

## ***Luke: Meeting Jesus Through Others' Eyes***

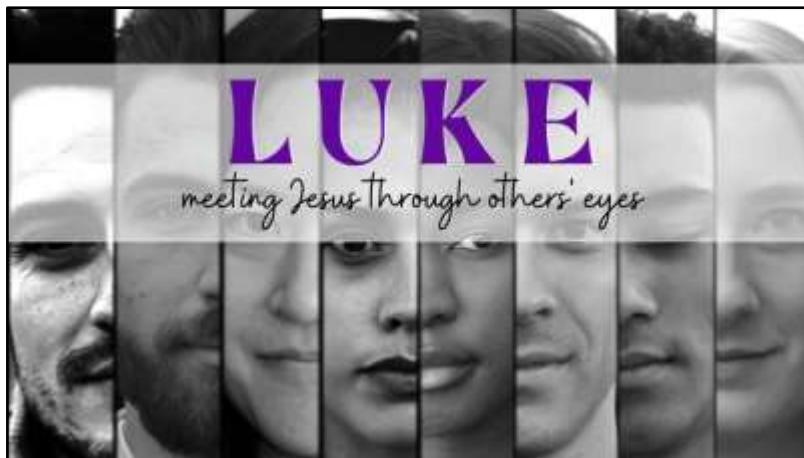
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Spring 2023

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXT: Luke 7:36-50**



Good morning, Beloved. Have you ever wondered why people are attracted to Jesus? What brings people toward Jesus? Some people are attracted to Jesus because of the lives they live, and they are asking Jesus to affirm and endorse their lives. They are seeking Jesus' approval. Some people are drawn to Jesus because the lives they have lived have broken them into pieces, and they are shattered, and they come to Jesus in hope that He might be able to put them back together. How would you describe yourself? Inside those who are confident of their lives are often concealed doubts or insecurities. Sometimes those who come to Jesus with shattered and broken lives have within them a deep faith and commitment to Jesus.

We are in the midst of a series on the Gospel of Luke, and we are meeting Jesus. Now if you are ever invited to spend one night with one person in the world, you should pick Jesus. You should pick Jesus because Jesus is the most interesting person you will ever meet, and if you can spend time with Jesus, you will find what everyone finds. Would that we could all do that. The great thing about the Gospel of Luke is that Luke takes us with him with people who do meet Jesus.

Our passage this morning takes place at a meal in a home. As we look at this passage, we will see people coming to Jesus from very different directions, but there's a challenge for every single one of us in this text. The challenge is where the passage takes us to the question: Is there room in my soul to love Jesus more? That's the question. Is there room in my soul to love Jesus more? It's a frequent prayer of mine. We regularly pray this in our early morning prayer before anyone else gets here, and the prayer goes something like this: Lord, we pray at 7:45 AM

that there would be more love for You in a few hours than there is right now. Will you go on a journey with me this morning, and will you pray with me? I'm going to ask you to close your eyes, and let's pray for more love. Lord Jesus, we pause to pray and ask You to fill our hearts with more love for You than exists there right now. Lord, may we have more love to give You in 30 minutes than we have to offer right now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's look at this passage. The passage starts in Luke 7:36 with an invitation:

*"One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table."*

That verb "reclined" tells us that this is a formal meal. To recline at the table reveals a formal meal where benches are laid out in a U-shape, called a "triclinium." You lean on your left side, and you eat with your right hand around a common table. This invitation is an invitation to a certain man's home. It's a Jewish home. For Jesus this is not a cross-cultural moment, but for many of us, we have to imagine and enter into a cross-cultural world.

What's it like to have a meal in a Jewish home? When we accept the cross-cultural invitation, we step into another world. This is a world where I studied as a guest for ten years of my life. It's a world that I care about. It's a world that I'm familiar with. Sociologists describe Jewish culture as a high context culture. A high context culture is a culture where there is a tremendous amount of cultural information, and that cultural information is assumed. In order to function in the culture, you need this information. American culture is characterized by sociologists as a low context culture, and that's not an insult. It's just a reality that there aren't a lot of barriers to participating in American culture. If you're invited to an American home, it's a rare experience to think to yourself, "What's happening right now? What's expected of me right now?" You just enter. The food moves around the table. Some people serve with formal dishes, some not. It's okay. You can enter, and there aren't huge barriers. You will rarely feel in an American home, "I have no idea what's going on."

In a Jewish home, in a Jewish world, there is a lot of information that you're supposed to know. To function in the meal, you need to know this. Judaism is a culture that values learning and study. It's a culture that sets a high priority on understanding, interpreting, and applying the Scripture. Judaism places great importance on putting faith into action. Within Judaism (this is a little bit of an overstatement and a generalization, but there is a truth in this), Jews often argue with each other about practice. They argue with each other about the living out of their faith and the different ways to do that, and that's where the arguments are—the internal arguments.

Christians tend to argue with each other about our doctrines, and we differentiate with each other based on our views and beliefs on certain key doctrines, and sometimes we even get a little mad about that. Jews don't get mad with each other about doctrines because they have a shared theology, but they do get a little upset with people who seem to have a strict view of this and a more lenient view of that. It's a rhythm of life that's shaped by scriptural vision of work and then rest on the Sabbath—the weekly celebration of worship in the synagogue and a yearly rhythm that recounts the great acts of Scripture: creation, redemption, and future glory.

There are three branches of Judaism today: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. These are different largely in their views of praxis. Most Jews have a complex relationship with the modern State of Israel, and this is a fascinating entry point for conversation today. I love Daniel Gordis' book, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*. It's a fascinating description of the modern State of Israel. Jews have a very complex relationship with the modern state. It's more complex than you might realize. There is a great deal that I admire and understand and respect in Judaism, but there is one great longing that I have. It's a great longing that my Jewish friends would share one other belief with me, and that's the same longing that I have for all of you.

In our passage this morning, it's not just a Jewish home. Jesus was Jewish, and so He could have entered in easily. But this is the home of a Pharisee, so that is a culture within a culture. The Pharisees were an influential group during the first century. They were characterized by promoting faithful observance to the law at both a national and an individual level. Their name comes from the Hebrew word *parash*, which means to separate from sources of uncleanness or ritual impurity.

There are three big groups of Judaism at the time of Jesus:

The Essenes lived in the wilderness. They wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. They thought the whole world had gone so badly that they were just stepping out. They were going to start their own church. They built their own community, and they spent time there for a couple of centuries and wrote several works and copied the Bible and studied it.

On the other side of the spectrum, there were the Sadducees, who were aristocratic upper-class people. They held a lot of political and economic power. But they didn't believe in the resurrection. Isn't that interesting? They didn't want the world to change dramatically, because the way it was was good for them.

The Pharisees were in the middle, and they saw themselves in the middle. They were lay men—they weren't priests—and they were not separating from the people. They were

separating from sources of impurity, and they were trying to make it possible for you and for me to live out God's commands. They saw themselves as moderates. They believed God was sovereign creator. They believed in human free will. They believed in the resurrection, judgment, the life to come, and they also believed that the Messiah was coming. They systematically interpreted the law, and they talked about it. They believed in the written text of Scripture, and they also believed in what they called the oral Scripture, or the oral Torah, the Torah from the mouth. They talked about it, and they talked about it, and they talked about it for generations. And this vast conversation eventually is written down. It's in documents that we call the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, *Talmud* and *Midrash*. Each of these are Hebrew words that capture a sense of the culture. *Mishnah* means to repeat orally. The *Tosefta* are supplementary sayings from the sages. The *Talmud* is a compendium of learning. And *Midrash* are expositions of Scripture. To give you a sense of the size of this literature, just the Babylonian *Talmud* itself is 6000 folio pages long. Devout Jews will study this material even today, on the side, for 20 hours a week. You could spend your whole life, studying 20 hours a week, and barely be confident and comfortable in what they call the sea of *Talmud*. It's an immense body of learning.

It's not an accident that Simon has invited Jesus to his home for a meal, because for Pharisees eating is a sacred act. They ate their meals in a state of ritual purity, voluntarily. Feet matter when you dine with Pharisees. One of the most famous lines of the *Mishnah* is by Jose ben Joezer, who used to say:

“Make your house a meeting place for sages, be willing to be covered by the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst.”

When Pharisees get together, the cultural assumption is that you're going to meet and eat and talk about the Bible. That's the assumption.

Another early text gives fifteen practices of the disciples of Pharisees and how they're supposed to conduct themselves. It's all centered around eating and how you act. This text says fifteen characteristics are:

1. You are pleasant when you come in. (Isn't that nice?)
2. And you are pleasant when you depart. (Isn't that nice?) When you come into someone's house for an invitation, be pleasant when you get there, and talk about the Bible all night, and then be pleasant when you leave.
3. Be unassuming in your learning. (Wear your learning lightly.)
4. Be resourceful in bringing about the fear of God (contribute to the conversation).
5. Be prudent in awareness (know your place).
6. Be wise in your ways.

7. Collect words of Torah.
8. Remember them well.
9. Take pains to reply properly.
10. Make your questions relevant.

Isn't that good? Don't you love it when you invite someone over for a meal, and you're having this great conversation about the Bible, and somebody asks some totally irrelevant question?

11. Reply to the point.
12. Listen carefully before replying. That's good for all ages.
13. Add something of your own.
14. Go to a sage to serve him.
15. Study in order to teach and to practice.

That's the culture that Jesus is stepping into.

As a brief aside, whenever you get an invitation to share a meal and cross a cultural line, as a follower of Jesus, you should take it. You should not only take it, but you should offer it as well. Our tables are profound places for disciple-making and accomplishing the Great Commission. Those meals sometimes will require a lot of cross-cultural information and sensitivity, and, as a general rule, it means you also are going to eat whatever is put in front of you.

I remember the most dramatic cross-cultural meal moment I ever had. It was the only meal I've ever had in a yurt. A yurt is a portable tent that nomadic peoples use in Central Asia. I just happened to be in Central Asia on the western side of China, and I was riding a horse all day through the mountains. What do you do at the end of the day after riding a horse in the mountains of Central Asia and Western China? You're hungry, and so your host pops up the yurt and is ready for dinner. I remember that when he came back, he brought a silver platter. I thought, "Wow!" The silver platter was covered. I remember looking at my teaching partner Simon. I know that 65% of communication is nonverbal, so we didn't say anything, but our gaze communicated clearly: "Whatever is under that lid, we're eating, and we love it." This guy looked at us, and his nonverbal communication to us was: "You are my honored guests, and I brought out the best." He pulled the top off the silver platter, and there it was: a sheep head on top of sheep parts. Steam was rising, and everything was this gray color. I looked at my teaching partner, and he looked at me, and we stayed in that nonverbal communication space of: "We love this; this is exactly what I wanted." Our host looked at us, and he pulled out this huge knife from his side, and he just slid down the snout of the sheep's head and scraped off the best portion. It was the best, and he offered it to me, and I loved it. So, can we accept every invitation for dinner? I think we should, and we should offer this invitation regularly.

Jesus accepts the invitation. Don't miss that. And you might think, "Oh, He's Jewish." Of course, He is, but He has accepted the invitation of a Pharisee in a culture within a culture. Jesus comes in. Then Luke tells us that the banquet was interrupted in a dramatic way. In the midst of this banquet, hosted by Simon who was drawn to Jesus, Luke tells us that suddenly a woman of the city, who was a sinner, came. She found out that Jesus was at this banquet, and she brought a flask of ointment. She stood behind Jesus, weeping, and her tears fell with such abundance, and then she knelt down and began to wipe His feet with her tears. She wiped them with the hair of her head, and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment.



Luke slows us down so beautifully in these two verses, Luke 7:37-38:

*"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, 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."*

It's one sentence in the Greek text. There is a beautiful artistry to the sentence. Luke gives us four participles—that she was learning, and then she was bringing, and she was standing, and she was weeping—and then her four actions—she was wetting His feet and wiping them and kissing them and anointing them. Luke's choice of vocabulary for her kisses is quite profound. It's impossible to translate. It's the emphatic form of kissing. It's the same word that Luke will use in just a few chapters to describe the father who welcomes back the prodigal son: *"and he kissed him and kissed him and kissed him."* That's what she's doing.

This banquet slows down, and in the middle of a banquet hosted by a Bible scholar, this woman enters. When Simon, who had invited Jesus, saw this, he had questions in himself. Just as we heard a couple of weeks ago, these thoughts and this question are not verbalized. For a man who loves to talk and is in the community that talks, he's not speaking. In Luke 7:39, we read that he says 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."*

Simon, who was seeking the approval of Jesus and welcoming Jesus into his fellowship, all of a sudden finds his fellowship ruined. The banquet is ruined. Jesus turns to Simon, and this is another reason why you should want to spend one evening with Jesus, because Jesus is the only one who actually knows your thoughts. He knows the good ones, and He knows the bad ones, and He loves you enough to call you forward. In Luke 7:40, we read that Jesus said:

*“Simon, I have something to say to you.”*

And Simon provides us a great, small application here as well:

*“And he answered, ‘Say it, Teacher.’”*

This is an important quality for all would-be disciples. When Jesus says to you or to me, “I have something I'd like to say to you,” what do you say? You say “yes.” You say, “Yes, Jesus, I want You to talk to me; speak to me; say it, Teacher.” Simon adopts the posture of the wise. In Proverbs 13:20, we read:

*“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”*

When we're around wise people and we ask wise people to speak into our lives and we're open to receive it, we grow in wisdom. And Simon says, *“Say it, Lord; say it, Teacher.”* And Jesus tells Simon a parable. It's such a short parable. It's a two-verse parable, and it has the structure of a lot of Jesus' parables, which have two main persons. Listen to it. In Luke 7:41-42, we read:

*“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*

That's it. That's the parable. The two people in the parable are similar, aren't they? They're similar because they're both in debt. They are different in degree. One owes 500 denarii, which is about a year and a half of salary. Think about what you make in a year and another half on top of that, and that's this man's debt—a year and a half of salary. The other has a debt of a month and a half, not insignificant but different—one tenth.

When we hear this parable, we see this, and it looks at first glance like an economic image. But when we operate inside the high context culture of Judaism, the language of debt is actually a religious image. It's the image of holy obligation. It's the obligation that we have toward God. Do you recall when Jesus Himself was asked: “What is our greatest obligation?” He answered that. He said our greatest obligation in this world is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Our greatest obligation is to give God the love for Him that is in our heart.

Now it seems that the two characters in this passage maybe aren't so different after all. The

sinful woman has given her love away to the wrong person. And maybe you have done that. But the net outcome of that is that her love is not given to God, because she has given her love away in the wrong direction to someone else. But, you see, Simon has a similar problem. Simon is right about everything, and he is not giving love to God. He is hoarding it for himself. So Jesus says to him, *“Which of them will love him more?”* I feel a lot of compassion for Simon in Luke 7:43, because he sees where this is going, and he begins to verbalize it, and he does so with just a slight hesitation:

*“Simon answered, ‘The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.’”*

Can you feel it when he says, *“The one, I suppose.”* There is a lot of compassion that should be directed at that little phrase *“I suppose.”* Can you hear that? Do feel that? Maybe this is you over here, because when he's about to answer this question, he knows what's at stake for him, and he could barely get it out. I wonder what those words sounded like: *“the one ... I, I suppose,”* as if he's thinking, *“I just might be...maybe I'm wrong. No, I'm not wrong. I'm the one, I suppose, for whom He canceled the larger debt?”* Continuing in Luke 7:43, we read that Jesus said:

*“You have judged rightly.”*

Isn't that gracious of Jesus? Just a few seconds ago, Simon had judged wrongly, and now in the presence of Jesus, he judges rightly. Jesus confirms this great conclusion with His next words. He turns to the woman, and, in Luke 7:44, we read that He says to Simon:

*“Do you see this woman?”*

I love the gift (I am so thankful for my teachers) to be able to read the text of the original. I don't want to overburden you, but I just want you to know some of the things that are said here. One of the things that is said right here is so clear: that Jesus physically turns Himself. He's turning to make eye contact with her, and He asks Simon to join Him in seeing her. Look at how central Jesus' feet are. Continuing in Luke 7:44-47, He says:

*“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.”*

It's critical, Beloved, to notice that her forgiveness is not dependent on her love. Her love is the evidence of her forgiveness. That's so important. I'm going to say that again. Her forgiveness is not dependent on her love. Her love is an expression of her forgiveness. And Jesus says to Simon, *“He who is forgiven little, loves little.”* In Luke 7:48, we read that Jesus turns and says to her:



*"Your sins are forgiven."*

He leaves no public doubt about her status.

Then you and I and everyone else gathered at the table has a question. It's a question we've heard a couple of times now. In Luke 7:49, we read:

*"Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?'"*

It's a good question; it's a right question. The question, in light of seeing what we've just seen is: "Who in the world have I just invited to dinner?" That's the New Living translation. "Who is this that I just invited to dinner?" You know the answer to this question. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Simon just realized that he invited God for dinner, and he watched God act at dinner. God allowed this woman's tears to fall on His feet and allowed her to wipe those feet with her hair and kiss them over and over and anoint them with oil. In Luke 7:50, we read that Jesus says to the woman:

*"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

As careful readers and attentive listeners to God's Word, we learn many things in this passage, as we meet Jesus. Let me close with three brief reflections:

**Number one: *Meeting Jesus reveals a crowded room. Many people from many different backgrounds and many different trajectories are drawn to Jesus.*** Simon is drawn to Jesus with a noble heritage, an honorable life, and significant questions. When he gets close to Jesus, he discovers that he needs more love toward Him and that he's lost touch with his own need for forgiveness. The woman comes to Jesus from a very different background, and she also is drawn to Him. Attentive disciples are aware of the crowded space around Jesus. When you get close to Jesus, you will bump into a lot of different kinds of people. Attentive disciples should be aware of this, expect it, and be open to this reality. People very different from you will show up right next to Jesus.

**Number two: *Meeting Jesus exposes our sin, not someone else's, ours. When we get close to Jesus, it reveals our sin—mine, yours—and calls us forward to find forgiveness in Him alone.*** It's amazing. It doesn't really matter that much if you owe 50 or 500, does it? Getting close to Jesus exposes our sin and calls us forward to find forgiveness in Him alone.

**Number three: *Meeting Jesus produces something extraordinary in us. It produces a grateful love in response to His love.*** I promise you that the closer you get to Jesus and the more you see your sin and allow Him to speak the word of forgiveness and grace, you will find in you that

you have more love to give. And, you know, Beloved, it is so wonderful that Jesus' love is not restricted or limited to one kind of sinner, isn't it? I love that Jesus forgives the Bible scholar and the sinful woman. Jesus puts broken people back together, and He takes hard people and breaks them, and He does that at the same meal.

So, I invited you at the beginning to ask: "Is there room in my soul to love Jesus more?" Is there? Is there room to say: Jesus: "If You have something to say to me, please say it?" Is there room, as you come close to Jesus with a shattered life to say: "Jesus, will You put my life back together?" What we find with Jesus is that His grace washes over us. "Grace" is something that is a uniquely Christian word. This is one of our most important words—grace. People say it, and sometimes they name their kids after it. But there's only one place where grace originates, and that's why we have to be acquainted with grace and disseminators of it in Jesus' name.

I love this text, because it feels almost like we get to be there, doesn't it? Luke tells us just enough of what we need to know to participate in the banquet. It teaches us a few things along the way and, in the end, challenges all of us to give all our love to God in worship. That's why the right application for us, the right thing for us to do in response to this dinner is to worship. We're going to worship with a song that captures some of the imagery of this passage. It reminds us of the amazing grace that we have received as people who are lost and now found. You can be lost in a thousand ways, but only One will find you. Amen? Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we do want to spend time with You. And we thank You for the Scriptures which have given us the opportunity to be at this meal in some way and to watch You, to be drawn to You. Lord, I pray this morning for those who are coming to You seeking Your approval for how they are now, and I pray that they would allow You to speak into their lives. Lord, I pray for those who are coming to You with great brokenness. I am confident, Lord, that You can put them back together. Lord, I pray for all of us, including myself, that Your grace and Your forgiveness would generate in me more love that I can offer back to You in worship. And, Lord, that's exactly what I want to do right now. Hallelujah!

In Jesus' Name, Amen.