

## Luke 7:36-50 June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>36</sup> Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, <sup>38</sup> and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. <sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup> Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. <sup>41</sup> "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. <sup>44</sup> Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup> The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

How well do you handle criticism? [pause for consideration].

"Facing criticism" is a very practical subject matter; maybe more so than some of us would be likely to admit at first. If there is a bit of hesitation at mention of the topic, I understand. There is a certain vulnerability I feel as soon as that word "criticism" is voiced. Lord-willing, by the time we come out the other side of this Bible account, we'll have found the healthy way to handle 2 types of criticism.

My guess is that some of you may feel exhausted by the time we are done. And I'm not saying that in anticipation of talking for 30 minutes. The topic might prove to be a bit emotionally fatiguing. But you'll find it healthy for your soul in the end. So...

Walk into the scene with me. Dinner must have been going along fine at first. I'm sure you can imagine something of what it would have been like. Did you know they leaned forward toward the table on short couches, with their feet sticking out away from the table? We don't hear any of the conversation at this point. But we know from other times how often people asked Jesus questions, and how good of answers he gave every time – perfect ones. And we hear how often Jesus taught timely topics and important truths. So we can get an idea of how the dinner might have gone... until something happened that changed the conversation. In fact, for the moment it brought all the conversation to a screeching halt (as far as we hear).

A certain woman came into the dining room. She wasn't on the guest list, but everyone knew who she was. She had a past, and everyone in town knew what it was. She walked up and took what she felt was the only spot she could imagine occupying – at Jesus' feet. She didn't say anything. But there she stood. And she wept. She wept and let her tears fall on Jesus' feet. She used her hair to wipe his feet dry. Then she pulled out her expensive jar of perfume and poured it over those feet of our Savior.

Now, pause right there. I want you to hear the silence. We hear no one speak about the woman's presence or actions. Simon's thoughts, remember, were kept to himself. And while we hear no words, one might imagine what kind of disapproving looks or mumbled comments may have made their way into the room along with the woman and her perfume.

Do you have this moment etched in your mind? The woman is bent down at Jesus' feet. Simon is firmly seated in his judgment of the woman... and of Jesus. Everything in the account hangs on what happens next. Jesus breaks the silence!

Jesus' words at first are addressed to Simon, but his words draw in the woman right away. Jesus knew both the thoughts of Simon's heart & of the woman's heart. And he has something so important to communicate to each. Let's start with what Jesus says about and to the woman. As we do, think of why the words are so meaningful for us – as repentant believers in Jesus.

What do we learn from Jesus' words? We can get at that by asking: is Simon's criticism of this woman valid, or not?

And the answer is: no. Let me explain: Jesus knew the woman was a sinner (but which of us isn't). There's something else Jesus knew about her - even though she didn't utter a word. She didn't have to utter anything for Jesus to know her heart – she was repentant. "Lord, I recognize my sins. I'm unworthy. I need you more than I can say. I'm sorry. And I trust that you will have mercy on me."

And Jesus confirms the news in which this woman placed her hope and trust.

Note how the example Jesus gives – about the canceling of debt – teaches the truth so often repeated throughout Scripture – the central truth: God forgives the debt we owed for sin. His forgiveness comes without strings attached. Each believer is assured that through faith in Jesus their debt of sin before God has been cancelled. Jesus paid the price in full. The gift of forgiveness and peace is yours – is mine – through faith. Our love – our thanks – our service to the Lord, then, flow from knowing His love already shown to us in Christ Jesus.

Now, go back to the context: Simon was rendering an unfair criticism of this woman. Hearing Jesus' words spoken in defense of this woman and to this woman gives us support for times we face unfair criticism. Sometimes people give criticism like this still today. They criticize a person, when God would want that individual to hear comfort, like the repentant sinner who trusts in Jesus.

- How do you handle people's judgment of you when it is different than God's?

The answer to such criticism, with the feeling of vulnerability that may well accompany it (after all, we're human and we care about what people think), is: Jesus' Word - the message of Jesus.

We don't need to be self defensive; we've got Jesus' defense of us ... Let His Word speak comfort to you. Your forgiveness in Christ and God's acceptance of you through faith in Jesus, provides a healthy framework for handling unfair criticism.

- Handling the times when people's judgment of us is different from God's... leads us back to the cross. I can live without the acceptance of the world. I can even live with their criticism... if only I have from Jesus the same word of forgiveness and peace that he spoke to this woman. And I do have them. And you do have them. Your sins are forgiven you. Through faith in Jesus, you are God's dear child and heir of salvation. Go on your way today in peace.
- View such moments as an opportunity for the cross of Jesus to be spotlighted to others too. We live the confession: "I come to this place, church, because this is a hospital for sinners. Jesus is the physician for my soul. He washes me clean. I'm forgiven through him. I have the certainty that I'm at peace with my God." And that's something I've heard others asking about: "Wow! Now that I see your outlook, I want what you have. How can I have the certainty & peace you have?"

TRANSITION: Return to the meal in Luke ch.7, at Simon's house. Now, if you put yourself into the scene this day, into whose shoes do you see yourself most easily fitting: the woman's, or Simon's? I mentioned up front we'd look for a healthy way to handle 2 types of criticism based on this Bible account. On the one hand, we at times face what the woman faced – unfair criticism. We've covered that ground now. On the other hand, we sometimes fall into blindness similar to that of Simon - blindness which Jesus addressed with Simon. Let's talk some more about that.

The thing different between Simon and the woman? The woman recognized her sin, but Simon ... he didn't put himself in the same camp. He was evidently good at detecting the sins of others, while overlooking his own sins.

Do you find yourself thinking about others – “if only they were more like me, serving like me” – without identifying how self-absorbed those thoughts are? Are you more likely to be bothered about the robberies and assaults that make the daily news, than about the greed you felt or gossip you spoke during the same 24-hour news cycle? Which is worse: the sins committed by the homosexual offender or the prostitute, or the sins you committed (or just wanted to commit) with your boyfriend or girlfriend before you were married? In summary: how often have you all to clearly identified someone else's sins, but somehow remained blind to one or more of your own?

At such times it is an act of love when God reaches out to us through his Word to set us straight. What we really need at such times is to be confronted. And so we've come to “criticism” of a good kind: correction of a wrong. The sinful nature in us will never stop trying to turn us back into a self-righteous Pharisee at heart.

By God's grace, in your heart lives the faith that he planted there, the faith that beats to the rhythm of repentance – that is, faith that rejoices to admit that I need God's forgiveness, and to trust that God our heavenly Father has been merciful and forgiven all my sins.

Interesting enough, the topic studied at District Conference this past week – on admonition given from one Christian to another – ties in quite well at this point. What if God uses a fellow believer to speak words of correction to me? How well am I going to receive those?

I've learned that it is hard to hear such correction – let's call it healthy criticism – from those close to me. Why is that? It touches a very sensitive spot. I hear that I've failed those close to my heart. And I may immediately get defensive. If I squelch that instinct, and find the criticism to be accurate, I may then fall the opposite extreme and feel crushed to the core by the revelation brought to my attention. There are the two different dangers: defensiveness, or feeling crushed by guilt as if there's no way to have healing.

What is the answer to both? Hear Jesus' words to you, both his law that points out your sin, and gospel that assures you that in Christ your sin is washed away.

It is good for me to see, to understand that the blind sinful nature which once controlled me can still mislead me to moments of blindness to one or more of my sins. Recognizing your sinful nature, should you be surprised if at times you exhibit “blindness” to something you're doing wrong? We should be ready to receive words of admonishment / words of correction.

And what a joy to hear again and again the proclamation of the same news David heard in our OT lesson. You and I with David confess: “I'm sorry.” And our Lord announces: “Your sins are forgiven you.” If a fellow believer has been the messenger of admonishment, they get to give the word of encouragement to a repentant brother or sister in Christ: “The Lord has forgiven your sins.”

We walk away today with so much of God's truth to appreciate and apply. Let me try to give you a summary:

- 1) It's good for each of us to have an openness that stands fully acknowledging our sin. Does that leave us vulnerable to what some people might say? "Eh, look at him! If only God knew what he's done!" Such criticism may fly our way. But we walk away renewed and strengthened every time we return to Jesus' word to hear his verdict about us and the peace we have through Jesus.
- 2) Hearing God's Word that identifies our moments of blindness & Coming clean about our sins is: our ongoing Mode of Operation. So, when you come to me, when I go to you, we'll meet each other each individually fighting to throw off defensiveness, and to hear correction from one another in the way it is intended – as love. After all, God doesn't want that sin to mislead one of us down a path away from him. Such openness with one another to share admonishment and to accept it builds trust among our church family. And that's healthy. As I'm led to see my sin, repent of it, and to hear my Savior's word of forgiveness again, I'm truly blessed.
- And 3) such openness sheds the spotlight on Christ for others to see too.

May our Lord grant us hearts to know and apply his truths! To him be all glory and thanks – salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Amen.