

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 11, Itinerant Ministry, Jesus, Women and the Parable of the Sower, Luke 8:1-21

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This is Dr. Daniel Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 11, Itinerant Ministry, Jesus, Women, and the Parable of the Sower. Luke 8:1-21.

Welcome back to the Biblical eLearning lecture series on the Gospel of Luke. In the previous lecture, we looked at Jesus and the sinful woman. In that account, we emphasize the fact that Jesus has come for all people, and Jesus engages all people.

He was at a scene with the Pharisees, and precisely Simon, the Pharisee, had invited him to his home. and it was in that scene that a woman who was known to be sinful woman came into contact with Jesus showed some gestures that will otherwise be problematic, but Jesus used the occasion to know, to show the Pharisees that indeed he has come not only for the righteous but for even the one they deemed to be a sinner. He pronounced forgiveness and peace to this woman. Going to chapter 8, while Jesus was still in Galilee, we are going to see the ministry of Jesus expanding.

Here, he would move to some other areas in the region of Galilee. We will be informed about those who follow him, and the immediate teaching discourse that Luke will record for us will be in parables. Let me just call the next few verses from 1 to 21 of chapter 8, Jesus is teaching in parables.

As we go through this session, I will draw our attention to the fact that this gospel begins with a short summary of the travel narrative followed by Jesus telling a parable known as the Parable of the Sower. He follows quickly after telling the parable to explain the reasons for which he speaks in parables. Unlike any other parable that we know about of Jesus in the Gospels, this one he will give the elaborate meaning of the Parable of the Sower, and we will look at that in detail.

As if this parable does not convey the central issues he likes to convey, Jesus will go on to give a parable of the lamb. Then, in that scene, the brothers, the siblings of Jesus, will show up, and he will be informed that his siblings want to see him. And here, Jesus will go on to establish that his true kinship is those who listen to his teachings and obey them.

Pause a moment before we get into the parables. Let's read chapter 8 from verses 1 to 3. Pay attention to some details about what Luke is trying to convey to us before he goes on to tell us the parable. And I read from the ESV.

Soon afterward, he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. At the twelfth were with him and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities. Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out.

Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Harold's household manager, Susanna, and many others provided for them out of their means. As you take note of this passage, let's make some quick observations before I move on. Jesus, moving from the scene with the party with the Pharisees, will go on from cities and villages and speak, proclaim, and bring along the good news of the kingdom of God.

Bringing and proclaiming the kingdom of God is powerful. The kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is not a geographical kingdom. It is the reign of God.

It is the power of God in manifestation. It's God's reign over the lives, hearts, and minds of people. It's God exercising his power over three dominant enemies to what he has come to do in our world.

The enemies of the kingdom of God are not people. They are sin, death, and Satan. God comes to reign and demonstrates his power over all this.

Jesus goes from cities and villages proclaiming, bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is powerful and manifested. Jesus proclaimed the good news, which brings healing to those who hear and will bring restoration, forgiveness, and peace to those who hear him.

He brings the kingdom of God when he demonstrates his power and sets free those who are sick, who are demon-possessed, who come to encounter God and receive wholeness. Jesus traveling through the cities and the villages did not go alone, Luke tells us. He was accompanied by the twelve whom Luke had told us at this time called apostles.

There were also some women on the team, among the twelve. Here, I would like us to pay close attention to the role of the woman in the team, which pertains to two things Luke is trying to do here. He just talked about a sinful woman in the context of the Pharisees, and here, proclaiming the good news, he's also going to mention women, showing his interest in the role of women in ministry.

But then Luke also mentions bringing the power of the kingdom of God from cities and villages, and Luke shows us that these are women who have benefited from the ministry of the kingdom of God. Who is following the ministry of Jesus because they have been recipients and beneficiaries of what this ministry brings? Let's look at this woman in the ministry of Jesus.

Three in particular are named. When we think about the profile of this woman, Luke tells us that they are first a woman called Mary from the town of Magdala. The woman is often referred to as Mary Magdalene, namely Mary of Magdala.

And then there's another woman called Joanna and then another Susanna. Luke is quick to mention these three names, and then he says many others, indicating that these three are very prominent women. Luke reminds us that they have benefited from the ministry of Jesus.

He says they have received healing from evil spirits. Yes, they have received healing from evil spirits. Having great status, monetary power, and the right economic standing in Luke's gospel does not prevent one from being influenced by evil spirits or is not immune from the need for an encounter with Jesus Christ.

He talks about Mary of Magdala in particular, and he says this is a woman of whom seven demons had been cast out. Whenever I read this, I pause to think about what would happen in our churches today if a prominent woman was known to have seven demons, and the demons came out of that person by the grace of God. Imagine the stigma that the person will carry in our churches today.

Imagine the perception and relational issues that a person may be having. Imagine how much people will project her past into her present to even determine her future course of action. But you see, Luke wants to tell you that Jesus healed her of these seven evil spirits, and that will not be the end because we will hear and read of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels.

Luke will tell us more about her later. John has a lot to say about her. This is a woman who will be the first person to testify of the risen Lord.

If you like the message Christ is risen, he's risen indeed. It was first given to a woman to deliver to the men who were out of the scene, and Mary Magdalene was that woman. Here, that is not the role she's playing.

She and other women were here to support the ministry of Jesus. So Luke wants to tell us that this important woman was demon-possessed. But look at the second woman he mentions, Joanna.

He wants us to know that Joanna is Chuza's wife. Joanna's husband was the administrator of Herod, perhaps Herod Antipas in Galilee. This is a prominent woman.

And then we have we have Susanna and many others. So, imagine that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, is a prominent woman in the system. Whether we look at her, some

have suggested perhaps she is the wife, she's the manager of the husband, the manager of Herod the Tetrarch.

Whoever this character will be, Luke wants you to know that there were prominent women who followed Jesus, and they did something. The ministry was very, very specific. They served Jesus and the Twelve.

And they did that by providing for their needs. I like the Greek word, which explains that they actually served. It's more of a word of saying they served with their substance.

This woman, later on will be told in chapter 23, that they will be there to witness the execution of Jesus, and two of them will be the witnesses of the barrier in chapter 23. And Mary and Joanna will be among the first to witness the resurrection. We find interesting patterns here that pertain to custom.

We find that not only did Jesus have women following him in his ministry, but Luke wants to tell us that married women followed Jesus. I find it quite interesting that married women will follow Jesus. However, when we look at rabbinic literature, it is not uncommon for women to meet the needs of rabbis.

So it is not really difficult to conceive that women who have perceived the ministry of Jesus as a great teacher will find in him someone they should support in this regard. They provided for his needs. Having said that, Luke will move quickly Jesus will proclaim and brought the kingdom of God will begin to talk in parables.

So far in this lecture, I have not said much about parables. So, before we go on to read the Parable of the Sower in Luke, I'll give you a general overview of what is going on with the parables of Jesus in Luke in particular. That way, when I come to other parables, I will not spend a lot of time giving you an introduction to parables.

So, what is a parable in the first place? In the broader sense, a parable is an analogy, is a comparison. Think about para, something going side by side. Sometimes in parables, Jesus employed contrast to be able to convince and persuade the audience as he tells a story.

Jesus used parables very often to disclose various aspects of the kingdom of God and to prompt adequate responses in relation to how God will be treated and related to. Parables are not true stories, but they are analogies. Jesus sometimes picked from real circumstances and reconstructed scenarios to make comparative thoughts, stimulate the thought pattern, and make his point quite clear to his audience.

When Jesus speaks in parables, he's picking up things that are familiar and drawing analogies and bringing them to bear in his teaching so that the people will use

images that are familiar in their subconscious mind to imagine the concepts, the content, the substance of the kingdom of God that Jesus conveys. Jesus presents four types of parables in the Gospels. Luke will show them and Luke will give us some of the most memorable and interesting parables of all the Gospels.

The four types of parables that Jesus will use in his teachings, according to David as follows, the parables that are presented in the form of allegory; the parables that are presented in the form of similitude, parables proper, which are usually analogies. And exemplary stories like what we will see later on with the Good Samaritan. Jesus uses these four types of parables to make the message of the kingdom of God clear but also vivid in the imagination of his audience. I like C.H. Dodd's definition of parables.

When he writes that when we think about parables and their definition, we should think about the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than receives it in abstractions. In other words, instead of following concepts in Jesus' teaching, Jesus gives you images attached to the concepts so that you can imagine the concept in concrete pictures. Jesus was a great teacher.

A few years ago, I had a student who had transferred from one of our sister schools in the greater Boston area. The student was a philosophy student in that school and came here as a philosophy student with a minor in biblical studies. In a class I taught, the student reminded me about his former professor in that school in the greater Boston area.

His philosophy professor decided to teach a course on the parables of Jesus. The only issue was that the philosophy professor was an atheist. The student told me about a whole class devoted to the teacher, explaining that Jesus was a master teacher.

If all teachers could capture the ability of Jesus to convey concepts in parables, the world would be a better place. The atheist professor was persuading his students, including this particular student I had at Gordon College, that if you don't like anything about Jesus, you should love his parables. I agree.

And so did I tell the student. Jesus was a master teacher. So, anytime we come to the parables of Jesus, please pay close attention and understand the powerful messages that are conveyed through parables and the literary artistry that Luke demonstrates in how he conveys this message in writing to us.

But before we look at the first in chapter 8, I want to give you a list of parables because you are aware of so many that are not found anywhere in other gospels except Luke. So as we go through Luke's parables, you begin to appreciate that Luke is the gospel you want to love and love indeed. And his parables are the most memorable and the ones that you like the most.

So, here is a quick list of parables that are unique to Luke. Then, we'll begin to look at one of the parables Luke writes about. Luke is the only one who writes about a parable of the two debtors that I spoke about in the previous lecture. Luke is the only one who tells us about a parable of the Good Samaritan, which we have yet to cover in this series.

Luke is the only one who tells us about the unfortunate friend who shows up and asks for help. He's the only one who tells us that parable. The rich fool Christian fundraisers like this parable.

Luke is the only one who tells us about this parable. Luke is the only one who tells about a parable of the barren fig tree placed at a banquet. Luke is the only one who gives us that parable.

Yes, Luke has more. He's the only one who gives us the parable about a tower builder and the king going to battle in chapter 14. He's the only one who tells us about a parable of the lost coin or drachma.

The parable of the lost son is one of my favorites. Luke is the only one who tells us that. Luke is the only one who tells us this controversial parable, the parable of the unjust steward.

When we reach there, I will tell you why it is controversial. He's the only one who tells about a parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The parable of the steward's reward, Stephen's reward.

Only Luke tells us that. The parable of the unjust judge and the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Note I said publican, not Republican.

If you look at the parables that Luke presents that other Gospels do not write about, for most people, they are the only parables you remember. As we go through Luke's parables, I'd like you to pay attention to them because they are not just stories, as I tried to explain earlier on. It is Jesus conveying deep concepts in concrete pictures.

What I will try to do here is to make the images clearer to make the content clearer and brighter for you. I don't claim to be as good of a teacher as Jesus. Perhaps you know someone who is but I'm not.

But I'll try as much as possible to make the message of Jesus come through these parables. So, let's begin to read from verses 4 to 8 of Luke chapter 8. And when a great crowd was gathering, and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, a sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot.

And the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Some fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.

Some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold. As he said these things, he called out, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And when his staff asked him what this parable meant, he said, to you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God.

But for others, they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see and hearing they may not understand. Now, the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard.

Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while and, in time of testing, fall away.

And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. And their fruit does not mature. As for those in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

In this parable, known as the Parable of the Sower, Jesus draws our attention to the ground in which the seed falls. The ground is the focal point as he uses the ground as an imagery to illustrate the reception of the message of the kingdom of God. If the ground is good, the seed lands, and the seed will grow.

The condition of the ground on which the seed falls determines the viability of the seed to grow and bear fruit. Reception and a heart that receives the message of the kingdom are big in this parable. You note here the ground that is position.

Jesus talks about the precious pleasures of life and commitment. Later, he will talk about what an honest and good heart is that receives the fruit. He qualifies it by saying it received the fruit and bears fruit with patience.

When Jesus gives the reason for the parable, he is telling the disciples that they are special because they are being given insight into this matter. But they should not miss it. As much as the ground is important, they should also know what the seed is.

The seed is the word. The seed is the message. And you should know that in Luke, the word is very important.

The message of Jesus is sometimes described as the word. If you go to Acts in particular in the second volume of Luke, what spreads to the world is the word. The seed is the word.

I try to make it graphic to try to explain what Jesus is doing here and highlight a few things in this parable. First, he said one seed fell along the path. That seed was trampled underfoot.

Bursts of the air devoured it. But please pay close attention to how he explained it. Those people heard.

But the birds that came is the devil. Here, I would like to remind you if you are not comfortable with demonology, Luke would like you to understand his worldview. In Luke's worldview, demons possess people, and people are healed from evil spirits, such as Mary of Magdala.

In Luke's world, the devil is an enemy who works against the kingdom of God and is doing everything to undermine God's course of action. In this parable, when Jesus brings the parable out, the first thing he wants to the readers to understand is the role of the devil in reception. Yes, you may be saying, I can hear from your accent you must be African, and you like to talk about demons.

One, I'm an African, so you'll be correct. Two, I like to talk about demons. Yeah, because Luke talks about demons.

So, Luke must be African, too. But for a minute, let's go on to explain more about what Luke is doing here. For Luke, the devil tempted Jesus to rob him of what God wants to do in the world.

The devil possesses people to destroy them against the very being and essence of who God has made them to be, and Jesus sets them free. The devil goes about trying to undermine so many people's welfare and well-being, and God intervenes in the power of the kingdom of God and sets them free. But here, too, in this parable, Jesus says the devil, in a very crafty way, tried to hinder people from receiving the Word of God.

It is a difficult thought when you live in the Western hemisphere where the devil and every concept of the devil is greeted with skepticism, and one questions what is this weird thing about the devil. Well, I am not here to convince you otherwise. I think all that I'm trying to do here is let us not gloss over what Luke is trying to convey in this message.

When the Word is sown, the devil comes, and he takes away the Word. Look at where he takes away the Word from. He takes away from the hearts of these people so that they may not believe and be saved.

Later on, we will see that when Jesus dispatches the disciples to go on missions, he will give them power over the devil and his forces because, in Luke, these are central obstacles to what God is doing. In Luke's spirit cosmology, evil spirits are active in the lives of people and are able to rob people of what God has for them. But God, the powerful God, when he comes in his reign in the kingdom of God, can overpower the forces of darkness and set free those who are held bound and destructed by the forces of darkness.

Luke said some will receive the Word, but the condition of their hearts will not be right, so the devil will take that away. But he says that for the one who falls on the rock, in the analogy, it grew up and withered away because he had no moisture. How did he explain the lack of moisture? He said those who hear the Word, they receive it with joy, but they have no roots.

They believe for a while, and in times of testing, in times of storms, they fall away. Jesus is still teaching on the reception of the Word. And he's saying there are those who are quick to go, oh I've heard Jesus, I know Jesus.

If you are like me, I have seen a few of those people at church. They have all the Jesus Psalms. They have all the Christian E's.

If you are preaching, they say three hallelujahs before you finish one sentence. And as soon as difficult situations hit them, they denounce Jesus. They say I don't want to be a Christian again.

Luke said it is true, it is real, that as the Word is spread, there are those whose heart will receive it. And because of the condition of the heart, this is what happens. Third is he said the seed falls among thorns.

When it grows up, it grows up with the thorns. But the thing is that the thorns choke it. And when Jesus explains it, he says they are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked.

Why are they choked by? They are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. So, the fruit does not mature. When I look at this parable and I think about my short years of ministry, it is so true to think about the condition of the heart and how the Word falls in these thorns and the cares and the riches choke people.

I have known too many people who become good Christians and love God when they have no crisis. As soon as they see they get themselves into big trouble, they need

Jesus the most. I've seen people who were broke commit so much to their walk with God.

When they get some money or become well off financially, they are too busy to go to church or to think about Jesus. They think they are in control. But in the words of Jesus, they are choked.

They are choked by the circumstances around them. They are choked by their pleasures. They are choked by the pressures around them.

So those two keywords, the pleasures and the pressures around them, are driving them away from where they're supposed to be to bear fruit and mature. But you see, the seed that falls into the good soil is a simple verb: grew. And that seed yielded the only one that is qualified numerically, a hundredfold.

Jesus said in explanation that those who hear the word hold it fast in an honest and good heart. And consequently, they bear fruit with patience. The parable of the seed describes Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom of God and prepares the disciples, the women, and all those following Jesus.

But as they go out in ministry, they should expect this reception. So, it's okay when you see some of these things bearing out. In fact, Jesus, in Luke chapter 8, wanted those around him to be aware that this is what comes with ministry.

Some will receive it with that genuine, honest, good heart. Some of their heart is not in the right place. Some, the devil is at work trying to rob them.

Should that discourage? No. Will that be setbacks if you don't see the fruit? Yes. The point of Jesus to the disciples here and Luke's portrait of it is that Jesus is not going about ministry thinking that it's always going to be so successful.

But in fact, he teaches the crowd in the hearing of the disciples and the women that he's fully aware that are these four possibilities of reception to the message he proclaimed. Then he goes on to verse 16 and tells this parable that is self-explanatory. He goes on to say that no one, after lighting a lamp, covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed but puts it on a stand so that those who enter may see the light.

For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest. Nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then, note verse 18, take their care then how you hear.

Again, reception. For to the one who has more will be given from the one who has not even what he thinks he has will be taken away. The point of Jesus is this: some may say I have a good heart, and I have received the word.

Some may say I am not like the one that fell on the roadside, the one that fell on the rock, or the one that fell in the thorns. But Jesus said you know what? We will know. The second parable explains that we will know.

Don't even try to argue with anyone because you can't hide a light under a bush. It will show out. Let it be so clear as he put it in verse 18.

Let no one be under illusion, but they should take care of how they hear the word of God. As he said earlier on, those who have ears to hear, let him hear. Because if they don't, notice how he phrases verse 18.

Those who hear, the one who has more, more will be given. And then he goes on to play with this irony there. But from the one who has not, even what he thinks is not what he has, what he thinks he has, what he wants to speculate that he has will be taken away from him.

At this point, in the midst of the crowd, while he has delivered this powerful speech, his mother shows up. Jesus' mother shows up, and Mary shows up with his brothers. And they came to him, but they could not reach him, Luke tells us, because of the crowd.

As he was told, your mother and your brothers are standing outside desiring to see you, but Jesus answered them, my mother and my brother are those who hear the word of God and do it. Please understand what Luke is conveying here because too many people have explained this particular passage or couple of verses as if Jesus did not like the natural family or as if Jesus came to replace the natural family with the kinship concept, or the kinship household of God. No, the point is still the same as he began in verse 4. When Jesus gave the parable, he gave the parable to emphasize those who hear the word and receive the word.

The whole Parable of the Sower explains that. The parable of the lamb shows to say, if you think you are hearing, but you are not hearing and receiving, that is problematic. Luke here nails it down in verse 21 to say, wait a minute, Jesus is ready to say, you should prioritize hearing the word of God and doing it above all other things.

He is not saying to exclude natural family members. No, verse 21 is the key point here. People should prioritize hearing the word of God and doing it above some of the most important responsibilities in Jewish culture as maintaining your kinship obligations.

Jesus did not come to destroy natural family relations. Jesus prioritizes the kingdom of God above all relations. If you understand that, you are catching the heart of Jesus.

If you tell yourself that for some reason, because of this verse, you can neglect your family and then go on and do God's work somewhere, wait a minute. That is not the point here. The mother of Jesus was referred to as the mother of Jesus.

The brothers were referred to as the brothers of Jesus. They were still his kinsmen, but here he is emphasizing priority, hearing and doing. Again, this is one of those areas that people have used to refer to the Catholic-Protestant debate.

Does the reference to the brothers mean Mary had children? I explained in the Infancy Narrative that yes, in this reference in chapter 8, Luke seemed to suggest to us that Jesus has brothers, but various church traditions have tried to explain what the word brother would mean. Traditional Catholic view would be that it refers to first cousins. The Eastern Orthodox view would mean that it would refer to his half-brothers.

In other words, Joseph had children before Mary, and these were his half-brothers. Traditional Protestant view would be biological brothers. As the Greek text stands, the word adelphos is not used for cousins per se.

On rare occasions, yes, but in contexts like this, when it is related to the biological or the maternal figure in the household, it often refers to a brother. But what kind of brother? We are in the field of conjecture. I respect the traditions and what various traditions will say, but I lean more towards the traditional Protestant view that the mother and the brothers coming to meet Jesus in chapter 8 of Luke seem to suggest to me that Mary had children.

After all, Joseph is no longer in the scene. So, we will not know a lot about Joseph's children. And the notion that the second question one should ask is, if Joseph has left children that are older than Jesus, will there be Mary's responsibility if Joseph is deceased? That is another cultural theme to examine if you are exploring the issue of kinship in the first-century context of Palestine.

But here, I would not like you to miss the thrust of the issue here. Luke begins chapter 8 by giving you a short summary of the travel narrative, telling you that Jesus went about cities and villages proclaiming the kingdom of God. He then tells us about the woman who accompanied him in providing for their needs.

There he was quick to highlight three of these women who are prominent figures. He then goes on to start telling us about part of the messages of the kingdom Jesus

delivered in parables. There he gave us the Parable of the Sower, emphasizing the need to receive the word of God and how the condition of the heart determines the viability, growth, and maturity of the one who hears.

The parable of the lamb emphasizes that no one should be under illusion. If any one of us claims we are hearing, but it's not reflected in our doing, we may be deceiving ourselves. He calls to action the need to prioritize hearing the word of God and doing it.

Even in circumstances where temporarily, people of one's family need one's attention, one should prioritize hearing the word of God and doing it and, precisely, hearing the word of God as it pertains to the kingdom of God and doing it. I hope that as you follow this series, you are beginning to understand the heart of the ministry of Jesus.

And especially as you follow the Parable of the Sower, you are examining yourself as to the condition of your heart. Is it the kind of heart that is likened to that of a rock in the thorns by the wayside? Or one that would be likened to the good soil? My hope is that wherever you are, you make the transition to allow your heart to be prepared to be the good soil on which the word of God could be planted and grow and mature and bear fruit like a light that is put on the lamp's tongue so that others will see. In Matthew 7 on the Mount, Matthew, talking about this, said in Matthew 5:16, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father who is in heaven.

Thank you for following us in this lecture series. I hope that God is blessing you, opening your eyes to new things in the gospel of Luke, and bringing you into a deeper relationship with him. Thank you again, and I hope you continue this journey of learning with us.

God bless you.

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