

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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**November 12, 2000
Luke 7:36-50**

Sermon Title “Losing Breathless Gratitude”

Let us read a story out of the book of Luke Chapter 7. Let me tell you a couple of things about it because part of it we will loose because of our culture. People in Jesus’ day did not sit up and eat like we do. All of us have seen pictures of the Lord’s Supper, but that is not the way they ate. What they would do is lie down and rest on one elbow and eat with the other hand. The second thing, if you invited people into your home one of the things that you did was to provide them some water so that they could wash their feet. As you have seen on television, when they greet each other in the middle east, they don’t shake hands, but rather they just touch each others cheek. Then they would always place a little bit of perfume on the persons hair because it was so hot and they didn’t have an opportunity to bath as often as they should. Another part of it is that all the time they would eat, they would usually eat outside. It was the common sort of thing, that people would come from the community, and particularly if they were someone well known, they would have the opportunity to join in and listen to what was being said.

Now with all of that, listen to our passage for this morning. A Pharisee invited Jesus home to eat and he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman had heard that Jesus was coming. Because she had lived a sinful life, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume and 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. When the Pharisee who had invited him heard this he said, *“If this man was a prophet he would know this is a sinful woman”*.

Then Jesus gives this story; although, I won’t read it all. The story is that one man owed a man fifty denarii and another man owed him five. The man forgave both of their debts. Jesus said, *“Which man would be the most appreciative?”* He said, *“The one who had the greatest debt.”* Then Jesus, in verse 47, says this, *“Therefore I tell you that the woman had many sins that were forgiven, for she loves much but he who has been forgiven little, loves little”*.

Dako was a student at our Baptist seminary in Saigon during the Vietnam conflict. He was told to go in and see the president, Dr. Sam James. about finding a place to serve. He said, *“I want to go back up to the northern part of the country, where I am from. I want to take the opportunity there to minister to my own people”*. He went and pastored a small Baptist church that began to grow because of this outstanding young man. One day when he was preaching, a group of North Vietnamese soldiers came in and said that if Dako preached the following Sunday they would kill him. The next Sunday Dak preached and the North Vietnamese, true to their word, showed up. They took him by the hand , walked him out of the church and riddled his body with bullets. Dr. Sam James heard about the incident and went up to the little church where Dako had preached. He noticed that underneath a tree the people had dug a grave and on it had put a cross. On the cross it said, *“He Loved to the End”*.

The night I heard that story it had been a very unusual day for me. I had not been too long at a new church. I had recognized that in most churches there are a lot of people who have names on the church role but do not attend. I asked my secretary if she would, every hour on the hour that day, make an opportunity for me to go and visit in these homes I wanted to ask each of those families if the church had done something wrong. Had something happened in their life, why had they grown cold in their Christian life so that you no longer attended service. I had thought I would hear all kinds of reasons. Really, what I heard was all kinds of excuses.

No one had a really good reason why they had dropped out of church - some of them for many years. I heard all kinds of stories. One lady, I thought, took the cake. She said, "I have a very difficult circumstance." She said, "It's too far for me to walk, but it's too close for me to get out and drive." After that long day of hearing these sorts of statements, I went to a missionary conference and heard the story of Dako. It created for me a spiritual crisis. The spiritual crisis was this: Dako and the members of my congregation gave their life to the same Lord. They were individuals who had been baptized, they were individuals who had walked down the aisle of a church and said, "I want to give my life to Christ." Yet here was a man who was willing to give his life and here were people who misunderstood what the Bible said. They thought it said remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. My question was, how can people give themselves to the same Lord, follow the same Christ and yet end up in entirely different circumstances?

Out of that incident I was led to this passage of scripture. A passage of scripture of a man who invited Jesus into his house as an act of friendship and yet insulted Him in every way. He didn't reach out his hand to shake it, to touch each others cheek, or to provide any water for His feet. He didn't provide a drop of perfume for His hair. What he simply was saying is , you are here but I want to do everything I can to insult you. And yet here is a woman who came to hear Jesus, who became so impressed with Him that her emotions got the best of her. She began to weep. She immediately took down her hair and started wiping the tears off of His feet because she was so embarrassed. Recognizing, of course, that in Bible times, women always had their hair up or always had their hair covered. The only people who ever put down their hair was a prostitute. She was not thinking, not worried about herself - only trying to express her love for the Lord. Taking something that would be very expensive, the perfume, and poured it on His feet. And Jesus turned to Simon and said, "*I want to tell you why this person loves and why obviously you don't.*" He said, "*This woman loves me because she has a sense of how much it means to be forgiven.*" Then He said, "*He who loves the most is the one who is forgiven the most*". Simply put, the people who remain close to Christ, who are willing to love Him and serve Him are the people who live their lives out of gratitude for what Christ has done for them in forgiveness. The people who grow cold in their Christian life are the individuals who have lost the sense of joy of what Christ has done for them in forgiving them of their sins.

Years ago one of our Presidents, John Kennedy, went to the city of Berlin. It was the time when the Berlin wall was there. Mr. Kennedy stood at the base of that wall and said to the people of Germany that the world and the Americans would stand behind them. You may recall that he said in German that day, "*Ich bin in Berlin*, I too am a Berliner. I am here to stand with you." You might recall that the next year the Russians came in and tried to starve out Berlin. We sent some of our newspaper people to see how the Berliners were reacting to it and they found a sense of calm and a sense of not worrying about the difficulty. One of the reporters asked a man on the street, "Why do you all feel this way?" And the man said, "You remember last year, when your President came and said, "*Ich bin in Berlin.*" We have never gotten over what your president said to us.

If you will look in your life and recognize that your spiritual temperature is ice cold, then the simple answer for Jesus is you've gotten over what I have done for you and that if you want to keep the flame afire then it means you are going to have to come back to remember who you are and how He has worked in your life.

Take a moment first of all to refresh your spiritual life, remember the fact of the depth of the sin in your own life. Jesus said, *We had a unique capacity. We can see the sin in everybody else's life but can't see it in ours.* He said, *You can see the speck in their eyes, but can't see the log in your own.* So you are able to look and see that other people are doing things that are wrong, but somehow can't see that you are doing it yourself. Now the reason that that is true, I think, is that we have such a light concept of really what sin is. If I ask the person who has been coming to church for a while, "What is sin?" And they would say, "Sin is breaking the law. Well, that is partially true. But the Bible says it is far more than that.

Let me show you how it works. Outside on Buford Road there is a stop sign. That is the law. The law says you are to stop. But suppose you run through the law, you run through the stop sign, the Bible would call that sin. But you know you can run through a stop sign and really not be that concerned. Oh, you can be anxious that you missed it but you will get over it pretty quickly. But suppose you ran the stop sign and you

happen to hit my car that had my child in it, and my child was killed. Then you see you have done far more than break the law. You have broken my heart. Sin is not breaking the law. Sin is breaking God's heart. And if you are here today and have a child who has turned away and gone into all kinds of difficulty, you recognize they have done a lot more than break a law, they have broken my heart. Then you begin to understand how deep it is what we have really done to God and if you want to know how deep it is then just stand at a cross and understand the broken heart of God as he dies for us and then we understand it is not broken law, it is breaking God's heart. And the only way in which we can keep aware of the depth of our sin is that we have to keep close to Him. In fact, I can tell you how close you are to Him. Tell me how deeply you feel about the wrong in your life, that's pretty good indication of how close you are to Him.

I remember the story of a man who was going out on a very important date, went out and bought a nice suit, was walking down the street to pick up his girlfriend, it had rained that day, car came by hit a pothole and he realized that water had splattered all over his suit. Well he looked down in the dark and he said, "Well maybe not too bad," and he walked down to the street light and he said, "My goodness, it's a little worse" and then he got into the girls living room with all the lights on and he looked down and he said, "My goodness I am ruined." The difference is light and the closer you are to Him the more you sense how aware you are that you ought not have the privilege of being there and as you continue to keep a sense of brokenness before God, you give a sense of gratitude that God could reach down and touch.

Second thing Jesus said that we need to have, we need to have a sense again of what it meant to be forgiven. You see, God created everything in six days, but when He wanted to forgive us it meant that His Son had to come to the earth and die for our sins. We somehow have the statement, you remember like the German philosopher said, "God will forgive you, that is His business." We feel like God is some big eraser in the sky, all we do is just sit down and the big eraser makes it so easy somehow to be able just to forgive us. I wanted to ask you, have you ever had anybody to really do you in, I mean really do something wrong to you. Then you tell me how easy it is to forgive? You will begin to recognize that forgiveness is one of the hardest things in the world you can ever do. And when God reaches down to forgive you, remember it cost His Son. Now I wanted to ask you, "Have you gotten over the brokenness before your God? Have you thought forgiveness is so easy? I mean you just do whatever you want to and every night you just say your prayers and say gimme, gimme, gimme forgive me. You don't even name your sins, its bound to be so easy for you to forgive. And have you gotten over what it really means to be forgiven.

Years ago I asked a well known politician to share his faith in Christ. It was a man who has been a very successful business man. One night he came home, his wife met him at the door. His name happened to be Tubby. She said, "Tubby, we've tried everything we can to try to work through this marriage and yet you continue to be involved in all of these things and I just can't keep doing this, and I wanted you to know that tonight I was going to go on home and live with my folks for a while and maybe we can work out our difficulty." Tubby said, "After he said good-bye to his wife he realized that of all the things that meant something to him, she meant more than anything." And so he said, "He went to the refrigerator to try to get some beer" and he said, "I started drinking it and though I have drunk all my life," he said, "the beer made me sick at my stomach." He said, "I sat down and tried to read the newspaper" and he said, "I got so nervous," he said, "I just jumped up" and said, "I think I'll go out and mow the grass," and it was 9 o'clock at night and it happened to be February and it was raining, snow on the ground and he was out running on the grass and finally he said, "He came in and just got down" and he said, "God I have made a mess out of my life and I really want you to make a difference with me." What Tubby didn't know was that his wife had not gone home that night, that she had gone down to the First Baptist Church of that city, had ask for special prayer and they changed everything that night and everybody in the room was praying for that one man that night. It was a wonderful testimony of how Christ had saved a life and changed a life. He went back and gave away his businesses or sold his businesses and just had become a wonderful leader in our state. When he began to tell that story I noticed that his voice began to quiver with emotion and then he took his glasses off, reached for his handkerchief and started dabbing his eyes and I realized that here was a very powerful, well known man in our state who was crying and he turned and said something that I've always remembered, he said, "I am sorry," he said, "I didn't

realize after all these years that I would still be so emotional.” And then he turned and said, “No, I’m not going to apologize.” He said, “I hope I never get over what Jesus has done for me.” This story is about a man who got over it and a woman who never could. I wanted to ask you, which one represents you? One who has gotten over it, you find it easy to ignore Him, easy not to be involved in what He is interested in, but now you recognize you would rather be like the woman who loved Him so much she wanted to everything she could for Him. Some of you in this room today need to come to say I’ve never publicly given my life to Christ and I realize what He has done for me and I want to come today and give my life to Him. Some of you are Christians who need very much to get involved in a church to show your love for Him and whatever God has been leading you to do, I wanted to ask you now as we stand and sing a hymn of invitation, if you wouldn’t respond and say Christ because of what you have done, I want to respond to you right now, would you? Why don’t we stand together and why don’t we sing.