

- Recap Series
- Point at Easter dates (This Table Manners series ends on Good Friday at the most famous table there is.)

I vividly remember sitting in student ministry classes in college and could not wait to the dirty, grungy work on fulltime ministry. I sat there thinking to myself, “Enough talk! Enough books! Enough tests! I just want to get out there and roll my sleeves up and they’re gonna know my name.”

I graduated from Nyack College in 1995 with a degree in Bible and Student Ministry. Like many college grads, I entered the world with an invisible cape on my back, with a machismo that quietly screamed, let me show you how to do it.

I started my ministry at New Hope Alliance Church in Winchester, VA. I was the first youth pastor this 5 year old church ever had. I was 21 years old. One day the senior pastor came to me and asked me to vacuum the sanctuary, which was not a small room. I thought to myself, “Uhhhh, I have a college degree. And you want me to lower myself to vacuuming?” But I agreed, and I’ve gotten tell you that over the next couple hours of vacuuming, God spoke very clearly to me. The purpose of my life was not to be how many people know my name, but how many people know His name because of my life. You see, my metrics were off. My measuring stick was broken.

Sometimes I wonder if our metrics are off. I wonder if the things we Christians measure success by aren’t the things we should actually measure success by.

We don’t often put the word “success” in the context of Kingdom work, do we? But if we did, what would be the measure of success in God’s eyes?

The passage we're looking at and learning from today is Luke 7:36-50. There's a boatload of truth here for us to dig out, so let's start with prayer asking God's Spirit to teach us.

[Prayer]

v. 36:

“When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisees house and reclined at the table.”

Into which of your stressful situations, your concerns for the future, your problematic relationships, or your fearful unanswered questions have you invited Jesus into?

Key truth: Jesus accepts all invitations. You want Him? You got Him. Finances, disease, anxiety, family issues, whatever you're facing—When you invite Jesus, Jesus shows up.

Imagine coming to your kitchen in the morning and finding Jesus at the stove flipping eggs. He looks up and says, “Good morning. You hungry? You got a lot going on today, so I wanted to make sure you know I'm with you, I love you, and I already know how this day is going to end. So....you ready?”

Sometimes in my own life, Jesus can become an afterthought. I know I'm not supposed to say this cuz I'm a pastor and I'm supposed to be perfect and everything but in all honesty, I sometimes forget to start my day inviting Jesus to be the center of it all.

v. 37:

“A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.”

If I was a newspaper reporter doing a story on Southside Church, here's what I'd want the headline to say: *"Southside Church: Where sinners come and find help, hope, and healing at the feet of Jesus."* If you're here this morning in the room or online, we just want you to know that Jesus is the answer to what you're facing. Your hurts, your past, your anger, your frustration, your questions; you're welcome here and you're surrounded by people who don't have it together at all, but know that at the feet of Jesus is where we find all we need.

And this woman had a bad reputation...a bad reputation. The word used to describe her here is "hamartolos" and it means "of those especially wicked", so when she walked in, her reputation made her entrance even more dramatic.

But I also love that this woman came prepared. She came with a plan. She brought perfume for the purpose of anointing Jesus' feet.

Sometimes I come to Jesus for what I can take, what I can get. But **what would my life look like if I always came to Him with all I have to give?** How would my attitude toward worship change if instead of coming to get, I came to give?

v. 38:

"As she 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."

True worship starts with true brokenness. There's no record of this woman saying a word to anyone. She's simply weeping. Because as well as everyone knew her reputation, she knew it best. And she was broken over the decisions of her past. The gospel is completely offensive because it looks you in the eye and causes you to come to grips with your own brokenness and sinfulness. Jesus is going to wipe every tear

away, cleanse every sin and stain, but we've got to first be humbled by our own need for forgiveness. **You want to be effective for the Kingdom? Start with a humility born from brokenness.**

So we know she was weeping, and her tears were numerous enough to wet Jesus' feet. So, this woman went even further and began to wash Jesus' feet with her hair--soaked with her tears.

I gotta tell you it's been a long time since I've felt that kind of grief over my own sin. This may sound backwards, but if we want to be the kind of church God desires, I believe it starts with a gut wrenching acknowledgement of our sins.

2 Corinthians 7:10 says, *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation..."*

James 4:8-10 says, *"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and weep. Turn your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you."*

Finally, we see the woman kissing Jesus' feet. Now I know that many of you would run for the hills if we started practicing what the bible says, "Greet each other with a holy kiss." Kissing in our modern day is reserved for very specific relationships. But Paul wrote half of the New Testament and to 4 of those churches, he encouraged them to "greet one another with a holy kiss." We're weirded out today, but in that time it was a rather common thing. There are parts of the world today that still having a kiss on the cheek as a very normal "hello."

I have a friend and fellow pastor named Rolf Kleinfeld. Every time I see Rolf we hug and he kisses me on the cheek. I grew up in a family where we were huggers and affectionate like that so this doesn't weird me out

at all. I know beyond any doubt that Rolf sees me as a close brother in Christ and we love one another in a strong spiritual friendship.

But this woman who came to Jesus weeping, and washing his feet, and now kissing his feet was communicating a powerful message. It was a deep desire for connection, for acceptance, for affection, for closeness. And Jesus received her and used her as a powerful example.

v. 39:

“When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.’”

So, this Pharisee, this religious leader, this teacher of the law, this expert of the Torah, sees what’s going on between this woman and Jesus and it’s clear that this Pharisee is repulsed by this and silently judging the situation; probably condemning her for her sin and even condemning Jesus for his apparent obliviousness or ambivalence to this egregious breach of conduct.

Now, we don’t have Pharisees today. Except we *do*. We just don’t call them that.

- Pharisees are those who try to charge others for the grace they got for free.
- Pharisees are those who use “us and them” language.
- Pharisees care more about appearances than authentic affection toward everyone.
- Pharisees prefer comfort for themselves above all else.
- Pharisees lack humility and perpetuate religious legalism.
- Pharisees say this place is getting too crowded, someone took my parking spot at church, I wish that person would dress properly before they came in here, I’m upset because they didn’t play my

favorite worship song, and I sure hope *THAT* person is hearing this sermon!

Yup. We got Pharisees too.

This past week, I got a text from Janelle Auguste, one of our amazing XZone staff mentors. She was letting me know that one of the students had hung on and broken one of the pieces of our 9Square game.

*Put photos of the broken pipe on the screen.

And I responded like this...

*Put photos of text messages screen shots on the screen.

v. 40:

“Jesus answered him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’ ‘Tell me, teacher,’ he said.”

How teachable are we? How teachable am I? I’ve been thinking lately about that. Can I pull back the curtain a little bit? I’m 46 years old, and I’ve been loving, serving, and leading middle schoolers and high schoolers for 25 years now. Never have I once ever thought I knew it all. Except for those first few months right out of college because that’s just how it works. You gotta learn for yourself that you don’t even know what you don’t know and at that age, you don’t even know *that* yet.

But as I’ve grown, I’ve always sought to keep a student mentality toward life, and faith, and God, and the Bible, and really in any area. I don’t ever want to stop growing or learning. I’m not one for tattoos, but “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” would be a good one. You ever left playdoh out on accident? It hardens and then you go to play with it you can’t. That’s probably why I love being a student pastor. I get to play with playdoh that’s still playdoh.

v. 41-43:

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

“Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.’”

“And the circle gets the square,” Jesus said.” Just kidding. “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Jesus is doing something so spectacular here and yet so understated that we often miss it because of its subtlety. In true Jesus form, He busts out a quick little story. But the story is just a thin veil delivering a one-two punch of truth. He gives Simon the left cross of setting up the scenario then the right uppercut of asking a question Simon himself answers correctly.

Who loves more? The one who is mindful of all they've been forgiven of.

Who loves deepest? The one who knows what a scoundrel they are, and what they truly deserve.

Who loves strongest? The one who sees how great their debt was and how great Jesus' payment of that debt is.

v. 44-47:

“Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my

head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

I can always tell when I'm with someone who's close to Jesus. They're non pretentious. They're approachable. They're not hiding anything and they're not seeking to impress anyone. Because they've already done the work of laying it all before Jesus and allowing Him to wash it away and call them His own child. There are no more secrets to hide or sins to uncover. So, there's no need for shame, there's no need for feigning perfect appearances, there's no need for seeking acceptance because they're already accepted by the one who matters most. Lord, how I want to live that way!

v. 48:

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Now THAT'S a benediction, right? Can I simply speak that truth over you right now? Flawed, filthy, hurt, sin-stained, weary, stressed, fearful human: **“Your sins are forgiven.”** What if we lived that? What if we were nothing more than daily reflections that Jesus alone forgives sins and sets us free?

v. 49:

“The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’”

Not everyone around is going to go as far as you'll go when it comes to your embrace of Jesus as Savior and Lord. Not everyone is going to understand. They might even question, or laugh, or turn their backs on you. Let them. Because when you fall in love with Jesus, you want to stay in love with Jesus. And that means humility, surrender, and peace in who He has already declared you are.

v. 50:

“Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”

Dear friends, what I want most for you right now is to “go in peace.” But you’ve got to understand that this kind of peace only comes through surrender to Jesus. The bottle the woman brought was filled with a precious perfume, but when you surrender to Jesus, you receive the aroma of His presence and that begins to impact anywhere you go and anyone to you speak to.

Jesus took the acts of this woman who had a sinful reputation and changed the metrics on the religious leaders surrounding him. He pointed to her and said, If you really want to know what it means to live in My Kingdom, watch the brokenness, humility, forgiveness, love, and strength of this woman.

So how are you in all this? Have we simply measured our righteousness by how many people we didn’t cut off in traffic or curse at under our breath? Have we measured success by how well we tolerate those around us, even though we’re silently seething with bitterness? Have we measured success by how quiet we stay when we’ve got so many things to complain about?

Or are we measuring Kingdom success based on how close we can get to Jesus, and allowing that closeness to clothe us in His aroma? Are we measuring our Kingdom success on the clarity of His reflection seen in our lives and relationships? Are we measuring Kingdom success on how little we are preoccupied with the cares of this world, and focused on communicating Jesus’ love through serving those around us?

Closing:

As we close today, I want to ask you to consider this woman's offering to Jesus. She came in with an alabaster bottle of precious perfume, called spikenard. The nature of this perfume was so costly that it was worth a year's wages. This was no small sacrifice. And the bottle was fashioned with a long neck that would be broken to release the contents. To her, the breaking of that bottle indicated that there was no reservation in her submission to Jesus' grace and forgiveness. There was no "let me dribble out a little bit for now, and maybe later I can use it for something else."

Breaking that bottle rendered it useless for the future. But when we are willing to be broken before God, that is the beginning of our usefulness in His Kingdom.

This woman barged in, uninvited with her act of worship. The fact that she came in and touched a rabbi would have made Him unclean. But look at Jesus response to her.

Jesus' response to her is His response to you as you come to Him in this moment with your brokenness. Would you let Jesus replace your past, your stale routine, your fear of the future, and all the things that have clogged you spiritually, and give you a new start?

Are you willing for the Spirit of God to interrupt your routine with new depths of brokenness leading to Kingdom fruitfulness?

I want to invite you to take some time to talk with Him today. Bring someone with you and pray together as your act of worship today. Your past is not held against you. And if God has talked to you today about your own Pharseeism, can I invite you to drop that act and simply throw your arms open to Jesus and to those around you? Don't we want to be know by who we're for instead of what we're against?

There's a world that desperately needs to smell the aroma of a life surrendered to Jesus.

[Prayer]