

Luke 7:36-50

"By Faith Alone"

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1. Intro

- a. On October 31, in the year 1517, Martin Luther, nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany
 - i. Luther had no desire in his heart to start an entirely new Church, completely separate from the Roman Catholic Church
 1. He loved the Church dearly, and wanted to see it grow and thrive
 2. But Luther's eyes had been opened
 - a. As he had begun to read the Scriptures, and dig deeply into the Word of God
 - i. As he had begun to mine deeply for the WISDOM of God, as we learned about last week
 - b. As he did these things, Luther began to realize that there were some serious issues in the teachings of the Church
 - ii. One of the most heinous of these teachings was the selling of indulgences
 1. According to Roman Catholic teaching, the souls of most of our loved ones are stuck in purgatory, an in-between place between our lives here on earth and our eternal life in heaven
 - a. If you were really, REALLY good in your life here on earth, then you MIGHT get to bypass purgatory, and go straight to heaven
 - i. But for most of the average, everyday people, purgatory was where you'd end up after death
 1. Your time stuck in purgatory was all dependent upon how good or bad of a person you were during your life
 - a. If you were mostly good, your time in purgatory would be relatively short
 - b. If you were NOT mostly good, then you could be there for a good long while, since you had a lot of sin you still needed to pay for
 2. Well, around the 12th century, the leaders in the Catholic church came up with a clever idea
 - a. If our prayers here in this life play some sort of role in helping others to turn from their sins and inherit eternal life...
 - i. Then surely our prayers for those stuck in purgatory could also help them move along quicker in that process
 1. But just praying for them doesn't seem sacrificial enough, or meaningful enough
 2. So let's give people the chance to BUY their loved ones' freedom
 - a. Let's create a system where they could put a certain amount of coins in a box at their local church, and the more coins they put in, the closer their friends and family get to heaven
 - b. These tickets to get out of purgatory, similar to the tickets you might earn playing video games in an arcade, were known as indulgences

- i. And at the heart of the Reformation was this central teaching that was RE-discovered by Luther:
 - 1. We are not saved by our good works
 - 2. We are certainly not saved by purchasing indulgences to get out of purgatory
 - 3. We are saved, only as we place our FAITH in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross
- d. This is the truth that we stand upon today in the Protestant church
- e. This is the truth that Luther rediscovered over five hundred years ago
- f. And this was the truth that Jesus himself taught when he walked this earth, as he dined in the home of a Pharisee named Simon
 - i. Let's look at our passage for this morning, starting in Luke 7:36

2. Luke 7:36

- a. ³⁶*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.*
 - i. If you remember from last week, Jesus had just criticized the Pharisees for their hypocrisy
 - 1. They had seen John the Baptist out in the wilderness, wearing a garment of camel's hair and living off a diet of bugs
 - a. And they determined that John must have a demon
 - 2. But then they saw Jesus eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners
 - a. And the Pharisees determined that he must be a glutton and a drunk
 - 3. Jesus exposed them in their hypocrisy, and he challenged them to pursue the wisdom of God
 - a. Well, it seems at first glance, that some of his words actually get through to them
 - i. Or they at least, to ONE of them
 - 1. We'll see in a moment that this Pharisee's name is Simon
 - ii. We get the sense here that Simon might have actually been feeling some conviction over what Jesus said
 - 1. Maybe there's some truth to what Jesus is saying
 - 2. Maybe we shouldn't just write him off as a glutton, or a drunkard
 - 3. Maybe I need to get to know this man better
 - iii. And so Simon makes the bold step of inviting Jesus to come eat at his house
 - 1. But someone else comes and joins them at this meal
 - a. Luke writes, starting in verse 37

3. Luke 7:37-38

- a. 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, ³⁸and 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.*
 - i. We need to make a few clarifications about this "woman of the city" before we actually get into what she did here
 - 1. There are some who have speculated that this woman is Mary Magdalene, who we'll be introduced to next week in Luke chapter 8
 - a. But there isn't a lot of ground for that argument, since Luke doesn't make any connection to her in this passage at all

2. Nor is this Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who anoints Jesus with oil in John chapter 12
 - a. In that account, Jesus was in Bethany, whereas here, he was still in the region of Galilee
 - b. Also, the timing between the two anointings is different
 - i. This passage in Luke is about midway through Jesus' ministry
 - ii. But the passage in John is just days before his death
 1. So it's clear that this woman was not Mary the sister of Lazarus
3. What's interesting, though, is that there is a third account in Matthew 26, of another unnamed woman anointing Jesus with oil, who also had an alabaster flask, and who was also in the home of a man named Simon
 - a. But as we dig into THAT passage, again we see that Jesus is NOT in Galilee, but in Bethany
 - i. And he is not in the home of Simon the Pharisee, but rather in the home of Simon the Leper
 - ii. And again, this account in Matthew is just days before Jesus' death upon the cross
 1. So while it is very possible that Matthew's account was the same as John's, and this unnamed woman in Matthew could very well be Mary the sister of Lazarus
 - a. What we have here in Luke is clearly a completely different event
 - iii. I believe that it is significant that we realize this fact
 1. In both of the anointings recorded in Matthew and John, Jesus specifically says that these were done in order to prepare for his coming death and burial
 - iv. But this anointing that we see here in Luke was different
 1. This anointing was not a symbolic event pointing to Jesus' death
 - a. It was simply an act of love and worship by a deeply sinful woman
 - v. Simon the Pharisee, however, was unable to see this
 1. And so Luke writes in verse 39

4. Luke 7:39

- a. ³⁹Now 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."
 - i. Well, Simon might have been curious about who Jesus was, but he obviously wasn't convinced, was he?
 1. If Jesus was truly a prophet like everyone has been saying, he would know how filthy this woman was
 - a. A prophet would have known this woman's past
 - b. A prophet would have known the sinful behavior this woman would have been involved in
 - c. A prophet wouldn't have allowed this woman to touch him in such a way
 2. Simon was disgusted by what he saw, but he kept his thoughts to himself
 - a. But Jesus knows all the thoughts of man, doesn't he?

- i. So Jesus answers Simon's question that was never asked out loud, as Luke writes in verse 40

5. Luke 7:40

- a. ⁴⁰And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."
 - i. And then Jesus tells Simon a parable...

6. Luke 7:41-42

- a. ⁴¹A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?
 - i. A pretty straightforward story, right?
 - 1. So Simon gives the answer...

7. Luke 7:43

- a. ⁴³Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And Jesus said to Simon, "You have judged rightly."
 - i. And then Jesus gives the application to the story...

8. Luke 7:44-48

- a. ⁴⁴Then 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. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."
 - ⁴⁸And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

- i. Simon was courteous enough to invite Jesus into his home for dinner
 - 1. But he didn't extend to Jesus the simple act of kindness of offering his guest water to wash his feet
 - a. This sinful woman, however, wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them clean with her hair
 - i. The difference in attitude was staggering
 - 2. Nor did Simon extend a simple act of friendship and honor by anointing Jesus' head with a drop or two of oil
 - a. This sinful woman, however, lavishly poured out her oil upon his feet
 - i. Again, the difference is staggering
 - 1. And the reason for the difference is clear:
 - a. Her LOVE for Jesus OVERFLOWED into ACTION
- ii. Simon might have been curious about Jesus, but this woman was filled with LOVE for Jesus
 - 1. Jesus, in praising this sinful woman, also chastises Simon
 - a. *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little*
 - i. Again, Jesus KNEW what was in Simon's heart
 - 1. Simon didn't see any sins in his life that he needed to repent from
 - 2. And therefore, Simon had no love for the only One who could forgive those sins
 - a. Apparently, Simon wasn't alone in his thoughts
 - i. For Luke then writes,

9. Luke 7:49

- a. ⁴⁹Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"
 - i. Luke doesn't specify who these other people were

1. It's likely that it was some of the other Pharisees and lawyers that were mentioned back in verse 30
 - a. It's possible that at this point it could have even been some of Jesus' disciples
2. But whoever these others were, they were stunned that Jesus would make the bold statement to this woman, "Your sins are forgiven."
- ii. It's at this point that we have to pause and think carefully about all that has happened in this passage
 1. If we were to read through it too quickly, it is very possible to think that this woman was forgiven BECAUSE OF her love for Jesus, which was expressed in her good works toward him
 - a. Jesus himself says in verse 47, *"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – FOR she loved much"*
 - i. And Jesus had just talked about how her love was expressed by her WORKS of washing and anointing his feet
 - ii. So we could walk away from this passage and say, "If I show Jesus I love him by doing a bunch of good works, THEN he will forgive me"
 2. This is what we see in so many people today, don't we?
 - a. If I show Jesus I love him by cleaning up my life, THEN maybe he'll forgive me
 - b. If I show Jesus I love him by getting back to church, THEN maybe he'll forgive me
 - c. If I show Jesus I love him by tithing, or by going on a mission trip, or by getting up a little earlier in the morning and reading my Bible more, THEN maybe he'll forgive me
 - i. My friends, this simply is NOT the Gospel that the Scriptures teach
 1. It does not matter how many good works we do in our lifetime – NONE OF THEM have the power to save us from our sins!
 - a. In fact, the Bible is painfully clear...
 - i. ALL of our good works done in our own strength and our own efforts are ALL like filthy rags before a holy and righteous God
 - ii. NONE OF THEM have the power to pay back the debt that we owe for our sin
- iii. This was the whole point of Jesus' parable to Simon
 1. Look back at verse 42... regardless of whether the debt was five hundred denarii or fifty denarii, both debtors were in the same boat
 - a. NEITHER OF THEM could pay off their debt
 - i. The ONLY way they could be free...
 - ii. The ONLY way their debt could be forgiven...
 1. Was if THE MONEYLENDER cancelled their debt
 - a. Not some of it
 - b. Not most of it
 - c. But ALL of it
 2. If the MONEYLENDER didn't come through, then the two debtors would be FOREVER in debt
 2. Simon the Pharisee didn't understand this
 3. The others reclining at the table didn't understand this
 - a. Only this woman who was sobbing tears over Jesus feet and washing his feet with her hair and anointing his feet with expensive oil

- a. This is what Paul would write in Ephesians 2:8-9,
 - i. *⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
 - 1. We are saved by faith
 - 2. But that faith comes BY God's grace
 - a. It is a gift from God
 - i. Not because you earned it
 - ii. Not because you deserved it
 - iii. Not because you were worth it
 - b. Your faith was the gift of a kind and compassionate and merciful God
 - b. This is what Jesus himself taught in John 3 as he was talking with Nicodemus
 - i. In John 3:3, Jesus said to Nicodemus,
 - 1. *³"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*
 - a. Nehemiah couldn't understand what Jesus was saying
 - i. How can a man be born again?
 - ii. How can he enter into his mother's womb a second time?
 - ii. Jesus patiently explains to him, "Nicodemus, I'm not talking about a physical rebirth – I'm talking about a SPIRITUAL rebirth. And that can only come about through the work of the Holy Spirit...
 - 1. *⁸"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*
 - iii. As God said to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 36:25-29... and just listen to how many times He says "I" ...
 - 1. *²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. ²⁹And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses.*
 - ii. According to the authority of the Scriptures, we are saved by faith alone, and this faith is the gift of God's grace alone
- e. But this is a very specific faith, isn't it?
 - i. We're not saved by having faith in God, for there are people all over the world who say they believe in God
 - ii. We're not saved by having faith in our own goodness, for the Bible has clearly said that there is no one good
 - iii. We are saved through faith alone, by the grace of God alone, through the finished work of Christ alone... Solus Christus
 - 1. This is what the sinful woman in Simon's house realized
 - a. She couldn't know at this point all that Jesus was going to do for her and all the rest of us sinners

- i. She had no foreknowledge of his coming death upon the cross, or his resurrection, or his ascension back to the right hand of his Father
 - ii. She had no knowledge that the Holy Spirit would come and dwell within the hearts of every believer
 - b. But, BY FAITH, she realized that this man Jesus was the ONLY one who could cancel the debt of her sin
 - i. And by her FAITH, she was saved
 - 2. This is what Martin Luther came to realize as well
 - a. Think about the bondage that the church had put people in in those days
 - i. Only the exceptionally good and holy and righteous people will get to go straight to heaven
 - 1. For all the rest of you people, you're going to get stuck in purgatory
 - 2. And in purgatory, you'll have to pay penance for every single one of your sins
 - 3. UNLESS, one of your relatives that is still alive loves you enough to get you on the fast track buy purchasing indulgences on your behalf
 - b. Friends, if this is actually true, then what did Jesus accomplish on the cross
 - i. What did he accomplish by emptying himself of all the glories of heaven, and becoming our servant?
 - ii. What did he accomplish by enduring all of the rejection, all of the scorn, all of the persecution, from his very own people?
 - iii. What did he accomplish by embracing the physical agony and torture of the Roman scourging and crucifixion?
 - 1. NOTHING! All of it means absolutely NOTHING, if we have to continually work our way to heaven, even after our death
 - 2. All of it means NOTHING, if we are still under the bondage of the Old Testament law
 - iv. This is why the book of Romans was so pivotal in opening Luther's eyes
 - 1. In Romans 3:21-26, Paul wrote these words that would transform Luther's life forever, and would bring the Church BACK to the teaching of God's Word...
 - a. *²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that HE might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*
 - i. Friends, we are saved through faith alone, by the grace of God alone, through the FINISHED work of Christ alone
- f. And it is ALL for the glory of God alone... Soli Deo Gloria
 - i. Brothers and sisters, you are simply a jar of clay
 - 1. Yes, we as humans have the incredibly unique privilege in all of God's Creation, that we alone have been created in His image
 - a. But don't miss the key word in that statement: CREATED

2. God is the great Creator of all things
 - a. He is the Vinedresser, we are simply the branches
 - b. He is the Potter, we are simply the clay
- ii. This is why Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:7-15
 1. *⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies... ¹⁵For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*
- iii. The Apostle Paul, along with countless other Christians throughout the history of the church, walked through afflictions, persecution, and even death
 1. And they did so WILLINGLY, knowing that as they suffered for the name of Christ, God's grace would extend to more and more people
 - a. And as His grace would extend to more and more people, thanksgiving to God would increase
 - i. And God's glory would cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea
- g. My friends, this is the heart of one who loves much, for he realizes that he has been forgiven much
 - i. According to the Scriptures, we are saved through faith alone, by the glory of God alone, in the finished work of Christ alone, ALL to the glory of God alone
 1. God COULD have left us alone to hopelessly try to live up to the law
 2. He COULD have created a place called purgatory where we would have to continue to try to earn our way to Him, even after our death
 3. He COULD have come up with all sorts of ridiculous schemes where we had to try to buy our way into eternal life
 - ii. But instead, God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life
 1. Have you truly put your faith in the ONLY one who can save you from your sins?
 - a. If so, then Jesus would have you hear these words today,
 - i. "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."