not a pardon at all. George Wilson must be hanged." And that was the decision. Why? Because he simply did not accept that free gift that had been given.

The woman went in peace because she had accepted from the hand of Jesus this immense forgiveness, and her life was never the same. So, you guys sure that you're forgiven? Isn't it an incredible place to be, that forgiving flow that is constant, that is always there? Let's walk in it, brothers and sisters, because far too often we still let the world, our own flesh, the enemy, just lie us right into thinking that, "Oh, we're condemned again." No! Jesus looks us in the face while He rebukes those that don't know they're sinners and says, "You've done everything that I've asked you to do and more. You've blessed Me with your worship, you've blessed Me with your fellowship, with your time of prayer. Those times when you acknowledge Me in the middle of your day, when it becomes almost like a natural next step to take to say, 'Oh, Lord, thank You for what just happened.' " Or, as we were on our way here this morning, with just a gnarly massive wreck on the side of the freeway there, I just found myself praying for the first responders. "Lord, be with those guys. Help them through. Anyone that's injured, watch over them, Lord God." You know how much that blesses the heart of our Savior, when we come and we act in faith in those things? That's walking in forgiveness, isn't it? That's walking in the grace that God has given us. And I would advise every single one of us - walk in that today. Amen?

Lord, thank You for this precious, precious time in Your Word and especially this account. Lord, this woman - that moment she decided to walk into this room - had no idea that this account would be written down by Luke and would stretch out into the eons the account and the truth of what she experienced, and her willingness - being driven by desperation - to act in faith - could be an example for all of us. And, Lord, maybe at this moment it's good for all of us to take a moment and, in confession, like the woman, stand for a moment at Your feet, there before our righteous and holy Savior, full of love and compassion and grace, willing to forgive. And may we find our own sin just welling up within us to where we just need to confess and repent and rededicate ourselves to You in every way, Lord Jesus. May

we do that in this moment, even as we're sitting here this morning. If there's anything in your life that is hindering your walk with the Lord, bring it before Him even now. He's there to forgive. He is there to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. He is there to say, "Not only are your sins forgiven, but your faith saves you, and you, too, can go in peace." That certainly applies to anyone here this morning that has never, ever committed their lives to Christ. Maybe you're like this woman in the sense that you recognize your sins, but you've never brought them before Jesus and before the cross. I want to let you know this morning you can be forgiven if you will simply believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins, that He rose from the dead, that He ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father - interceding for all those who believe, all those that have been forgiven by His precious blood. That can be you. Just open up your heart, and surrender to Him this morning. And if you've done that, I would encourage you to come up and pray with one of our pastors or elders here that are up front. Let them know that decision that you've made. And even beyond that, for brothers and sisters in Christ, if you need to rededicate your life, maybe you need to break open a flask of oil and pour it out before the Lord to say, "Everything I've hung onto of myself and of this world I'm letting go of now. I'm pouring it at Jesus' feet. I'm trusting Him for the rest." Just pray that within your heart. Know that the Lord hears, and He does indeed forgive. You, too, can come up and get some prayer. Have the guys share some verses with you. May we go from this place as this woman did - into absolute, unwavering peace of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. It's in His name we pray. Amen. Let's all stand.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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