

WEB BIBLE STUDIES

2 Kings 20:1-10

King Hezekiah's Prayers (2 Kings 20:1-10)

Jesus and an Immoral Woman (Luke 7:33-50)

Annual Sermons Volume 1

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By

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WHO WANTS TO DIE AT 39?

(2 Kings 20:1-11)

Most New Years cards wish us all sunshine and joy.” Secretly, we wish the same. Nervously we wonder if bad things might happen. But I remind you on this first Sunday of the New Year that “all sunshine will make a desert” and our dark pages can turn out to be the best pages. Luther once said, “Tears have been my best teachers”. Henry Ward Beecher said, “Tears are telescopes by which we see into heaven”. T. DeWitt Talmadge said, “I never had a set-back but it turned out to be a set forward.” We see this in the life of one of God’s greatest servants- Hezekiah, the King of Judah during the latter part of the Eighth and the early part of the Seventh Century before Christ. And the Bible says that of all the Kings who descended from David, he was the greatest. We read in II Kings 18: 5-7a, *“He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he stayed with the Lord and departed not from following him. He kept the commandments, which the Lord commanded to Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered wherever he went.”*

1. The Amazing Person. Hezekiah was great in many respects. He was a great political leader who delivered Judah from the chaos of the reign of his father Ahaz. He was a great builder and his aqueduct which brought water to Jerusalem can be seen today. He was a great man of letters, having gathered together much of the sacred writings in Books like Psalms and Proverbs. But most of all he was a great religious reformer, a mighty man of God. He had the courage to *destroy the serpent* Moses made because the

people made an idol of it. He *opened the doors* of the House of God, closed by his wicked father. He reinstated the long neglected feast of *Passover*. He destroyed the *high places* where pagan idols were worshiped.

2. The Awful Plight. At the very height of his power, when he was only thirty-nine years old, when his nation, surrounded by the armies of Assyria, needed his leadership the most, God sent him the he was lying on a sickbed with a severely infected boil. **3. The Anguished Praying and Awful Prediction.** Knowing human nature, we know Hezekiah and his people, especially at this dangerous time, were praying for his recovery. But God sent his Pastor to him with bad news. We read, *“In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came to him and said, ‘This is what the Lord says,’ Set your house in order; you are going to die, you will not recover.’”* (Is. 38:1)

4. The Alarming Protest. Hezekiah did not fold his hands and say, “Thy will be done!” as we Christians are taught to pray (2 Cor. 12, Matt. 6). He turned his face to the wall and said, *“Lord, remember how I have served you faithfully and wholeheartedly and have done what is right in your eyes.”* And then, the Bible says, *“Hezekiah wept bitterly.”* (2 Kings 20:2)**5.**

5. The Amazing Promise. We can easily expect an angry response from God to such a proud man who dares tell God how good he is. What we have is God’s amazing promise, *““Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, ‘Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father (ancestor): I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and defend this city.’”* (38:4-6) There are some deep theological mysteries here. We could discuss for weeks the question, “Can prayer change God’s will?” There are some thorny problems of chronology and the sequence of events in the reign of Hezekiah, but let’s learn some practical lessons for you and me.

A. THE PERPLEXITY PRODUCED BY SUFFERING

1) The inevitable questioning in suffering. We know God has not promised to shelter His people from the ordinary hurts of life, so these are not punishments when they come. It is irrational to ask why. We get old, we get cancer and we get fired for no reason. If things like this did not happen to Christians, we could not build enough churches to hold the

people. We pay lip service to this, but even the best of Christians deny it. When our children are well, our bodies are healthy, our business is good and our lives are problem free; we praise God for His goodness. But let our loved ones lie on sick beds, let our bodies or emotions be racked with pain, let us have reversals in business and have problems pile up like leaves; and we cry like Hezekiah, *Lord, why are You doing this to us?* To find some logical reason we even blame ourselves and say, *“I guess we deserve this. God wouldn’t be punishing me unless I had done something wrong.”* The Bible lets us know this was not the case with Hezekiah. He was not being punished. It was after listing his outstanding virtues that the Bible adds, *“After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah.”* (2 Ch. 32:1) Alexander Maclaren’s sermon on this text was “A Strange Reward for Faithfulness.”

2) The Understandable Anger in Suffering. Some people do more than question, they get mad at God. There was probably a little anger and a whole lot of pouting and self pity in Hezekiah’s tears. That’s OK, God still loves us when we pout. **Illustration:** One of my best friends in this church told me of the time, when as a young father and husband, the doctor told him he had a tumor. He turned his face to the hospital wall and said, “God, I have tried to serve you all my life and THIS if the thanks I get.” Some would call that prayer blasphemy; I call it honesty. Now, if he didn’t work through it and in the end, submit to God’s will, which he did, it would have been wrong. Almost all of us, if we are honest, feel this way *for a while* when life hands us a dark page. But God is still our Father, He still loves us and wants what is best for us, which *may* or *may not* be healing or deliverance. The key is to go to God in prayer and be honest. The Bible tells us *“Let your requests be made known to God...”*(Phil.4:6) and Hezekiah did just that. And what he requested was to get well. His dark day became a bright day because he took his problem to God. Now what can we learn from all this?

B. THE UNCERTAINTY PORTRAYED IN SUFFERING.

Hezekiah came face to face, first with sickness, and then with a death sentence from God. You and I both know I will probably bury several of you this year or perhaps you will bury me. We might turn over our final page. And God alone knows who will be taken. The old and sickly may well survive and the strongest among us may fall. At the height of power and influence, at thirty-nine years of age (the age of your pastor I might

add), in the prime of life, Hezekiah was stricken. As we all face the uncertainty of each tomorrow, this year, *let us live each day as though it could be our last*, for it could be. **Illustration:** We ought to live like Jesus came yesterday, the Holy Spirit came today, and Jesus will come back tomorrow.

C. THE ANXIETY PRODUCING SUFFERING. Hezekiah's physical suffering may not have had a physical cause. It could well be that his serious illness, coming at the time of Assyria's invasion, was more than a coincidence. **1) *The Danger of Worry.*** Sickness and death, can result not just from physical, organic causes, but from inner turmoil, from worry. The invasion could have caused the illness. **Illustration:** During World War II, three times as many Americans died of heart disease than died in combat. As John Haggai put it, "*Worry won't send a Christian to hell, but it will send him to heaven early.*" Did Hezekiah worry himself to the poor of death? Thousands of years ago Plato said, "*The greatest mistake physicians make is that they attempt to cure the body without attempting to cure the mind; yet the mind and the body are one and should not be treated separately.*" And in our day the famous Mayo brothers of the Mayo Clinic said that more than half of our hospital beds are occupied with people whose real problem is nerves. **Illustration:** In the thick fighting of the Civil War, General Grant, in hot pursuit of General Lee's troops, was half blinded with a sick headache. He stopped at a farmhouse and wrote in his memoirs, "I spend the night in bathing my feet in hot water and mustard and putting mustard plasters on my wrist and the back part of my neck, hoping to be cured by morning." When morning came, he was still sick. But suddenly an officer appeared with the message that General Lee had surrendered. And Grant wrote these words, "I was still suffering with the sick headache, *but the instant I saw the contents of the note, I was cured.*"

2. *The Danger of Work.* It is also possible that Hezekiah worked himself into that sick bed. To do all the superhuman things he did, he had to work constantly. While sensible commitment to work is a cure for worry, neurotic addiction to work is as bad as worry. Hezekiah was one of God's great workmen. God needed him and God used him. But, as John Wesley put it, "God buries His workers and carries on His work!" We ask, "How could God remove so useful a man, so good a man?" And in the asking we reveal our pride. We reveal the exaggerated opinion we have of our importance. Preachers tell us to "put ourselves down." Psychologists tell us to "put ourselves up." The Bible says, "*Be honest in your estimate of yourselves.*"

(Rom. 12:3, LB) You are neither a worm nor are you super-mom or super-dad. You and I are ordinary human beings who need to have the good sense to take care of ourselves. **Illustration:** The preacher I know who accomplished the most was W. A. Criswell. He worked hard into his eighties with a strong mind and body. And he religiously went daily to the YMCA to work out. A staff member said he would jokingly sing as he went, “*I may not study/ I may not pray/ But I will go/ To the YMCA.*” He did all three and more.

Conclusion: An honest estimate of ourselves would remove much of the stress and strain from our lives, because most of us try to bear weight of responsibility far beyond our strength. We all have the “superhuman urge” and it is driving us to early graves and robbing our lives of peace and joy. You wives have demanding jobs, you keep your house, care for your families and take on outside responsibilities as though you had the time and strength of ten women. You business men are married to your work and push and push at a hectic pace, certain that without you, the business would fall apart. And men and women, sooner or later, your tired body, like a Missouri mule, is going to quit. And the escape it often uses is sickness. A sick bed is often a warning sign, sent from God, to those who are rushing through life at breakneck speed, saying, Slow down and live! Speed Kills! I am convinced that the dark page of sickness, which is often the result of too much worry or work, does not come upon us as a punishment but as a friend. It is God’s way of slowing us down, of getting us to take stock of our lives and getting our priorities straight. Mother, which is more important; having a spotless house or having heart- to- heart talks with your children and husband? Dad, which is more important, making salesman of the month or taking time for your family? When we are thrown upon sickbeds and perhaps have a close brush with death, God often shows us the things that matter the most.

C. THE PERSONAL GOD SUFFERING PORTRAYS.

Turning to the wall, Hezekiah saw more than a wall, and talked to more than a wall. He saw and talked to God. How do we know? His prayers were answered. The sun halted in the sky. He was healed. One hundred eighty thousand Assyrians died. Every day this year, remember, *God is only a prayer away*. We don’t find God at the end of logic, we find Him at the end of a need. Most of our prayers are little religious acts, where our attention span is only a few minutes long. But when troubles drive us to face the uncertainty of life, the fragile nature of our life and health, and troubles too

great to bear, we beat on heaven's door with bleeding fists, until God opens the door and we know we are being heard. To know that God is there when we need Him, to see the invisible God with us, is the faith that will see us through. As the old New Year's prayer puts it: "I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year. Give me a Light that I may tread safely into the unknown! And he replied: Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

Annual Sermons Volume 1: Part 1 Bob Marcaurelle

SERMON 2

HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER SECRETS (2 Kings 20:1-10)

We have learned from Hezekiah's deathbed recovery valuable lessons such as the uncertainty of life, the danger of worry and the danger of neurotic addiction to work. The lesson today is the secret of power in prayer. And Hezekiah is a good teacher. *When life beats you to your knees*, says Norman Vincent Peale, *that is a good position from which to pray*. Hezekiah, beaten to his knees by a terminal illness, given up by the doctors, the clergy and even God, turned to prayer. The disease was cured. Death was chased away. The earth's rotation was reversed. And Jerusalem was spared as 185,000 Assyrians died in one night. Hezekiah teaches us to:

A. PRAY BELIEVINGLY.

1. Belief in the Power of God. You say preacher, "Do you really believe God reversed the sun?" I surely do! I say with Dr. Talmadge, "The whole universe waits upon God, and sons and moons and stars are not very big things to Him, and he can with His little finger turn back an entire world as easily as you can set back the minute hand of your watch."

2. Belief in the Personal Concern of God. Some of us doubt God is interested in our little problems. This miracle says that the untold millions of stars streaking through space are not as important or as precious in the sight of God as one child of God with a need. No star can say, "Our Father," but I can and you can. And that is the basis of prayer. The dark pages of life become the best pages because they drive us to our knees. Most of us do not really pray when all is well. We say words. We go through the motions.

But in the grip of trouble we do little more than worry on our knees. Our trouble is we don't believe Bible stories like this with miraculous prayer answers.. It reads, to us, like a fairy tale. Reality, to us, is depicted in the cartoon where the little boy, kneeling by his bed, says, "Uncle Herman still doesn't have a job. Aunt Sally still isn't married and daddy's hair keeps falling out. And I'm tired of saying prayers for this family without any results." The tragedy is, when we bump into a few "no" answers we lose our faith in prayer. Some give up prayer altogether. Some reserve their praying for emergency hours. And most of us do not take the time and effort to cultivate the difficult art of learning to pray. All three responses are tragic because they rob our lives of the peace and power and the purpose that can come from God through prayer. Let us decide to give ourselves to prayer this year and with Hezekiah as a guide...

B. PRAY SPECIFICALLY

He did not scatter pious phrases all over heaven. One reason we don't have answers, is that we do not ask. He wanted one thing and cried out for one thing and that was to live. He asked God for it and he got it. Prayer is just that simple and that powerful. Without prayer he would have died and because of prayer he lived. God has many blessings He wants to give us but we do not get them because we do not ask for them. The Bible says "*You do not have because you do not ask.*" (Js. 4:2).

One reason we don't really ask is because we are too lazy. Specific praying takes a great deal of time and effort and that is why we do not do it. When people come for counseling because of messed up lives or homes, the first order of business is to get them to identify their root problem. They can tell you the *symptoms* easily..."My wife yells and screams...My husband doesn't pay me any attention...", but getting down to the *why* of these symptoms takes time and effort. The same is true in the Christian life. We must spend time alone with God, listening and learning as He leads us into our own depths and shows us what we really need. It does not take long to say, "Deliver me from worry or overeating or tension or working too much." But it will take time to get to the root of these problems; to find out why we worry or over-eat or over-work and seek the deliverance we really need.

We also fail to ask God for specific things because we are too proud. The Bible says, "*Ask and it will be given you...Let your requests be made known unto God.*" We give all kinds of reasons for not asking. In fact, many

books on prayer actually condemn people like Hezekiah and criticize a prayer like his. We call asking “*childish*” and say we must use the abilities God has given us to solve our problems. We call asking “*selfish*” and we say we should fold our hands and accept the inevitable. We call asking “*cowardly*” and say we should take our medicine without whining. But the real reason we don’t ask is *pride*. We don’t want to be obliged to our Creator.

Illustration: There is a story about a man who died and went to heaven. One sight that intrigued him was a huge barn. It was by far the largest building in heaven. He asked the angel who was escorting him, “What is that building?” With a touch of sadness in his eyes, the angel answered, “That building is full of all the blessings God wanted to give to His people, but they failed to ask for them.” It has been well said that if regrets are allowed into heaven, our number one regret will be that we did not pray more. We have not because we ask not.

C. PRAY EARNESTLY

God said to Hezekiah, “*I have seen thy tears.*” One reason our prayer lives are impoverished is that God says, “I have not seen any tears.” There is no answer because there is no anguish. We peel off a few petitions before falling to sleep, forget we ever prayed them in a few days, and expect that kind of praying to touch God. The literal translation of Matthew 7:7 is, “*Keep on asking and you will receive, keep on seeking and you will find, keep on knocking and the door will be opened.*” This carries the idea of urgency and fervency and persistence. It is not that He wants us to care. He wants us to have the holy boldness and tenacity of Jacob. When he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, he grabbed hold and said, “*I will not let you go until you bless me.*” (Gen. 32:26)

Dr. L.R. Scarborough used Hezekiah’s prayer as an example of the kind of praying that brings revival. We need, says Scarborough, a *burdened heart*. Our new hymnal contains the song our young people made popular, “Do You Really Care?” A more penetrating, pertinent question could not be asked of the church in this hour. Has our ease and luxury dulled our sense of caring? Do we care that thousands are heading straight to hell all around us? Do we care that sin is ruining the lives of more of our young people and young married people than we are willing to admit? Do we care that many in our church family are still bound by horrible sins and that make life a hell-

on-earth for them and their loved ones? Do we care that most of our prayers never get off the ground because they are based on ignorance of the laws of prayer or backed up by inconsistent lives? Do we care? That is the crucial question facing us. Are you prepared to ask God for the gift of caring? Be sure you want it because the price of a burdened heart often runs high.

Illustration: A young singer, obviously proud of her preaching ability, asked a friend, “I know that I have a god-given talent, and people enjoy my singing, but I really don’t feel I bring them closer to God. What do I need to do?” Her honest friend replied, “You need your heart broken a couple of times so you will have a compassion for others.”

D. PRAY DANGEROUSLY

Hezekiah dared to ask God to halt what He Himself had decreed. He prayed against what had been interpreted to him by his pastor as the will of God. I do not believe it was ever God’s will for him to die. Reading between the lines I hear God saying, “Hezekiah, you are going to die. You are beyond all human, medical help.” And what God wanted was a deeper level of pleading, a more strenuous wringing out of his soul. I cannot give you neat and tidy little rules about prayer because each situation is different. But one of the great prayer principles in the Bible is that we are to pray boldly and even dangerously. Abraham argued with God over the destruction of Sodom. Moses argued with God over the destruction of the Israelites. Jacob wrestled with God. Jesus knew Calvary was the will of God for Him and yet He went to Gethsemane and sweat blood to see if there was some other way. We are always to yield to the will of God but we are also to “let our requests be made known to Him.”

E. PRAY HONESTLY

Hezekiah told God how good and faithful he had been. Some modern “self is dead” preachers throw fits over this kind of praying. They say all we can plead is our badness and the blood of Christ. It’s a good thing Hezekiah didn’t hear their sermons because if he had followed their advice, he would have died. Why, because he would have been lying to God in prayer. Sometimes, in prayer, we lift up our virtues and sometimes, like Daniel (Dan. 9), we lift up our faults, but at all times we are to be honest. People who say things because they are supposed to say them will not get through to God. Why? *“We might as well kneel down/And worship gods of*

stone/As offer to the living God/A prayer of words alone.”

Pretense, even when it is pious pretense, has caused many a child of God to miss the blessings of God. For example, when a crisis comes, many of us fold our hands and piously say, “Whatever God wants I want.” Like Muslims we say, “Allah wills it! So be it!” We say it because we think we are supposed to say it, or we are trying to put something over on God. Hezekiah, following this example would have said, “So be it, Lord. Thou hast spoken and I will gladly die.” It would have been a dishonest prayer and he would have died. Instead, he prayed, “*Oh, restore me to health and make me live!*” (Is. 38:16) And he lived!

Illustration: When my little girl went to surgery I begged God to let her recover. That was what I wanted and what I prayed. I concluded the prayer with - “Nevertheless, not my will but Your will be done” - which is the number one condition of power in prayer. I was willing to accept the worst, believing that God knows best. But to say I *wanted* the worst, would have been a lie, even though it was a pious lie.

F. PRAY IMPERFECTLY

Hezekiah’s prayer had several things wrong with it. He *should* have included some confession of sin. He *should* have asked for healing and then said, “Nevertheless, not my will but Your will be done.” His reasons for avoiding death were defective theologically (Is 38:18). The Book of Second Chronicles says he was too proud after his recovery and caused the later fall of Jerusalem (32:25). The one great sin of his life, recorded in the Bible, came after his recovery (Is. 39). But God still answered his prayer.

Illustration: A local company has as its motto, “*Anything worth doing is worth doing wrong.*” In other words, even if you can’t arrive at perfection in a job, give that job your best shot. This is true of prayer. We don’t have to dot every “i” and cross every “t” for the Lord to hear us and help us. If the Lord refused to answer all defective prayers we would never have a prayer answered, for they are all defective somewhere. But we are not praying to some heartless Computer Bank in the heavens, but to our heavenly Father who leads us down the road of prayer even when we stumble. My first few years as a Christian were agonizing when it came to prayer. Nothing has ever been harder for me to learn or to do. The more I read on prayer the more I found wrong with my own praying. I read of men

like Wesley giving four hours a day to prayer and I couldn't give fifteen minutes. I was ready to give up when a statement by Dr. Fosdick in his book *The Meaning of Prayer* turned my prayer life around. It is still a source of strength and encouragement. He talked about how difficult prayer was for some people and then he gave this advice. "*If you can't pray as you OUGHT, pray as you CAN.*"

Annual Sermons Volume 1: Part 1 Bob Marcaurelle

Sermon 3

THE LOVE OF THE FORGIVEN (Luke 7:33-50)

From the clatter and clash of the crowds of Galilee who stood for or against Jesus, Luke tells us of one beautiful woman who stepped from the crowd, found cleansing and changing, and showered our Lord with grateful love. The religious snobs called her a "sinner", but people like her bring honor to the word, for every congregation of saints is composed of those who acknowledge that they are sinners - sinners saved by the grace of a merciful God. In a way, what we have here is the third and the greatest miracle recorded by Luke since the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount. The first miracle, the healing of the Centurion's servant (Lk. 7:1) was great, because it involved the *restoration of health*. The second miracle, the raising of the widow's son at Nain (Lk. 7:11) was greater, because it involved *the restoration of life*. But the third miracle, the salvation of a Galilean prostitute, was the greatest, because it involved the *restoration of a soul to God*. Warren Wiersbe said it *met the greatest need, produced the greatest results and cost the greatest price*. The two characters in the drama are Simon, the self-righteous churchman who served his god faithfully, but in cold blood and this woman who served her God faithfully with warm hearted devotion. Nowhere in the Bible do we see more clearly the difference between a church member, who has religion, and a child of God, who has Jesus. Look first at...

I. THE SPLENDID SCENE (7:36)

Jesus fame was spreading throughout the land. He was being called a "*great prophet*" and the people's verdict was "*God has visited His people*" (Lk. 7:16-17). But this "prophet" had little in common with the religious leaders. He associated with sinful people to tell them of God's great love and was labeled by these leaders, "*A glutton and a drunkard and a friend*

*of...sinners” (Lk. 7:34). Not content merely to be different, Jesus took the offensive against their self-righteous hypocrisy and preached, “*The Pharisees and experts in the Bible rejected God’s purposes for themselves because they were not baptized by John*” (Lk. 7:30) In other words, these supercilious, self-righteous, church-going snobs needed to take their stand with prostitutes and thieves and foul mouthed folk and confess and forsake their sins. This was more than the Pharisees could take, and in a few days their clash with Jesus would break out into open warfare.*

Today we view a minor skirmish that took place before the outbreak of war. Jesus was in some Galilean town and a Pharisee named Simon invited Him to dinner. We have no idea *who this Simon was*. His name was common (there are several mentioned in the New Testament) and there is no evidence that he is Simon the leper, in whose home in Bethany, another woman anointed the feet of Jesus (Matt. 26:6). Neither do we know *why he invited Jesus*. It was not out of any commitment to Christ for everything in the story points to his dislike of the Lord. Hospitality was a gracious art in Palestine and common courtesy to guest involved three things.

At the door the host would place his *hand* on the guest’s shoulder and give him the *kiss* of peace or welcome. Since those were the days of dirt roads and sandals, servants would come and pour *cool water on the feet* of the guest. Finally, a touch of oil or sweet smelling spice was placed on the head a sign of joy (Is. 61:3). Not a one of these was done for Jesus (v. 44-45). Usually there were many guests when a Rabbi or teacher was present. Can you imagine the embarrassment when Jesus was snubbed, and treated like an intruder? Why then did he invite the Lord? It could have been *curiosity*. It could have been to *criticize* Him and *expose* Him as a false prophet. It could even have been to *feed his own pride* by having a famous person in his home. Barclay calls him a “*collector of celebrities*.” The simple truth is, we do not know. But this we do know, Jesus goes anywhere He is invited. Even self-righteous sinners are offered the love of the Father. Entering the banquet hall Jesus and the other guests would lie on their side on cushions spread around the extremely low table. Leaning on their left arm and eating with their right they would bend their knees so their feet would point toward the wall. A strange custom of that day was to have cushions all around the wall so people other than the invited guests could come in and listen to the discussion and conversation. This was especially true when a famous Rabbi, like Jesus, was the guest of honor.

And so we have a splendid scene that is filled with not-so-splendid people, who in their self righteousness, feel they are too good to take their stand with sinners. **Illustration:** Charlotte Elliott was a wealthy socialite who belonged to the church, like everyone else, but who took little interest in the things of God. At a dinner a visiting minister said to her, “*Miss Elliott, unless you are willing to take your stand with the thieves and harlots of our town and confess your sins, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven.*” The nice socialite was offended and angered. But the Holy Spirit, over the next few days, burned these words into her soul and showed her their truth. She repented, was gloriously saved and went on to write one of our most beloved hymns, “*Just as I am, without one plea/But that Thy blood was shed for me.*” Thank God she had sense enough to see her need. Thank God that into this splendid scene another, like her, came and did the same. Look second at...

II. THE SWEET SACRIFICE (Lk. 7:37-38)

1. A Sinful Woman. In the crowd around the wall was a “sinful” woman. Everybody saw her come in and everybody’s question was no doubt, “What is she doing here?” Eyebrows were raised and Simon was embarrassed because this woman dared show her face. Tradition has it that she was the town prostitute. Even Jesus said her sins were “many,” so that verdict is probably correct. There is no evidence that she is Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany, as some suggest. She was an unnamed woman, from an unnamed town, who found cleansing, forgiveness and the power to live a holy life from Jesus.

2. A Saved Woman. Everything in the story indicates that she came into that house a saved woman. The point of Jesus’ sermon about her was that such love flows from forgiveness (7:42). His words to her “*Your sins have been forgiven*” (7:48 NASV), in the Greek, point to a past completed act with present results. She did not face that hostile crowd, open herself up to ridicule, pour costly perfume out and kiss the feet of Jesus to *find forgiveness*. She did it because she had *already found it*, and her love for the one who had forgiven her had to come to that home and express itself. Jesus had just issued His beautiful invitation to the crowds, “*Come unto me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest*” (Matt. 11:28-30). Perhaps, as she stood way back on the edge of the crowd, the words that arrested her gripped her soul were “all of you.” The impact of it was inescapable. God loved her! God would forgive her! God would change

her! Somewhere, someplace, sometime; she got off by herself, confessed her sins, asked for the power to overcome them and claimed the love of God as preached by Jesus. When the truth of it hit her I believe she went all over that town singing something like “*Jesus included me/Yes He included me/When the Lord said Whosoever/He included me.*”

3. A Sacrificing Woman. When salvation entered her heart it exited her and expressed itself through her life and especially her love. This was her *public confession*. Before everyone in that town, before all the turned up noses, before all the dirty looks, she told the world she was a Christian. And there was her *sacrificial commitment*. Whatever the cost- she would minister to her Lord. **Illustration:** Sadie Smithson of Johnson Falls, West Virginia, grew up on the wrong side of town. She never fit in with the “in” crowd. Working as a seamstress she earned the money to go to Europe with the desire to come home and be accepted in her community’s literary league. While in Europe, World War I exploded and she found herself ministering to the wounded and the dying. As she held the hands and prayed with dying men her values changed. On the ship headed home, a traveling companion said, “Well, Sadie, I guess now you will make the literary league.” Sadie gave a strange response. She said that did not matter to her anymore. Her friend said, “What does matter then?” And Sadie said, “Nothing except God, doing things for people, and love.” Oh what a revival would sweep our lives if these three things were what mattered most to us.

C. THE SELF RIGHTEOUS SARCASM (7:39)

Simon said to himself, “*If this man were a prophet, He would know who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is.*” (v.39) **Illustration:** A man visited a fashionable church and kept saying things like “Amen!” And “Praise the Lord!” An usher slipped in the seat beside him and asked him to be quiet. The man said, “I can’t help it! I just found the Lord!” The usher replied, “Well, you didn’t find him here, so please be quiet!” Religious people don’t know what’s going on when Christian people get excited about Jesus. Simon said nothing, but he was boiling on the inside. In his mind the verdict against Jesus was rendered. This man is no prophet of God. He allows this piece of garbage to actually touch Him. His contempt for the woman is now joined by contempt for Christ, as evidenced by the Greek word used here for “man” It was a term of contempt, like our word “guy.” Simon’s whole concept of religion was wrong. He could not see this woman having any part in a prophet’s life, because he did not see

religion as a way to *find help and hope and mercy*. He saw it as a way to *earn favor from God*. The church to him was a *museum to display the saints*, not a *hospital to cure sinners*. Thus he did not know what was going on. He was locked in on what we do for God, not on what God does for us. And the person who looks favorably at himself will never see the Lord.

IV. THE SEARCHING SERMON (7:40-50)

In the words of Augustine, Jesus “*heard the Pharisee thinking*” and he preached to him and to us (for there is a little of Simon in each of us) the beautiful parable of the two debtors (40-47). Then, with the divine rights of the Son of God, He declared that the woman’s sins had been forgiven (48-50). Then with divine insight into the soul of Christianity, he said, “*He who is forgiven much loves much.*” People speak today of the love of God and do not come within a million miles of what the Bible means by the love of God. God’s love is a pardoning love that expresses itself in forgiveness to those polluted by and imprisoned by sin. People dwell on the providential blessings of God, like health and family and money and they hold Him in high regard and speak of His love for them and theirs for Him. Such people, says Maclaren, have left out one-half of what the Bible says about God. He is the Author of untold blessings in general.

We ought to praise Him “*from whom all blessings flow.*” But God is also the God and Father of Jesus Christ, who makes moral requirements, who dwells in absolute purity, who deals out righteous punishment, who (in the words of scripture) will not “*spare the guilty*” and who let His Son die “*for the forgiveness of sins.*” Most people bathe in the warm sunlight of some vague “*god in the great somewhere*” but Christians are those who have been handed a pardon by holy God Who came to this earth in Jesus Christ and paid for our sins on the old rugged cross. It is when we are found by Jesus that we realize all this. Confronted by Him we are overwhelmed by our sin and find our refuge in Him. Theilicke says we are like children lost in the darkest forest of life and “*when we come to Jesus we see for the first time the full terror of the wood in which we have been.*” And then he adds, “*It always seems to me to be one of the greatest things about Jesus is that He allows us to realize all the terrors of guilt...only when we are at home and safe in Him.*” God’s love is expressed in forgiveness. Christianity is not what we do for God, this was Simon’s mistake. It is what we do for Jesus because of what He had done for us. This was this woman’s glory. We receive God’s love as forgiveness to sinners and we express our love as

service to the Lord.

Illustration:G. Campbell Morgan told of the father who adored his little girl. The highlight of his day was taking a walk with her every afternoon. One day, when the time came for the walk, she was busy. Everyday she had an excuse not to go. It broke the father's heart but he didn't say anything. He just walked alone. On Christmas morning he found out what was going on. His little girl gave him a pair of slippers she had knitted herself. Now he knew what she was doing all that time. The man put his arm around her and said, "Sweetheart, I thank you for the gift. But next time please buy the slippers and give me our time together. You mean more to me than anything you can do for me or give to me."