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## JESUS FORGIVES A SINFUL WOMAN

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### Part 30 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 7:36-8:3 | May 30, 2010

Luke 7:36–8:3

<sup>36</sup> One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. <sup>37</sup> 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, <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

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

<sup>8:1</sup> Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup> and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

*NOTE: You can find the business discussion (annual report and update) at the end of this transcript.*

### A SINFUL WOMAN

And that leads us to the text today. So we move from business to Bible. And what we see is Jesus being really, really gracious, and two different responses. Someone who's very passionate, and some of you are. And someone who's very indifferent, as some of you are. And so if you'll turn with me to Luke 7:36 through chapter 8:3. I'll pray, and we'll see what God has for us.

Father God, thank you that you've been exceedingly generous to us individually and corporately. Thank you how you continue to just show up in big ways. I thank you that with all this good news, there's even additional good news that would be premature to tell. There's more good news, not to mention the greatest news of all, that the tomb is empty, that Jesus is alive, that sin is forgiven, that the Holy Spirit has been poured out, and that the nations are ripe for the harvest. Jesus, we ask that you would send the Holy Spirit so that we might study the Scriptures that you've inspired to be written, and that he would illuminate our understanding of them, and ignite in us a passion for you and for your kingdom, so that we might share in your joy. And we ask for this grace in Jesus' good name, Amen.

To set up the sermon today, I want you to use your imagination for a moment. Imagine a woman who lives in the Middle East, in a small town, in a very religious, highly conservative, cultural context. Imagine that she is notoriously known as a sinful woman. Maybe she's sleeping with her boyfriend, living with her boyfriend. She's the gal who gets passed around the class at school. She is committing adultery with a married man. Maybe she is married and cheating on her husband, or she's a stripper, or a porn star, or she is a prostitute, or at least just living with her boyfriend and doing him certain kinds of favors because he pays the bills, which is just another kind of prostitution arrangement. Imagine that she is well known as a notorious sinner, an unclean, defiled, degraded, disgusting, dirty gal. Imagine that she is surrounded with religious men who condemn her, and shame her, and despise her.

Now, take that woman in that context and move it back historically two thousand years. If you think it would be difficult for her today, move it back two thousand years ago when a woman couldn't vote, couldn't own property, couldn't testify in open court, was herself sometimes considered property of her father or husband. Imagine what her life is like—how damaged, and broken, and brutal it is. That's the woman that we meet in Luke 7.

## A MEAL WITH “HOLY” MEN

The story begins like this. Luke 7:36–38, “One of the Pharisees,” the religious guys, “Asked him,” that is Jesus, “To eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. 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, 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.”

Jesus had previously been invited to dine with those who were notorious sinners, thieves, perverts, drunkards, gluttons. Jesus did dine with them. These kinds of people loved Jesus, and wanted to spend time with them. Jesus never condoned their sin or participated in their sin, but the religious people condemned him nonetheless. “He’s a friend of gluttons, and sinners, and tax collectors, and whores. Who is this guy?” Jesus spends time with notorious sinners, and religious people. And the religious people invite him to have a meal as well, particularly we’re told here the Pharisees. And I didn’t anticipate this when I started Luke, but one of the major themes that keeps recurring throughout Luke is how awful religion is, and how cruel religious people are. And here we see them again, that Jesus is always the hero, and they’re always the villain. That’s how Luke tells the story under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And so the Pharisees had a scribe, and he would have been their teacher, so akin to me. He was the teacher. And then the Pharisees were the people who followed the teacher. They worked jobs, and they were devoted to their teacher, and they were very zealous, and very religious, and very moral. So it’d be as if I were a scribe, and you were the Pharisees. And one of these leading Pharisees, maybe the equivalent of an elder or deacon in their community, community group leader or coach, perhaps, invites Jesus over for a meal, a closed-door, private event in a home. We know not why—maybe to interrogate him, to find additional rocks to throw at him. And so Jesus accepts that offer.

The way the meal would have worked was this: unlike our dining, their dining table would have been lower to the ground, and it would have been surrounded with pillows, and you would lean on one arm, and you would eat. And the meal could take a long time. It was not rushed. It was about conversation and relaxation, and the men’s feet would be coming out from the table in a circle.

## AN INCONSIDERATE PHARISEE AND AN ATTENTIVE SINNER

Women did not participate in these kinds of theological discussions, were not invited to these kinds of meals. Luke tells us, “And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner.” Here’s this woman, and she’s a sinner, her reputation negatively precedes her. Most commentators believe that she was, perhaps, even a prostitute. Whatever the case was, like some of you women, she’s been with many men. She’s done things that ought not be done. Her reputation’s damaged and destroyed because she’s considered dirty and defiled. And she hears Jesus is at this man’s home, so she is going to do the unthinkable.

I need you to see her. She’s going to get an alabaster flask of perfume, and she is going to walk to the Pharisee’s house. The perverted woman is going to walk to the religious meal. She walks to the door, she walks in the house. Can you see her? I’m assuming she’s nervous, ashamed, not wanting to make eye contact, wondering what will be said or done to her or about her. She may even be shaking. She’s nervous. She walks into a room filled with men, not just men, quote, unquote, “holy” men, “devout” men, “religious” men, they all know her. They all know her reputation. She walks into their meal. She’s the only woman in the room, and she’s uninvited. And you don’t do this. You don’t walk into someone’s home. You don’t walk into their meal as an uninvited guest, as the only woman, as the quote, unquote, “unholy” woman among the holy men.

And the men would have stopped their conversation, shocked—an awkward moment. They see her coming. They smell the perfume. This is very expensive perfume. This is costly. This may have even been the perfume that she wore to entice men, or to cover the stench of their body after she was intimate with them. “She brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 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.”

She notices that Jesus’ feet are dirty, that means they had been inconsiderate and rude to Jesus. They weren’t treating him as an honored guest, as they ought. It was customary, when a guest entered your home, you would have a servant or slave to wash their feet. Curiously enough, the same thing that Jesus would do for Judas Iscariot some time later. At the very least, you’d provide a basin of water so they could cleanse their feet, and some olive oil so they could freshen up because you would walk along dirtied, muddied paths that were trodden upon by animals, so there’s feces, and garbage, and mud, and it’s gross, and you’re wearing open-toed sandals, and it’s between your toes, and it’s under your toenails, and your feet are a gross mess. And if you’re gonna lay down with your feet out, and everybody’s gonna look at your feet during a meal, it was at least honorable and considerate as a host to either have the feet washed, or to allow someone to have the means by which to wash their own.

They didn’t do that for Jesus. These people are like some of you, they’re just inconsiderate. They’re rude. Some of you are difficult spouses, not because you’re committing adultery, or beating your spouse, you’re just inconsiderate. You’re just rude. You’re not thoughtful or attentive. You’re negligent. That’s how Jesus was treated. And this woman comes in, she’s very thoughtful. She’s very attentive. She’s very considerate. She notices Jesus’ feet are dirty, and she does the unthinkable. She approaches Jesus.

## A HUMBLE, REPENTANT, GENEROUS, AND PASSIONATE WORSHIPER

Now, the Bible didn’t forbid it, but their culture and its religious traditions forbid a woman like her from touching a man like him, in any way. She gets down, perhaps on her knees, and she goes to wash Jesus’ feet. And at this moment, something happens that she was not anticipating, and that is that she is overcome with a conscious awareness of her own sinfulness. It is true for her as it is for you and me, the closer we get to Jesus, the more sinful we recognize ourselves as being.

The closer she gets to Jesus, the more she realizes, “He is holy, I’m unholy. He is without sin, I’m filled with sin. He is clean, spiritually speaking, I am unclean in the sight of God.” And she begins to weep bitterly, and some of you gals are criers. She’s a crier. It’s okay. Martin Luther rightly calls these tears “heart water.” That these tears come out of her heart. This is cleansing for her soul. This is an act of repentance. This is her publicly acknowledging before the most judgmental, shaming, condemning, self-righteous, religious men, “Yes, I’m a sinful woman, and I have deep regret for the life I have lived.”

And she just begins balling. Her eyes are filled with so many tears. They’re coming down her cheeks. There’s snot in her nose. There’s a quiver in her voice. Her make-up is coming down over her dress. There’s so much water flowing out of her eyes that it wets Jesus’ feet sufficiently to clean them. That’s a broken, humble, repentant, devastated, grieved sinner. That’s an act of repentance.

Some of you have never shed a tear for your sin. She may have never shed a tear until that moment, and she shed a tear for, perhaps, every sin. And I believe she was not anticipating that she would become so emotional. Had she anticipated becoming that emotional, she would have brought a towel. She didn’t have a towel to dry Jesus’ feet, and so instead she used her hair. She let her long hair down. Paul says elsewhere that a woman’s hair is her glory. She takes that which is glorious, and she uses it to clean Jesus’ dirty feet.

The Talmud was a Jewish commentary. It stated that a woman letting her hair down in the sight of any man other than her husband was grounds for divorce. Some rabbis taught that a woman letting her hair down in front of another man was akin to her taking her shirt off. Culturally speaking, this was unacceptable behavior. Biblically speaking, she wasn’t breaking any commandments. One commentator rightly says that her actions are passionate, but not erotic. I think that’s a most helpful distinction. Her actions are passionate, but not erotic.

She then takes this very expensive perfume that would have been used only, perhaps, to anoint someone’s head. It was not to be used on the feet because it was too costly, and she was very lavish in her worship of Jesus. And I want you to see here that she is worshipping Jesus. When she falls at his feet, when she is acknowledging her sin, when she is shedding her tears, when she is cleaning his feet, when she is anointing his feet, when she is kissing his feet, this is an act of worship.

One of the words for worship in the Bible is to fall down on your face. All right, one image of worship the Bible gives is you fall down on your face at the feet of Jesus. That’s what she’s doing. She’s worshipping Jesus passionately, humbly, publicly, repentantly, generously. She’s giving her best. She’s giving all that she has. She’s giving all that she is in love to Jesus as her Lord.

## TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

Some of you, this would make you very uncomfortable, this kind of passion and freedom. You would not be alone. The story continues, Luke 7:39–40, “Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself—” Notice he doesn’t say it out loud. Like some of you religious people, you guard your words and your actions, but God knows your heart. ““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.” And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon,”” I think he said it like that, ““I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.””

Some people need to be rebuked publicly because they have made the issue a public issue. This man, Simon, who is the host of the party, in his heart was thinking to himself, as some of you may and as religious people do, whatever their religious preference is. This is one of the many great errors of religion. There are two kinds of people: unholy people and holy people. And what he decides is, “I am in the category of holy, and this whore and Jesus, they’re in the category of unholy.” The pride, the hubris, the judgmentalism, the self-righteousness is unspeakable in this man.

Jesus says, “Simon, not only am I a prophet, I’ll prove it to you. I know your thoughts and her sins.” See, there are two categories of people: unholy and holy. In the holy category is Jesus. In the unholy category is everyone else. And Simon had himself in the wrong category. He stood back, looked at the woman and said, “She’s a sinner. If Jesus were a good man, he would know that.” Jesus says, “I am the God-man. “I know that, and you’re in the wrong category. You’re a sinner too.”

Religious people see others’ sin, not their own, are aware of others’ sin, not their own. They’re filled with pride, smugness, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, holier-than-thou-ism. Religious people tend to live in their heads, and think, and quietly criticize others who are serving Jesus. This woman is serving Jesus. She’s doing the thing that Simon should have done, and Simon didn’t serve Jesus, and he’s going to judge the way that she serves Jesus.

Some of you, tragically, you’re like that. You live in your head. You think you’re holy. You criticize others, and you don’t participate. Jesus knows your thoughts. It’s amazing, isn’t it? When you read the story, don’t think, “Yeah, I’m like that woman.” Think, “Maybe I’m like that guy.”

## THE EXTRA ZERO

The story continues, Luke 7:41–43, Jesus is now going to tell a parable, which is a story that illustrates a point. ““A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, ‘The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.’ And he said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’”

I think Jesus here, is playing with him a little bit. “Simon, you think you’re a great teacher? I’ll teach you a few things. How about we start with kindergarten spirituality? Two guys owe money. One guy owes fifty days’ wages of a common laborer. The other owes five hundred. Neither can repay, the lender forgives both. Hey Simon, A or B, which one is more excited about the forgiven debt?” “Answer: the guy with the extra zero.” “Good,

you got it right, Simon.” Jesus does this in front of the other men. This is the simplest parable you can conceive of. What’s the point? Simon thinks he’s only a little bit in debt to God, where this woman is very much in debt to God. And what Jesus says is, “But if both your debts are canceled, wouldn’t she actually be more grateful than you?”

Let me ask you this question: what do you owe God? See, every month we get a statement. It tells us what our debts are, credit card debt, housing debt, school loan debt, car payment debt, and you get a reckoning. “Oh man, I’m that far in the hole.” What if God sent you that ledger each month of reckoning and accounting? If God said, “Oh, you didn’t give, you didn’t serve, you didn’t pray, you didn’t care. You were supposed to speak to that person. The Holy Spirit convicted you, you didn’t do it. You’re supposed to love and help here. You didn’t, you were too busy. You were supposed to pay attention to that person, but you’re too busy dinking around on your phone, you didn’t even see him.” What if God took an account of all your sin—past, present, future—all your thought, word, deed, sin of commission and omission, everything you have not done? And everything you have done, you’ve done to your shame because it was ought not to be done. What if God sent you a bill every month, what would you owe God? What would your debt be? What is your debt? That’s Jesus’ point.

Some of you would say, “Well, okay, from this day forward, I’m going to live a good life,” but you’re not going to live a perfect life, and even if you do live a perfect life, all you do is not add to your debt. You don’t pay any of it off because you’ll only be doing what you’re supposed to do.

What Jesus says is, “God has come to forgive debt.” That’s what Jesus prays, “Forgive us our debts, forgive us our debts, God.” And Jesus is the means by which our debts are paid. Jesus is going to, ultimately, go to the cross. He’s gonna substitute himself, and die in our place for our sins. And it’s religious people who are going to murder him, and three days later he’s gonna come back, on a Sunday, to pay our debt to God. And see what religion tells us is how to pay our debt to God. We don’t pay our debt to God. Jesus is our God, and he pays our debt. Jesus pays our debt.

Every other religion tells you what you should do to pay your debt to God: go to purgatory and suffer, reincarnate through multiple lifetimes to suffer and pay God back, go to Mecca, do these things, give this money, whatever it might be. No. Jesus says, “Simon, you may think your debts are small, and her debts are large.” And some of you feel that way. “I’m not a big sinner, I’m a little sinner. I just have a little debt to God.” That’s enough to go to hell, because either you pay God back in hell, or God is paid back at the cross of Jesus, either way, a holy, just, good, righteous God has justice, rightly so, so that he can still be good. But in dying in our place for our sins, he proves himself to be loving, merciful, gracious, and kind. So all debts will be paid. Some of you are going to hell. Some of you are going to suffer conscious, eternal torment forever, separated from God. And for those of you who come to Jesus, your debt is canceled. That’s where Jesus says on the cross, “It is finished,” debt paid in full. Nothing left to do to have forgiveness in the sight of God.

## DO YOU EVEN SEE HER?

The story continues. Luke 7:44–46, “Then turning toward the woman—” And I need you to see this, and I need you to love this gal, and I need you to feel her pain. Simon is, perhaps, off to the side. And the woman is near Jesus, and she is weeping, and what I love is that she hasn’t said a word. She’s not even engaged with the religious people. All she cares about is Jesus, and he’s going to defend her honor, and give her dignity. And Jesus looks at her. He’s talking to Simon, but he looks at her, smiling, I think. There’s love in his eyes, affection, compassion.

He says, “Simon, do you see this woman?” And see, this is the question: do you even see her? ‘Cause when you look at people through religious eyes, you don’t see them at all. All you see is someone who is condemnable, and damnable, and shamed, just shamed. You don’t see anyone made in the image and likeness of God. You don’t see anyone who needs to learn about the love, and the grace of God. You don’t see someone whose debt can be canceled, whose life can be transformed. See, Jesus sees her in a way that Simon doesn’t, ‘cause Jesus looks at her through the lens of love, and Simon looks at her through the reality of religion. Jesus says, “Simon, do you not even see her?” ‘Cause see, Simon’s thinking in his heart, “She’s an evil, notorious sinner!” Jesus is saying, “Obviously she knows that, look at her. She doesn’t need yet another lecture on sin. She’s devastated. The Holy Spirit has broken her resistance. She can’t stop crying.” Some of you are like that. “She’s done with her life as she’s known it. She’s come to me. She needs help and a savior. Simon, do you not see this?”

See, Jesus is very stern with religious people, and very compassionate with broken sinners. And too often the church has made the mistake of being very tolerant and accommodating of religious people, and very cruel, and mean, and unloving toward those who know they’re sinners, and come into the church trying to meet Jesus, and get some help. So we want to be like Jesus. We want to contend with religious people, and invite in broken sinners. And we do that, not because we hate the religious people, but we hate what they do to the church. And those religious people need to see that they’re sinners too, and that they need the grace of God, and that they’re indebted to God, and Jesus is the hero, and they are not.

And religious people don’t even see people through the lens of compassion and hope. “Simon, do you not even see this woman? Look at her, Simon. Who cares about your house party? This woman needs a savior. Simon, do you not know who I am? Do you not know why I’m here? Do you not realize that she’s a great example?”

## A MIND-BENDING EXAMPLE

“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. You gave me no kiss,” which was a formal greeting, “But from the time 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.”

Jesus says, “Simon, she’s a worshiper, you’re not. She repents, you don’t. She serves, you won’t. She gives generously, and you don’t give at all. Simon, just ‘cause you’re a quote, unquote, ‘holy man,’ as designated by some teacher in a religious club, does not mean that you have anything to teach

her. In fact, this 'whore,' as you would call her, she should teach you some things about being humble, and repentant, and broken, and honest, and generous, and serving, and caring, and being considerate, and loving, and thankful." Can you imagine this?

This is like Jesus shows up, grabs a porn star, goes to the Dalai Lama's house for dinner, and in the middle of the meal says, "You know, Dalai Lama, you can learn a lot from this prostitute because she's closer to the kingdom than you are. You talk about compassion. There's no compassion for the unrepentant. You talk about peace. There's no peace between you and me. You lead nations astray. You don't repent. You don't have faith in me. You don't worship me. This gal, she gets it, Dalai Lama. You should pay attention to this woman. You should stop lecturing, and let her do some teaching. At least she apologizes, and changes, and wants a new life, and is honest about how far she is from God. You, you're just a deceived deceiver." It's amazing. I mean, this is mind-bending.

This is Jesus having a meal with the Pope, and bringing a stripper, and using the stripper as the example for all the cardinals of how the Pope should be. This is insane, in a good way. It's amazing.

The holy, righteous, religious men, the guys in hats who have job descriptions. Yeah, they're further from God than the repentant whore, because the distance between us and God is repentance, not good works, or morality, or spirituality, or good deeds—repentance.

This is one of the ways I know that Christianity is not a manmade religion, no one would have made this up. All the other counterfeits, that makes sense. God loves good people, doesn't like bad people. You get a white hat, they get a black hat. That's not the way this Bible tells the story. We're all whores, and Jesus is a savior. And religious people are sometimes the worst whores of all. Some of you are religious people and you'd be offended that I used the word "whore." That's your problem.

I love this. Jesus is saying, "She's a generous, humble, repentant worshiper, you're not, Simon." How about you individually? Have you ever shed a tear over your sin? Have you ever literally got down on your knees, and put your face on the ground, and shed tears, and envisioned yourself at the feet of Jesus, like this woman, repenting of who you are, and what you've done? Are you generous? This is a very generous gift of ointment. Do you serve? What have you done in response to what Jesus has done for you?

See, we need to be very careful that we see Simon judge the sinner, and then we can judge the religious guy who judges the sinner, and then all we are is another kind of religious person. "Oh, how dare you judge that woman? I'm going to judge you for judging that woman. Oh, wait a minute, I'm doing what you do." We need to be very careful as we judge Simon that we don't become Simon, or we acknowledge that there are often times that we do. There are times that I'm religious, that you're religious, that we're religious, that we're not like Jesus, that sinners don't feel attracted to us, but judged by us, not just convicted of sin, but condemned, and without hope, and without love, and without compassion, and without affection, and without invitation. And we need to learn from this woman as an example.

How many of you women, you identify with her? What you've done is disgusting. Who you've been with is grievous. And you know it. This woman serves as an example for the women, and us all, and God puts her in the Bible as a mentor, and a teacher, and a friend. How about you? What do you give? How do you serve? Where is your passion? Have you shed a tear? Are you ever on your knees? Have you repented at all?

After I preached this sermon earlier, I had a line of people come up to me and ask, "Well, if we're not saved by what we do, why should we give or serve?" The answer is love. We don't give or serve to make Jesus love us. We give and serve because he already has loved us; not to make him love us, but to respond to his love. That we would even ask, "Why should I give anything? If Jesus loves me, are we not done?" No, that's where the relationship begins.

It's like a husband and wife on a wedding day sharing vows, and the husband says, "I'll never leave you, I'll never forsake you. I'll never divorce you. I'll never betray you. I'll always take you back." And the wife says, "Great, so I don't need to do anything, and I can have an affair?" Really? That's how you heard it? Your beloved gave himself to you, and your response is, "Then I will do nothing." Then you don't love, you don't love at all. If your beloved loves you, you love them.

And the reason this woman is responding so passionately is because she's loved. She's loved by Jesus. She's loved in a way that no man has ever loved her. She's touched a lot of men, but not like this. She's had a lot of men speak of her, but not like this. She's loved, and so she is passionate, and broken, and free, and generous, and serves.

## **HER MANY SINS ARE FORGIVEN**

How about you? Some of you would say that this bothers you, it's uncomfortable. It's awkward, this woman. You wouldn't be alone. The story continues. Luke 7:47-50, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many—" Let me hammer that point. I've been in pastoral ministry long enough, and dealt with enough woman who are sexually promiscuous, and doing things that ought not be done, to know this, that most of those women have, as part of their history, contributing factors of abuse, and various kinds of horror stories.

If you took all the women who call Mars Hill Church home, all those who were abused, sexually molested, raped, things of that nature, we would still have a mega church of female victims. That's how epidemic this issue is. And there are women in this church who were porn stars, and strippers, and call girls, and shacking up with their boyfriend, and doing tricks for guys 'cause they were paying for drinks, or dinner, or rent, which is another form of prostitution, all kinds of things. And every gal that I've ever talked to: "I was abused, and I ran away from home, and ended up on the streets, and something bad happened." Or, "I was addicted to drugs, and I started doing horrible things to pay for my addiction." Underlying, underlying so many sexually sinful women's stories are contributing factors of abuse and neglect.

I don't know what is under this woman's story. Did she not have a dad? Did her dad leave, throwing her and her mother into poverty, and forcing her into prostitution to pay the bills? I don't know. Did her husband cheat on her, leave her for another woman, abandon her, betray her? I don't know. Was she an abuse victim, and not a virgin, so no man would marry her, and her way of earning a living was through sinful, sexual activity? I don't know. The Bible tells us everything we need to know, it doesn't tell us everything we want to know. When I see her in the kingdom, I want to hear the rest of the story.

Whatever sin was committed to her, and in her line of work you can assume there were many, Jesus also deals with her sin. He doesn't excuse her sin, or neglect her sin, or shift the blame for her sin. He says, "Her sins, which are many." He doesn't say, "She's had a hard life. Who are we to judge? This is an alternative lifestyle." What he says is, "She's got a lot of sin. I'm not arguing with that. The question is: what are we gonna do about it?"

And this line is amazing, "They are forgiven—for she loved much." You see, Jesus loved her much, and she loved Jesus much. That's where her life is gonna change. When you know how much Jesus loves you, and you love him back, and that's the beginning of your passionate, worshipful, generous relationship, that's where everything changes. That's why I'm concerned about some of you because you would theologically agree that you're loved and forgiven, but there's no passion for Jesus and no generosity, worship, or service. And I must ask the question, have you really met him? 'Cause when you meet him, you change.

And he looks at her, and you can see it. I can see Jesus smiling. I can see the love in his eyes. "You're forgiven." That's amazing. That's absolutely amazing. "You're forgiven." He didn't tell her to do anything. He's gonna go to the cross and do it all. "You're forgiven." That's it? Yeah. And the same is true for you, and it is for me. "He who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?' And he says to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

"I forgive you. You can leave now. These religious guys will be of no help from this point forward. Go make some new friends. Find a good community of faith to worship in."

## FAITH IN JESUS

And they begin debating because that's what religious people do. They don't help people, they stand back in judgment of those who are. They live in their head as critics. "Hmm, who can forgive sin but God alone? Yes, let's talk about that. Let's not celebrate the fact that the most notorious woman that we know, perhaps, has gotten her sins forgiven, and is worshiping God, and is gonna go live a new life. Let's not do that, let's criticize the way it happened."

To some degree, they're on the right path, and they make the wrong turn. See, psychology says, you need to forgive yourself, and others need to forgive you, and you need to forgive them, which is kind of true, but the truth is that our sin is primarily against God. The Psalmist says it this way, "Against you only, Lord God, have I sinned." We sin against God, and God needs to forgive us. Forgiving ourselves, well, that's playing God. That's back to the first lie, "be your own God. Judge yourself, forgive yourself. Save yourself," all wrong. We sin against God.

And so they're asking, how in the world can Jesus forgive sin? Only God can forgive sin. The answer is Jesus is God. He's God. There is no other major world religion whose founder says these two things, "I am God, and I forgive sin." Nobody says that. Krishna, Mohammed the pedophile, Buddha, no one. Abraham, who the Jews would look to as their father, he never said he was God and forgave sin. The Dalai Lama doesn't say, "I'm God, I forgive sin." No one says, "I'm God, I forgive sin." They all say, "I'm not God, and I'm going to tell you how you can merit righteousness, pay God back, pay off your debt, get right with God. Here's the religious list. Check all the dos and don'ts, and maybe in the end, God will declare you acceptable in his sight." Jesus says, "I'm God, you're forgiven. Go and live a new life." That's it. That's it. That's Jesus. This is amazing.

See, some of you think, all religions are the same, and all religious teachers basically teach the same thing. No, they don't. And Jesus says to this woman, "Your faith has saved you." We're still saved by faith. See, grace comes from God through Jesus' death, burial, resurrection. Salvation is a gift that we receive through Jesus, and we receive it by personal faith. That's trust. Faith, in and of itself, is worthless if it's not in the right object. Some of you will say, "But I know very devout, religious, moral, spiritual people, and they have great faith." My question is, in who or what is their faith residing? Her faith is in whom? Who's her faith in, Mars Hill? It's in Jesus! She looks at Jesus. She's consumed with Jesus. She comes to Jesus. She acknowledges her sin to Jesus. She pours herself out passionately to Jesus, and she hears from Jesus, "I forgive you." That's it. The object of her faith is Jesus, so her faith saves her because it is the receiving of Jesus and his forgiveness. I want that for all of you—to receive by faith the forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

Do you love this woman? She's amazing. Aren't you glad she's in the Bible? For those of you who are not the greatest people, your sin is well known, and your life has not been great. Isn't it great that she's in the Bible? That she's got the courage to just walk into a religious meeting like ours, and to just be broken, and honest, and weep. And if you want to cry, cry all you want, and tell Jesus you're sorry, and receive forgiveness of sins.

And for those of you who are religious, please repent of your religion, even if it's judgmentalism in your heart. You're gonna miss the grace of God, and you're gonna destroy so much of what God is doing here. You're going to drive sinners away when Jesus is trying to draw them near.

## THIS STORY IS NOT JUST HER STORY

And what I love is this story is not just her story, 8:1-3, "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and some women who had been healed of evil spirits—" or demons "and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many

others, who provided for them.” You know what? Jesus loved women. This was very unusual. It wasn’t unusual that Jesus had the twelve male leaders; his apostles, his senior leaders, the priests in the old covenant, the pastors in the new covenant, the apostles in Jesus’ ministry: all men. But what was unusual is that women would be taught, ‘cause they weren’t in teaching, not with men. Women were included in the teaching ministry of Jesus. Additionally, women were part of the traveling band of followers of Jesus, and servants of Jesus. They were vitally involved in Jesus’ ministry, though not as apostles.

Furthermore, it says that not all these women had the best story. Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven demons. A few gals had illness that was caused by demonization, but they met Jesus, and their demons were lifted, and their healing came, and their lives were changed. And I need you to trust me on this, there’s a long list of women like this at Mars Hill, sexually sinful, life out of control, demonized, suicidal, sick, healed by Jesus, delivered by Jesus, changed by Jesus, loved by Jesus, and they respond like these women do, including Joanna, the wife of Chuza of Herod’s household.

That’s a wealthy, affluent family, a prominent family. And what do they do? They provided for them. These women generously funded the ministry of Jesus. They followed him. “Jesus, we want to follow you. We want to serve. We want to help. We want to be involved. What do you need us to do? Can we tell our testimony? Can we talk about your grace in our life? Can we encourage some battered, and broken, and abused, and betrayed women? Can we invite them to hear you? Can we pray for them, and love them, and serve them? And, oh, by the way, since ministry costs money, we’re gonna pay for it, us women who otherwise would be rejected, and tossed aside, and not taught or utilized.” ‘Cause the kingdom of God has come, and the king is here, and he invites everyone to meaningful participation in his work. That’s amazing. We have guys in this church that have never given, and here everything’s getting paid for by women who had been demon possessed. That’s amazing. That’s God.

And what I love is the story continues even into our own day from this woman to these women to other women. I’m gonna share with you one testimony, and I share it with you because I’ve chosen it among many. We got a few of these. And I want you to see that God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, and by the grace of God, we want to all repent of our religion, and we want Mars Hill to be a welcoming, generous, passionate, hospitable place. We especially want it to be a place where women are welcome.

So what that means, gentlemen, we treat the ladies like Jesus treated this woman. He didn’t, in any way, transition her affection or her vulnerability toward impropriety. He loved her like a sister. Gentleman, there will be, in our midst and in your life, vulnerable women who are hurting, and broken, and they will trust you. Treat them like Jesus treated this woman. If you’re a guy who is sleeping with his girlfriend, cheating on his wife, downloading porn, going to massage parlors, hanging out at strip clubs, you are part of a culture of abuse and violence. You are part of a culture of rape, and slavery, and disease, and oppression. And if you belong to Jesus, you are to bring healing and life. You are not to bring suffering and death. And I rejoice at the way that Jesus treated this woman, and it is a glorious example of how we men are to honor and treat all women, especially those who have the worst reputations and, perhaps, are the most vulnerable.

And for you ladies, we see it is okay to be honest. It’s okay to be passionate. It’s okay to weep. It’s okay to serve Jesus. It’s okay to be honest about who you are and what Christ has done.

And this woman shares her story saying, “Dear Pastor Mark, when I was eighteen, I attended a Christian college. I won’t tell you the name. There I met a man and fell for him, a young man. He ended up taking advantage of me on the beach one night. We were both breaking rules to be there together. I’d been raised in a legalistic Baptist church. I was taught that any sexual sin before marriage requires you to marry the man you are intimate with or else you would lose favor with God.” That’s horrendous. “Even though I did not love or have any respect for him, I married him at age nineteen, scared that if I didn’t, God would not bless my life.” That’s religion.

“The first month of our marriage, he would be gone all night. I would lay in my bed alone and cry. The next year was the first time one of his friends told me he was having an affair. Later, he had rape charges pressed against him. I found out he had raped his own sister at age fifteen and had slept with a friend of mine two weeks before our wedding. I was scared to death of spending the rest of my life with him. I recently found out that he boasted about being able to do whatever he wanted because he knew I would never leave him because it would be even worse to divorce, which God hates. He was in the military, and a week before I was to give birth to our second child, he was discharged. He had problems stealing, gambling, and sexual harassment in the work environment. I moved back to my parents’ waiting for him to find a place for us to live. I realized I would rather die than go back to him. I also realized that I would rather live with the wrath of God than with him.” Thankfully, she was wrong.

“That’s about the time I started listening to Mars Hill on the Internet. Thankfully, God opened my eyes to the lies I had been taught. I’d gotten counsel from my pastor that even with all the problems, I should not leave him but only pray for change. I sought other counsel and every other elder, pastor, and man I went to, told me to leave him. I filed for divorce after he started threatening to kill me if I didn’t go back to him. When I filed for a divorce, my church gave me the black spot. No one talked to me. I would sit alone. My baby was one-week-old when I started waitressing to try to provide. I ended up working three jobs, eighty hours a week, seven days a week to pay off the debt my ex-husband had left me in, and to provide a place and food for my children.”

“One great part about all of this was my lawyer. I had heard that he was inexpensive, so I went to him even though I heard he was Catholic and would never do a divorce. He was a kind old man and not only did he end up doing my divorce for almost nothing, he was so kind to me and showed me great affection through this time, and told me I needed the divorce more than anyone he had heard of. I am twenty-three years old, and I have been a single mom for about two years. I’m a full-time student, and I work full time as well. I could write books about God who has been a husband, a father, a friend, and has provided me with more than I could ever want. Even when all of my friends were losing their jobs, I had six job offers. When I went to court to get custody of my children, the only people in the courtroom were the judge and my lawyer. I have two beautiful children, and even though my old church would teach that I would be forever judged for my divorce, God’s justice and mercy are better than anything I could ever have. I would not

trade my story because through it, God became my true love. The God I learned about growing up is not the God I know today.” Praise God. She’s a sister at Mars Hill Church now.

Father God, thank you for the story of this woman in Luke 7. Thank you for the stories of the other women in Luke 8. Thank you for the story of this woman at Mars Hill, and the stories of so many women at Mars Hill. Thank you, Lord God, that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever, that what you did for the women in the Bible, you do for the women in our church. God, I pray for us men, that we would be like Christ, and that this would be a safe place for women. I pray as well for the women, Lord God, that when they need to cry, when they’re feeling passionate, that, Lord Jesus, they would work it out in ways that honor and please you, and not worry about what all the religious people think. I pray, Lord God, for the religious among us, that we would repent like this woman did, for the times that even those of us who do not consider ourselves religious have moments of religion, Holy Spirit, we invite you to wreck us, and to remind us that we need desperately forgiveness of even religious sin, that pride, and self-righteousness, and judgmentalism, and condemnation, rather than a desire to see people changed is a horrible thing. And you died for it too. God, I pray for our church. God, sometimes I feel inclined to motivate people to be passionate, but that’s not sustainable. Only in coming to Jesus, and being broken, and repentant, and hearing that we’re forgiven—that’s the only place that real generosity comes from, and real passion comes from, and real affection comes from, and real ministry comes from. So Holy Spirit, please allow us to enjoy the gift of repentance. May we be saved by our faith in Jesus Christ in whose name we pray, Amen.

*[End of Audio]*

*Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.*

## **A LITTLE BUSINESS**

Howdy, Mars Hill. We’re gonna do a little business, and then a lot of Bible. It’s that time of year again where we are finishing up our budget year, which goes from July through June. So we’ve got a few weeks remaining in this fiscal year, and we wanted to give you the beginnings of an annual report and update: where we’re at, how we want to finish this fiscal year strong, some plans we have for course corrections this summer, and then where we hope to be for next year.

If you’re new, I’ll start by just encouraging you to grab the Weekly. It has some information from Pastor Jamie, and also a Connect Card so we can get you plugged in, and get you more information, both from you so we can know you, and to you so you can get to know us.

In the providence of God, as we’re going through Luke, it actually fits thematically along the story line of that great book of the Bible. There is a parable forthcoming in the ensuing weeks where Jesus talks about sowing seed, pulling roots, pruning, harvesting. And so we’re gonna use that as our overarching metaphor for the next number of weeks to sort of finish this year strong, and be encouraged about the fruit that God has borne here at Mars Hill Church, and what we see for the future.

I’ll start with some good news. We are really committed to church planting. Acts 29 is our church planting network. There are twenty-eight chapters in the book of Acts, and our plan is to just keep doing what they were doing until we see Jesus, and he says the work is done. And so we give 10 percent of our dollars to church planting, other churches contribute as well, and this is a collective. If you can see from 2000 to presently in 2010, this network has grown from 2 to 314 churches, just in the United States of America, just in the U.S. That does not include churches that are planted around the world, as we are heavily involved and invested in international church planting. At present, under the leadership of Pastor Scott Thomas, and the help of Pastor Tyler Powell, we are continually assessing upwards of five hundred church-planting candidates. We are planting more than a church a week. It’s almost now two churches a week, by God’s grace. What that means for us is five or six years, we hope and pray that we will be over a thousand churches in the U.S. I’m praying that they average 250 people each, and a quarter million people worshipping Jesus as part of our extended network that Mars Hill is a part of. That is cause for much, much, much rejoicing. That’s a great number.

Additionally, Mars Hill Church, here is what has happened at our church. From 2001 to at present in 2010, the number of campuses has gone from one to ten. There are also two more in progress that it would be premature for me to tell you about, but do be in prayer. And there is some very exciting news that is forthcoming, including some great information I received today about a potential new campus. So I anticipate that number will be at twelve very shortly. Our attendance has gone from about a thousand to an average of almost ten thousand a week with a high of thirteen thousand at Easter. All of this to say, these are good charts. I know your investment portfolio does not look like that, but your weight may, from 2000 to 2010.

Additionally, our community groups. We love to have big church and small church. Community groups meet in condos, dorms, apartments, homes. It is where people gather to cover the material that was in the sermon, to discuss Bible, pray, have friendship, relationship, accountability, shepherding, counseling, do evangelism, be on mission, serve their community. The number of those groups from 2000 to 2010 has gone from three to more than four hundred, with enough leaders being trained that we’re anticipating heading into the fall with between five hundred and six hundred groups. What that means is every week, some six or seven thousand people are meeting in smaller groups. We rejoice in that. We want to be a big church that also has very close, loving, intimate, missional community.

Also, here is our giving. Some of you ask, “Well, you want me to give. What does Mars Hill give?” We’ve always, by God’s grace, sought to be a generous church as God is generous with us. We want to be a generous people, so we give to Acts 29, the church planting network, Resurgence, which trains missional leaders. You guys gave about three-quarters of a million dollars to help in Haiti, and we have pastors that are traveling there to train pastors, and help and assist in their church planting. And by God’s grace, I told you we were able to ship \$1.7 million of medical supplies to the clinics for \$17,000, amazing what God is doing there. MicroMissions, where we know that people are struggling, and suffering, and hurting, and so we have a



few hundred thousand dollars earmarked for the groups to use for serving their community, and helping others in need. As well as giving a lot of books, and Bibles, and resources to those who are in the military. And we have a lot of soldiers at Mars Hill, and a lot of soldiers that tune in.

And so you can see the amount has increased dramatically. Just in the first four months of 2010, over \$1.2 million has been given for things other than Mars Hill Church, to help other people. And so last year we gave 1.4-ish million dollars. We're almost there in the first quarter of this year alone. We see opportunities, and we want to be generous 'cause our God is real generous.

And now I'll give you the update on how the various campuses are doing. If you're new, we've got a few dozen services that meet in ten locations, most of them around the Puget Sound, from Olympia all the way to Shoreline and over to Bellevue and West Seattle, as well as a campus down in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Downtown Seattle, their giving is on target. U-District is on target, and Federal Way is on target. We had a low-budget expectation going into the year. We pulled back the expenses. We anticipated it would be a hard year. The campus pastors met with the various accountants, and CPAs, and MBAs that are on staff at the church, and put together some conservative budget projections. These three campuses, with a bit of time until the end of June still remaining, are on target, and you'll notice that seven are missing.

Well, they're on the next list, the naughty list. That first one was the nice list. The naughty list: Ballard, West Seattle, Lake City, Bellevue, Shoreline, Olympia, and Albuquerque are all campuses missing budget anywhere from a quarter million dollars to \$40,000. These are campuses of a few hundred people, up to Ballard, which has thousands of people. So Ballard's got about a quarter million to make up, which, quite frankly, with as many people as are at the Ballard Campus, that should not be difficult. West Seattle, you can pray for. Great people, great campus, but their campus pastor's transitioned out to plant. They're short on budget about a quarter million dollars, and it's not an enormous—it's a good size, but not an enormous campus. So they've got some heavy lifting to do to finish the year strong. Lake City is one of our smaller campuses, a couple hundred thousand dollars behind. Some very generous, faithful, long-term members, but they've got some work to do as well. Bellevue's \$180,000 behind, but I think they'll make it just fine. I know that they have different jobs than people at the U-Dub. Shoreline as well. Good campus, great families. Our first campus outside of Ballard, they've got about \$156,000 to make up. Olympia's got about \$100,000 to make up, one of our newer campuses needing to relocate into a bigger facility, and also Albuquerque, our most recent addition, is about \$40,000 behind budget.

Our goal is make all this up by the end of June. And the total nugget that we're trying to raise is an additional \$1 million spread across about ten thousand people. So it's a lot of money, but not for the number of people that we have.

And so you can be in prayer as well. There are a few things that I can tell you about. One is that we are looking aggressively for a new location for the Albuquerque Campus. They are outgrowing their building, and children's space in particular, so you can pray for them.

As well, you can pray for the University of Washington Campus. It started in Kane Hall. This year is now up to more than four hundred people, is going very, very well. They need more training space, and a permanent location to meet, so we have agreed, in principle, to terms for the purchase of a building in the University of Washington District, walking distance to the campus. It is a church that has ceased meeting. Their facility will seat about four hundred, about twenty thousand square feet altogether, a few apartments for interns, lots of class space for training. And their price has come down significantly, thanks to negotiations with Pastor Jamie Munson, and also the grace of God. Do not play poker with Jamie, you will lose. This is Jamie's gift. He is a great negotiator, and this church was very generous and kind to work out an agreement with us. So Pastor Matt is informing the U-Dub Campus that this is not yet an ink deal, but is very, very close. And if you can fathom it, a church, Mars Hill Campus, walking distance to the campus, planting a permanent flag for Jesus for generations to come, right next to the University of Washington. So we rejoice in that, and we'll have some work to do there.

Additionally, the Bellevue Campus has outgrown their space, so we've agreed in terms for the John Danz Theater that used to be in downtown Bellevue. It's right near the mall. It's between Rock Bottom, and Starbucks, and Barnes & Noble, right in the heart of downtown Bellevue. They're going to be having an open house, and I'm gonna be over there with them on a Sunday. So we're gonna cast the vision, let them see the space. It will double the number of seats to eight or nine hundred, allow that campus to expand, and be the center from which we plant additional campuses and churches across the east side of our great region.

All of that to say, there's a lot going on, and there's two more I can't even tell you about, but I will as soon as we are able. So we want to rejoice in God's grace, and all the fruit that's been borne. It's been an amazing year. All right, I mean nothing, nothing looks like our chart, all right, your investments, your retirement, nothing looks like that, and I know some of you will look at it and say, "But you're asking for money in the middle of a difficult economy." We understand that. We've already ratcheted back the budget. We have had a series, a few series of layoffs this year at Mars Hill. We're hoping not to have another series of layoffs. I think it is seven of our ten campuses only have one paid pastor on staff, and so to start cutting beyond that is one guy to fire himself. And that's a real hard day when you have to sit yourself down and fire yourself. And so we're just praying that our people would be generous, and that you all would do all that you can.

For those that have been faithful and generous, with all sincerity, thank you. For those who are Christians and have not been very generous or faithful, we would invite you to participate. And I tell you this in all truth, when you get to heaven, you're not gonna regret giving to the cause of Jesus. You may regret a lot of other ways that you spend the money that God has entrusted to your care. And there was a report that was out this week, a national survey actually said that Seattle has the strongest economy in the United States of America. And I know it is hard, and many are unemployed or underemployed and things are difficult, but we are actually positioned in the best place nationally for a rebounding economy, and we hope and pray that that continues.

I just want you to see all that God is doing. I want you to see all that is possible, and I want you to be a part of it because I believe, with all sincerity, that

the next year could indeed be the biggest year that we've ever had. More people meeting Jesus, more lives getting changed, more people getting married, more new Christians getting baptized, more babies being born, more people in community groups, redemption groups, church membership, all of it, and that's what we want. We want to go deep, lots of people maturing, and wide, we want lots of people to meet Jesus.

And if you don't know where to begin, the Connect Card is the simplest way to start. You can give online at [marshallchurch.org](http://marshallchurch.org). You can send in a check to the office. You can give when the offering basket is passed. However works for you, works for us. It's exciting. And I'll say this too, it's kind of confusing for me, like God does so much, and so few respond. I don't understand that.