

“His Mercy is More” Luke 7:41-50 Wilson Van Hooser 7/18/21

So, if you would, open your Bibles to Luke 7:36-50. What we’re going to be looking at today is frankly what I think one of the most amazing texts in all of the Bible. There is a picture of Jesus here that you can’t make up. You could not imagine this, if we were going to sit in this room and come up with a religion on our way, we would never come up with this type of a Savior. That’s what makes it good news. This view of Jesus here is what makes good news, good news, and wherever you are, or whatever you’re going through right now, you’re going to see a Jesus who you can bring everything to. Luke 7:36-50.

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

⁴¹ “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” ⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.””

Let’s pray. Our holy Father, we ask that you would please send the Spirit and help, because we are seeking to see Jesus, but we know as our Lord, Himself, said, is that oftentimes when the word is proclaimed, the evil one lies close at hand to take away those seeds and the world seeks to choke out those seeds so that we would no longer care for your word and oftentimes we might leave here and we might experience suffering and might walk away from your word, but we’re asking for the good seed and the good soil, we’re asking that we would bear fruit. So, Father help us, Holy Spirit help us, to hear and oh Lord Jesus, as we see You and all of Your glory and Your beauty, Your majesty, may we walk away from here and may we say there is no one like Jesus, and it’s in your name we pray, Amen.

I remember after my freshman year of college down at Tulane, if you know anything about the deep south, those deep southern dynamics where it’s all about making sure you keep up the good image, a good reputation, you try not to be too bad because you grew up in the church, so you want to make sure you’re put together. Well, Montgomery, Alabama, is a lot different from New Orleans. They don’t care. It’s the exact opposite. My freshman year, even

though I grew up in the church, even though I grew up in the PCA church and seemed like I had a good image, I was not a believer. So, when I went down to New Orleans, well, I lived the New Orleans way of life. I was out on the town living in the hook-up culture, experiencing alcohol and drugs and everything else, and I remember after my freshman year, I had such a burden on my conscience, I knew that I needed to talk to someone. So, I decided to reach out to an area youth pastor. Unfortunately, for whatever reason I did not reach out to my own youth pastor, he would have been great for this, but I reached out to someone else so I went to go talk to him and we were in the parking lot and you know those moments when you have something burdening your conscience, but you're really just trying to do a lot of small talk until you get to the point where you have to tell them, right? So, here comes the moment, and so, I tell him something that I've really been struggling with and that no one else knew, but I knew I just had to tell him. Here's how he responded, he said, "You did, what?" and then he proceeded to leave.

Maybe something like that has happened to you. Maybe someone like me, maybe a pastor has done that to you. But for all of our shortcomings, for all of our sin, Jesus is not like that. We so often fail, and even we who proclaim the gospel and minister the gospel, we still so often fail, but Jesus never fails and here is the picture that we see of Him. I remember another moment in my life when I was really struggling with shame and I remember there was a song that I've heard. Maybe you've sung it before, or heard it before, it's from Matt Papa and Matt Boswell and the song is called, "His Mercy is More," and the constant refrain of the song which I do think they are getting from this, it says, "Our sins they are many, His mercy is more." That is the main point of this text. So, let's look at it.

If you've got a Bible open, keep it open, because who cares what I say, it's just a matter if this says it. So, look at verse 36. It says, "³⁶One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table." Now that's actually already an amazing statement because Jesus never says no to an invitation, even from a Pharisee. Well, let me give you a little bit of context. What is a Pharisee? You probably know a little bit about a Pharisee, but if you don't that's totally fine. Basically, here is a Pharisee. A Pharisee was Jewish sect, a Jewish party that was formed to make sure the Jewish people would not be worldly, as the Roman Empire was in control. How were they going to do it? Here is how they were going to do it, they added on hundreds and hundreds of laws to make sure that all of our little boys and girls are going to be good little boys and girls, just like in Montgomery, Alabama, right? It's all about making sure we can enact all of these rules and then if you obey those rules, we'll be fine. They were very strict, overly strict, and because of their strictness, they lost sight of God.

Now what's interesting here is that we need to remember that, because this woman, as we'll talk about soon, she is everything that they stood against. She is everything that went against their efforts. Look at verse 37, here we meet her, "And behold." Now, that word for behold is awesome. You might look at it, and be like, 'That's weird,' it's just behold. But actually, this is what that word means, when it says, 'Behold,' it literally means stop everything that you are doing and pay attention to what's about to happen because it's about to go down. Okay? Something strange is about to happen, and you need to be asking that question, whenever you read it in the Bible, what am I supposed to behold?

Here it is: "a woman of the city." Most likely, this woman was a prostitute. According to every scholar, they are almost positive that this woman is a prostitute. Remember, she is everything that the Pharisees were against. What's interesting is that it says, doubly, a woman of the city, but not just that, 'who was a sinner.' Now, let me just ask you a question: why do you need to add that second part? I mean, look, we all know, she's a sinner. Luke, why would you

also add that? There's a point here, it's giving emphasis. She is not merely a sinner, she is *the* sinner of the town, and we can see that when Simon says below when he's questioning who Jesus is, he says, 'Look, if Jesus really was a prophet, he would know that this woman is a sinner.' She's probably the person in Tulsa or maybe even in this room that when you think about who is a sinner, you would say, 'Her.' 'Him.' That's this woman. She is the epitome of what a sinner is, but it's not just that she was a sinner, under Jewish law she would also be considered unclean. Whenever someone who was unclean would touch someone who was clean, they would contaminate the person who was clean. But also this, in that context, this is just what happened in their context, whenever they would have dinner, the men would eat in one room and the women would eat in another room, and you wouldn't cross over. So, this woman is about to break a lot of rules here, okay?

Now look at it: ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet," remember Jesus, whenever He would eat He wouldn't pull up a chair to a table, knees underneath, He would be reclining, He would be leaning in, He would be laying down with His elbow on the table and another arm to eat, and so, His legs would be going out from the table and that's where she would be standing. That's important as you watch His posture. She begins to weep. You know sometimes when we feel bad about sin, what do we do? We try to squeeze really hard like we're actors or actresses and we're trying to fake cry. Let me muster up a tear or two to make it look real. This word for weeping is different. It's actually the same word that is used to describe rain showers.

During this time of the year, down in New Orleans, it'll just randomly rain, like pop-up showers here and there in New Orleans, but sometimes what happens in these pop-up showers is that it rains so quick and it rains so much, and with New Orleans being below sea level that it will flood the streets and I want you to see here that something is so burdening the conscience of this woman that as she is before Jesus she doesn't have a tear or two, she is constantly, continually weeping, so much so that she could rain them upon Jesus' feet. This is a woman who knows her own sin. She leans in at Jesus' feet. It's actually really interesting, Jesus would not wear shoes like this. They didn't have Nikes back then; I don't know if y'all knew that. Sorry for the sarcasm. I just got done preaching to youth all week as well. They didn't have close toed shoes, and that's important. As a matter of fact, we actually learn in Luke 15 that the only people who would wear shoes were actually people who were rich, or part of a family who was very rich. You would often walk around barefoot, and these roads would not be these nice paved roads that we have today, you know, we often complain about pot holes but at least they're paved! They would have dirt, they would often travel by animal, you know what animals do, well, they let stuff out of their bodies, okay? You get the point. There is a reason why you would have a water bowl at the beginning of your house so that when someone would walk in, they would wash their feet, because your feet stank.

But we learn here that Simon did not offer Jesus any water. His feet would probably have been caked with mud, dirt, maybe even feces. Imagine as you're this woman, and you get that close to his feet, and you are just weeping. She also does this, this is actually super incredible. She lets her hair down. *gasp*. What's the big deal in that? Back in that day, women would wear their hair up in a bun and you would only let your hair down in the most intimate of settings between a husband and a wife. In fact, the Mishna, which was the oral law of the Pharisees, said in one portion of it that if a woman let her hair down in public, you could divorce your wife because of that. This woman is literally coming before Jesus, almost in a very symbolic way,

she's just exposing herself, she is absolutely vulnerable. She's not doing this. 'Well, Jesus, my sin is manageable. I have a couple things that I want you to fix, but I've got everything else under control.' She is at the end of herself and she is letting her hair down in front of Jesus. It's a stunning picture. She is leaning in, she is weeping, she is face to feet with Jesus. She is just wiping, cleaning, and she anoints his feet with ointment. If there's something going on here, this woman must be beginning to grasp this truth, and the truth is this: that her sins they are many, but His mercy is more.

What's amazing is that the story doesn't stop here, you have to keep going. We're almost looking at this in different stages of the events, so let's look at verse 39. Now watch this, as He's watching this, imagine the room probably gets hushed and Simon the Pharisee who had invited Him, he saw this and he's actually saying to himself, 'If this man were a prophet,' now why is he questioning the prophetic role of Jesus? Well actually, if you have a Bible you can look up a little bit in chapter 7 verses 11-17, what happens there? Here's what happens: there's a widow whose only son, remember a widow does not have a husband, a widow's only son had died, Jesus appears and what does He do? He raises the only son who was dead. He raises him from death to life. Here's how the people respond to it at the end of the section in verse 16, they say, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" After all these years, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, four hundred years of silence, God has finally sent a prophet. And not just a prophet, this is most likely *the* prophet.

They're hearing these rumors, but then all of a sudden, a prophet who is supposed to see people the way God sees them, Simon's beginning to question this because he's seeing this unclean prostitute wash Jesus' feet and He's letting her. And he's beginning to question, he's beginning to doubt, and he's saying, 'If this dude were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of a woman this is, for she is a sinner. Even our little kids in the street know who she is!' You see, actually, Simon is essentially saying, 'I see her more clearly than Jesus sees her.'

And isn't that often the way we treat each other? Well, I knew Shane when he was in high school, I know what he's *really* done, and if you really knew him the way I do... I didn't know him in high school, it's an example, but if *you* knew him the way *I* know him, then you wouldn't let him be your pastor. Amen, right? You know, if you knew Sarah the way I knew her in college, then you would actually say she shouldn't be walking through these doors! We're often doing that. We're often saying, 'Well, I see someone better than God sees them,' and we're just like Simon. You see, Simon does not realize this, he does not realize that his sins, they are many, and His mercy is more.

Jesus responds to this, look at verses 40-43. Jesus answers him. Jesus most likely as the prophet, the Holy Spirit is making this known to Him, it's making Simon's thoughts known to Him and so now, Jesus answers him, and He says, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And Simon says, "Say it, Teacher." Here's the parable: ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii," five hundred denarii would be a year's salary, "and the other fifty." Fifty would be a day's salary. But notice this, look at verse 42: ⁴² "When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both." I want you to see something here. There are two debtors. Jesus does not say this: only the five hundred denarii debtor could pay, but the 50 denarii debtor, it was manageable. No, no, no. Both people could not pay.

Do you know what one of the biggest dangers in all the world right now, for you, for me? It's that we would look at ourselves and say, 'Well I'm merely the fifty denarii debtor, so my sin is manageable. I have my sin under control. I may need a little bit of help, I may need a little bit of church, a little bit of community, a little bit of the gospel, but I really have everything else

under control. So, the things that I see on my phone whenever my spouse isn't in the room, or the things that I say about someone else, or the things that I consume, I really have that under control, I just need a little bit of help from Jesus.' We often can look either in this room or outside this community and say, 'Well, they're really the five hundred denarii debtor,' but here's the thing: even if they are the five hundred denarii debtor, you both can't pay, because the wages of sin is death. I want you to see this. You might be looking at someone's life, and they may have sinned gruesomely, and you might be looking at yourself and saying, 'I'm not really *that* bad,' or as Jerry Bridges says, you might have 'respectable' sins. The problem is you both cannot pay. That is what Simon is saying. Jesus is telling this parable, actually, it's like he's sitting in the seat of Simon, he's saying, 'Here's how you see the world, and as a matter of fact, the biggest problem is that you're downplaying your sin and when you do that, you're acting like you're not really in need of grace.'

Steve Jobs, whenever he was really sick, he was told by a doctor that he needed certain treatment, and he didn't want to take the standard way of treatment, he wanted to go this different route to see if it would work, and so he tried this different route, and the longer it went on, the worse his illness and the worse his sickness got, and then he realized, maybe this way is not working so I need to try this other way. So, when he came back to the doctor and he said, 'Can we try this other treatment?' Do you want to know what the doctor said? 'It's too late.'

Ethos Pres I want you to hear this. The worst thing you can do is ignore your sin. The worst thing you can do about your life is look at your sin and say, 'It's manageable.' It's always manageable if you always have it under control, but at some point it'll be too late. Jesus asked this question at the very end of the parable, after they have their debts cancelled, Jesus says, "Now which of them will love him more?" I love Simon's answer to this, look at this. I actually think it is kind of funny. ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose," what do you mean, you suppose? Are you kidding me? Of course, it's the 500 denarii debtor! "I suppose." Of course, it's that person! Because here's the thing: when you understand the magnitude of forgiveness, the magnitude of grace, you will respond in praise and love and thanksgiving because nothing is like that! Nothing is like forgiveness.

See, actually, the first duty of the Christian, this is a bold statement, the first duty of the Christian is to embrace God's grace. Did y'all hear that? The first duty of the Christian is to embrace God's grace. It's not to get your life in order and then come to Jesus. It's not to fix yourself up or make sure you're doing enough good deeds, and then you can embrace the grace. It is seeing the muck and the mire of your life and just everything that is messed up about you and saying, 'I believe that Jesus is my Savior and I'm going to embrace that grace.' Do you know what's amazing about that? Here's what this parable is teaching us. I love what one author, a guy named Heath Lambert says, "When you believe the forgiveness that God gives you, when you believe that forgiving grace, you will grow in the transforming grace." There's a dynamic that happens here. Jesus is saying, when the five hundred denarii debtor understands how much they have been forgiven, they will respond in loving more! Do you see how you grow in the Christian life? How you grow in what we call sanctification or holiness? You grow, you live more like Jesus the more you've understood how much you've been forgiven. That is amazing.

Jesus is teaching in this parable that when you understand that your sins they are many, His mercy is more, that you will love Him more. Jesus, now watch this, look at verse 44: "Then turning toward the woman," that is awesome. Watch this: Jesus is reclining at table, He's got His elbow down, He's eating with the other hand, His feet are going out from behind Him, here's this woman she's crying and weeping, washing His feet. Now watch this, He's been talking with

Simon, but now, He is turning toward the woman. That's actually really incredible, because people who were in the highest authority often don't take time to notice the people who are most lowly. Jesus is not someone like this. He is not someone who is so high in authority where he says, 'Oh, Callie needs some grace? Ah. Here you go. John needs some grace? Let me throw it long, but I don't really have time to really face them and see them and look at them and pour into them personally.' Jesus is *not* like that. He faces you with all of your struggles and with all of your sin, and all the things that you have done and all the things that have happened to you.

You know what's really cool? Let me nerd out with you for a second. Do you know in Hebrew, the same word for God's presence is also the same word for His face? When God is saying 'I am with you, I am Emmanuel,' He is saying, 'My face is toward you.' Jesus faces her. I love this next question. Look at it: "Do you see this woman?" Jesus. Do we see this woman!? She's the only thing that we see right now! This is literally the most awkward moment that we could possibly imagine. The last person who we thought would ever walk in this room, she's breaking so many rules! Do we see her!? This is weird. This is the only thing that we see right now. This should not be happening. We will tell this story for so many days and weeks and years after this. Do we see her!? Here's the thing: they see a project. They see a scientific experiment that, as long as they just tweak it, they'll get it right. They see problems where as long as they put enough rules on this person, then it'll make that person right. They don't see *her*.

That's often, once again, the way that we look at each other. We look at each other and we say, 'Well, that person just really needs to get their life together,' and we often just think about fixing their problem rather than pouring into them. I told my college students, whenever you see someone who's really struggling with drunkenness, yeah, we must get to that, but that's merely a symptom. Are you going to slow down and pour into *them*, because maybe if you hear what's going on in their life, you might find out the reason why they're running to drunkenness.

Jesus says, "Do you see this woman?" Now, watch this contrast. Jesus says, "I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet," whew, those feet would've stank. "You gave me no water for my feet," but what has she been doing? "She has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss," another cultural custom that would've been really rude for Jesus not to receive this, "You gave me no kiss, but from the time that I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment." You see, Jesus is saying, once again, 'Simon, you clearly don't understand this, that your sins, though they are many, my mercy is more. But she does.'

Now watch this, this is the climax, here it goes, you can't make this up y'all, you cannot make this up. Jesus then says this, verse 47, "Therefore, I tell you," now remember, one of the big things going on behind the scenes here is the question of, is Jesus a prophet? One of the things the prophets would do in the Old Testament is whenever they would speak, what would they begin their speeches with? "Thus says the Lord." But there is no 'Thus says the Lord,' here. Why? Because He is the Lord. He is saying, 'Therefore, I, in my sovereign authority, there is no higher position than anyone could ever be in. I am that person that sits on that throne. I tell you.'" Watch what He's going to tell them, look at it. 'Her sins which are small,' that's what it says, right? 'Her sins which are not that bad... which are manageable.' No. "Her sins which are many." Look, when that word says many, it means *many*. "Her sins which are many."

I don't know if you guys know this, but if you go outside and you look up in the sky there's going to be this really bright burning ball in the sky. Have y'all seen that before? Yeah, it's the sun. It's HUGE. I think it's like 93 million miles away and it is almost the most obvious thing to our five senses, that if that thing were gone, we would not exist. You cannot ignore that.

It is so massive. It is so hot. It is the thing that you feel, and especially in the summer, it will burn you like it has burned me already many times this summer. Here is the thing: that's your sin. Your sin is massive. Your sin is just burning with depravity and it is not just something you do; it is in the very core of who you are. You naturally live this out. Here is the thing: that is so obvious before the sight of God. Though we try all these different things to cover it up and mask it and put Band-Aids over it, it's there and you cannot ignore it. Jesus is saying, your sins they *are* many. They are. Even if you think you're merely the fifty denarii debtor, it is still many.

He doesn't stop there. "Her sins which are many," she might be a five hundred denarii debtor, but they *are* forgiven. Come on now! I mean, they're forgiven! Look at this! This is amazing! Let's take that same example. The sun... huge. Let me ask you a question, have we ever measured outer space? Have we ever measured outer space? God's grace is bigger than outer space. Take that as a rhyme or whatever you want. You cannot measure God's grace. As a matter of fact, I've taken this illustration from a verse in Romans 5:20 where it says, 'Where sin increased, grace super increased.' Now guys, though our sins are many, though we've done so many things in our past and we've affected so many people and people have affected us, there is just so much mess there, but God's mercy and His grace is more. When you come to Jesus, and only when you come to Jesus, they are forgiven. Notice Jesus, He doesn't say this, 'Go back and fix your past and then they'll be forgiven,' right? Jesus does not say this, 'Go back and find everyone who you've sinned against and make amends with them, and then you can be forgiven.' He doesn't even say this, 'Some of your sins can be forgiven, but you really have to make sure that you go on a long enough streak without sinning this sin again, then you can be forgiven.' He doesn't say that. He says, 'Right now, in this moment, your sins are gone from your record. They are no longer held against you. We often doubt this.

The bloodiest battle in the Iraq war was called the battle of Felucia and in this memoir by a guy named Sergeant Bellavia called "House to House," Sergeant Bellavia tells this story about when he'd been fighting in the Iraq war for a couple years and he was getting ready to go out into what eventually would be the bloodiest part and the chaplain comes up to him and says, "Sergeant Bellavia, can I pray for you?" And in that moment, he says that what he began to think about was, "I don't think God would accept me if He knew all the things that I've done, the people that I've killed, the atrocities that I've seen. I don't think He'll embrace me." But doesn't this totally overturn that?

You know what's really cool? You can't make this up. I was preaching this same text this past week in Edmond and I told that same illustration. As a matter of fact, what's so funny, that illustration came to mind right at the last second. Right before the sermon, I was like, 'Oh, that'll be good, let's put that in there.' I got a text later that day and the pastor of that church had forwarded me a text from another man and he said this: "I fought in the battle of Felucia and those are my exact thoughts that I've had for so many years and I thought there was no way, and I've struggled so much with that shame, that regret, and that guilt, and I have always questioned God's grace, and this text helped me so much." This is the gospel. This is Jesus Christ. You can't make this up.

Jesus, we can't even get to this, and this is just amazing, you could just keep going on this for so long. Jesus says, look, "he who is forgiven little, loves little." I could just speak for so long on that. Now watch this, in verse 48 He says to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Man, we don't just need to hear about forgiveness once, we need to hear it a lot, because we all forget it. Verse 50 he says to her again, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace." You see, the big theme here is this: our sins they are many, but His mercy? His mercy is more.

There is a story of a missionary who was a nurse, and they were going to go treat people who were inflicted with HIV and AIDS and they were going to draw a lot of blood and give a lot of medicine and you know, it was one of the things where they would no doubt warn them, 'Look, if you're going to draw their blood, you can't let their blood get in contact with yours.' So, they still went, knowing that the risk was worth it. And they went, and everything was fine for the first couple of days but then, inevitably, it did happen. They accidentally got someone's blood in contact with theirs, and that was a moment they had to ask... was it worth it? Was it worth it to draw near to such unclean people? It absolutely was worth it because they brought the gospel that cleanses way deeper than what anything physical could do. It's the same thing that Jesus did, but way bigger.

Jesus, being the clean one, when He comes down and comes in contact with the unclean, He doesn't become unclean, He cleanses. Jesus came down and He went to that cross, and He was treated as if He was the ultimate unclean one and He was pierced for your sins, and He took the wrath of God upon Himself so that you might always have His grace. Jesus died so that we might be able to say, 'Our sins, they *are* many, His mercy is more.' You have no other response here but this: come to Jesus. Come to Him. Stop trying to clean yourself up. Stop trying to be enough. Come to Him and He will embrace you and He will transform you. Let's pray.

Our Father, we ask that you would very graciously and mercifully not let us forget, because we so often suffer from gospel amnesia and we need to remember the gospel more and more, so keep telling us, please keep proclaiming to us, keep showing us more of who you are and what you're doing and may this church, as we sang earlier, know your mercy, may we show your mercy. Help them, help Ethos to embrace the grace and bring in great sinners who would also embrace the grace. It's in Christ's name that I pray, Amen.