



“Responding to Jesus”
Luke 7:36-50

Idea: The way in which a person responds to Jesus has both eternal and temporal consequences.

Intro: William Patton MacKay was a seventeen-year-old Scottish young man who lived with his mother just outside of Edinburgh, Scotland. He was headed off to the university, and as he prepared to do so, his mother gave him something that he found to be ridiculous. It was a Bible, and she had inscribed his name on the first page in that Bible. Under the name she wrote out a verse of Scripture and listed many others.

William went off to the university and immediately made many new friends. He loved the social scene, and he became enamored with drinking and partying. In fact, he gave himself to it. He nearly drank his opportunity away. He got to the place where he had exhausted all of his resources, so he took the Bible his mother had given him before leaving home and pawned it just to have money for another drink. He was so engrossed in the party scene that he came close to flunking out of school that first year.

Thankfully, William came to his senses and realized he needed to take control of his life. He had to get serious about his education and make something of himself. Therefore, he decided to put off the party life and get back to his studies, and he did just that. He graduated from the university with honors and went on to medical school. He then graduated from medical school as a doctor and took a job in the city hospital in Edinburgh. William, however, was lost. He had no feelings for people. He could care less about the welfare of others. He only went into medicine to make money. He was short, snappy, and harsh with patients and staff. He cared nothing about his patients’ feelings or curing their ailments. He really was only concerned about making money and having a good time.

One day, as Dr. MacKay was making his rounds at the hospital, he walked into a patient’s room who was dying. He examined the man and quickly realized there was nothing that could be done for him. So, he looked at the dying man and in his cold demeanor said, “You are dying, and there is nothing I can do for you.” Well, the man began to scream, “Get me my book! Get me my book!” He was adamant that he had to have his book. Dr. MacKay looked at him in disbelief and then looked at the nurse, and they both just shrugged their shoulders and walked out of the room.

Later that day after making his rounds, Dr. MacKay thought about the man and what had happened earlier. He wondered if the man was still alive. He stopped by the room just to see and found that he was dead. He was extremely curious about the book the man kept screaming and making a fuss over. It seemed so strange to him because the man did not want to see any person. He only wanted his book. So, he pulled back the man’s sheets and found a Bible tucked down by his hand. The doctor picked up the Bible and opened it to the front page. As he did so he saw the name, “William Patton MacKay” inscribed in the handwriting of his mother. The book the

dying man screamed for was the very Bible that Dr. MacKay had pawned years earlier to get enough money to buy whiskey. He had forgotten all about this Bible. Well, he was so intrigued by this discovery that he took the Bible to his office and spent the night reading it. He started with the verse his mother had listed under his name. Then he continued with the other verses she had marked. Dr. MacKay's mother had marked all these verses hoping that he would read them when he went off to the university, but he never did. On this particular night, as he sat there in his office reading the verses his mom had marked for him, this socialite doctor who lived only for himself, came under deep conviction about his sin and his need for God. In that moment, he bowed his head and trusted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

For the first time in his life, he felt and experienced the presence of God, so he took out a piece of paper and wrote these words:

“We praise Thee O God for the Son of Thy love, for Jesus who died and is now gone above.

Hallelujah! Thine the glory, hallelujah! Amen!

Hallelujah! Thine the glory, revive us again.”

“Revive Us Again” has been one of the great hymns of the church for over 150 years. Think about it! We would not have this hymn if William Patton MacKay had not responded in faith to Jesus.

His response reminds us of how important responding to Jesus is. Did you know that everyone responds to Jesus in some way? We all respond. In fact, in the closing pericope of Luke 7, we find two different responses to Jesus. We discover from it that the way in which a person responds to Jesus has both eternal and temporal consequences.

Read Luke 7:36-50.

Inquiry: As I have pointed out, Luke 7 depicts five scenes that present five different windows by which we are to see who Jesus is. We also see through them how the people involved responded to Jesus. In the first scene, Jesus reacts to faith as the centurion believes on the Lord for the healing of his servant. We learn that faith is an exercise in reality as we rightly see ourselves and rightly see Christ. In the second scene, Jesus is moved with compassion towards a widow who is burying her son. In response the people stand in awe of His marvelous grace. In the third scene, the Lord receives a question from John the Baptist who is imprisoned and suffering with doubt. From it we learn that Jesus answers and is the answer in our doubt. In the fourth scene, we discover from Jesus' conversation with the crowd that sinners must approach their sin from heaven's perspective. We learn that the rhythm of our lives must be united with the rhythm of God's character and voice. In this fifth and final scene, Jesus visits a Pharisee's house, where a sinful woman washes His feet with her hair and tears. From these two individuals we see two completely different responses to Jesus.

There is no way to know why Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his home for a meal. He might have extended the invitation because Jesus had preached in the synagogue. It was customary and admirable for religious leaders to invite traveling rabbis to a Sabbath meal. Whatever his reason, Simon's hospitality was overshadowed by a nasty animosity for Jesus. He purposely omitted the common courtesies afforded any honored dinner guest. Normally, the host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace, but this was not done for Jesus. As a rule, a guest's sandals were removed and his feet were washed when he entered or while he reclined at the table, thus removing the dust of the street and refreshing him. Jesus' feet, however, were left embarrassingly dirty. Dinner guests were also anointed with a touch of olive oil, but for Jesus there was no such kindness offered.

Simon treated Jesus with callous and calculated contempt. He carefully avoided every custom that would make the Lord feel welcomed. Every guest and spectator recognized the disrespect and mockery Simon offered.

Simon seems to have been a man of wealth. The fact that Luke records a “*woman of the city*” washing the feet of Jesus in Simon's home speaks of his wealth. More than likely, Simon's house was built around a courtyard

where formal meals were served. This was the design of most homes of the wealthy class. On such occasions, the doors to the courtyard were left open so that uninvited townspeople could wander in to observe the conversation. Many people would come and go during the mealtime. One such onlooker was this “*woman of the city*” who washed and anointed Jesus’ feet.

We see in this scene two completely different responses to Jesus. From them we discover the right way and the wrong way to respond to Jesus.

1. The Right Way

The “*woman of the city*” responded rightly to Jesus. Her presence and actions surprised everyone as verse 37 conveys, “*And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner.*” Simon and his guests were appalled by her presence and ministry to the Lord. The woman, however, did not care or concern herself with them. She was there for Jesus. He was her focus and care. She was there in response to what she had seen in Jesus.

More than likely, this woman had heard Jesus preach, and His words had touched her heart. Through His powerful but gracious words, she realized her sinfulness and need for forgiveness. In faith, she turned from her sin and trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior. When she heard that Jesus was at Simon’s house that evening, she could not help but go and see Him again. She hoped for an opportunity to serve Him as an act of gratitude for the new life she experienced. Seeing the Lord reclined at the table with dirty feet, she could not help but approach Him and wash His feet.

Four adverbs describe the woman’s right response to Jesus. She responded:

- **Honestly**
Luke describes this woman as “*a sinner*” (vs. 37). Most scholars and commentators, both ancient and modern, agree that this designation refers to a prostitute. We should not associate this woman with Mary Magdalene (8:2) or Mary of Bethany (Mark 14:3-9). This woman is not named in Scripture, but she had undoubtedly repented of her sins and changed her life. She had been honest about her life. The people of the city knew who she was. Simon the Pharisee knew who she was. Jesus also knew who she was. She was a sinner in need of forgiveness and new life.

On this evening, the woman did not dress in a way to hide who she was. She did not put on a mask or try to hide her identity. No, she came as she was. We also must respond to Jesus honestly. This is the heart of confession. When we confess our sins to the Lord, we are agreeing with Him that they are sinful. We are dragging them out of the darkness and into the light. We are honestly laying them bare before the Lord and anyone else.

This is the right way to respond to Jesus and His gospel. Why would we do otherwise? He sees and knows our sin, so why not stop hiding and covering it up?

- **Boldly**
The woman approached Jesus, “*standing behind him at his feet*” (vs. 38). She was not satisfied with staying in the crowd or being a closet believer. Instead, she boldly approached Jesus. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

– Hebrews 4:16

We should with boldness draw near to Christ, knowing that in His presence we find grace. Boldness means we do not fear what others might think or say. It means we want to publicly identify with Jesus.

³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. – Matthew 10:32-33

It is important that we respond to Jesus publicly. For this reason, every Sunday we extend an opportunity to respond to the preaching of God's Word.

- Humbly

"...weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet..."

Everything this woman did was socially unacceptable. Servants washed the feet of the homeowner's guests. Along with that, women did not approach or touch other men. They doubly did not approach or touch a rabbi. Women especially did not let down their hair in the presence of another man. A woman would only let down her hair in front of her own husband. According to the *Talmud* a woman could be divorced for letting down her hair in the presence of another man. Doing so was taboo and on par with uncovering one's breasts.

Despite cultural and personal pressures, the woman knelt over Jesus' feet and became overwhelmed with emotion. I believe in that moment she saw the ugliness of her many sins juxtaposed over and against the beauty of the mercy and grace she had found in Jesus. She saw that Jesus was being mistreated. He deserved so much better from Simon, so she wept tears of joy and tears of remorse. She was ill-prepared not planning to wash the Lord's feet but only to anoint them. There was no towel in her hand, so she used what she had...her hair.

This woman responded humbly to Jesus, which is how we must all respond to Jesus if we would do so rightly.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." – James 4:6

- Completely

"brought an alabaster flask of ointment..."

This woman brought her most expensive possession to the Lord. She brought her best. She gave her all to Him. This was no half-hearted step toward Jesus. She was all-in.

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." – Luke 9:23

When we respond to Jesus' invitation, we must give ourselves completely to Him, holding nothing back.

This sinful woman responded in the right way to Jesus and the gospel. She responded honestly, boldly, humbly, and completely. If we would know and experience the beauty of Christ's mercy and grace like she did, then this is how we must respond to Jesus. Many have and will respond rightly. Unfortunately, many more will not, and Simon portrays the wrong way to respond to Jesus.

2. The Wrong Way

Simon was a Pharisee. He was a religious leader in Israel. He was a teacher of the Law and one whom the people respected and followed. Unlike the woman who recognized her sin and need, Simon believed Jesus had nothing to offer him. He responded:

- Cynically
“If this man were a prophet...” (vs. 39)

Most of the common people believed Jesus to be a great prophet (Luke 9:18-19). He was a miracle worker. Many sick people had been cured. The dead had been raised. The blind had received sight. There was no doubt that Jesus had come from God, yet Simon cynically disregarded all the evidence.

We dare not respond to Jesus with cynicism. “If Jesus were God, then why am I...”

- Religiously
Simon invited Jesus to his house for religious reasons. He was going through the religious motions of being a good Jew and Pharisee. On the Sabbath, when there is a visiting rabbi, you invite him and his family over for the evening meal.

How easy is it for us to respond religiously to Jesus? It is really easy to jump through religious hoops and go through the motions without our hearts being surrendered to the Lord, which leads to a third wrong response.

- Self-righteously
Jesus presented a provoking parable to Simon about forgiveness. The person forgiven of much loves much, but the person forgiven of little loves little (vs. 41-47). Simon viewed himself as being morally superior to the sinful woman. He believed himself to even be morally superior to Jesus because he recognized what kind of woman she was and apparently Jesus did not (vs. 39).

We dare not dismiss our own sin or compare ourselves to anyone other than Jesus Christ. We have all sinned and fallen short (Rom 3:23).

- Half-heartedly
Self-righteousness is always behind our half-hearted response. Simon invited Jesus to his home for a meal, but he did not invite the Lord for the purpose of getting to know Him. At best it was to uphold his religious status among the people. At worst it was to malign the Lord in front of the people.

Attending church is not an adequate response. Going through religious motions will never bring you to God. He requires for surrender to His Lordship.

Conclusion: William Patton MacKay was raised in a home that believed the gospel. He had a mother who pointed him to Jesus. I am sure she spent much time on her knees, crying out for the Lord for his soul. There is no doubt that she taught him the Bible. Even when he left for the university, she continued to point him to Christ. This mom did all she could to set her son up to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, but she could not respond for him. William MacKay had to respond to the gospel himself. For many years his response was at best religious, but more than likely it was cynical and self-righteous. MacKay had not thought about God in a longtime until he met the dying man who only wanted his Bible. Once he saw that the man’s Bible was the one he had pawned, all those stories he had heard from the Bible at home came back, flooding his mind. He had cynically run from Jesus his entire life, but now he could not help but turn and run to the Lord.

Which group do you fall into today? Are you running from Jesus, or have you run toward Jesus? How do you need to respond to the calling He has on your life?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?