

Overcoming Internal Battles

Luke 7:18-50

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

In this past Sunday's message, Pastor Scott continued with our study in the Gospel of Luke and broke down chapter 7, verses 18 through 50.

Pastor Scott titled his message, "Overcoming internal battles" — and that is certainly apt, given what's going down in this passage, for which there are two parts.

Verses 18 through 35 cover Jesus' response to the messengers from John the Baptist. John as we were reminded wondered in a moment of doubt if Jesus is the Messiah.

Verses 36 through 50 cover Jesus' radical response to a Pharisee who's quite skilled at judging others and who wondered how Jesus could possibly forgive the sins of a woman of questionable morals. (As if all of us don't have questionable morals in God's sight!)

Yes, indeed, internal battles can be messy.

The bottom line, which Pastor Scott shared at the start of his message, is the condition of our own hearts: King David after his adultery with Bathsheba asked the Lord to create in him a "clean heart"; the prophet Jeremiah called our hearts "deceitful" — which turns on its head the preaching of those who say, "Follow your heart"; Proverbs 15:13 reads, "A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed" — which underscores the fact that our hearts are our central processing units and the most sacred places of all.

So ... where is your heart today?

As for John the Baptist, it may be surprising that he expressed some questions about who Jesus is: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (v. 19)

After all, John heralded Jesus' coming to massive crowds in Israel — why would he now wonder about who Jesus really is?

But John the Baptist indeed had some doubt — not unlike other biblical figures.

And not unlike you and me.

However, Pastor Scott wisely drew a line between what he termed "good doubt" and "bad doubt," noting that good doubt draws us into a greater understanding of God while bad doubt moves us away from the Lord. Bad doubt is primarily about our own pride, and our love for our own opinions — and refusing to let go of our agendas and not conceding that the Lord is sovereign over us.

Of course, God can handle our doubts and will help us when we approach him with humility — but we have to give up our own agendas, too.

When Jesus answered the question posed by John the Baptist's messengers, he gets into areas Pastor Scott called "spiritual instability" and "courageous faith."

Jesus indicates that John the Baptist isn't a "reed shaken by the wind." He stood up to King Herod Antipas and called out the despot's marital infidelity — to the point where Herod threw John in prison and had him executed later on. John had spiritual backbone — and we can share that same resolve. When the temptations come today to let culture influence us, we need to push back and tell the world that Jesus is our only measuring stick in regard to right and wrong (despite our upside-down world endlessly saying to our faces that "right is wrong," and "wrong is right").

John the Baptist indeed possessed "courageous faith" that all of us should emulate. And while Jesus praised John by saying that "among those born of women none is greater than John" (v. 28) he added that "yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Pastor Scott explained that we have something John didn't have — being among those who have accepted Jesus!

We need to drop our agendas and ask the Lord to give us courageous faith if we're lacking it right now.

The next part of the passage takes place after a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to his home for a meal. During the meal Jesus lays bare Simon's pride — as well as the humility of a rather unwelcome guest.

Verse 37 and 38 state: "And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that [Jesus] was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment."

Well, that's a dinner-pausing scene if there ever was one!

Simon is uncomfortable with the woman's presence — and particularly with Jesus' reaction, and Simon judges Jesus: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Nevertheless, Jesus forgives her sin — and others wondered "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

The difficulty here, Pastor Scott emphasized, is that Simon can see the woman's sin — but he can't see his own sin. When we're in touch with our own sin, we're less likely to judge others. The woman with questionable morals full-on saw her need for forgiveness.

So let's remember, as Pastor Scott said, to focus on growing closer to the Lord, which will result in us to begin feeling uncomfortable with sin and desiring more spiritual truths in our lives.