



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 6

The Hallmark of the Spiritually Prepared
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College and the big earthquake—let's put those together in your mind: college and the bigger threat. And I don't mean either one of those in a metaphorical sense; college and the big earthquake—I mean both of those as literal future events for the Fabarez family.

Now, having three school-aged kids, it makes sense that on the horizon for our family would be college and all that goes with it—kids graduate, they go off to college—and you know that that's on the horizon. I also realize, living here in Southern California—which should be, at least in my mind, in the future somewhere—is the anticipation of perhaps another big earthquake, which seems like more than a “perhaps” because of where we live and all that is said about it and all that's going on under our feet in terms of the fault lines and all the rest.

So, living here, I realize there's probably a big earthquake in our future. And I'll tell you, when it comes to preparing, I've been advised by prudent people to be ready for both college and the big earthquake—I've got to be ready. And to be ready, you think, “Okay, well get ready.” That's hard to do, just like it is in your life. It's hard to do. It's always costly to get ready for some impending future event, particularly those two things, which could both be very big in terms of the cost to a family like mine. So you've got to prepare.

Now, here's the thing about getting caught off guard. If you get caught off guard with your kid's graduation from high school, you're going to have a lot of people mocking you, and there'll be very little sympathy: “What, you didn't know they were going to graduate? Can't you count? Did you get a calendar? Of course they're going to graduate—you didn't know this was coming? You did nothing to prepare for this?” No sympathy there.

But if I'm caught off guard and did no preparation for the big earthquake, I bet I'd get more sympathy from people. But should I really? Living here, you know, almost my entire life—with the exception of my college break—I mean, I've been here. I know. I've been watching the news. I've heard the public service announcements. I've been told. I've been warned. I've been exhorted. Everyone has told me, “It's coming—be ready.”



Now, I don't think there should be much sympathy for me to get caught off guard with either one. The reason I'm probably going to get more sympathy from you is because a lot of us don't get ready for those events because it's an event that I don't know when it'll happen. I can figure out when my kids are going to graduate from high school and when I need to be ready to release them out into the world as adults—into college and all the rest. I can look at a calendar and figure that out. And because of that, my preparation—know this now—it can be incremental and methodical. It can be very methodical. I can lay aside some money. I can get ready. Everything involved in that I can incrementally and methodically prepare for.

The problem with something like an earthquake—a big earthquake—is that I can't incrementally or methodically prepare for it. If I want to be ready for the big earthquake, I've got to be ready—already completely ready—right now. I mean, that's what preparation looks like: I'm ready today. It's not the way it is when I look at some future event on a calendar; I can kind of space that out.

Now, I say all that because we've been studying here for the last few weeks the coming Kingdom of Christ. And the thing about the coming Kingdom of Christ is it leaves you and me no luxury to methodically and incrementally prepare. You can't methodically and incrementally prepare for it—it'd be a silly thing to do—because it is something that, according to Matthew 24:50, is going to happen at a time I do not expect and at an hour I do not know. That's when the master is going to return to the life of the servant, and it's going to come unexpectedly.

Because of that, I need to be ready for the seismic, cataclysmic reality that one day I'm going to step across the threshold of this world and this life—with all of its values and rules—into the kingdom of God. And when I step across that threshold into the kingdom of God, that's going to happen by my death or by the return of Christ. Either one of those is going to happen all of a sudden. And the only way for me to not be caught off guard is to always be ready. I've got to, right now on Sunday morning, be absolutely 100% sure that I'm ready—as they put it in my grandfather's day—"to meet my Maker." I've got to be ready.

Now, sometimes you reach passages like the one we've reached here today, and sermons feel like an earthquake preparedness seminar—and I get that. There's nothing wrong with that, because, much like an earthquake, this is a big deal—a really big deal. We need to make sure your life is completely prepared for this. This passage is a great passage for us to look at because it gives us a contrasting picture between someone who's prepared and someone who's not prepared, and we can learn from that.



Now everyone, I'd like you to take a Bible—or punch it up on your phone or your iPad or whatever you've got—turn to Luke 7. We've reached verse 36. We're going to study a big chunk for us, all the way through verse 50—36 through 50, Luke 7, the end of this chapter.

Now in this chapter, we see two people: a Pharisee named Simon and a woman who is described as a sinful woman. And these two people are interacting with Jesus Christ. One is ready for his coming kingdom and one is not. And like Luke likes to do, he posits these two and juxtaposes two people. The one you'd expect to be ready is not ready, and the one you wouldn't expect to be ready happens to be ready.

So let's read this text. And since it's such a long text, let's just read the chunk we're going to deal with first. If you got your worksheet out and you notice the numbers by one, two, and three, you'll see we're going to deal with the first section of this first; we're going to deal with the second section of this last; and we're going to do the last section of this in the middle—just to make sure you stay awake through the whole thing. So we're going to be at the beginning, to the end, back to the middle. Now, the middle I'm going to take last because it's Jesus's explanation of what this gal is doing and why she's doing all of this. But let's read the text and try and envision this historical situation.

Beginning in verse 36: “One of the Pharisees”—right, his name, we'll learn later in verse 40, is Simon—“asked him to eat with him,” that's Jesus. And so, as Jesus did with someone that wanted to hear about his claims and interact with him, he consented, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and he reclined at the table.

Now, as weird as this is, you need to see what that looks like—reclining at the table. I know “recliner”—you picture a leather, padded seat with Cheez-Its next to it—that's not the recliner we're talking about. This is reclining at the table.

Now picture the table here as parallel with the front of the stage; there's the table. When they would recline, they would recline on their left elbow, and they would eat off the table—oftentimes they had pillows and things like this—eat off a very low table, you know, a little lower than a coffee table. They would eat with their right hand. As weird as this is to see—and I know you're saying, “Please get up, Pastor Mike, this is too weird”—but you've got to know what this feels like, because all the attention is right here on the table. And if this table is going parallel to the front of the stage, you'd have another guy right here, and his legs would move out this direction—it's like that oblique parking on streets sometimes, the diagonal parking, it's like that. And they're all kind of laid out like this eating at the



table. Everybody's attention is here at the table. So you've got that. You ready for me to get off the ground? Okay. The reclining at the table.

"And behold," verse 37, "a woman of the city, who was a sinner"—now we don't know what kind of sinner she was. A lot of people speculate she was a prostitute. Maybe she was one like in John 4, you know, who's been married to half the people in the town—I don't know. But she's someone everyone notoriously knows—this gal is messed up. She's a sinner. "When she learned that he"—that is, Christ—"was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and, standing behind him at his feet"—now you can see how this works: like those diagonal parking spaces on a street. His feet are behind the action. Everybody's got their feet dangling out here, you know, behind the table four or five feet. She sees his feet. She stands behind them. "And she"—in the middle of her story—"she's weeping, and she began to wet his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed"—that's no word the charismatics have absconded; that word simply means to apply lotion or oil, and in this case, it was the ointment in her alabaster flask—"so she anoints his feet with the ointment."

Now, if you're going, "I know the story. I know this story." No—maybe, perhaps you don't. Because this story is often conflated with a story that takes place over a year from now, at the end of Christ's ministry, in the city of Bethany. We're not in Bethany. We're not in Judea. We're up north in Galilee. You remember, this is going on in the Galilean ministry of Christ—somewhere around Galilee, perhaps in Capernaum. A lot of people guess this is taking place at the house of Simon the Pharisee.

Now here's the thing—"Simon," you ever heard of that name? Oh sure. There's another name among the apostles—Simon Peter. No—see, not the same guy. Simon Peter was not a Pharisee. Oh, there's even another Simon—remember last year we were looking through every one of the disciples as Jesus names them apostles—there's another Simon. So there are two Simons among the apostles. And here's another Simon here that is a Pharisee.

Now this is going to be weird, and you're going to think, "Well, this must be conflated stories." There's a Simon that hosts the dinner down in Bethany—he's not a Pharisee; he's Simon the leper. He's a leper, and he's hosting in his home, and Mary and Martha and Lazarus are there. And you say, "It's got to be a conflated story, because I remember the story and it's Mary, and she does the same thing this gal does—she wets his feet with her tears and wipes his feet with her hair. Something's goofy here with this story—conflated story."



I propose it's not a conflated story. This is clearly not the end of Christ's ministry. Luke, of course, knows this, having researched everything carefully. This is a different setting with a different Simon—which is a very ubiquitous name in the first century; we have at least seven of them in the New Testament. Simons everywhere, just like Mikes and Matthews and Jakes—they're everywhere; very common name.

And when it comes to this scene, you say, "Well, how could these two gals do this same thing?" This was a very notorious sinner who is so overcome with her guilt. She comes; she gets forgiveness from Christ. Everyone celebrated this; everyone talked about it; it was a big, "Did you see that display of thanksgiving? This gal, this prostitute—or whatever she is—she cried, she wet Christ's feet with her tears and wiped with her hair." That became known. So I'm suggesting this: Mary, Martha's sister, did this as a reflection of this very story here. But it's at least over a year later that that takes place, in a whole different geographical location, in a whole different home outside of Bethany. If you remember, if you go out east of Jerusalem and down the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives and over the hill, that's where Bethany is—nowhere close to where we are now. It doesn't fit the time. It doesn't fit the setting. It doesn't fit—just the guy's names happen to be the same who host this, which is very common. I bet you met a few Mikes this week in your life if you're out and about doing your work. And one's a leper; one's a Pharisee. And the same thing that takes place is taking place here. This person's not named. This is not Mary. And as some people have speculated, "This is Mary Magdalene." It's not Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene we're going to meet in chapter 8. Had this been Mary Magdalene, certainly Luke would have named her that.

So hopefully I've clarified a few things. Don't conflate these stories in your mind—different settings. This is the first time we have a lady wiping Christ's feet with her hair. Got all that? Great.

Verse 39: "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this"—now, here's a good phrase—four words in English to underline: "he said to himself." Now, when you say things to yourself—unless you want your friends to think you're crazy—you don't say them out loud. That is a thought he's having, which later is revealed by Christ's retort and response, and later learned, of course, among the apostles and recorded here for us. Christ, of course, knows our thoughts. Interesting that he's saying, "I don't think this Jesus is a prophet," and Jesus is reading his thoughts and about to respond to it in verse 40—we'll get to that in a minute. But he says to himself, "If this man were a prophet"—which is interesting, because he's reading his thoughts because he *is* a prophet; he's more than a prophet—"he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Now that's interesting. As Jesus penetrates the thoughts of Simon the Pharisee, I'll bet if he spent a little time running around in the thoughts of the Pharisees, he'd find a few things that would qualify for



the word “sinner,” too—don’t you think? And yet that’s the problem with the Pharisees. So many of the Pharisees could not see their sin; they could only see other people’s sin, because other people’s sin was more notorious than their own sin. And so they distance themselves from sinners. And here he was going on, “If this guy were such a prophet, he certainly would know this woman’s a notorious sinner, and I don’t understand why he’s putting up with this.”

Let’s make that first observation. If you’d be ready for the coming Kingdom, there’s a hallmark of people that are spiritually prepared. Let’s do it in three parts—a threefold hallmark. And here’s the first part of it—something that the Pharisee didn’t have but clearly the sinful woman did:

Number one: If you’re ready, you will sense your moral problem. You’ll know it. You’ll sense it. You’ll feel it. You’ll get the gravity of the problem of sin. Now, this is the thing Jesus is always illustrating. The Pharisees often miss it; they often don’t see it.

Once you jot that down, turn with me to Luke 18 real quick—we’re not far from it. Luke 18. I think I quoted this for you last week, and maybe some of you quickly turned to it. But let’s look at this parable, which is, again, another contrast of the Pharisee—the typical Pharisee—and the notorious sinner. In this case, it’s not a prostitute or whoever this gal was; it was a man, and it was a tax collector. Take a look at this. Let’s jump into the middle of it here in Luke 18:10: “Two men went up to the temple to pray.” Luke 18:10. “One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus.” Here’s what he prayed: “God, I thank you that I’m not like other men.” Know what other men are like? “They’re extortioners, they’re unjust, they commit adultery—they’re adulterers—or even like that guy, that loser over there, that tax collector who sold out his own nation—he’s collecting taxes for the Herodians—and he’s a bad guy. I’m glad I’m not like that.”

Let me give you three quick reasons the Pharisees had a problem seeing their sin—and perhaps one of the reasons, if you’re not there yet, you don’t sense the moral problem that you have.

Number one: We’re engaged in lateral comparisons. I like to use that phrase because we do it a lot. We make comparisons laterally with each other, and we say to ourselves, “I’m not like that guy. I’m not as bad as those people.” All you do is watch the news tonight—turn on the news and watch the people that the news stories are about—and they’re all worse than you are. And it’s easy for you to say, “I’m glad I’m not like that guy. I’m glad I’m not like that guy. I’m not like those people.” And you can begin to insulate yourself from feeling the weight of your own sin and sensing your own moral problem before God, because instead of looking this way, you’re looking this way.



And yet, when the Bible tries to indict all of us under sin in the book of Romans for three chapters, the punch line after going through all the argumentation about the fact that we're all sinners ends with this phrase in Romans 3:23. It says this: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory"—of what?—"of the cultural standard of sin"? Is that what it says? "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of *God*." So you really want to figure out whether or not you have a moral problem—you've got to look up; you cannot look laterally. You can't compare yourself with people. Because here's the thing: you're always going to find people that are worse than you. And if you find enough people that are worse than you, you're going to say, "I'm not all that bad." And if you say you're not all that bad, here's the problem: you're not ready to meet your Maker, because you cannot be prepared to meet your Maker as a forgiven person until you sense the gravity of your sin.

We heard that this morning in the baptismal tanks—people that really went through life thinking, "I'm a good person. I'm okay. I'm sure I'm okay with God. I went to church, I've done things, I've gone along with it all"—until they really grappled with the weight of their own sin. The sinful woman didn't have a problem with that.

It's like at the hospital. There are two ways to enter the hospital, are there not? You've got a problem; you can come through the front door. And usually, because you're sent there after a blood test or a scan—a body scan—or an X-ray, and the doctor keeps at you and your wife keeps at you, and finally you go and you check in through the front. You get into the parking structure, you get your parking ticket, you go in there, you say, "Okay, I'm here, I got this appointment or this surgery at this time," and you sit there, you pull out your insurance cards, and you matriculate through the admissions desk. And then you get in queue and you go into the hospital. That's one way to get in the hospital.

There's another way to get in the hospital—it's through the side door. And there's a driveway that goes right up to it, and it's got "Emergency Room" over the top of it. Guess what? They don't have to go through the admissions process—for some weird reason, they get whisked right through the doors—and you worry about the insurance card later, because there's some boxy car out there with all the sirens on that are whisking you to the hospital because your problem is so evident to everyone that someone picked up the phone and called 911.

Now, both men needed the hospital. Both men needed surgery, let's say. One of them doesn't have the eruption of the problem so that people are going to say, "Call 911—look at that guy; something's going on." Maybe it's cancer, maybe it's—who knows what it is—but it's inside and you can't see it. Oh, you feel the effects of it, but no one's going to pick up the phone after talking with you and call the



ambulance and have you whisked to the hospital. But those two men both may die without the intervention of the hospital. It's just that one seems urgent and the other one doesn't. And yet both of them have a problem—and both of them have an important problem that has to be dealt with.

The Pharisee—more like the guy who should check in through the front door. The tax collector, the prostitute—that's the one that gets whisked in through the emergency doors. Doesn't mean that both of them don't have a problem that needs attention.

Here's the issue when it comes to lateral comparisons. I'm looking at people that are getting whisked into the emergency room, and I say, "Look at that mangled life. My life's not mangled." Here's what Jesus says for people that feel that way. Here's a little diagnostic for you: he runs through things in the Sermon on the Mount and says, "You've heard it said," and then he quotes a biblical command—like "Do not commit murder." You go on the news tonight—someone got murdered in L.A.—you know, several people, I'm sure. So you watch the news. You hear about the murder, and you go, "Oh, look at that guy—killed somebody. I'm glad I didn't do that. I'm glad I'm not a murderer like that."

Jesus said, you've heard it said that that's wrong, and you can point at people that have done it and you can feel morally superior. But wait just a second. Take a good look at your life. What's the thing under the surface that erupts into murder in the streets of Los Angeles? What is it that goes on here that leads to that? Is that happening in the blood-veins of your soul, so to speak? Is that going on in your life? Oh—it's called hatred. "Anyone who hates his brother in his heart," I tell you, "is guilty—guilty before the tribunal of God." Oh yeah, you've stopped short of murder, and that's a good thing, and we will applaud you for that. But really, you've got the same systemic problem the murderer has if in your heart you can detect bitterness and anger toward your brother—same problem.

You know the next one that he brings up: "You've heard it said, 'Don't commit adultery.'" Here's the Pharisee looking at this guy—or, looking at, in his mind, other people the text is going to get to later—and he says, "I'm glad I'm not an adulterer; I haven't cheated on my wife." Really? A good thing. You hear a scandal—you hear a story. Watching the news this week, hear about this, you know, wacky thing going on in the news, and look—"He's got a mistress. And what does his wife think of that? It's terrible." Great. You can say, "What a loser—look at his marital situation," and you can all feel morally superior to that. But all we've got to do is bring out the brainoscope, focus it on your forehead, and say, "What's the thing that leads someone to get a mistress or to commit adultery or to be unfaithful in a marriage? What fuels that eruption of sin?" Oh, it's the same thing you can find systemic in your own life. Aren't you really a sinner too? Both need a solution. One walks in through the front door through admissions; the other one gets whisked in on a gurney. But both of them have a problem that will cost you your life.



You see, the reason this woman has no problem calling herself a sinner and seeing her need for Christ is she feels it. She sees it. Everyone sees it. And we could spend a lot more time on that, but I don't think we need to—you get the point. Take a good look at yourself and see. And you'll stop making lateral comparisons; you'll look up and say, "I understand—I've got a problem with the living God. I've got a moral problem."

I said a few reasons. Are you still in Luke 18? Look at the next verse. I'll give you another reason Pharisees have a hard time seeing their sin. Verse 12: "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." Now, don't get me wrong—there is a cultural discussion going on, even among Christians today, that the Pharisees were righteous people. Get that out of your mind. They were not righteous people. When someone's really holy you'll say, "Oh, these Pharisees." Don't say that—because if they're really holy, they're *not* a Pharisee. The Pharisees were sinners. They were hypocrites. And what they did was they said one thing and did another. But as this passage reveals, there are some things they do that are obvious and evidently righteous. But then they turn around and do other things that are obviously and evidently sinful. They're a contradiction.

But the thing that helps them overlook those contradictory things is the things they can point to that they know are biblical and moral and godly. In this case, "Hey, I fast twice a week. I give a tithe of all that I get." Those are godly, biblical things. But they—in the mind of a Pharisee—often cancel out the bad stuff.

Do you ever think that way? Thinking like a Pharisee is thinking, "I did some good things. Yeah, I got some bad things." If you want to dwell on that lateral comparison point—"You're right, I've got lust, I've got greed, I've got whatever—I see that. But look at the good things I've done." You can try to play that game with God, but it doesn't work. The Bible says the problem is a problem that we are guilty before the tribunal of God. We just need to own up to it. And no good deed can cancel out a bad deed when it comes to the problem of sin in your life. And the Pharisees were good at that—lateral comparisons and pointing to biblical morality. They have some signs of biblical morality. There's a lot of contradiction. But an honest appraisal should solve that in our own hearts.

Lastly, one of the things that may be odd to you is how a Pharisee named Simon can have a meal and some notoriously sinful woman can walk in and no one notice. Well, here's the thing: the Pharisees—if you do a study on the Pharisees—you'll know they were quite well off. They usually made good money. They lived in bigger homes. Here's a problem I think that we often find. It's so big—by the way—that, no, it's not like today with gates and security codes and all that. And certainly with Jesus



and his entourage, people were coming in and out of this guy's house in the middle of his dinner, and he didn't even keep track of who it was. And here comes the sinful woman.

My point is this, though: with all the comfort that is involved in a comfortable life like a Pharisee's, it starts to insulate us from the problem. In other words, if we talk about lateral comparisons, and we talk about pointing to résumé-building biblical morality in my life, there's another problem, and that is when we're well off or in peacetime or living comfortable and convenient lives—that often keeps me from seeing sin for what it is. That's the argument—by the way, a lot of these arguments overlap—in Romans 2, when it says if you're able to detect sin in someone else, look long enough—you'll see it in yourself. And the answer that's implied there by the person is, "Well, but God's not punishing me. God must be happy with me—look at my life, things are well." And the response to that, in Romans 2:4, is, "Do not mistake the kindness and the forbearance and the patience of God—don't mistake that for approval—because all of that is supposed to lead you to repentance. And if you don't repent, it's your impenitent heart that's going to store up wrath for you on the day of God's wrath when his kingdom arrives."

You've got to understand: sometimes our comfortable lives can dupe us—make us almost so insulated to our sin problem. Like the rich young ruler in Matthew 19—Jesus can look at those people and say, "Man, it sure is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Why? He rarely sees his problem. He rarely sees or senses his moral problem before a holy God.

Now, I doubt I need to even do this, but if there are some people that still think, "Well, you know what—I don't think I really have a moral problem. I think I'm okay." Well then, here—maybe this will help: we need a quintessential role model for our teenagers in the youth program. We need somebody godly that we can hold up as a model to live their lives in the pattern of a godly person's life in our church. So I need some people to sign up for this today. I'll have a table out there, and it'll say, "Godly ones—sign up here." Okay? And so you line up out there, and we're going to find the godly people that we can hold up in the lives of our teens.

Now, I've already—you know—a lot of you are just like, "Oh no, I remember my teenage years; I can't do it; I'm not qualified." Great. Some of you are saying, "I know it's hypothetical and all, but I live a pretty good life—if people turned out like me, that would be a good plan." Great. Let's keep going with that.



Speaking of the news and our—our Donald story this week—let’s take the story this way: before you sign up on the little form there—“I’m a godly, quintessential godly role model for teenagers at Compass Bible Church”—I want to tell you, you didn’t know this, but I installed about a month ago a bunch of hidden microphones in your home, and some cameras, and we’ve been recording all of your unguarded conversations. And so we have all that. So before you sign on the dotted line, why don’t we come back in the auditorium; we’re going to show all the things that you said this last month, and all the conversations you had—everything you discussed with your wife, everything you did with your kids—you know, we’ll take a good look at the time you kicked the dog—and we’ll just look at all of that here so that we know you’re really qualified to be that quintessential godly role model for our teenagers.

Now, if I said that, the pen would go down for a lot of people. Okay? By the way, Jesus is always trying to cut through that kind of duplicitous life by saying things like this: “The things that were whispered in the inner rooms—they’ll be proclaimed from the rooftops.” You may be able to fool people at church, but you cannot fool the living God of the universe. He sees everything. Everything—as he says—is laid open and bare before the One to whom we must give an account. He sees it all.

And if you’re going, “Well, you know what—everybody may be out on that one, but I’m still in because I had a great month.” Great—I’ve got one more thing for you. Let’s get the brainscope back out. We’re going to stick the brainscope there and focus it on your forehead. And here’s the thing about my brainscope: it’s attached to a computer that takes all of your thoughts that were never spoken, and we’re going to turn those into images and put those all up on the screen. So I have the last month of all of your thoughts. Let’s play those all. And let’s just call the teenagers in too so they can see the quintessential godly role model and all of your godly thoughts for the last month.

Do you see the point? Just with enough thinking about even a room of sinful people and their standard of God—you can’t even meet our standard of godliness. Think about that. And we’re a bunch of sinners. Everybody in the room is a sinner, right? Even our collective idea about what’s a godly, quintessential role-model life—none of us would qualify for it. You think you can qualify for God’s standard? Not a chance. Think that through, guys. I know a lot of people whistle their way through life going, “If I were to die and stand before God, he’d say, ‘You’re a good guy.’” Think that one through really, really well. If you’d be embarrassed about not meeting our human standard of godliness—you’re never going to meet God’s. “Oh, well, he’s nicer than us.” Really? The holy God of the universe has got a sliding scale that’s more Jell-O than ours? I don’t think so. The holy God of the universe is so holy, he looks at all of us and says this: “You’re all sinners, and you all fall short of the glory of God.”



Is the Pharisee a sinner? Yeah. He has a problem seeing that, though—lateral comparisons, pointing to résumé builders on his life, comfortable life kind of insulating him from any feelings of guilt.

Now, where does this story go? Back to Luke 7. Luke 7 ends this way, verses 48, 49, and 50. We're going to skip this middle interjection of Christ giving a parable to Simon the host, but let's get to where this ends up. Here's where it ends up—verse 48, Luke 7:48: “And he said to her”—Jesus says to the sinful woman—“Your sins are forgiven.” And those who were at the table began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” Now, Luke doesn't elaborate on this because we've already seen it in our study of Luke, but they think it's blasphemy—“Who gives you the right? You can't forgive sins. A mere man can't forgive sins.” And they have their theology right about this. They have their Christology wrong, though. Their theology is right—you're right: only God can forgive sins. But their Christology is wrong—thinking he's just a prophet. He's not “a prophet.” He's God incarnate. And he does have the right to forgive sins.

Verse 50: He turns now to the woman, and he says this: “Your good works here today have saved you. Go in peace.” Underline “good works.” Do you see that there? Is that what it says? No. It says, “Your faith”—and all the good things that you've done here today for my feet? Is that what it says? No. It just says, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

See, here's the problem: moral debauchery—sin. The solution is forgiveness. Christ grants forgiveness to those who put their faith in him. Here's how it's always been put, and rightly put. And if you study the Bible you'll come to this conclusion—it's not just the cry of the Reformation: **by faith alone.**

Number two: You must be trusting Christ alone for forgiveness. That's the hallmark that you're ready. You've sensed your moral problem—you get it; you even linger as a Christian with the sense of your moral problem. But when it comes to your moral problem, you sit there and you say, “I'm trusting Christ, and I'm trusting in him alone.” Here's a gal—didn't have much of a résumé. Christ could have pointed to her good deeds there, but he doesn't. He says, “Your faith has made you one who is saved. Now go in peace.”

Let's deal with a couple things here real quickly. Pharisees were mad that he's forgiving sin—as we saw earlier in the book of Luke—because he should have no right to forgive sins. Here's something you need to understand about God real quick. Jot this down, if you're taking notes: Psalm 51:4. Psalm 51:4—David is the subject. He's the one speaking, and he is writing a song about his guilt and his penitence—his repentance—over his sin with Bathsheba, which, of course, was complicated. It was not



just mere adultery. He commits adultery, impregnates his neighbor's wife. He realizes he's done that, so he brings the husband back from the battlefield to come home, and he tries to have him have sex with his wife so that when she turns up pregnant, everyone will think it's Uriah's kid. But he can't get this noble warrior to have sex with his wife because he's saying, "How could I possibly go and enjoy my home and sleep with my wife when all my comrades are out on the battlefield?" So he says, "No, I'm going to sleep on the porch," and he sleeps on the porch and everybody knows it. So David's stuck. So he has his commander do what? Put him in the heat of battle, draw the troops back, don't tell him—let Uriah die on the battlefield. David, by proxy, ends up becoming a murderer—killing Bathsheba's husband. Nathan confronts him; he feels the guilt of his sin; he senses his moral problem, and he repents.

When he repents, in the writing of this song, he says this in Psalm 51:4: "Against you and you only have I sinned." David, you must not understand what you've done. Let's talk to Uriah's mother about this. You've sinned against a lot of people here. You've sinned against Bathsheba. You've sinned against Uriah. You've sinned against Uriah's family. You, as a king we trust as some kind of example of righteousness—you've sinned against the whole nation here. You've sinned against a lot of people. But David says something theologically profound, and that is, "I've sinned against God. Ultimately, I've sinned against God alone." And here's the next line, and this will help build the logic on this principle: "Therefore"—he says—"you are justified in your words and blameless in your judgments." If you punish me—which is what he did; God punishes David because of this—you are just, and no one can say otherwise.

Now think that through: how can someone who wasn't sinned against actually exact any kind of recompense for the sin if it wasn't against you? Well, it *is* against you. That's why God is always just in bringing recompense for sin. Now, you know this intuitively, because when you sinned and did something against someone else, and it was egregious, and it pricked your conscience and you felt bad about it, and then something happened that wasn't from the person you sinned against—something painful and bad happened—and you knew it was orchestrated by the God of heaven—you didn't say, "God, what are you doing? This isn't your problem; I sinned against my neighbor." You knew it was right. Because here's the thing: you never sin and *don't* sin against the Triune God. You always sin against God, because God is the rule-giver and the law-giver. When you break the law, you've violated the Law-giver. Breaking the law—even if the collateral damage ends up hurting Uriah, Bathsheba, your kid, your nation, your neighbor—we always sin against God.

And if we sin against God, when God brings forth judgment, we say, "You're right in doing that," as David said in Psalm 51:4. What if he chooses to forgive? Then he has the right to forgive. See, the Triune God—in this case, the second person of the Godhead, the incarnate Jesus Christ—stands there and says to a woman who's sinned against a lot of people in her town, "I forgive you. You are forgiven." How can you do that, Jesus? You know this is a Christological statement here—he's



claiming to be more than a man—more than a prophet. A man can't forgive sins unless, I don't know, you're part of the lateral violation of my life. I suppose I could say, "I forgive you for what you've done to me." But how can someone like Jesus say he forgives a woman for the sins she's committed against other people? Because all sins ultimately are against the Law-giver, and Christ is the Law-giver, and he has the right to punish, and he has the right to forgive.

Now, this is what makes it even more profound—and if you're Christians, you know this. He not only forgives, but because he's just, he has to have a punishment exacted for the sin. Think this through: he also becomes, as John put it, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Now keep that thought bookmarked.

Let me give you another passage: Exodus 34. Moses is talking about the law and how God gives the law, and he says this, in reflecting on the revelation of God in that text. He says, "Your lovingkindness and your mercy—you're a great God—you're a loving, kind God." All of the things about your mercy and your grace—he says, "You forgive transgressions; you forgive sins." Think about that—forgive sins. You say, "Oh, okay, forgiving." The next line in that same verse says this: "And you will not hold the guilty harmless." In other words—as the ESV puts it—you "will by no means clear the guilty." You're going to forgive sinners, but you won't clear the guilty. What does that mean? Some people think God can just say, "You're forgiven, you're forgiven, you're forgiven," and it's all forgiven. You can't forgive just by mere fiat—out of nothing—say, "You're forgiven," because God is a God who is just, who will never clear the guilty.

How then do the guilty get forgiven? Well, they have to have a transfer of that sin so that the guilt is paid for. I know, we think that when we sin and God forgives, it goes *poof* and disappears. It disappears from your account, but it goes somewhere else. That's what the cross was about. Think about how rich it was for John to say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The lamb was the picture of the innocent animal taking the hit symbolically in worship by being roasted there as lunch while the guilty sinner has a sense of atonement. The substitutionary atonement of the Old Testament sacrificial system gave us the picture that the guilt was not *poof* removed—it was transferred to something else. In the Old Testament, symbolically an animal—the blood of bulls and goats. But that never removed sin, the writer of Hebrews says. It was only Christ—Christ who came to take human sin and punishment upon himself. Christ, who says, "You're forgiven," doesn't do it without cost. The woman's sin has to be paid for. And that's where the book of Luke goes—to the cross—where he finally says on the cross that he would bear the sin, as the prophets said in the Old Testament, of the guilty in his own body.



I've got to trust in that alone. That's the only way I can be right with the living God. Luke 18—I know we already turned there—but you remember this story. Let's just real quickly go back to that since it's close. You're in Luke 7; go to Luke 18 one more time. We jumped into the parable in verse 10—"Two men went up to the temple to pray." Can you just glance at verse 9 real quick? Why did Jesus tell this parable? Here's why he told this parable: "to some who"—underline it—"trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt." See, the problem isn't in lateral comparison just that you don't feel your sin—it's that you start thinking your righteousness—per the statement there: "I fast twice a week, and I give a tenth of all that I receive"—you start thinking that you're righteous enough. You trust in yourself that you're righteous. That has to go away.

Let me say real quickly about another Pharisee—his name was Saul. He became the apostle Paul, and he autobiographically tells us in Philippians 3—he says, as it relates to the rules, he was keeping them in a way that was blameless. People looked at his life—on the outside at least—and they saw that he was a great Pharisee. He calls himself a Pharisee in Philippians 3—he was a Pharisee. But he said anything that was credited to his account—did he trust in that? No. "I don't trust—I put no confidence in myself—in my flesh. I count it all loss." He says it three or four times in that text, even calling it *skubalon* in Greek. "I put no con—I consider it rubbish—filth—that I might gain Christ." Listen to this line now: "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from keeping the rules—from the law—but that which is through faith in Christ."

Now, you've heard that a hundred times. Have you really heard it? You know, this is the thing non-Christians don't like about the message that we're preaching right now—that somehow, without any work on your part, you can trust in Christ—even if it were the last minute of your death—and you'd be right with the living God. They think that's wrong when they look at other people that reject Christ but live a "good life."

Let me test this view of grace in your mind. I want you to think right now about the most vile person you know—the most vile, evil, frustrating person you know. Think of that person. That didn't take you long, did it? You got it. Now, I mean the person *you know*—don't pick Dahmer or Bundy or Manson unless you hung out with those guys—but if you don't know them personally, I don't want you to think of them. I want you to think of the person you *know* that you think, "I can't stand that person." I'd reveal that, but I won't. They're so sinful, so evil, so—that's the worst you know. Got it?

You're on the patio having your donut and coffee afterwards, chit-chatting and saying hi, hugging a few baptismal people there that were in the tank this morning, and here that very person walks up to you. And you go, "Ooh—you were here in that service?" "Yeah, I was." "Did you hear those baptisms?" "Yeah, I heard 'em." "But what are *you* doing here?" "Well, you know what? Someone



invited me—I came. I was so overwhelmed with the testimonies, and Pastor Mike got up and taught from that passage there in Luke 7. I was so convicted that today I broke down in that service that we just got out of, and you know what? I confessed my sin to God. I repented of my sin. I trusted in Christ.” And you know your response: “We’ll see about that. Let’s see about a year from now. See if you’re even walking with Christ.” “Well, yeah, sure, okay, we’ll see.” Maybe you’re polite.

We get no time to see, because you get another phone call tomorrow, and you find out—some relative of this person calls you and says, “I know it’s weird for me to call you, but I was talking with this person on the cell phone as they were leaving your little church there in Aliso Viejo. And they told me that they became a Christian, and they were so excited to see you there, and they know they did a lot of wrong in your life.” And then, “But here’s the thing: I’m calling you because—they died in a traffic accident on the way home from church. And I know it’s weird, but because they talked about you, and they saw you there, and they were so thrilled to see you there, and they felt like a new person because of something that was taught at your church, I just want to ask you—next week we’re planning the funeral. Would *you* speak at his funeral?” (Or I should say “her funeral”—I don’t know who your vile person is.)

Let’s test your view of grace real quick. Can you get up behind the podium at that funeral—based on that testimony of a contrite heart transferring the trust of that person’s heart to Christ—and claim at that funeral, with the message of the gospel, that they are right with Christ the same way *you* are—by faith alone—and extol not only the grace of God in that person’s life but the reality of the fact that you have confidence they’ll be with Christ? That’s the thing non-Christians don’t like about the gospel. That’s why man has created things like purgatory—because, “I’ve got a place for a person like that. At least maybe they’ll get to heaven eventually—we’re going to burn them for a little while before we get them in there, because, you know what—they’re really bad. Now, if you live a really, really, *really* good life, then you know what—you’ll pass a lot of that.” See, this is nonsense.

Jesus could look at the most vile person being crucified right next to him and say—because of your faith (that’s the context)—“Today you’ll be with me in paradise.” That’s the grace that we all claim to get right with God. That’s trusting not in a life of your sanctification, not in a life of good works—that is trusting in Christ alone to be saved. Now, if that’s your theology—if that’s your experience—you’re trusting, then you know what? So far, so good. That’s the second component of the hallmark.

Lastly—with the three minutes we’ve got left—let’s go to the middle of this story. Luke 7:40. Luke 7:40. Now, remember what we just got out of in verse 39—“The woman’s a sinner; if you were really a prophet, you’d know that; you wouldn’t let her touch your feet.” Jesus, now answering him—wait a minute, it was a thought in his head! I know—he is a prophet; he’s more than a prophet. “Simon, I have



something to say to you.” And he said, “Well, say it, Teacher.” Interrupts his little thought—his nasty thought about Christ being a terrible prophet. “Well, okay. So, yes, sir. What’s your story?”

“Well, there’s a certain moneylender who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii”—and if you’re a Sunday School graduate, you know what a denarius is—a day’s wage of your average minimum wage worker. In a culture like ours, let’s just say that five hundred of those is around \$40,000—so that’s a frame for you to work with. “The other owed fifty denarii”—fifty—that’s around \$4,000. Fifty days’ wage—so \$4,000 and \$40,000. Now split-screen this in your mind, if you would: “When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both.” Right? Let’s just say it’s an email, and you’ve got the split screen—here’s the guy who owes \$40,000—can’t pay—and here’s the guy that owes \$4,000—can’t pay. You’ve got the split screen; you send the email to one: “Hey, you know what, I know you owe me \$40,000; you can’t pay it. But here—I just want to tell you—let’s just consider it all paid in full. It’s over. I forgive your debt.” And the guy with \$4,000—same thing: “I forgive your debt.” Now the camera goes—they read the email. What’s the reaction of those two guys? They’re both happy. Which one’s happier? That’s the question.

Take a look at this—bottom of verse 42: “Now,” he says, “Simon, which one of them will love him more?” Which one’s going to dance around? Simon answered, “Well, the one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You’ve judged rightly. That’s the right answer.”

Verse 44: Then, turning to the woman—speaking of people with a big debt—he says to Simon, “Do you see this woman? Let’s just talk a little bit about her. I entered your house—you gave me no water for my feet.” That was customary when you came into someone’s house—could be overlooked, like it’s customary maybe to bring a gift to someone’s home if you’re visiting them and you bring them a gift—“Thanks for inviting me over for dinner—here’s a little something”—and that was totally overlooked. Which can be, I suppose, if you feel like, I don’t know, just “Yeah, we’re buds,” and—whatever. But whatever it was, he did not look up to Christ enough to even wash his feet or have someone wash his feet. “But she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss”—and that was customary, too—and maybe he felt, you know, honestly, like he was such a peer with Christ—“I’m not going to give you that customary, respectful greeting.” He doesn’t do it. “But from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You didn’t anoint my head with oil”—and granted, that was something you usually did only at the best banquets in the first century—but still, it did happen sometimes—“and yet, look: she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven.” Now he’s making the observation—her reaction was because she feels the relief of this big debt being forgiven. And you know how you can tell? Because she’s loved much. “For she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”



Now, don't confuse that. Don't think he's saying, "Hey, Simon, you don't love me very much because you think you're forgiven little." The problem was he didn't see his sin at all. Because even a Pharisee who's lived a relatively good life in comparison to lateral comparisons—here's the thing: when they get struck with the sin in their own lives, they say, like Saul did, "I'm the worst of sinners." Now he says that because he persecuted the church, but he did it in ignorance; he did it in zeal. He looks at his life and he says, "The worst." Man—no matter who you are—you don't have to be on the 11 o'clock news to feel like you are a horrible sinner when the Spirit of God gives you the conviction from point one in the sermon and you see your moral problem.

The point here is, though: to the extent that you feel that relief of the forgiveness of your sins, you're going to see a reaction. What reaction do we have here? A woman who could have been doing anything that day tracks down Christ when she hears that he's there, takes an expensive vial of her ointment, comes in, finds him, sits there at his feet in tears over gratitude for Christ—who is the one who takes away the sin of the world—and she's wiping his feet in the humility of taking her own hair and wiping between the toes. This is an amazing picture—anointing his feet with that ointment.

There's a reaction to forgiveness.

Number three: Let your relief motivate sacrifice. You've got to see that in your life. And if you don't see it—if you see no reaction—have you sacrificed?

Let me give you three categories. One is being displayed right here, and that is **sacrifice in worship**. Clearly, worship is saying thanks to God. Here, is she being thankful to God? She's being thankful to God because she knows she's forgiven. Look throughout the Psalms and you'll see it all over the place. They feel the sense of worship for God and thanksgiving to God, and they bring their sacrifices—even the picture of sacrifice: something I have that I could keep, but I'm giving it to you. Sacrifice in worship. When you come to worship, you sacrifice time; you sacrifice your offering; you sacrifice things because you are grateful and motivated by the love you have for God because of the forgiveness you feel in Christ. That's the first aspect.

Here's the second one: **obedience**. Love sacrificially obeys. Obeying is when I know that something is wrong, but because I love the Christ who forgave me, I'm willing to deny myself the satisfaction of doing the wrong thing—whether it's a word of gossip, a thought of lust, or something that you do at work that you know you shouldn't do. But you say, "I'm not going to do that. I'm going to sacrifice," and, as it's put in the Bible, "put to death the deeds of my flesh," because I love Jesus Christ. That's a



picture of the kind of loving sacrifice we see throughout the New Testament. Love motivates sacrifices in worship. Love motivates sacrifices in obedience.

How about this one: **love motivates sacrifices in service.** And by service—you can't serve Christ directly, he's not here. So put your vial of ointment away. Right? No—no, that's not true. Keep it out. Why? Because here's what the Bible says—1 John 3:16: "We know what love is—that he laid down his life for us—and therefore we ought to lay down our lives for"—*him*? It says, "lay down our lives for the brothers." So that's the thing about the sacrifice that comes from a loving heart—because they've been relieved of their sins, they're willing to serve the body of Christ. They're willing to serve not the literal body of Christ, but the metaphorical body of Christ—the people of Christ. You'll see them involved in all kinds of stuff you never thought they'd sacrifice time and energy to do, because they're giving themselves to other people in the name of Christ.

If your relief over forgiveness has not motivated sacrificial worship, sacrificial obedience, and self-sacrificial service, then I'd wonder if you have any sense of your forgiveness. Or maybe you've never even sensed your moral problem. Or maybe you're not trusting in Christ alone. But real salvation produces that.

Now, there's a lot more to this sermon, and I tried to help you—knowing we'd have a truncated time together—on the back would be a great week for you if you've never done the worship or the work or the discussion questions on the back—to work through those.

But let me just end—as long as I started—with a quote from Matthew 24. The next chapter—Jesus is talking about the coming Kingdom. He puts it this way: He says, "When the Son of Man comes"—speaking of himself—"and sits on his glorious throne." You remember that passage; remember the wording of that passage—"sits on his"—what? When the Son of Man comes and sits on his throne—that's the picture of the coming Kingdom—which, by the way, is going to come without notice. At some point, you're going to walk across the threshold of this life into the next one. And unlike an earthquake, this is something you don't dread. This is something—if you're a Christian—you pray for every day: "Your kingdom come." We want it to come.

But when you get there, know this—here's what he says next: When the Son of Man comes and sits on his glorious throne, "he will gather the people before him and separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." There's the prepared and the unprepared. And it may be surprising that some people—like the notorious tax collector or the notorious sinful woman of Luke 7—they're going to be



the sheep. And sometimes those that don't see their sin problem, don't trust in Christ alone—because they've got a lot of their résumé in their trust—and people that never show any kind of sacrificial response to forgiveness—because they really haven't experienced that—you're going to find those people that the world thought, "For sure they're going to be sheep," and you'll be surprised. Because—this isn't the beginning of the sermon back there in Matthew—saying that all is a sermon, but the Sermon on the Mount—Matthew 7—he says, "Many will come to me on that day and say, 'Lord, Lord, we did a lot of these things,'" and he'll say, "Depart from me; I never knew you."

The Kingdom's coming. You don't know when. You can't incrementally and methodically prepare. You have to leave this building today prepared. And maybe you've been to churches where they do a lot of weird things—like, "Raise your hand; slip it up; play another song; and, over the course of the song, walk an aisle; come forward; talk to me; get a Bible; fill out a form." We don't do any of that here. We just want you to do business with God before you get on the roads today. Make sure that you're right with the living God.

"What do I do?" God's work on your heart—you'll know what to do. You'll repent of your sin—your life of independence from God. You'll say, "I'm ready to trust in Christ alone." You'll experience what we've all experienced who are Christians—the relief of your sin, like that old Bunyan story I think I mentioned last week—where the guilt of your sin is taken off your back because you're trusting in Christ. You'll have a great sense of relief, and it will motivate a lifetime of service—sacrificial service—worship to the Lord Jesus, including a lot of personal obedience people will never see. But you'll say "no" to things in your life because you love Christ—because he forgave your debt.

Ran out of time. So why don't you stand with me and I'll let you go. If you need to deal with Christ, please do that right now. If you're a Christian, this is something that just affirms a reality in your life that you've already lived through, and I just encourage you, as I pray, to celebrate how good it is in your heart to know you're forgiven. Nothing better than that.

Let's pray.

God, we know—like a lot of testimonies we heard this morning in the baptismal service here—it's easy for us to get duped. We like to think the best of ourselves like the Pharisees did. "We're okay. Surely you love us. We've done a lot of good things. Clearly you can't see us as morally dispatched—we've got to be good in your eyes. You're loving anyway, right?" That's what the Bible says. With all that kind of talk, we can insulate ourselves from seeing the moral problem we have before you.



And God, we want to sense that—not because we want to live in that guilt, but because we want that guilt to drive us to repentance—real repentance, the kind of repentance that sees that our only hope is trusting in the finished work of Christ alone. And as that transfer of trust takes place, we know the signs of that are a life that doesn't live like everyone else. We don't fit in the world very well because we're not concerned about man's opinions. We're not just trying to live a comfortable life. We don't live for the weekends. Our whole life changes. We live for the Kingdom. We seek first the Kingdom. We care about Jesus Christ and his agenda. And because of that, we're willing to say no to sin; we're willing to worship you extravagantly; we're willing, in our own lives, to serve other people in the name of Christ. These kinds of things characterize our lives because we feel the indebtedness that we have to a God that loved us so much he gave his only Son—that if we would trust in him we wouldn't perish but have eternal life.

Thanks for this sober reminder of the theology and the gospel that we proclaim. Let it motivate us this week to live for you. Thanks so much for the relief of forgiveness. In Jesus' name, amen.