

# **Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 10, Jesus and the Sinful Woman, Luke 7:36-50**

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This is Dr. Dan Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 10, Jesus and the Sinful Woman, Luke 7:36-50.

Welcome back to our Biblical e-learning lecture series on the Gospel of Luke.

It has been a privilege to be able to walk through the Gospel of Luke with you and to think about some key things that are emerging from the discussion. As you probably observed at the end of lecture 9, we were transitioning from where John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask whether Jesus was the one or they should be expecting someone else, and Jesus sent the disciples back to John to explain to John that they should just see, they should tell him about what they have seen and what they have heard. Implying that what they have seen in terms of miraculous deeds and what they have heard in terms of the message of the Gospel, they should be satisfied in recognizing that, indeed, he is the Messiah who has come.

As we follow on from this lecture, you will begin to observe that the issue of Jesus' identity will emerge again and again. So, in order to move smoothly from where we left off in lecture 9 to lecture 10, let me read the last passage I read from lecture 9, which I did not spend any time at all on, but I want to just give you a sense of where we are going. So, I read from verse 29 of chapter 7 to verse 35.

To what, then, shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in a marketplace and calling to one another. We played a flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not weep.

For John the Baptist has come, eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, He has a demon. The Son of Man has come, eating and drinking, and you say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners, yet wisdom is justified by all his children. Jesus followed the discourse on the quest for identity that John the Baptist's disciples or followers had come to put forward.

But he turned the whole thing upside down and began to criticize the scribes and the Pharisees for rejecting the central issues that need to be known. And he referred here in Luke's writing, referring really specifically not this time to just scribes, but he refers to the Pharisees and the lawyers as the ones who are the cause of the problem. Luke is setting up something here.

He's setting up the fact that the Messiah has come trying to deliver the message of the gospel, performing signs and wonders in the public place, things that are so

obvious to be seen, and things that are so clear to be heard and understood, and yet they did not hear. He goes on with that phrase of talking about playing flute and the children not dancing in the public arena, criticizing the Pharisees yet again. In Luke's view, the issue is expectation.

The Pharisees have misplaced expectations. John came trying to do what was right, and they had all kinds of criticism against him. The son of man also comes doing what he's supposed to be doing, and they say, look at him.

He eats with sinners and tax collectors. He even drinks too much wine and gets drunk. They have all kinds of names and all kinds of portraits of him because of wrongful expectations.

You must remember that I said earlier on in this lecture that in Luke, Pharisees are not always negative characters. But here is one of those instances where Jesus gets on the Pharisees for misplaced expectations. As we go on into the next pericope, where I will focus on the main lecture today, you'll begin to see another, if I will phrase it, a paradox of Jesus accepting an invitation of a Pharisee.

Where he finds himself in the company of so many Pharisees, having a barbecue if you like, and just enjoying time together, and yet something is going to emerge in that scene. That will make Jesus come back to the Pharisees. Again, Pharisees are not always bad characters in Luke, but where they do err, Jesus picks on them and addresses them, and Luke is quick to portray that to us.

The point of Luke's reference in the passage I read is best explained in Howard Marshall's quote that I have on the screen for you. That point may be more general. General one, that just as some children refused to play the games suggested to them, so the Jews rejected all God's advances to them.

In this particular reference to Pharisees and the scribes. Now we move quickly, so please have at the back of your mind the idea that Jesus had just have not so pleasant things to say about the Pharisees and the lawyers. And then we go to verse 36, and we'll see what will go on there with Jesus and the Pharisees.

In verse 36, we read, One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at a 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 with the ointment.

Verse 39, When the Pharisees 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. And Jesus, answering, said to him, Simon, which is the name of the Pharisee host, I have something to say to you. And he answered, Say it, teacher.

A certain moneylender had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled their debts. Now, which of them will love him more? Simon answered The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the large debt.

And he, being Jesus, 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, and 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. He said to her, Your sins are forgiven. And those who were at the table, namely the other Pharisees, with him began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you.

Go in peace. Jesus picked on the Pharisees and the lawyers following John the Baptist's disciples' visit. But this account I just read introduces us to another scenario.

A few things emerge from this particular passage that I would like to take my time to highlight. Please don't lose sight of the general picture. It was a Pharisee who invited Jesus to his home.

A Pharisee threw the party. It was a party of the gathering of Jesus and his disciples with the Pharisees. So, keep that at the back of your mind.

But then comes something of an interruption. As the party was going on, you can imagine a scenario. Just imagine if you are in America. Think about the situation of summer barbecue.

Or if you live in Texas, then think generally about barbecue. This seemed to be something that was going on the outside or even on the inside. Somehow, a woman was able to penetrate and get in there.

And then, somehow, this woman who got in turned to hijack the whole story. And Luke says you should know more about this woman. And so do I. So who is this woman? Before I proceed to elaborate on the account of this particular woman, let

me draw your attention to a few things about how the other Gospels present this woman.

The other Gospels, the two other synoptic Gospels, namely Matthew and Mark, have a lot in common with what Luke is saying, with the exception of areas that I will point out. They locate the account fairly in an area that is reasonably in the same geographical area. But John tells us something different.

John talks about a woman, and he places this woman in a different context. John even goes on to talk about a similar incident, talks about an incident that was imagined in Bethany, and identifies this woman with Mary. And this is Mary, whose brother is Lazarus.

Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, are good friends of Jesus. John narrates this account slightly differently. So, scholars have posed the question, are these two different accounts, or are they the same? So, I should say, as I go on to explain whether it is two different accounts or the same, let me remind you of some of the things that my colleagues do in commentaries and writings that if you are not a scholar, you may have felt disappointed somewhere along the way.

As soon as we get into this particular situation, we allow the woman's story to take over what is going on. Commentators and other scholars would like to talk about this passage as if it were all about women. I am going to talk about the woman.

But I also want you to continue to remember that it is an invitation of a Pharisee to a Pharisee's house for a wonderful meal time. In other words, Jesus accepts the invitation of a Pharisee and goes to dine in the company of Pharisees. That is the context in which these things are unfolding.

Having said that, let's begin to make some comparisons to see how other gospel writers recall the incident with the woman in comparison to Luke. When I begin to highlight Luke's distinctives, you begin to understand what is going on in Luke. So, let's try to do that.

First, if you are looking for parallel accounts of this subject with the woman in Matthew, it is in chapter 26 from verse 16, verses 6 to 13, which is at the far end of Matthew in its writing. In Mark, it is chapter 14 from verses 9 and 3 to 9. John was located just after the incident with Lazarus in chapter 12, verses 1 to 8. The other thing you observe is in Matthew and Mark, these two gospel writers will agree with Luke in identifying the host as Simon. So, the host is called Simon in all three synoptic gospels.

A major difference, though, that you would observe when you look at Matthew and Mark's account is they identify Simon as not being a Pharisee but a leper. So, in this

case, you find Simon a leper in Matthew and Mark, and in Luke, Simon, who is named in this account, is a Pharisee. Following Luke's discourse about Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and the lawyers soon after, John the Baptist's disciples came to contact with him.

In John, we find that John agrees with Luke that the woman anointed Jesus' feet. John also agrees with Matthew and Mark that the event occurred in Bethany in Judea. But in Luke, this event is occurring in Galilee in the north.

So you may begin to wonder why scholars think there might be two different accounts and there might be some misplaced characters or a similar character or different characters by the same name. Excuse me, Simon. In Matthew and Mark, we find an agreement with Luke that the woman is not named. But for John, no, the woman must be named, and this woman is Mary.

So, just this quick comparison should draw your attention to the fact that though some details look similar, there are some differences in how we look at this particular pericope in the four gospels. John's, in particular, is very, very interesting in the way that Mary becomes the main character here. The geographical location of the other three gospels against Luke is also significant in trying to find out that Luke is here talking about the ministry of Jesus in the north in Galilee and where he's encountering the Pharisees and the lawyers.

And so, he's visiting the home of a Pharisee right there in the north where these things are happening. While the others said, no, no, no, this is closer to Jerusalem in Bethany. But in order to focus on what Luke is doing, let's begin to look at Luke's unique features in this particular account to try to understand what he wants to tell us about this particular woman.

In Luke chapter 7, verses 36 to 50, he tells us more about this woman, but he does not say in any way that the woman was Mary. That is number one. Number two, he does not say in any way that the woman was a prostitute.

That is an early church characterization that sent Pope Gregory I into trouble the Catholic Church later apologized that the sinful woman was a prostitute when they named a home a halfway home for women who are transitioning from prostitution and then called that place the house of Magdala. And to make it this woman being Mary Magdalene and Mary Magdalene being a prostitute of some sort and all that, no. Luke just tells us this is a sinful woman.

In none of the four Gospels portraits, whether it is the same account or they are different accounts, does any one of them characterize this as a prostitute? She was a sinful woman, but her sins were known enough to the public that the Pharisees could pick on them. Unless you were a Pharisee and a professional fault finder, you spent a

lot of time trying to check people's piety, and you were able to spot that. Having said that, let's begin to make observations of the uniqueness of Luke's characterization.

First, Luke is the only Gospel that describes the host as a Pharisee, and then later in the description, he names him as Simon. He was quick because Luke wanted to show us, in this particular incident, the character of a Pharisee. Remember, he criticized them.

Jesus criticized them and the lawyers just a few verses prior. In this particular pericope, Luke refers to this man as a Pharisee four times saying, you need to know that we are dealing with a Pharisee, and the contrast couldn't be further away from a sinful woman. Two, Luke identified the woman as a sinner, not a prostitute, but as I said earlier on, we should always remember that she was known in society enough to be characterized as such.

Third, Luke talks about the tears of the woman. The woman cries in Luke. Elsewhere, that is not quite the portrait that the other Gospels give about this woman.

She uses her tears instead of water to wash the feet of Jesus. Now if I will pause here a minute to try to explain some things here, please let's not be confused into thinking that this was a custom, that people would sometimes weep and use their tears to wipe the feet of someone. No, typically, it was water that was given to the stranger who came home to wash the feet.

In a world where there are dusty roads, and you walk on foot, and you don't have the best sandals, don't think America or don't think whatever you are, the fancy things you find in the cities, think about first-century Galilee. The woman washes with tears, and we see that he dries the feet in Luke. For Luke, it is not only washing but also drying the feet.

And then Luke says something. Luke said she kisses the feet, something other Gospel writers don't talk about. I like to ask my students, especially those at Gordon College, that I have fun with, and I always tease them in the classroom.

Supposing they came to my home for a barbecue, a stranger, a woman who is known in our neighborhood as not having a very good reputation, showed up. And they start wondering what this woman is doing at our party. These are Gordon College folks hanging around and enjoying some barbecue.

What is she doing here? And supposing they started finding this woman doing some strange things. When she starts crying, the tears stream off her cheeks.

And she's using her tears to wipe my feet. And she's trying to use her hair to brush things off. Oh, in one class, one woman said, this is romantic and suspicious.

And I said, yeah, I know where you're going with that. You see, this was being done to Jesus in the context of Pharisees and the party of a gathering of Pharisees. Before you become so self-righteous to condemn the Pharisees, ask yourself what your reaction would be as we observe the distinctiveness of Luke's portrait.

Because Luke is quick to tell you Jesus came for sinners and the outcast. Sometimes, their manners may not be the best. Sometimes, their sensibilities may not be the best.

But Jesus came for them as well as for the rich and the honorable. This woman was doing something that you and I, under any circumstance, should say, what? Why should Jesus do this? So please don't judge Simon too quickly. When he posed the question, I thought this man was a prophet.

And if he was indeed a true prophet, he should have known who this woman is, who is playing all these romantic gestures around here. Luke continues by showing us some fine distinctions here. She said, The woman used her tears, washes, and wipes, and yet goes on to anoint his feet.

She does not only anoint the feet, he anoints the feet with alabaster, the oil in her alabaster jar. This jar is precious and delicate. Precious oil and precious perfume are administered to Jesus.

Oh yes. If it is America, I know what you'll be thinking. This is too romantic for Jesus to take it.

Oh yes. So that is why when Simon asked the question, Jesus could ask him to listen to what would happen if he had the scenario of two people. One owed so much, and one owed so little.

And the one to whom both owed forgives. Jesus asked Simon, Simon, who do you think would be more appreciative? In their response for the forfeiture of the debt. Well, Jesus got Simon to agree.

And Jesus got Simon to say in his own words. That is a good reason for the woman to do what she was doing. Of course, she's forgiven much.

Implicit in that parable that Luke is giving us that no other gospel presents is this. It is even possible that the woman had already been forgiven elsewhere. The woman saw Jesus and was here to show an extreme gesture of gratitude.

We don't know for sure if that is what is playing out. But implicit in the parable is to say, the Pharisee who encountered Jesus and has seen some life change invited him

to his home. Well, if that is so, then maybe the characters in these two parables are one woman who was a sinner known to the public and who was forgiven.

And a Pharisee who was forgiven. And the two are together. And Jesus asked Simon, Simon, who should be so excited that they have been forgiven that much? When he gets Simon to agree, then he can point to the woman and say, hey, my friend, you see.

Now, understand what is going on with this woman. Luke alone is the one who used the word love to explain that those who have been given much love much. Please don't get romantic ideas here.

This is a serious business. Luke will go on to say that Jesus will tell this woman that she is forgiven. And as soon as he said she is forgiven, the whole company became very angry now.

Because Jesus said, the woman is forgiven. That has prompted a whole pharisaic response. Imagine the chorus.

Jesus said the woman is forgiven. And we are told in the text. Those who are present, the other Pharisees, who knows who is still chewing what? At the barbecue party.

What have we just heard? Imagine the reaction. Does he say he has forgiven that woman, too? Who has the right to forgive? They are Pharisees. They know that is only God who does that.

Jesus runs into trouble with different Pharisees in different places for that same reason. He forgives sins. And I think only God should be able to have that power to do that.

But here, Luke said, yes. He also said, Jesus also said in front of the Pharisees that the woman is forgiven. Luke alone is also the one who talked about the objection to forgiveness.

And the farewell, in which Jesus tells the woman to go in peace. The 12 observations I have made in terms of distinctives of Luke. This is why some scholars have argued that perhaps Luke's account is different.

But before we think and reflect more on what Luke is doing here. I would like to refresh your mind on the major thrust of what Luke is doing here. In the manifesto in Luke chapter 4, he also said when the spirit of God came upon him.

And anointed him to preach the good news. He anointed him to preach the good news to the poor. Jesus has come for the outcast.



And Luke is going to remind us that those who are on the margins are the marginal people, the people that people would despise. Sometimes, even their manners don't count. Jesus came for them.

Luke will remind us that those who have sinned so, so much. They will still get the attention of Jesus, and Jesus will forgive them. It is Luke's team to communicate to Theophilus.

That Theophilus, yes, said Theophilus. Jesus came for the highest. But he also came for the lowest.

And he came for all in between. The fine details show the awkwardness of a sinful woman's gesture of appreciation in the house of a Pharisee. So, let me draw your attention to some key things about this woman's gesture.

The five things I point out in her gesture are the things that stand out to me. She anointed the feet, not the head. She washed the feet with her tears.

She wiped the feet with her hair, not a towel. She kissed the feet as an expression of affection. Do you understand that while this is going on, Simon's reaction is the reaction that the ideal person is supposed to have? He feels embarrassed that, as a Pharisee, he brought so many other Pharisees.

They are known to be the pious people. They like to walk around the street. Jesus even talks about on the days that they are fasting.

They fast twice a week. On the days that they are fasting, the little people know that they are fasting. They are pious and holy, as we used to say back in my village; they believe in sanctimonious sanctity.

And now in front of them, it is as though Simon's invitation attracted the worst sinner to come before Jesus. Please, I don't know if so far in this particular lecture I am coming through to you about the heart of Jesus Christ. That which Luke wants you to know.

He came that sinners might be forgiven. He came that those who are guilty will feel loved. He came that those who are rejected will feel accepted and included.

When we talk about the views of what is going on in Luke, we find significant alterations in how other Gospel writers have presented this account. Because Luke wants to make that point clear. In the company of Pharisees, Jesus acknowledged the gesture of a sinful woman.

The portrait of a Pharisee clearly in Luke shows some exaggeration. Luke mentions him four times, implicitly trying to draw a contrast between the woman and the Pharisees. Some think that Luke is re-rendering some of the accounts in 2 Kings.

But what seems to be going on, I think, is potentially two different accounts from what the other Gospel writers put together. The woman who was a sinner. The woman who was a sinner.

The woman who was a sinner showed hospitality to Jesus. To the extent that the host, the Pharisee, could not show that much hospitality. The woman who was a sinful woman anointed Jesus with the most expensive perfume.

Perhaps she acquired that even from her sinful means, we don't know. Yes, it is in dealing with a woman who is known as a sinful woman that a Pharisee will have the audacity to question the credibility of Jesus, whether he had prophetic discernment or not. Jesus wanted to let Simon know.

He had withheld hospitality, but the sinful woman had shown hospitality beyond expectation. That is why forgiveness becomes her portion. The heart of the matter is this, and I want to wrap up on this conversation with the sinful woman.

The heart of the matter is this. One. Jesus was prepared soon after he had condemned the Pharisees and the lawyers for wrongful expectation.

He was prepared to accept the invitation of the Pharisees to go to his home and dine with them. If you are a Christian leader and you are listening to me in this lecture series, please pay attention to this. Jesus condemned Pharisees on one hand, but he did not give blanket condemnation to say that because of that, I would not deal with any Pharisees.

When a Pharisee who seemed to have been forgiven invited him to his home, as personal and as intimate as that was, he took the invitation and went to the home of the Pharisee. Yes, Jesus could walk together from the crusade ground to the home of a Pharisee with a Pharisee to maybe have a barbecue party with other Pharisees. Second, Simon the Pharisee was so obsessed with piety.

If you note and observe his language in this particular discourse, he wanted to highlight that the woman is a sinful woman. And he was upset that Jesus could not even see that about this woman. Of course, as a Pharisee, he likes to be a fault-finder.

Simon also presumed that in the wider narrative of Luke, who portrays Jesus as a prophetic Jesus, Simon, Luke is trying to tell us something here. That when John the Baptist came and sent his disciples to come and ask for Jesus, they went back with a

message that suggested prophetic ministry. But miracles and healing are all that are taking place with the proclamation of the word.

In this case, Luke is still following the theme of prophetic Jesus, but he also tried to tell us that, Oh, ideally, or maybe, Simon presumed that Jesus must be a prophet. But he began to question if he was a true prophet and what is plain out there that should be known. Implicit in that is this.

Simon had presumed that he was dealing with a prophet, prophetic Jesus. However, a prophetic Jesus had no good discernment in his view. He will come to realize that the prophetic Jesus knows what he's doing.

We find here in the parable that Jesus will show that those who have been forgiven much will show that appreciation in the highest extent, and that is what the woman is doing. When they ask whether Jesus could forgive sin, as I said earlier on, yes, Jesus could forgive sin. So let me conclude this session in Luke's own words from verses 37 to 50 when he writes. Therefore, I tell you, her, the woman who is a sinner, her sins, which are many, are forgiven.

For she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little. And he said to her, your sins are forgiven. Then those who were at a table, namely the Pharisees, with him began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you.

Go in peace. Friends, if you have been following me in this lecture series, you know that I am not going to pause until I remind you about your life. I don't know where you are in your walk with Christ, as a Christian or as a seeker trying to know more about Christianity.

You could be as self-righteous as the Pharisees. You could be a fault-finder like the Pharisees. I urge you to understand the grace that accompanies the ministry of Jesus.

Don't question why he loves sinners. Luke will tell us again and again. He came.

He came for all people. But maybe you are trapped in sin. And you are known by public image to be a horrible person.

May I remind you that Jesus forgave this woman for her sins. She pronounced peace into her life. He is ever willing to forgive if you would come to him.

He does not ask a lot of you. He just wants you to come and ask for his forgiveness. But remember that as you do so, there is another principle we learn from this passage.

There are people who will judge you by your past. They may not be nice to you. But the good news is Jesus knows your heart.

He knows what drives you. The sinful woman was not a prostitute. The sinful woman was not Mary Magdalene.

She was unnamed. And the fact that she was unnamed means it could be you. It could be me.

Jesus Christ is available and ready if any one of us will still heed the call to come to him. He has a big heart to forgive and to love. Thank you very much for following this series with us.

And I hope that during this particular session with Jesus and the sinful woman, some things will become clear in your mind. This is why he came. He came that you, I mean you and me.

This is Dr. Dan Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 10, Jesus and the Sinful Woman, Luke 7:36-50.