2 SAMUEL 11:26–12:10,

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. 27 And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

12 1 And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds, 3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. 4 Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” 5 Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, 6 and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

7 Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. 8 And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. 9 Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

GALATIANS 2:15–21; 3:10–14

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

LUKE 7:36–8:3

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 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. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “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.” 40 And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”

41 “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44 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. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” 48 And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” 50 And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

8 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

A little cultural context will help us better understand today's Gospel. Sabbath Day activities included time at the synagogue, but they did not end there. After the services were over, a wealthy member of the community would often invite celebrities for a meal. As they ate, they discussed the important topics of the day. The wealthy person also invited the general public to observe and learn from these discussions. It was just such an invitation that a Pharisee named Simon extended to Jesus in today's Gospel.

As Jesus reclined at Simon's table, a woman from the crowd followed Him. This woman was behind Jesus and she wept. As she wept, she kissed His feet and anointed them with ointment. The tears of her weeping dripped on His feet and she dried them with her hair.

This woman was breaking all kinds of cultural taboos. She was kissing a man to whom she was not related and she unbound her hair in order to wipe Jesus' feet. The kissing and the unbinding of hair were both very intimate actions on the part of this woman - actions that were simply not done in public. To top it all off Luke describes this woman as a sinner.

Given that this woman had a bad reputation and was putting on this disgusting display at his dinner, the Pharisee's response is not surprising. He said to himself, "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." He was probably not the only person there who was thinking this sort of thing.

Of course Jesus is the ultimate prophet and He knew Simon's thoughts. Jesus responded with a short, little parable that illustrated Simon's error.

Two people owed money to a banker. One debt was ten times greater than the other. Neither could repay. The banker forgave them both.

Jesus then asked Simon to give the moral of the story, "Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." [Jesus] said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Jesus then used this parable to compare the woman and the Pharisee. "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." Jesus gave His full approval to the woman and severely criticized his host, Simon the Pharisee.

This is one of many incidents in the life of Christ that demonstrate that Christianity is for bad people. Jesus Himself said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." This fact points out one of the greatest tragedies of our society. There are billions of people in the world today who think that they have to get their act together before they can come to church. You will actually hear remarks such as, "If I ever walked into a church, the roof would fall in." The really sad thing is that these are exactly the people who need to hear the Gospel.

Jesus left His throne and took on our humanity because, even though we are sinners, He still loves us. He took the punishment of all our sin onto Himself as He suffered and died on the cross, because He loves us. Thus He took away all of our sins, not only has He removed all our debts, but He has also deposited His holy life into our spiritual savings account as a gift. He has certified this transaction by rising from the dead never to die again. This is the Gospel for all sinners.

If this is the Gospel, why then do so many believe that they must get right before they come into the church? The problem is people like Simon the Pharisee. Jesus had this to say about the Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

What does Simon the Pharisee look like in our churches today? If Simon the Pharisee is a teacher or preacher, he starts out really well. He tells you the story of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. He tells you how Jesus rose from the dead. He tells you how life eternal is yours. Everything is going great until he says, "Now that you are a Christian and free from the guilt of sin, here is what you have to do." Once you become a member of the church, Simon the Pharisee stops telling you about Jesus and starts telling you how to have a stronger marriage, well behaved kids, a better job, better managed finances, and so forth.

In today's Epistle, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. Today's Simon the Pharisee says the exact opposite. He says, "Deeds, not creeds." He moves us away from faith and back to works and all the guilt that that brings.

The sad thing is that the Simons of this world actually believe that they can achieve perfection before they die. They really, truly believe that they can live a life without sin. These people not only believe this themselves but they also teach other people to believe the same thing. Compare that to the words that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Is it any wonder that people get frustrated and confused when a modern day Simon the Pharisee teaches them that they too can live a sanctified life when Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit clearly says it is impossible?

Of course laypeople can also have the attitude of Simon the Pharisee. Such people will actually go to their pastor and say, "Hey pastor, I get it. I am a sinner. Jesus saved me from my sins. I get it. Now, can we move on to the rest of the teachings in the Bible." Is it any wonder that the average person on the street thinks Christianity is all about being a good person instead of having a perfect savior?

On the other hand, people who weep at Jesus' feet say, I need more Jesus. Tell me again how my sins are forgiven and how I will rise from the dead because He rose from the dead, and He’s preparing a place for me to live with Him forever.

Fortunately, the day is coming when Jesus will take all those who weep at His feet to His eternal home. In that place, there will be no Simons. Instead, we will have all Jesus all the time. Jesus will continually give Himself to us in perfect measure. The Wedding Feast of the Lamb will never end and it will always be special.

At one time or another, all of us have been Simons. We have all been arrogant and forgotten that the church is for bad people. We have forgotten that we sin every day. We have forgotten that we need more Jesus. Pray that the Holy Spirit will give us a sense of our own depravity and bring us to weep at the feet of Jesus and receive His forgiveness.

Pray also that the Holy Spirit will bring all people including the Simons, to weep at the feet of Jesus while they live in this world so that they will experience His eternal joy in the next. Amen