

## **Second Chances: 3. Sinned/Ashamed**

**Luke 7:36-39**

**January 22, 2017**

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Two weeks ago, I began this series with a story about helping my daughter pick up a discarded table. It had been left on the street by someone who no longer wanted it, but she wanted it in spite of or maybe even because of its rough condition. So we brought it back to her apartment, tightened the legs, cleaned the surface, and we gave it a second chance, and she was happy. Just like a discarded piece of furniture, there are times in our lives when we, too, need a second chance. But what I didn't mention was that when her roommate at the time saw the table, her roommate did not want it in the apartment. It was unacceptable to her and since she was paying the larger share of the rent, the table that we restored for a new purpose – by the next day, it was back on the curb. Sometimes people won't give us a second chance.

A few weeks ago, Amanda and I saw the movie, *Manchester by the Sea*. It is the story of Lee Chandler, a quiet, reserved janitor, who receives a call to return to his hometown when his brother dies and names him as the guardian for his teenaged son. What we discover halfway through the movie is that there is something in his past that no one talks about but the people in his small town will not let him forget. They could give him a second chance, but many will not. The question to the end of the movie is whether even he will allow himself to have a second chance. Some people won't give us a second chance. Maybe they were so let down, so disappointed, felt so betrayed or so hurt by our actions that they are unwilling to consider second chances. Or maybe there's so much baggage from our past that we cannot bear to be given another chance. But the premise of this series is that God never gives up on any one of us. God is the God of second chances and this series is all about seeing how Jesus does this.

Two weeks ago, we saw how Jesus offered a second chance to a woman who had been married and divorced five times. Last week, Jesus met a man possessed by demons which we connected to today's understanding of mental illness. We all are mentally ill at points in our lives. We will need a second chance, and we saw how important it is for us to give others a second chance. And today we have a story where Jesus is the dinner guest in the home of Simon, the Pharisee. As a Pharisee, he is one of the most influential people in town. While eating dinner, a woman enters his house that everyone recognizes as the town prostitute. Only men would be at this table. If there were women, they would be serving the men. In those days, tables were only a few inches off the floor. Those at the table reclined on pillows or a mat. As they are reclining at the table, the woman enters. She is terrified. She's not been invited. She knows she is not welcome – that she doesn't belong. But she has come to see Jesus, and when she sees him, she kneels at his feet. Can you see her? She is weeping. Her tears fall on his feet, so she lets down her hair and begins drying his feet with her hair. In her hand is a small alabaster jar of scented oil. When she opens the jar, the scent fills the air. Then she pours the oil on Jesus' feet. Simon, the Pharisee, is not happy. This is his house. He is embarrassed and angry that she would barge into his home. And when he sees what she does, he wonders what kind of man Jesus must be that he would allow "this woman" to touch him.

Who is this woman? Luke identifies her as a "sinner". The Greek word for sin is HAMARTIA which was an archery term that meant "to miss the target" – to miss the mark. If sin is to miss the target that means there is a target, a way for us to live. And we all miss the target. Every day we say things we should not have said, we do things we should not do and we fail to say and do the things we should. Can we agree that in thought, word and deed, we all miss the target? HAMARTIA. We sin. But Luke's reference to this woman implies that she was a certain kind of

sinner – a prostitute. It would help us understand this story to learn about prostitution in the first century. In the Greco-Roman world, most prostitutes were slaves, forced into prostitution to earn an income for their master. How did a woman become a slave? It might happen when the Romans conquered a new territory and the women were sold into slavery. Or when you found yourself in debt, the way to pay off the debt was to sell your children – and the children became slaves, paying off that debt by selling their bodies. Or if a woman ended up on her own – she was divorced or no longer had parents to support her – the only way to survive would be to sell herself to someone that today we call a pimp. No little girl grew up hoping one day to be a prostitute. She was forced as her only way to survive. Day after day, year after year, this was her life – and the toll it took destroyed her body, her sense of self and her soul. The woman who enters Simon's house must have been a shell of a person. Everyone knew who she was and what she was. No one would look her in the eye. She was an outcast who stayed in the shadows, walking the streets at night.

If that was first century prostitution, then what about the 21<sup>st</sup> century? We know it exists today. A few days ago, I met with the executive director of Breaking Free, an organization that is working to end sex trafficking and to help women break free. It can take as many as 15 attempts before she is successful in breaking free. As I drove to her office, I almost turned around and came home because I wasn't sure I wanted to hear what she had to say. It is estimated that 15-20% of men in America have used a prostitute. The average "john" is a 47 year old white man who is college educated, married with children and living in the suburbs. On any given night, as many as 10,000 women and children are being trafficked in the upper Midwest. The Twin Cities is one of the major centers of sex trafficking in America. And I didn't want to hear about that. And as I listened to her story and the story of many others who were forced into prostitution, I could barely keep my composure and when I got back to my car, all I could do was cry. No little girl in America grows up dreaming of being a prostitute one day. 85% are victims of child sex assault, rape or incest. I listened to those stories. 95% are chemically dependent in order to keep them under the control of their pimp or to escape the brutality experienced night after night. Typically, a girl has experienced abuse as early as 7, 8 or 9 and with her self-esteem almost nonexistent and wanting some way to escape she is vulnerable. By age 12-14 she has been lured into prostitution by someone who is looking for girls like her and promises a better life, promises to love her, and once he's got his hold on her, he expects something in return and ends up forcing her to sell herself to other men for his benefit. She's forced to do this 10-15 times a day, 365 days a year. I had planned on sharing one woman's story this morning but I could not bear to read it to you. These are not the glamorous stories that we see pictured in movies. These are stories of children who are being destroyed.

This is the woman who walks into the Pharisee's house. Luke doesn't tell us what happened earlier in the day, but she must have encountered Jesus. My guess is that when she met Jesus he looked her in the eyes and told her, "You are a precious child of God, and no matter what you have done or been forced to do, God has never stopped loving you. As far as the east is from the west, so far does God remove our transgressions from us. God can make you new again. You have a second chance." It must have given her hope. And when she hears that Jesus is eating dinner at the Pharisee's house, she must see him and thank him. She brings this jar of oil. Mark's gospel tells us it was worth more than a year's wages – for her, more than 3000 "tricks" in order to buy it.

We all need what this woman received. We all have missed the mark – and sometime through no fault of our own. Maybe you've found yourself in a place of no hope, wondering if God could ever forgive you. Throughout my ministry, people have confessed all sorts of things to me that I will carry with me to my grace, because I know they are just telling me but the God whom I

serve. They are confessing to God, wanting, hoping that there might be a word of grace and forgiveness. Just as God is the God of the second chance for this woman, so also for you.

When the woman enters Simon's home, he's embarrassed and angry. He knows who she is. Everyone in the room knows her – maybe some have even used her. Simon had already judged her. **He said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner.** How could Jesus let her touch him? And Jesus says to Simon, **A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay 500 people for a day's work. The other owed enough money for 50. When they couldn't pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?** And the answer is obvious, the one with the larger debt. But what Simon doesn't get is that this parable is about Simon and woman. And Jesus says, **Do you see this woman?** Because he didn't. All he saw was a sinner and that's all she would ever be. She didn't deserve to be loved – didn't deserve to be a child of God.

It is hard to see and not be judgmental. When we start looking at people as sinners – defining them by their actions, we don't see them. We've already judged them. And when all we see is a sinner, we've judged ourselves as better: "I would never do that." "I would never let myself get caught up in that." "I'm not as bad as that." Do you remember what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount? *"Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. You'll receive the same judgment you give...Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye?"* In other words, spend more time looking in the mirror of your own life rather than someone else's life. We all sin. We all stand in need of grace and forgiveness. In our story, we see a woman, wiping Jesus' feet with her tear, drying his feet with her hair, and anointing his feet with her most precious possession. She knows she needs forgiveness, and she is so grateful to receive it – to have a fresh start. But Simon did not even extend the common courtesy, customary at the time, of a basin of water in which Jesus could wash his own feet. Simon, do you see? We all have blind spots that prevent us from offering someone else a second chance. Jesus has no blind spots which how he can say to the woman, **Your sins are forgiven.** Jesus shows us who God is. God is love. God is reaching out with forgiveness before we can even ask for it. God is like the father in the story of the Prodigal Son. The entire time his son wanders from the path – is missing the target – he stands and waits for us. God never lets go. The psalmist wrote: As far as the east is from the west, so far does God remove our transgressions from us.

Last week as I listened to Teri's story she told me that when her life was at her absolute worst, her body ravaged by the abuse, addicted to the cocaine that gave her moments of escape, seeing no hope – suddenly from a place inside her that she no longer knew existed, she heard verses from the Bible and a voice that gave her the strength to get out. And I said to her, God gave you a second chance. And she said to me, God has given me so much more than that. God saved my life. Two thousand years ago, there was a woman discarded and so dirty no one would look her in the eye – and two thousand years later, there are people around us – maybe even you this morning who need to hear a word from Jesus: "You are a precious child of God. You matter to God. You are forgiven and set free."

And if we are to be Christ's body in this world, then we must see what God can see.

## Grow, Pray, Study for Week of January 22, 2017

**Weekly Prayer:** Lord Jesus, none of us wants to be identified as a “sinner,” especially among the people we know. Remind us that in your sight, we are all sinners—and you are the friend of sinners, who offers grace and second chances. Amen.

### Monday, January 23

**Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32, Luke 15:1-2**

“What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ “‘No, I don’t want to,’ he replied. But later he changed his mind and went. “The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, ‘Yes, sir.’ But he didn’t go. “Which one of these two did his father’s will?” They said, “The first one.” Jesus said to them, “I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God’s kingdom ahead of you. For John came to you on the righteous road, and you didn’t believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Yet even after you saw this, you didn’t change your hearts and lives and you didn’t believe him.”

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

**Observation:** In Matthew 21, Jesus’ enemies from the religious “establishment” of his day were challenging his right to teach as he did. We see their attitude reflected in the complaint voiced in Luke 15. Rather than backing off, Jesus told them that “sinners” (including prostitutes) were more open to true spiritual change than the self-righteous people who refused to change their own hearts and lives while despising the “sinners.”

**Application:** Two sons—one rebellious at first, but obedient in the end, the other one saying the right words while he stubbornly went his own way. When Jesus spoke positively of “sinners,” he was observing the gap between how we look outwardly and what goes on inside us. Jesus’ story didn’t cover all options, but which of the two sons in this story do you identify with more? What does it take to be an obedient child of God both outwardly and inwardly?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about and welcoming “sinners.” I’m thankful that there is a place for me in your heart and in your Kingdom. Amen.

### Tuesday, January 24

**Scripture: Matthew 1:3-6**

Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Aram. Aram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz was the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah.

**Observation:** The way Matthew wrote the genealogy at the start of his gospel showed one effect of Jesus’ model in relating to prostitutes. In that male-dominated world, most genealogies only listed male ancestors. Yet Matthew purposely included women. And at least three of the women he included had a history of some kind of immoral behavior—Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 2, 6:22-25) and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12).

**Application:** Tamar's story showed how men saw prostitutes. The patriarch Judah heard that unmarried Tamar was pregnant (by him, though he didn't know it), and said, "Bring her out so that she may be burned" (Genesis 38:24). No one said they should burn the man who had bought her sexual company! She proved that she was pregnant by Judah himself, and in the end he treated her honorably (by the standards of his day). Have you ever seen a double standard that judged a woman more harshly than a man for the same action? Do you think that reflects what Jesus would want?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, even before we got to see you living as one of us, you were extending grace to Tamar, to Rahab and to Bathsheba. Remind me that your grace and compassion are a part of your eternal character, and reach all the way to me. Amen.

### **Wednesday, January 25**

#### **Scripture: Luke 7:36-38**

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee's home, he took his place at the table. Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee's house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster. Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them.

**Observation:** Luke called the uninvited woman at Simon the Pharisee's home "a sinner." Women in that day had many fewer options (they couldn't, for example, embezzle, or run a dishonest business), so the term "sinner" almost always meant a prostitute. As she entered the scene, something important had already happened. Without a thought for how it would look, she began to express her profound love and gratitude to Jesus.

**Application:** It was common in the rather warm climate for the doors and windows to stand open, especially in larger homes, to catch any cooling breeze. Yet it took boldness for this "woman from the city" to walk directly into the Pharisee's dinner party when she saw Jesus there. Do you believe her tears were more likely a sign of sadness or joy? How would you expect Jesus to respond to her actions?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, keep me as attuned as this woman was to your presence. And help my heart to feel, and express, the same kind of love for you that she showed. Amen.

### **Thursday, January 26**

#### **Scripture: Luke 7:39-43**

When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner. Jesus replied, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher, speak," he said. "A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day's work. The other owed enough money for fifty. When they couldn't pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled." Jesus said, "You have judged correctly."

**Observation:** Simon assumed that a good person would shun sinners, and that Jesus didn't know anything about this "sinner" at his feet. That was consistent with the kind of religious training Simon would have had. But he was mistaken—Jesus knew all about the woman's heart,

and about Simon's. Jesus made that plain by telling a story about the gratitude and love in a person's heart, rather than the person's outward actions.

**Application:** Who are you more like: the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, or the Pharisee who thought he was much better than someone like her? Jesus saw in the woman a beloved child of God. Simon saw only a "sinner," a person who didn't deserve respect, much less love. Jesus specifically directed his story to Simon, to challenge his attitude. Spend a few moments in silence and listen. Does Jesus have anything to say to you today (verse 40)?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, deliver me from the inner Pharisee who haunts my heart. Remind me of how much I need your grace, and how much of it I receive every day. Amen.

### **Friday, January 27**

#### **Scripture: Luke 7:44-50**

Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn't give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet. This is why I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other table guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this person that even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

**Observation:** This story had a prequel – though not included in the Bible. Verse 47 made it plain that this was not the first time Jesus had met this woman, and gave a clear idea of how he must have extended grace to her earlier. He reiterated the forgiveness of her "many sins" that she'd already received. That gift of peace with God was the reason that her heart had responded with such great love.

**Application:** How was Jesus treated in this story? Simon couldn't even treat an invited guest with the basic courtesies expected in his day. The woman, on the other hand, went far beyond any social or cultural norms. Do you agree with Jesus that the way we treat people (God's beloved children) is the ultimate measure of our "righteousness"?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I realize that like both people who were with Jesus in Luke's scene, I owe a debt I couldn't possibly pay. Thank you for forgiving me. Keep me forgiven and forgiving. Amen.

### **Saturday, January 28**

#### **Scripture: John 8:3-11**

The legal experts and Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. Placing her in the center of the group, they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of committing adultery. In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. What do you say?" They said this to test him, because they wanted a reason to bring an accusation against him. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. They continued to question him, so he stood up and replied, "Whoever hasn't sinned should throw the first stone." Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd. Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Is there no one to condemn you?" She said, "No one, sir." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don't sin anymore."

**Observation:** In verse 6, John made it clear that this wasn't a random occurrence, but a set-up by Jesus' enemies to try to put him on the spot. Nothing much had changed since Tamar's time—once again, the prosecutors seemed to think only the woman deserved punishment. But Jesus refused to play their game of judgmental righteousness. Instead, he gave the woman mercy which pointed her toward to a new quality of life.

**Application:** Jesus, of course, was the only person in the scene who would have qualified as sinless. But, precisely because he was sinless, he hadn't come to throw stones (John 3:17). Given Jesus' teaching and example, do you qualify to throw stones at anyone else? Does anyone? What steps can you take to make sure that in your home, your office, your church, stone-throwing becomes a thing of the past?

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me remember clearly how much it hurts when someone else throws stones at me. Help me learn from Jesus' merciful example, and to every day grow more like him. Amen.