

*Introduction:*

- A. *Illus.*: Recently I was over at Einsteins and I ran into a couple I know. We chatted a bit and I asked, “So what are you guys up to today.” She replied, “I’m going over to church to help.” She’s a Christian, very involved in a good church. He said with a grin. “I’m not. I’m a heathen.” Not that he really meant that, of course. He thinks he’s just fine even though he has no interest in Christ.

But how is it that two people with so much in common can see Jesus so differently? How come one sister loves Christ and her spouse wants nothing to do with him? Or what about our friend who loved the idea of knowing God personally but turned her back on Christianity when she realized that she had to admit that sin was a deadly problem which only Jesus could forgive? “*I just don’t think sin is a big deal,*” she said.

- B. Today, we look at a story from **Luke 7** where two people met Jesus reacted completely differently.
- C. To understand what Luke is doing with this story we have to back up a bit to John the Baptist. John’s baptism wasn’t like Christian baptism today. His baptism was the first step for people returning to God. It was an act of repentance. Our baptism as Christians is the last step—the public declaration of the salvation we’ve received. Now, back to John the Baptizer: **Luke 3:3-4** says, “*He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*  
*A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
 Prepare the way for the Lord,  
 make straight paths for him...  
 And all people will see God’s salvation.*”

The way people responded to John directly affected how they would respond later to Jesus. Look at **Luke 7:29-30**, *“All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, **because they had been baptized by John.** But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, **because they had not been baptized by John.**”* John’s baptism had indeed prepared the way for the Lord, and those who were baptized saw God’s salvation in Jesus. The others didn’t

**So which response to John and to Jesus was the right response.** A few verses later, after talking some more about John, Jesus concluded his remarks in **v. 35** with this proverb: *“Wisdom is proved right by all her children.”* In other words, you can tell which was the wise response by what happened to the people who made those choices.

**What follows is a case in point.** It’s as if Luke says, *“Let me give you an example.”* He introduces us to a Pharisee who undoubtedly fits the description that he *“rejected God’s purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John.”* He and most of the other Pharisees had not been baptized by John because they saw no need to humble themselves and repent. They were, to their thinking, demonstrably righteous and in no need of repentance. Then there’s a woman—with a reputation in that town as a sinner—who was among those who, *“when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.”*

So here’s how the story goes: **Luke 7:36-39...** Can you imagine the stir that woman must’ve created! But while everyone in that room was looking at her, Jesus focused on Simon. Do you remember the cartoon character, Mr. Magoo? He was this old guy who was as blind as a bat but he was oblivious to his poor sight,

which got him into all kinds of trouble. Simon in this story is a spiritual Mr. Magoo. He thinks he sees fine, but he lost his sight when he refused to face his own sin.

## I. THOSE WHO REJECT REPENTANCE GO BLIND

- A. Those who won't repent are so blind they can't tell a saint from a sinner. Now that's pretty fundamental in the religion business—being able to tell a saint from a sinner. But it's still the same today. **People think that saints are people who are religious rule-keepers....** (*“Well, isn't she a saint!”*) **But actually there are no saints except those who have been forgiven.** When you're as blind as Simon you can't recognize a saint when she kneels in your own dining room. I love what **Alexander Maclaren** wrote, *“‘She is a sinner.’ No, Simon, she was a sinner, but she is a saint, far purer having been washed, than thou art, who art only whitewashed.”*
- B. What's more, those who won't repent are blind to their own unpayable debt. Vv.40-43... Don't you get the impression that at the end of that parable Simon gives his answer but he is oblivious to the point. After all, he hadn't even had a small debt forgiven. In his mind, he was no debtor at all; certainly not to God! He scrupulously kept the Law—or so he thought. Never mind his self-righteousness. Never mind his stinginess with grace. Never mind his complete blindness to the Messiah himself, even when he sat at his own table! **Kent Hughes** calls self-righteousness like his *“the tasteless, colorless, odorless carbon monoxide of sin.”* **When we're blind to our sin, even Jesus himself could preach to us and we wouldn't see!**
- C. Finally, those who won't repent utterly dishonor Jesus Christ. Vv.44-50... Jesus bluntly points out that Simon didn't even offer him common hospitality—washing the

dirt off his feet, a kiss of greeting, or some oil on his head. Those who won't repent often treat Jesus with contempt and scorn. Think of how often you hear Jesus' name used derisively and thoughtlessly. What's more, they disdain those who love Jesus unabashedly. And, bottom line, they do not believe that Jesus can or would forgive sins. If "Wisdom is proved right by all her children," **this child of that decision, this spiritual Mr. Magoo, doesn't seem too wise!**

SUMMARY: God, in his great mercy, sent his one and only Son to die for our sins and he invites us to repent so that our sins might be forgiven. "*Repent and be washed clean. Repent and have your insurmountable debt wiped away.*" But when people refuse to face their sin before God, they eventually go blind.

Illus.: I've never forgotten a story I read years ago. **Eddie Martin** was a well-known evangelist in the days of tent revivals. He told of a well-dressed lady from Bluefield, WV, who came forward at an invitation to repent and receive Christ. "*I took this woman's hand and began to give her the prayer to repeat after me: 'Dear Lord, I know I'm a no-good sinner.'* She never said a word. I looked at her and said, 'Don't you want to be saved?'

*She said, 'Yes, Eddie, I do want to be saved, but I'm not a sinner.'*

*'Then you can't be saved,' I said. 'Jesus only died for sinners.'*

*'But, Mr. Martin,' she replied, 'I'm a good sinner.'*

*'A good sinner! Lady, there are no good sinners. You will have to take your seat. God can't save you until you become conscious that you are a no-good sinner and need his forgiveness.'*

*‘But Mr. Martin, you don’t understand. I’m really not a bad sinner.’*

*I told her to go back and sit down. She held onto my hand with a vise-like grip.*

*Finally she looked me in the eyes and said, ‘Oh, please forgive me. I know I am a no-good, hell-deserving sinner. I am a proud, no-good sinner. I do need Christ to forgive me of my sins.’*

*‘Wonderful! Now, lady, you are ready to do business with God!’”*

And that brings us to the person in this story who could see: the sinful woman turned saint.

## **II. THOSE WHO REPENT ARE FORGIVEN AND FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS**

It’s clear that this woman had sought and found God’s forgiveness before this event. She doesn’t come to repent. She comes with her alabaster jar of perfume to worship Jesus. Given the context, I’m sure she was one of those who went to John to be baptized for the forgiveness of her sins. What’s significant here is that she has come to show her love for Jesus because she recognizes that he is the reason God has forgiven her. Though in this story she never says a word, it is clear that she sees what Mr. Simon Magoo didn’t. **Those who repent and receive Jesus see what others are blind to:**

- A. We see the wonder of God’s forgiveness. She’d gone out to John at the Jordan River heavy-hearted with the guilt of her sin. She humbled herself to be baptized and when she came up out of that water her terrible burden was gone, as if it had miraculously dissolved. Spiritually speaking, she was *born again*. She was new, guiltless, free. God erased her debt. He bestowed on her a crown of beauty instead of

ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

- B. What's more, we see that our bondage to our old sinful life ended. She didn't *want* to do those things anymore, and she didn't *have* to. God gives us the power *not* to sin!

*Illus.:* I met a girl years ago who'd grown up in the Jehovah's Witnesses, as legalistic a group as these Pharisees. By the time she was 13 she'd already broken so many of their rules she knew she was already destined for hell, and there was nothing she could do about it. So, she reasoned, why even try to be good? But then a Christian relative explained the gospel to her and she was drawn to the grace of Jesus. She said she'd never known anything but darkness and then God's light dawned, and she became a new person. She loved Christ. She loved her freed heart. She wanted to be righteous. I think that same thing had happened to this woman. She finally had the freedom *not* to sin.

- C. Another enormous change was that we see how to walk by faith. It started when she heard John preach, promising that God would forgive the repentant who were baptized and that she—even *she*—could be part of God's kingdom. She ***believed*** that with a tiny seed of faith and then it happened.

As she listened to John speak of the coming Messiah, and when she eventually heard Jesus teaching, she ***believed*** that Jesus *was* the Messiah and that what God had done for her was because of Jesus. I don't know if she understood that this Lamb of God would die for her sin, but she knew he was the reason God saved her.

Not only did she realize that Jesus was the reason for her salvation, but ***her faith kindled her love for him***. I imagine her listening to Jesus teach and her heart

overflowing. I doubt this was the first time her tears had flowed. *She trusted Jesus*. She knew he had changed her life and she loved him for it.

D. Finally, those who see become worshippers of Christ. She came to that dinner with her alabaster jar of perfume in hand. She knelt at his feet, in the posture of a servant, and when her tears began to flow, she didn't care what people thought. She let down her hair to wipe away the tears and dirt of the road. She kissed Jesus' feet, spontaneously, no doubt. And then she poured that perfume on his washed and kissed feet. The fragrance filled the room like a love song, like a prayer of love. She couldn't get enough of Jesus!

E. And when Jesus spoke to her, his words were wonderful: "*Your sins are forgiven.*" Then, "*Your faith has saved you.*" So the wisdom of believing God's offer of forgiveness, the wisdom of believing in Jesus as the Messiah, that wisdom had in her a child of wisdom, while the blind and foolish Simon was left a debtor to God.

Then Jesus said, "*Go in peace.*" It was not a wish. It was her benediction, her birthright.

SUMMARY: It's tempting to say, "*So if you love Jesus be like this woman.*" But love can't be forced. We can't stir up love but we *can* think about where we'd be without Jesus.

We *can* think about his sacrifice for us.

We *can* think about the inner life of the Holy Spirit.

We *can* think about all the times we've sensed his company and help.

We *can* think about the hope of heaven he's given us, about the desire he's given us to be righteous.

We *can* think about our new identity in Jesus and our family among God's people.

We *can* think about how wonderful the Scriptures have become.

We *can* think of how good it is to now be reckoned as “oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.” And thinking with thanks upon those great gifts, our love will grow.

*Illus.:* I met Rosa at Einsteins where she was working. A couple of years ago when Rosa and I first began to talk, she was so guilt-ridden, fearful, and confused. I’d talk to her about God’s forgiveness and at first she couldn’t wrap her head around it. She’d be grateful but she’d also wonder what she had to do to pay for her sins. “*Nothing,*” I said more than once. “*Jesus pays for all our sins.*”

Then right at the end of December a year ago, as we visited one day, the gospel clicked for Rosa. She prayed that day and trusted Jesus to save her and give her new life. Three months later, on Easter last year, she was baptized. She was so excited that day!

A few months ago, Rosa moved to Florida but occasionally she sends me text messages, like these:

*Thank you for being there for me and showing me how great it is living in Jesus’ way.*

*I want to let you know that even when I am far away from the church that I had been born [again] in, I am looking forward to learning the Bible.*

*I know everything started when Jesus chose me as his daughter and you as my pastor to bring me to his feet.*

Often her messages include Bible verses. One of her last messages said, *I can’t stop talking about the wonderful blessing ... to take me to the light.*

**Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**