

Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 19, Jesus Versus the Pharisees and Lawyers, Luke 11:37-12:12

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This is Dr. Dan Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 19, Jesus Versus the Pharisees and Lawyers, Luke 11:37-12:12.

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

So now we continue with Jesus dealing with the Pharisees and Lawyers, and then we move on quickly to address his discussion on possessions or greed, covetousness, and God's ability to provide for his people. I'm reading from the last end of Luke chapter 11 from verse 37. And I read while Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him.

As he went in and reclined at the table, the Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleansed the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also, but gives us arms for those things that are within? Behold, everything is clean for you.

But woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb and neglect justice and the love of God. This you ought to have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Woe to you, for you, are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it. Here, we find Jesus having a very interesting development in the conversation. We are told that a Pharisee invited Jesus to come to his home.

As I mentioned earlier in this class, Pharisees are not always negative characters in Luke and Corpus. In both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Pharisees sometimes have positive elements or contributions in their dealings with Jesus. Here, one of them invited him to his home.

Again, we saw that a little bit earlier on in chapter 7. And Jesus took the invitation and went, except that he was going to land himself in trouble. For him to accept the invitation is to accept cultural norms of hospitality. It was both a privilege for the one who invited Jesus to come to his home and for Jesus also a privilege to be a guest in his home.

According to the custom, when you go to a home as a guest, you actually follow what the host expects of you to be able to enjoy all of the occasion. Here we are going to see something different. Things will turn different very, very quickly.

Jesus is going to have a situation where he turns it around and makes it look like he is in somebody's home, but he is going to be in charge. That makes Jesus a bad guest. But we are going to see that is according to culture, how Jesus is going to manage these things playing out.

When Luke, we will see as we will see in Luke here, in this particular account of verses 37 to 54, Luke is going to bring Pharisees and lawyers together. Whenever Luke brings Pharisees and lawyers together, we notice something else. It is always going to show that there is going to be some kind of commotion or something is going to go on between the two parties and Jesus.

Sometimes it is one of the parties that will be isolated to do something negative with Jesus. We also know that some of these people, referred to as nomikos or lawyers, would be Pharisees. So, it is very interesting to observe how Luke teases these things out because sometimes it appears as if Luke knows that all of them are Pharisees, but he is trying to distinguish the lawyers from the general Pharisees to distinguish between some particular troublemakers for Jesus and the rest of the community.

We see in these passages that as it unfolds, we will observe that the contest is a mealtime setting. Meal time is very, very important for Luke, and this is going to be a mealtime between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the lawyers. I like to say that the ministry of Jesus must be well understood sometimes in terms of American Christianity.

In America, one of the we love best is food. In the Gospel of Luke, meal time features significantly throughout the Gospel and in the Book of Acts. In fact, if you follow the Lukan discourse, you will notice that perhaps one of the things we don't emphasize enough is the role of meal time both in the spread of the Gospel and in the expansion of the early church in terms of community activities.

Meal time was crucial. So, Jesus would take this offer and go and dine. How does it relate to culture? Well, culturally, it's a big thing.

I like to go to Egypt, and I like Egyptian food, but I also know something about Egyptian culture. If you are invited as a guest into an Egyptian home, it's a big thing. First, for you to be invited into the home means you are a trusted friend or someone they are very, very interested in getting to know and bringing you into their circle.

Then, the other side becomes true: when you go to the home as a special guest, they will prepare a lot of meals. And if you think you are going to have a mealtime with a

friend who invited you, you are actually mistaken. As they will tell you, that doesn't happen in all Middle Eastern or Arabic-speaking cultures.

He said, what are you talking about? Do you think you are in America? Come home for a meal. It can mean coming and meeting the family. Come and meet everybody.

So, Jesus comes in having the occasion to come into the inner circle of a Pharisee, where we are going to see that, yes, it is true. He comes there and meets more Pharisees and more lawyers. Let us not lose sight of that as we go on with this text.

Marshall points out something interesting here in the observation. When we think about what kind of meal we'll be having, Marshall reminds us of the kind of meal that will normally be served in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evenings. As you can see from the passage I put on the screen, he shows what the upper class will do.

Now, if we build on the language that Luke uses here, one could say that Jesus was going to have breakfast with the Pharisees and the lawyers, or he could probably be having brunch. Have that at the back of your mind, but that should not be a central issue here. A major issue of contention here is the issue of washing hands.

Here, I want to talk a little bit more about hand washing. Luke uses the word baptizo, the verb baptizo to say Jesus did not dip, Jesus did not put his hand in the water. What does that mean? Because this is going to be a major source of problem between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the lawyers in the home.

Remember again, Jesus is a guest, and according to custom, he's supposed to follow the expectations of his host. That is the rule of engagement in the Jewish custom of the time. It's a major custom of hospitality, and this will have to be observed.

But what is going on with hand washing? The first thing you should know is that we don't have any text in the Old Testament or, in general, Jewish tradition, suggesting that people have to dip in the way it is characterized here. But we know that this was something that was practiced among Pharisees in particular. We know that some of the Jewish sects have specific practices that are observed around mealtime.

Dipping here using the word baptizo is supposed to be understood not as something that is meant for physical hygiene. For example, if there is coronavirus, you need to wash your hands, and you need to have a lot of lotion. That is not what is at play here.

The point here is not for physical hygiene but for ritual washing or dipping in the expectation of the Pharisees. Now, if you read the historian, the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his Jewish War, 2-128 going, you will recall, and if you are a scholar following this, and if you are not a scholar, pardon me, let me just try to explain what

Josephus was saying there. Josephus reminds us of a sin community, the custodians of the Qumran scrolls that we talk about often; they had a tradition where before a meal, you don't just dip; you actually wash your whole body.

You bath, that is the language used there. Now, the Pharisaic tradition is that you dip into the water, take your hand out, and it is clean, and then you can dine. To do that, when you are invited as a guest in a home, it brings you to an in-group, and you earn in-group acceptance by doing that.

If you do not observe that, you would actually not be in the in-group. So, look at what Jesus did there. We find out that they are talking about Jesus who did not dip as Luke describes it, but Jesus would talk about you, Pharisees; if you are interested in cleaning, he uses the word that actually means to cleanse.

He said you like to cleanse; you take a bowl; you like to cleanse the outward and not the inside. He pushes away from the word dipping, baptizo, into the word for cleansing in Greek. Talking about the true sense of purity.

Jesus refusing to do what the Pharisees wanted clearly could make him look like an out-group. He is supposed to have observed that, and he is not observing that. Worse, he is a guest, and he is now beginning to critique the practice of the host.

Now, Luke refers to him as Lord, and then as a guest, he stands in somebody's home and he calls them fools. The Greek word is not the word for fool, per se, but the word for unwise. What Jesus is doing there is very interesting.

He goes to somebody's home for dinner, and he takes charge of the party. Why? Because ceremonial cleansing with the Jews, the Pharisees, is introducing something that Jesus is going to use as an object lesson to penetrate to the heart of the matter. Something that these strict Jewish law observers, people who are interested in piety, should observe and do as right.

Jesus will use inside-outside language to show even some special dimensions. We see Luke say he comes into the house, and later, we see he will go outside. Jesus will describe the inner part of the cup and the outer part of the cup, as well as the exterior and interior expressions here.

If they wanted Jesus to be an in-group member, or if they invited Jesus as a special guest to have a fellowship of comrades, Jesus just turned the whole thing upside down. The dinner conversation became nasty because Jesus had insulted them, if you like. And if they were going to respond, Jesus has already established himself as the Lord and takes charge and says, you fools, and then beyond that, he is going to warn them in the sternest way possible.

I put on a chart how Jesus frames his warning for these Pharisees for you. Do you see how it begins? He goes, now you Pharisees, cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish. And then talking about what they do outside, he condemns them on that column that I gave you there.

So, look at the three columns carefully: what they do outside, what they neglect, and the verdict. He says, but woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb. Verse 43, woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplace.

Verse 44, woe to you, Pharisees, you are like unmarked graves. And then he says, this is what you neglect. On the inside, you are full of greed and wickedness.

You neglect to do what is right. He goes on, as we see following the woe statement, saying they neglect justice and the love of God. The verdict is, you see verse 40, you fools, did not he who made the outside make the inside also, but give us arms, those things that are within and behold, everything is clean for you.

Then, the second verdict is that you ought to have done this, namely justice and love of God, without neglecting that. And talking about the tithing and the rue, I should make a quick note here before I move on, that you should know that some of the herbs that Luke mentioned are exempt from tithing. So, without necessarily spending a lot of time arguing about the details of the herbs or the objects that Luke is talking about, tithing, and all that, I just want to draw your attention to the fact that some of the herbs that Luke mentioned are actually exempt.

Not everything that is on the list is part of the tithing there. But his point is that they are meticulous about tithing, which is a good thing. But they elevate that and neglect basic things like justice and love of God.

Consequently, Jesus' statement now comes to bear as he says, they ought to observe the heart of the matter, and that is, hypocrisy is unacceptable in the kingdom of God. If he, Jesus, is leading the way, people should know that the inside should be as clean as the outside, and if anything, inner cleansing is much more important than the outside show. The Pharisees, he rebukes them to saying they want to be in public sight, they want to be visible in a public place, they're like showmanship if you like.

Reversing the rules of hospitality and turning it on the head of the Pharisees now also prompts this whole situation where the Pharisees could be against him at this point. What is the bone of contention though? The bone of contention is as basic as this. Jesus could have walked in, and he could have washed, dipped his hand, and sat down and ate, and they will have some nice theological conversation, and then the conversation will move on, and then they will say bye, they probably will say shalom, shalom, and they will go, and everybody will have his good time.

Jesus just messed them all up. But as if that is not enough, because Jesus has said three woes to the Pharisees, one of the lawyers thinks he was too harsh; it's supposed to be a wonderful dinner time, but Jesus is screwing the whole thing up. So, in verse 45, when I read, One of the lawyers answered him, Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also, he said.

And he said, Woe to you lawyers also, for you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourself do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed, and you are witnesses, and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore, also the wisdom of God said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets, shared from the foundation of the world, maybe charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you, lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge and did not enter yourselves, and you have hindered those who were entering. Jesus turned to the lawyers in the same tone he did to the Pharisees, and it's as if the lawyer who asked this question has introduced himself into a messy situation. He says you deserve a rebuke.

Jesus criticized them in saying, they impose harsh burdens on the people regarding observance of the law. They should know that they are complicit of all the wickedness their ancestors did to God's prophets, from the very first prophet named in the Bible, Abel, whose life was supposed to testify to the good work of God and was killed, to the last prophet named to die, Zechariah, in Chronicles 24.

Their ancestors have consistently killed the prophets who come to tell them the good things they should know about God. He mentions the blood of Abel, a blood that was shed as a result of envy and rage of a brother. He says the lawyer's reaction is prompting some of these sensibilities, which makes them very, very guilty.

They should have actually learned from the wisdom of God. Here again, I should note we have no knowledge of such a book as the wisdom of God. Luke could be referring to the wisdom of God as a general principle, or he may be referring to a text that we are not aware of.

But as Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and rebukes the lawyers over the dinner, he puts them in the appropriate place, and if you like, a nice time together now becomes a very bad time. He will leave. And we are told, as he went away from there, verse 53, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait to catch him in something he might say.

Well, you may say, why should they do this to Jesus? Jesus must be a nice man. Oh yes, I agree. But the thing is that you invited Jesus to your home, and you brought all your friends around.

He came in, disgraced you in front of your friend, said all kinds of harsh things to them, and then he just moved. Luke doesn't give us any glimpse whatsoever about what the host can say to Jesus in return. They couldn't even say things back.

So now the next thing is, let's see what he will do if we get him into trouble. In turning to chapter 12 of Luke, I'd like you to make some observations as I read the text. I want you to realize that Jesus is now knowing that the Pharisees and the scribes are trying to find fault on him.

He is going to encourage his disciples to be vigilant because, at any time, they could fall prey to the schemes and the stratagems of these guys. He will warn them against fear, and he will encourage them to understand the need to trust and have faith in God. He will give them some important principles regarding how they stand as witnesses of the gospel in this world, as well as preparedness whenever they are in trouble and called before the rulers and the authorities.

To that, I turn. Reading from chapter 12 from verse 1, In the meantime, when so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were trampling on one another, he began to say to his disciples first, Beware of the living of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be made known.

Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light. And what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed in the housetops. You notice here in the call to vigilance in verses 1-3 that Jesus revisits some of the things he had said about the Pharisees, that they are hypocrites, and their hypocrisy will be unmasked.

Now, he used the living to illustrate the poisonous or corrupt nature of their hypocrisy and reminds them that they should be aware that the corruptible nature of these Pharisees can bring in massive corruption indeed. They need to be very, very, very aware of this. But beyond vigilance about the hypocrisy and the corruptible nature of all the corruption that the teachings of the Pharisees and their lifestyle can bring, the next thing they should pay attention to is fear.

One of the things that goes together with faith is fear. Faith in God triumphs over fear. But disciples of Jesus must be aware that there will be circumstances after circumstances that will prompt some degree of fear that needs to be overcome by faith.

In the words of Jesus, I tell you, he says, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that, have nothing more that they can do. But I warn you whom to fear. Fear him who, after he has killed, has the authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. His point here is this. Fear God, not the Pharisees.

Fear God and not the scribes. They come in, try to corrupt, and if you don't have the courage to stand on your grounds for fear of being incriminated or arrested or put into trouble of some sort by them, you may give in to the wrong things they want you to do. Stand up for God and stand for what is right.

And that brings up a segue quickly into the next thing Jesus will say from verse 6, talking about the need to trust God. The need to trust God is going to be illustrated by Jesus mentioning, are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? In other words, these insignificant birds are cheap. He says that not one of them has been forgotten before God.

Why even the hairs on your head are all numbered? Fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. In other words, Jesus is saying trust God because even the cheap sparrows are taken care of and protected by God.

For those who have heard, some of us don't have a whole lot. But if you have a whole lot, you are worth it. Since your hairs are even numbered, drops that may not be so significant are even known by God.

If God pays attention to those minute details, or pays attention to that which is so cheap and perhaps not so significant, disciples of Christ must know that if they stand in trust in God in the face of fear, God will protect them. God will be on their side. Notice what Jesus is not saying.

Jesus is not saying that challenges will not come. No, challenges will come. Persecution may come.

Circumstances that may prompt fear may come. But when they come, he says, trust in God. Fear not.

It reminds me of some of the Old Testament traditions where the presence of God is what brings comfort and stillness in the face of that which is supposed to evoke the worst form of fear. Psalm 23 verse 4 comes to mind where the psalmist says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil. And the only reason you will fear no evil is because God is with him.

The presence of God, faith in God that brings God's presence into the scene is what dispels fear. I can think about Psalm 27 verse 4, which says, one thing I seek and that's what I desire, that I may dwell in that, that I may remain in that house, I may remain where God is all the time. Jesus said, fear not because you are of more value than many sparrows, and God will keep you and will be with you.

The fourth point in that passage, as I outlined earlier on, is the witness from verse 8, which says, and I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the son of man, also would acknowledge before the angels of God. But a one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the son of man will be forgiven.

But one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. You find out here that Jesus is trying to stand firm as a true witness in the face of whatever challenges may come. You want to stand there as true witnesses as his spirit.

He speaks to his disciples and speaks in front of the crowd. They need to be aware that the Pharisees are looking for ways to trick him and, by implication, them as well. Being a true witness is very, very important here.

And in the face of trouble, those who would deny God must be aware that if they deny God here, God will turn his back towards them then. In other words, when there is an opportunity to stand before God as a true witness here and now, be it in the face of Pharisees or at a court where one is in trouble if one does not gather the courage to stand for Christ, God will also deny him on the day of judgment. Remember, the language of before the angels of God speaks to an eschatological event where God's judgment will come.

But in a Lukan way, you also want to notice how verse 10 ends there. But everyone who speaks against a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. I must say that in other Gospels, that particular line goes with the Basel controversy where Jesus will use the language here and there.

But here, the point is that people should stand firm and true to God because true witnesses, when they come before trials, are expected to confess they are standing before him and not deny him. When they are put in public today, they should know that whatever they do will be reciprocated in a heavenly court. They should also know that any slander that they do against the Son of Man in the process or the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

That is another way of saying be true, be firm, be consistent disciples as you go about your business as Christ's followers. And the last thing there is preparedness. Preparedness, as I mentioned to you earlier on, Jesus will continue in verse 11.

And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you will say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say. Let me clarify some things about this test.

Now, I mentioned in the previous lecture that I was a pastor of a Pentecostal church. Yes, that is true. So, let me speak directly to my Pentecostal friends who are listening here.

Pay attention to what has been going on in the text up to date. And please don't say what Jesus is not saying to be happening here. When he says for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say, he was not saying when you are supposed to prepare for sermons on Sunday, just seek the face of God and not prepare, and the Holy Spirit will teach you.

He is not saying don't go to Bible school or don't take any theological education for the Holy Spirit will teach you what you ought to say at any given time. No, no, no, and no. What Jesus is saying is when in being a true disciple, you are being persecuted, you are standing for the truth, you are a true witness, and you are coming into face-to-face where you are in front of the authorities, he urges you to understand that you don't have to be anxious about preparedness for those occasions.

But while in the persecution for the sake of Christ, God will help you, and the Holy Spirit will give you the ability to discern the words to speak at that very hour. This is another way of putting it or looking at it. In other words, how could you foresee questions that were thrown at you for being a true disciple when you are brought before rulers and authorities? You could be so anxious about what to say in such occasions that you would miss being a true faithful follower of Jesus.

It's like some Christians today; they are not so concerned about how they live their Christian life; they are so obsessed with apologetics and how they defend their faith. Don't be anxious about that, Jesus says. Don't be anxious about that.

Just keep following the course of Christ. Be a true witness. Trust in God. Be a true witness wherever you stand.

And when you stand in trouble, God will give you what to say through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus said that when you are brought before people, he used being brought before the synagogue. Yes, that could be being brought before Jewish rulers.

When he used the language of authorities and rulers, some have suggested that perhaps he's talking about Gentile authorities or rulers or when you are brought before members of the Sanhedrin or anything of the sort. In a nutshell, what he's trying to convey here is this. If, for reasons of being a true follower of Christ, you are brought into a place where you are going to be judged for your faith, trust in that God who is able to enable you by the Holy Spirit to be able to answer.

Anxiety, for now, is not the answer for tomorrow. The Spirit will instantly give you the ability to say what you need to say. Friends, as we think about discipleship and continue on the path of discipleship as Jesus teaches it, remember that Jesus is walking on his way with his disciples all the way from Galilee as we started that journey, and he's heading towards Jerusalem.

In between, he's having these occasions to highlight the essence of discipleship. Many things, one after the other, will be imagined, and he will have to address some core and serious issues that will emerge on being true disciples. Being a true follower of Jesus is hard, but one thing that has always been true in the history of the church and now is this.

Some may die for the sake of the gospel. Some may suffer for the sake of the gospel. True witnesses will always experience and see the hand of God through it all.

It is worth standing for what is right and dying for it. In fact, in ancient philosophy, it is noble. In Christianity, we have all, and we have a right cause.

I pray that as we go through these lessons and you think about them and being true disciples of Jesus Christ, that you do not neglect the essence of the teachings of Jesus here. The need to be a disciple who approaches life fearlessly, knowing that in the background, there are false finders seeking for an opportunity to malign you, to incriminate you, to find where you will falter and hold it against you. Stay firm and strong, and I pray that for those of you in the Middle East, for those of you in South Asia, some of you in Asia, some of you in African countries, and those in the predominantly Muslim context who are going through difficult times as missionaries following some of these lectures, may I encourage you.

God has promised to be with us through it all. One thing is certain about him. He will always be there to fulfill his promise.

He will not let us down even if we suffer or die for the cause. May God bless you in our continuous journey to follow Jesus Christ. God bless you.

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