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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
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Series: UnStuck

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. **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. **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. **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." **40** Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. **41** "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. **42** 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?" **43** Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. **44** Then he turned toward 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 she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. **45** You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. **46** You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. **47** Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." **48** Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." **49** The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" **50** Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

For 25 years, Bill and Sally lived what probably most people would consider kind of a perfect marriage. They were pastor and wife in Florida -- a Methodist church. They loved the Lord, and what was very obvious is, they loved each other. They'd taken a lot of trips together, and then when they added their daughter five years into their marriage, they took her with them, and they just made journeys everywhere together. For 25 years, their hearts beat together. For 25 years, they traveled together. For 25 years, they served together. But there came a day where Bill walked out of the house headed to a prison, and his wife would never take the journey with him. He was not being put in prison -- he was visiting a person in prison. And he started that journey because he knew he needed to.

One day, as he was making his way out of the house, Sally asked him, said, "Bill, why do you have to go visit that man?" Bill looked at her and said, "He murdered our daughter. I don't want him to kill me." And he walked out the door. He went to a prison -- Sally was in her own prison. And she sat there, and her hatred grew for both of them. Eventually -- as Bill made his way to visit this man, for the purpose, first and foremost, to ask for his forgiveness, because Bill had hated him ever since the day he took his daughter's life -- but it eventually led to a reconciliation and a friendship, one

that ultimately Sally couldn't bear. And she divorced him. It's strange, because Bill in some ways thought he knew her. For 25 years, every journey they took they took together. Until Bill took a journey of forgiveness that she wouldn't go on.

Forgiveness is a strange thing. It's difficult, to be quite honest with you. Theoretically, it's easy to define. Practically, it's very hard to live. Theoretically, we understand where it comes from. The passage tells us in Colossians to "...forgive each other, as Christ has forgiven us." God goes as far as to say, "If you do not forgive others, He will not forgive us." It's a sobering passage. But on that day, Sally wouldn't take that journey. She took another journey -- it's one filled with hate. One filled with hatred of her husband and of the man who took her daughter's life. When Jesus walked into this room on this day, he found probably what He would have found if He would've walked into Bill and Sally's house. He found two different kinds of people. When He walked in, He was invited by Simon. Simon was a pharisee. And he invited Jesus over -- I don't think for a moment because he was interested in Jesus. I don't think he invited Jesus over because he appreciated him. I think it was a political move. I'll explain why in a minute.

Jesus had a good idea what he would face at Simon's home. He knew what He was getting into -- He'd walked into these kinds of things forever. He'd gone into pharisees' homes, he'd gone into sinners' homes, and -- I mean, he was at home. He knew what was going on. But more likely than not, no one was aware of this woman who would come to the party uninvited. Simon didn't expect it. And Simon's wife REALLY didn't expect it. She was a prostitute. I can only imagine that when she walked in the door, Simon was embarrassed, aghast, had no idea what to do. His wife was looking at him with looks that could kill. And she may even have gotten a little closer to him and said, "Do you know this woman?" And I'm sure he said, "No." And she said, "I do."

When Jesus came into that room, He found two different kinds of people. Some of them have trouble expressing love and forgiveness, and they have trouble when it is expressed in front of them. They don't like it. Just like Sally -- she hated it when her husband walked out that door. She hated it when he drove up to the prison. She hated it when he came home. She hated everything about his expression of love -- just like Simon did on this day. Why? I think, number one, is that they don't appreciate the extravagance. They have no categories for how to put it into their mind. Simon did not like the idea of a visitor. He hated the idea that she would walk into his party. He could not stand the idea that she would stand right behind Jesus. Most likely around that table, as they were inclining for dinner, was a group of men, their wives probably in different places of the room, and she walks into a place, uninvited, unannounced, and certainly not wanted. And then of all things, she has to absolutely destroy the party when she takes a bottle of perfume and starts to pour it on Jesus' feet. This only after she's standing there weeping and weeping and weeping. And Simon is a hundred and eight point nine on the temperature scale. He's seething. They don't appreciate the extravagance -- maybe it's because they don't understand it. Maybe because they have no comprehension of how could anyone ever do such a thing? And maybe, like Sally, they feel like when they see this kind of extravagance, that it is maybe in some sense condoning or minimizing the behavior. I think that's what Simon says when he's

saying there, in verse 39, "If he were a prophet, surely he wouldn't let this happen."
Why?

There was an article written a number of years ago in Moody Monthly, and they said there are three great myths of forgiveness. Number one is that if I forgive, I minimize the behavior of the person who has hurt me. And maybe even worse -- if I forgive, I condone the behavior. That's exactly what Simon -- when he said, "If he were a prophet." Why? Because in his mind, IF you're a prophet, IF you're a Christian, IF you're a follower of God, you distance yourself from sinners. You don't eat with them, and you would never allow them to touch you, cry over you, and kiss your feet. In Simon's mind, Jesus might as well be telling people -- "I am a frequent customer to this woman."

Forgiveness is dicey. It is. Because, to be quite honest with you, some people love the leverage of unforgiveness, and there is huge leverage with unforgiveness. There's massive leverage when you have something on a person. There have been more than a few spouses that have held the leverage against their unfaithful spouse -- sometimes for 15, 20, maybe even longer, years. There are some parents that hold leverage over their children. Their children sinned, or they made a choice, and it was horrible, and they kind of leverage that with some periodic digs that remind the kid -- "Hey, I remember the day when you scorned our name. I remember the day when you made a decision that I had to bail you out." And the kid's now 40 years of age and it's been 25 years, but mom and dad seem to be able to remember that one. Why? Because unforgiveness is a massive leverage. It's a fulcrum that you can move the world sometimes. And that's why some people have trouble when love and forgiveness are expressed, because they feel like you're letting her get away with it, you're not holding her accountable, you're not standing up for holiness. And so, when she walked in the door, Simon not only looked at her with hatred, but probably spewed it.

Same people -- some of those same people have difficulty expressing their own gratitude and grace. Not only do they hate it when they see other people doing it, but they don't want to do it themselves. Jesus is aware of all the things going on, and He just turns up the heat. I love this part. I can only imagine. In fact, I think this is where it just got really, really crazy, because Jesus starts having a conversation with Simon. Now -- we don't know all who's there, but I guess -- if a person is having this dinner for political means -- the kind of thing, you know, keep your friends close and your enemies closer -- that, I guarantee it, there are some other people there Simon wants to show off. It's like -- "I can be toe to toe with Jesus." This is the point where Jesus starts having a conversation with Simon, and Simon's wife is getting a little closer, because she wants to put some jabs in herself to her husband, who's not taking control of things and getting this woman out the door. And then there's all of the guests. And I can only imagine that they say to Mrs. Simon -- "Hey -- get the popcorn, 'cause this thing is gonna be good!" Jesus looks at him and says, "Hey, Simon -- would you look at this woman?" As if he hadn't been. As if he hadn't been lasered on her for the last 30 minutes as she's crying over Jesus, and as she's wiping his feet with her hair, he is staring at her. Jesus has a conversation with him. "You see this woman?" "Yes, I see her." "Simon, did you give me any water for my feet? Did you kiss me? Did you put any oil on my head?" Why is he asking those questions? Because some people have a

difficulty expressing their gratitude. Some people have a difficulty expressing grace. Why? Because there's no appreciation for what they've received.

You see, you and I didn't grow up in this kind of culture. But you would have never had anyone over to your home that you yourself or your servant would not have met at the door and when they took their sandals off -- and they would've -- because they're gonna gather around a table, and they're gonna put their feet to the side, and so now your toes are about a two-and-a-half-foot trip to somebody else's nose -- and you would've never in your mind thought about inviting some friends over without meeting them at the door. It would have been as common as opening the door and saying, "Hello!" to wash their feet. And to welcome them into the home. Not only that, you wouldn't stop there -- you would kiss them. It would be standard. It's not guy to gal, it's guy to guy, it's gal to gal, it doesn't matter. I remember a number of years ago a group of us went to France. And I told the guys, "I just want you to know that we're going to France -- they kiss each other." "Who?" "Everybody. Every guy that you go to, to their house, to the church -- they're gonna come up and kiss you. Just get ready for it, and don't act like an American prude. In other words, let 'em do it. You know? And in fact, if they're really excited to see you, they're gonna kiss you on both sides of the cheek. Live with it. You can go back and wash your hands and your mouth after, you know, the whole series." But they're gonna do that, because that's their culture. That's this culture! He would've greeted him, he would've come and he would've kissed him, and then he would've taken him over to his servant and he would've washed his feet and Jesus is saying, "Hey, Simon -- did you kiss me at the door?" "No." "Did you wash my feet?" "No." "Did you anoint me with any oil? Telling me that you have a clue who I am?" "No." Some people have a difficulty expressing gratitude and grace. Why? Because there's no appreciation for what they've received. See, I don't think Simon is inviting Jesus over because he loved Him, he recognized who He was, or he wanted to get to know Him. I think he was inviting Him over because he thought to himself, "I'm a religious leader; you're a religious leader; we're peers." He saw Him not as a friend, but as competition. He saw him not as a person that he would anoint, but as a person he would challenge. After all, Simon's a pharisee. He's smart. And he's equal to the task of Jesus -- at least in his mind.

You see, it's hard, really hard, to worship when you're not very impressed with God. When you're actually more impressed with yourself. When you're way more impressed with your degrees, way more impressed with your invitations, way more impressed with your ideas. When that's the case, worship is just tough. Lifting your hands unto the Lord -- ha! Get your hands in your pocket. You probably didn't use deodorant this morning. The idea of worship, the idea of falling down on your face, the idea of bowing, the idea of expressing that -- that would be craziness if you're not impressed with God. Some people have a difficult time expressing gratitude and grace. Why? Because there is a strong sense of pride in their own accomplishments. There's a reason why Simon didn't wash Jesus' feet, there's a reason why he didn't kiss Him, and there's a reason why he didn't anoint Him. Because Jesus was not a friend -- He was competition. Jesus was not his Savior -- He was a thorn in his side. And so, it's hard to express gratitude for those kinds of people. It's hard to express praise and thanks, grace, when the person who

murdered your daughter is despicable, and you're just a sanitized sinner. It's hard. Might it be impossible.

But also -- there's another person in this room. No one expected her -- she certainly wasn't invited. No one would put her on their list. Some people find it easy to express love and forgiveness. It's the unnamed woman. When a woman who had lived a sinful life -- she's a prostitute -- in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume. What was that for? Payment? I doubt it. It was probably tools of the trade. Might it be that when she walked in the door, she was doing more than anointing Jesus? She was telling Jesus by her very act, "I'm leaving this work and I'm following you. Not only do I want to anoint you, but I'm symbolizing I'm giving this whole thing up." That perfume's what she used in her trade. And maybe behind the whole statement is a woman who's saying, "I will move beyond any normal convention." You happen to do that when you fall in love.

There are some people -- this woman -- who find it easy. She had to, because she overcame every known cultural barrier. She went to a party that she wasn't invited to. She sat or stood around a table of most likely men, and she stood there, and she wept and wept and wept. Until maybe she looked down, and she saw all of the tears from her face that had fallen onto Jesus' feet, and so she bowed, it says, and she began to take her hair and she began to just wipe his feet. There wasn't a thing about what she was doing that made any sense to anyone, other than her and Jesus. Because when you fall in love, you are often moved beyond convention.

I'm not sure why -- maybe it's because I raised three boys -- but periodically, and not all that long ago, usually moms -- sometimes dads -- will come and make an appointment -- "Pastor, can we see you?" Yes. "Pastor -- our son won't take a shower. And he stinks to high heaven. Can you help us? We've tried everything. We've tried to barter, you know, we've threatened him. I mean with, you know, the will and the whole works! And I mean, man, his bedroom smells like a junior high locker room. It stinks! And when he sits down with his father to watch the NFL playoffs, it's four hours, and by the time he's done with that chair, I want to take it and burn it! I don't know what to do!" I laugh. "You're coming to the pastor about your son who doesn't take a shower. Wow. I'm gonna reach on this one, but I think I got an idea. There's gonna come a day -- you don't know when, but it's gonna be a glorious day. You'll know the change, because your son's gonna get up before his alarm goes off, and he's gonna walk into the shower, he's gonna turn it on. Now you're gonna be mad -- not because he doesn't take a shower, but because his showers last 45 minutes. And he's gonna walk out of there and you're gonna think, 'What happened to my son?' And then when he comes home, after basketball practice, he takes another shower -- why doesn't he take it at school? Well, that's weird. I mean -- who wants to do that? That's kind of crazy. And so, he comes home and he takes another shower. And it's another 45 minutes! And you're gonna be back into my office after this period of time -- don't know when it's gonna happen, but I guarantee it will. Promise you. And then, something else is gonna happen -- just wanna brace you. He's gonna sneak into your room, and he's gonna find your husband's cologne, and he's gonna use enough that -- I am telling you

straight-up, if you have sinus problems, they're gone! Because he is gonna blow your mind with how much he can put on one body at one time."

How do I know that's gonna happen? Can I give you a thousand young men who have fallen in love? They hope it's not at ten -- you hope they don't get married at 12. But the reality is, it will happen. Why? Because some people find it easy to express love and forgiveness. They even move beyond convention. They change their whole behavior when they've fallen in love. They do. It's as natural as young men becoming men. It's as natural as a woman walking into a room, standing behind Christ, dripping her tears on his feet, and then falling, and kissing them. Not everyone in the room is comfortable -- but Jesus is. He's absolutely comfortable. They are unrestrained in their expression of love -- they are. They're not there measuring how much the perfume costs. They're not there parceling out just a little dropper so that Jesus can be anointed. She's pouring the whole thing, completely unaware that everyone is staring at her. Completely unaware that Mrs. Simon hates her guts. Why? Because it was a day that she was lost, and there wasn't anyone who respected her. And she never went home for holidays, ever, because her dad told her to die. There was a day when the only friend she had was another hooker that she lived with. And she walked into a room, and she was forgiven. And she was completely unaware of anyone else.

That little boy who's now taking two showers a day, and emptying your perfume every week -- and that's expensive garbage -- he makes a trip down to Roth's. I know it -- I've watched him. He goes to a place that he's walked by with his mom a thousand times, and he's never gone in there, because why would you go to the flower shop at Roth's? But he goes up there, and he goes up to a woman he doesn't know -- he's seen her there, he has no idea her name. And he goes up, and she looks at him, and she is so kind, because she's seen this before. It's beautiful. "Can I help you, young man? Are you here to buy flowers for your mom? Do you have somebody special that you wanna buy flowers for?" And she says, "Come with me." And he's like, "Praise God for Moses that looks like a woman! She's gonna lead me into the promised land! Hallelujah!" And he goes in there, and he comes home, and this kid, who only had two interests in his entire life -- the tennis shoes he wore and the new game system that he was gonna buy -- all of a sudden is spending money on the most ludicrous thing in the world! Flowers. For 14-year-olds. Why does he do that? Why will they do that? And they will! Because they're falling in love.

Why does she go unannounced and uninvited? Because she's in love. Why does she shower him with her tears? Because she's been given grace. And my friends, when you've tasted forgiveness for the first time -- oh, my stars. You have no idea what it means to taste grace. They're extravagant. There's a lady who came into my office one time -- it was on a Monday. And she said, "Pastor, I'm gonna come back and see you on Wednesday. And I need to confess something to you. And I want to tell you this -- right now -- just so that you hold me accountable. When I come in on Wednesday, I'm gonna confess something to you." I was like, "Wow. I've never had a pre-confession to the confession." So, she comes back. She sits down as stoic as you could ever imagine. And this woman -- one of the godliest women I know -- so sweet and kind. She happened to be the chairman of our deaconess board. And she came in,

and she sat down, and she said, "Pastor, years ago I married a man that I had no idea who he was. I committed two armed robberies with him, and then, one day when I came home, the police intercepted me and told me that I shouldn't go home and that I should leave this man and never, ever see him again. And I did exactly what they said. I went back home -- I had three affairs, I destroyed three marriages -- and then I vowed I would never tell anyone, and I was gonna die with this news. But I've told you. And I resign as the chairman of the deaconess board."

Man, my head was spinning. I was like, "Wow." I kinda thought to myself -- "Wow. I think you've confessed everything. You're actually really fit now to be a deaconess. You're perfect!" But you know what the real joy was -- not that she confessed to those previous things, it's that she discovered she'd lived 60 years trying to earn the favor of God. Her real sin was not those things back there. Her real sin that kept her distant from God and never, ever experiencing joy was the fact that she had committed her life to trying to earn the smile of God. And once you have it -- and you know you have it, and you know that the Father looks at you and embraces you and doesn't hold your sin against you, but welcomes you home, and is kissing you -- expressing love and gratitude is an easy thing.

When Christ walked into that room, there were two people. Really more than that, but two kinds of people. There are lovers and there are condemners. The difference is in what you understand. When Christ walked into the room, He looked at Simon and Simon knew who He was. Oh, he wouldn't say that he was perfect. He would say that he was a sinner. And he was saved by all the sacrificial things that he did. But when he looked over at that woman, there's a difference -- she was a scandalous sinner, he a respectable sinner. And one of the things that Jesus taught us is that there are, if you will, in some people's minds, scandalous sinners, and respectable sinners, but all of us need forgiveness. We have it in our culture, by the way. We do. We have people who are criminals. They go to jail. They're drug dealers, they're wife-beaters, they're children-beaters. And they're despicable individuals. And they need to go to prison. Then we have this other group of people. They're not scandalous -- they're sinners, they're criminals, but they're white-collar criminals. We have a whole different category. Whole different penal system, if you will, for them. Why? Because even in our culture, there are scandalous sinners and there are respectable sinners.

Jesus helps us understand when He teaches this parable. All are in need of forgiveness. Debt is debt. And if you can't pay it, you can't pay it. No matter how much you owe, if the debt can't be paid, you are a debtor. And Jesus wanted them to understand that He was prepared to forgive their sin by assuming their debts, whether their sin is scandalous or respectable. Doesn't matter. Simon, it doesn't matter. You can dream up all that you want in your mind that you are somehow a respectable sinner, and she's somehow a scandalous individual that no one would ever want to be around, but the reality is, both of you had debt, but only one in this room has any appreciation for the forgiveness. Simon, which one is it?

See, that's the great danger. It's the great threat to you. It is to me. For those of us who maybe were raised in the church, been Christians for a long time -- sometimes

when we think about Christ, we think, "Oh, He died for me, but -- He only needed a little droplet of blood, and there are other people who need a whole gallon." Jesus wanted them to understand -- God is prepared to forgive them by assuming their debts. Taking it all. Because if you can't pay, you can't pay. The difference is, some people understand that. But on that day, Jesus identified that those who experience forgiveness feel tremendous gratitude, which always -- and I underline always -- expresses itself in love and forgiveness. It's a sobering statement. "Therefore, I tell you," verse 47, "her many sins have been forgiven -- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Can I ask you a question? Has anyone been forgiven little? Is that the moral of the story? That there are some who are forgiven a lot and there are others who are forgiven a little? Has anyone ever stood before Christ, and Jesus said, "Wow! It didn't take much of my blood to save you!"? Has anyone been forgiven little? No. What's His point? His point is -- some people actually think there are scandalous sinners and there are respectable sinners. And Jesus is saying, there are debtors. Some people understand that -- the woman did. Other people, like Simon, don't get it. And in some ways, the more religious you are the more dangerous it is for you, because you actually might think there are scandalous people out there who actually NEED Christ, and there are people like me, who just need a few droplets of His blood. But those who experience forgiveness -- they feel a tremendous gratitude, which always expresses itself in love and forgiveness. Bill would have never thought -- he wouldn't have. He would have never thought that he married a woman who saw herself as a respectable sinner. But when given the wrong circumstance, she believed in her heart, "That man that murdered my daughter -- he deserves hell." And she believed it so strongly she'd leave her husband over it. But those who experience forgiveness feel a tremendous gratitude -- which allows them to forgive people that you would never ever imagine that they could. Why? Because the key to loving much is being forgiven much. But understand, no one in this room is forgiven little. The difference is, do you understand what you've been forgiven? Do you understand? Do you understand it enough that it will unleash you and free you and get you unstuck from your unwillingness to forgive certain people? Do you understand the forgiveness of Christ in your life enough that you could say to yourself, "Through the power of Christ I can forgive anyone"? Do you understand the death of Christ for you and the gift of Christ enough that it can let you release your unfaithful spouse from the prison of unforgiveness that you've held them in, because leverage -- it has its weight?

Amy Biehl -- she was a Stanford student, and in 1993 she graduated and she left and moved to South Africa. When she moved there, she moved for the purpose of joining a movement to help see South Africa experience their first free election. Tragically, one day she -- a white woman -- was pulled out of a car by some black revolutionaries, who stabbed her and killed her. She was there for them. She was there to love them. Word got back to mom and dad. They grieved. They wept. They walked through the whole process of anger. And in 1998, they did something that no one ever imagined that they would do. They lived in southern California -- Orange County -- and they sold their house and they moved to Johannesburg. 1998. Why? To continue the work of Amy Biehl. Did they forgive those who murder? Oh, yeah. They did. They went a little bit

further. They hired two of them. They hired two of them -- not to be their bodyguard, not to do their dirty work -- but to join the team of people that were seeking to bring free elections to South Africa. They moved there, and they not only forgave those who murdered their daughter, they hired them.

One day a reporter was there, and interviewing them, and asked them. "How on earth could you ever do this?" Her dad responded, "Forgiving is looking at ourselves and saying, 'I don't want to go through life feeling hateful and revengeful, because that's not going to do me or anyone else any good.' We took Amy's lead, and we did what she -- we felt -- would want. We forgave. And we learned to love people who once hated us." How do you do that? What I think is marking our country right now is the most visible hatred I've ever seen. It's destroying families. Churches. You can let it keep going -- you can even join it. You can be a part of it. You can identify your enemies, and you can tell me all the people who tick you off. Or you can stand in front of Jesus and remind yourself that one day you were lost. One day you and I were bound for hell. And Christ sent person after person in my life -- a mom who prayed for me, a high school teacher who woke up at 1:00 in the morning to wake me up and drag me down a path to talk about my life, a friend who would drive 10 hours just to be present with me. If you want to love people -- even those that right now anger you -- it's not about mustering up that love, because Jesus doesn't say the one who loves much is disciplined. No, the one who loves much and forgives much has been forgiven much. The reality is, we've all been forgiven the same. Some of you understand it.

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