

DO WHATEVER IT TAKES... DELIVER US FROM COMPLACENCY



One day a man named, Jack Smith, took me aside for a little talk. Jack and his family had been coming to church for a couple of years. He was a foreman at a manufacturing plant, lived in a nice house in the suburbs, drove a late model car. Somehow Jack and his family had found their way down to this inner city church.

“I don’t know if I really belong in this church”, he said, “I don’t have any dramatic stories to tell. I’m just an ordinary guy. I haven’t been into drugs or alcohol or crime. These people have had their lives turned around by God. What’s there to turn around in my dull life?”

“What’s there to turn around in my dull life?”

Fortunately, Jack hung in there and he came to a place where he could see that he was just as needy as all these men and women who had spent years on the streets.

And that’s when his faith began to grow.

Old Simon the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner had no idea how needy he was.

Like Jack, he was complacent.

Life was going pretty good.

He was respected in the community.

He felt secure about himself.

Secure enough to invite this controversial man from Nazareth to dinner to get a closer look at him. And doesn’t he raise his eyebrows when this woman with a bad reputation barges across the room and begins to wash Jesus’ feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with expensive ointment!

“Well, now I know”, says Simon to himself, “that this Jesus is no prophet. If he were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman that is kissing his feet! He would not have allowed her to touch him.”

Simon watches this strange episode with eyes that are spiritually blind. He hasn’t a clue about what’s going on here because he hasn’t a clue about his own need. He’s complacent.

Jesus looks over at Simon the Pharisee and he can see the wheels turning. He sees the cynical expression on Simon's face.



"Simon, I want to tell you something." "What is it, Teacher?" (This ought to be good. I have this guy's number.)

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which one will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Luke 7:41-47

Now was it that Simon didn't have many sins to forgive and this woman had a lot of sins?

Or was it that Simon only thought he didn't have many sins?

How about the sin of complacency?

One thing is for sure:

This woman found her way straight to the door of the kingdom that day because she knew her need. She saw Jesus as her only hope.

Whereas:

Simon was so full of complacency that he was blind to his own need *and* blind to the one hope that was sitting at his table!

Jesus comes and sits at our table.

He does more.

He comes to feed us with the bread of heaven, to strengthen us and heal us.

And like Simon the Pharisee, we find it hard to discern the presence of the Holy in our midst. I mean Jesus doesn't seem to be doing his job. If he's the Son of God, and he's really here,

Why isn't more happening?

Why is it that only certain people get excited about him? People like that woman?

Just like Simon the Pharisee, we find it easy to sit back and pass judgment on the way Jesus does things.

If he's the Son of God,

Why did he let that person die?

Why does he allow children to suffer?

Why don't I get better answers to my prayers?

Now here comes this woman into our church right in the middle of our feast. She doesn't ask any questions about why Jesus does this or doesn't do that. She goes straight to him and starts to worship him.

She washes his feet with tears of repentance, kisses them with devotion, anoints them with an offering, not of her leftovers, but of the best she has.

Ah ha! That's it! Jesus appeals to the riffraff. Those people always seem to go for him. Well, that's all right. They have nothing better to do with their time.

Then, one day Jesus calls you by name and says, "I want to talk to you." Somehow the Spirit of the Lord gets our attention through all our apathy and says,

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which one will love him more?"

Maybe I always thought of myself as the guy with the small debt. "After all I haven't messed up my life like that woman messed up hers. I've always been a decent person, so I don't owe like she does. And I'll admit it, that's why I'm not into prayer, and reading the Bible, and tithing my income, and running around doing for people like that fanatical woman. I don't need to. I already have a pretty good record."

Now we don't know what happened to Simon the Pharisee after Jesus left his house that day. But let's suppose he had a little trouble sleeping that night. Let's say he began to remember a few things about himself he had forgotten. By morning he's so distraught by this new uncovering of his deceitful heart, he has no peace left until he finds his way to Jesus and cries out for help. Now he's no longer the lightweight debtor he thought he was. "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips... I had the Word of God at my table and didn't even know it!"

The only thing standing between each of us and a life of burning faith is complacency.

Complacency. We're all affected by it.

This is why we find it so easy to judge people and so hard to trust God.

Complacency is like an odorless gas that seeps up through the floor and lures you into a strange slumber. Your eyes are open. You can hear everything that goes on, but you're above it all. You can see other people's faults, but not your own.

How do we get rid of that poison gas? How do we come out of that stupor?

What we have to do is pay attention when Jesus talks to us like he talked to Simon. And he does! In love he puts his finger on the very thing in our hearts that needs to change.

Simon the Pharisee had God the Son sitting at his table and treated him like an imposter. We have God the Son standing among us in the power of the Spirit and we look right past him. He speaks to us and we let his words evaporate in our heads before they ever get to our hearts.

Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.



We are not dealing with a far off God here. We are dealing with a God so close and so personal that the slightest gesture of welcome draws him right into our hearts. That woman knew that. She knew he wouldn't push her away.

"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

We can have what she had. We can walk out of here today with hearts at peace.

As she washed Jesus' feet with her tears, she was repenting of sins which were destroying her life. And we, like Simon, may feel we are above her. But in God's sight there is one sin in us which is more dangerous than all her sins put together - the sin of complacency. It will destroy you.

So today, when we come to the table, we need to come with a prayer,

*"Lord, open my eyes to see my true condition.
Open my ears to hear your Living Word.
Deliver me, O God, from the sin of complacency.
Do whatever it takes, O Lord, to wake me up."*

Of course, that's a dangerous prayer. "Do whatever it takes to wake me up." But it's a prayer you'll *never* regret. Let's pray that prayer today when we come to the altar. Let's pray that prayer every morning until we start to see the answer.

"Do whatever it takes, O Lord, to wake me up."



Message: Richard E. Bieber 2001

Featured Art: Stills from the Jesus Film Project (CRU)...From clip 14 A Sinful Woman Forgiven. <https://www.jesusfilm.org/watch/jesus.html/sinful-woman-forgiven/english.html>

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