

OpenTheo

Elijah, Sinful Woman (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In part two of his talk, Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' statement in Matthew 11:25 about revealing things to "babes" rather than to the "wise and prudent." He explains that Jesus is referring to the burdens of legalistic religious observances, and that he offers a lighter burden for his followers. Gregg also discusses the story of Jesus' forgiveness of a sinful woman, who anointed his feet with costly oil. He challenges the assumption that this woman was Mary Magdalene and suggests that the story may have been conflated with another similar incident.

Transcript

The crowd was Jewish. It was Jewish worshippers at the Passover, or at a feast. He's not talking about Gentiles here when he says, the crowd that doesn't know the law.

The Pharisees were educated in the law. Do you remember that they marveled when Jesus spoke? He said, how does this man know the law? He's never learned his letters. He never went to our Phariseic schools.

He never went through seminary. He's uneducated. How could he teach the law? How could he know the law? You see, it didn't take a Gentile to be regarded as lower by a Jewish scribe or a Jewish leader.

The Jewish leaders thought everybody who didn't know the law as well as they did were fools and babes and accursed because of their ignorance. Well, Jesus says in Matthew 11, 25, that God had revealed these things to babes and hidden them from those who were self-regarded as wise and prudent. Paul has something to say about this in 1 Corinthians also, in chapter 1. 1 Corinthians 1, beginning at verse 26, Paul said, For you see your calling, brethren, not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are almighty, and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in

his presence. Now, God has chosen not the wise, at least not in large numbers, but the foolish.

Not the wise and prudent, why? Because they're usually so self-satisfied and self-congratulatory and proud, that, you know, to take a stand for Christ would put them in company that would endanger their respectability. Paul is basically saying, look at the congregation around you, look what kind of rabble you're with here, you know. These people wouldn't be your friends if you weren't Christians.

I mean, look at this crew, what a motley group, you know. If you were not a Christian, guaranteed you wouldn't pick all these people here to be your friends, if they weren't Christians and you weren't Christians. There are just too many cultural differences, too many interest differences, too many ego trips and rivalries and so forth.

But I would suppose that you, since you all love the Lord, that you find each other to be somewhat tolerable, and maybe enjoyable to be around. You find that God has changed your opinion, but not everyone is willing to have their opinion changed. I mean, there are certain people who would not be caught dead in this school.

It's not, you know, it's not accredited. There aren't teachers with master's degrees and PhDs teaching in this school, at least not most of the time. And it's just not the kind of academic environment that some people would wish to be associated with.

Well, that's fine, that's fine. It doesn't bother me at all. People who think like that wouldn't get along with me very well at all anyway.

And so it's just, well, they go somewhere else and find someplace that will take them. But I don't think there's any shame in not being a scholar, in not being wise and prudent in the worldly sense of that word. Of course there's a shame in not being wise with the wisdom of God.

But the wisdom of God is foolishness to those who are perishing. It's foolishness to the world. And Paul goes into that in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. We won't dwell on that for long.

You've recently studied it. Anyway, let's go on here. In Matthew 11, 26, Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight, all things have been delivered to me by my Father.

And no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and He to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Now, I won't take the time to give you all of the cross-references in the Gospel of John that sound like this statement in verse 27.

Anybody who's read the Gospel of John enough to be familiar with its style will recognize that this is a very Johannine kind of passage. That is, it's the kind of thing Jesus says all

the time in the Gospel of John, but it stands out like a sore thumb in the Synoptic Gospels. You know, scholars who are more critical than they should be of the Gospels as history, they often say there's a different Jesus in the Gospel of John than there is in the Synoptics.

And one of the differences, there's several they point to, but one of the differences they say is that in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus speaks in short aphorisms and short witty sayings and mostly memorable proverbs and things like that. And they're practical and so forth in nature, but in the Gospel of John, his sermons are deeply theological. He's talking about himself and the Father and all this kind of mystical kind of stuff.

And long sentences and interwoven thoughts and so forth, and they say that's just not the Jesus of the Synoptics. Well, I would point out to you that Jesus in the Synoptics is most of the time talking to the Galilean peasant, whereas Jesus in the Gospel of John is usually interacting with the Jewish leaders. And any intelligent person can adjust the way he talks to his audience.

You know, if he's talking to people who are not given to theological discussion, and they're just fishermen and tradesmen who are just trying to learn how to trust God in their practical affairs of daily life, his teaching would no doubt reflect that. When he's talking to theologians over theological issues, he can rise to the occasion and get just as theological as they can or more so. But one thing is very clear, and scholars really are, in my opinion, rebuked by this very passage.

Everyone acknowledges that Matthew 11, 27 is a very Johannine or John-like passage. It could have been lifted directly from the Gospel of John. It is just the kind of thing that Jesus says all the time in the Gospel of John, but it has nothing like it elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels.

In fact, if you look in the margin of your Bible, the cross-references that are given related to this verse 27, a number of them are going to be from the Gospel of John, because the same things that are said in this are said by Jesus in John. For example, in John 3.35, John 5.20 and 27, John 13.3, John 17.2, John 6.46, John 10.15, John 1.18. Now, I didn't expect you to write those down as quickly as I said them. I told you we're not going to take the time to look at them.

But all of those references in John I just gave you, which is, how many did I just give you? About seven or eight. They all are parallel in thought to what is said right here. So, I guess what this points out is that even the Synoptic writers knew that Jesus talked this way.

It's the same Jesus who we find in the Gospel of John. And, by the way, this statement is also found in Luke. So, more than one of the Synoptics includes this Johannine-sounding statement.

What I'm saying is it proves that Jesus was quite capable of talking both ways, because the Synoptic Gospels that are said to present a different kind of Jesus, a different kind of teacher, than John does, because they actually present a very John-like portrait in this particular statement. Now, a very famous passage. Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, who are these heavily laden people and what is it they are burdened by? What are they heavily laden with? I'll tell you, my tendency in the past, at least until some years ago, was to see this as an evangelistic kind of passage that would suggest, in a modern evangelical sermon, that people are burdened with the burden of guilt.

In our modern psychological society, specialists have said that guilt is really a burden on many people. It creates all kinds of psychosomatic conditions, and many people are wrestling with unresolved guilt. And that is certainly true.

And with that in view, I think many evangelicals would just assume immediately, well, he's talking about being relieved of the burden of guilt. You've got sin. You're burdened by sin.

Jesus is going to take away your sin. Well, of course, he is going to do that, but I don't think that's what he's talking about. He's talking in the context of the babes and the wives and prudence.

The wives and the prudence are one class of people that God has neglected or chosen not to reveal these things to. The babes are those that he has revealed it to. But unfortunately for the babes, they are under the oppression of the wives and the prudence.

The Pharisees and the rabbis and the scribes were the ones who interpreted duty to the masses. And the masses were not experts at this. They were just kind of dependent on whatever the interpretations were for the most part of the scholars and of the theologians.

Now, it so happens that the rabbis, the scholars, and the theologians interpreted the law in a very burdensome manner. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 23, verse 4, talking about the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 23, verse 4, Jesus said, For they, the scribes and Pharisees, bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Now, the Pharisees and scribes bound heavy burdens on people's backs. What kind of burdens were these? They were the burdens of legalistic religious observances. Minute little requirements about Sabbath keeping and about purification and about a whole

bunch of other things, which only a person who is devoted full time to the study of the legal particulars could possibly be acquainted with.

And that was part of the burden of being uneducated. Because you didn't know all of the loopholes that the smart guys knew. All you knew was that you were probably living under condemnation most of the time because these guys tell us that every little infraction, every little contact with the world is defiling, and it kind of takes away your hope.

It kind of makes you despondent and say, This is an impossible burden to bear. This is a heavy burden and grievous to be borne. Now, it would be nice if those who put the burden on there would also do something to help relieve the burden.

But Jesus said they won't so much as lift a finger to relieve them or to lift the burden. Now, Jesus, on the other hand, says, Listen, you people who've got these burdens, you people who have suffered religious oppression at the hands of the legalistic Pharisees and scribes who've been putting heavy legalism upon you, something too heavy for you to bear. It may be that you're nearly broken under the legalistic requirements and religious requirements that the Jewish leaders are interpreting the law to impose upon you.

Well, if you come to me, I'll relieve you. They won't lift a finger to relieve them, but I will. I'll give you rest.

Now, what he's saying is, I don't have a new set of religious rules to give you. You've got enough of them. They're what's burdening you.

What I'll give you is relief from that. What I'll give you is rest. If legalism is a burden, then rest must be the opposite of legalism.

And what was Jesus offering? Well, he also offered a yoke. The yoke of the law was already imposed upon him. It was a heavy burden.

Well, he says, I've got a yoke for you, but it's a lot easier than that one. It's light. My burden is light.

Now, Jesus doesn't say, surrender your burden so that you won't have a burden or surrender your heavy yoke so you won't have a yoke. He's saying, I'll trade you. Give up the yoke and the burden you have and take mine instead.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. You'll find it a lot easier. My burden is easy.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Now, the yoke, as you, I'm sure, must be aware, was a bar with holes for an animal's head, usually for two animals.

Some yokes accommodated one ox or one horse or mule, but frequently it was a bar that

covered the necks of two animals and fastened them together. And, of course, the purpose of the yoke was to press them into service, to put them under the control of a driver to either pull a cart or perhaps a plow to do some bit of work. And the law made people work real hard.

It was a yoke and a heavy yoke and a burden. And the Pharisees didn't make it any easier. They made it heavier and more grievous to be born.

Jesus said, I'll give you rest. But this is not rest in the form of no yoke or no burden. It's just going to be almost as if you have no yoke or no burden because it's so easy compared to what these guys are putting on you.

What is his yoke? Well, he's the Lord, you're the animal. He directs you. And your service, you're pressed into his service.

You basically come under his lordship. As an animal under a yoke is under the lordship or the leadership and control of the person who puts him under yoke. Take my yoke upon you means make yourself accessible to me and serve me.

But my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Now, there's a couple of ways to understand that. Some have said the yoke is easy because your head is in one side of the yoke and Jesus' head is in the other.

And he's pulling along with you and he's bearing most of the weight. And therefore, although there is a lot of work to be done, there is a lot of field to plow, there's a lot of burden there, yet he's carrying most of it. And he's providing most of the muscle in the other side of the yoke.

Now, that illustration is not without merit. But I think that we'd understand my burden is light a little differently than that. I think what he's saying is that, of course, what he had to offer, he doesn't explain it here, but we know the phenomenon in the New Testament, that he was offering a new covenant that did not impose laws externally on people's backs which were grievous to be born.

He did impose service, but not a grievous service, and it was a service of love. It says in 1 John 5, something that is a good parallel to this, 1 John 5, verse 3, it says, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. They're not a heavy load.

They're not grievous. In the King James, the word grievous is used here, and in the other passage, they bind heavy burdens, grievous to be born, in Matthew 23, 4, and then over here, the word grievous is used again in the King James. The commandments of God are not grievous.

They're not burdensome to us. Why? Well, it's not because we don't have to keep them.

It's not because we don't have to serve God.

It's not because there's less work to do than there was before. It's because this is what the love of God does. Our love for God is demonstrated in the fact that we keep his commandments, and it's not a burdensome thing to us.

Legalism sometimes can be found to be doing things obedient to God, but it's a burden. And you can tell it's a burden because the legalist is always critical of other people who aren't doing as much. They're not enjoying themselves.

They're doing it as a burdensome duty that they don't enjoy doing. They don't feel themselves at liberty not to do the work. Like Martha, you know, complaining about serving in the kitchen, serving Jesus and the disciples.

Lord, you know, I've got too much work to do in here. Well, she loved Jesus the way he ought to. It seems like she'd feel delighted for the opportunity to be serving Jesus and glad she didn't have to share that privilege with anyone else.

It was a great privilege for her to be the one serving the disciples and Jesus himself. But that's not how she felt about it. Her love for Jesus was not quite at the level as Mary's was.

And that's frequently the case. Religious persons, often simply out of a sense of duty, which they don't much have a heart for, they feel compelled to do things, obedient or in terms of service to God, but they find it grievous. Why? Well, the only thing that makes service not grievous, not burdensome, is love.

And Jesus was basically offering a change of heart. That change of heart, as we've pointed out many times before, was figuratively described in Jeremiah as writing God's laws on your heart. You still do the will of God.

You still are obliged to obey God. You still live up to the standards of righteousness that have always been there. But the difference is your heart's different.

And obedience is a very burdensome thing if you've got a rebellious heart. But if you've got a loving heart toward the person who is asking you to do what you have to do, then it's a delight to do it. And while you may be doing it as heavy a load as before, it doesn't seem heavy anymore.

The burden is light because love lightens the burden. It's hard for me to recall, since we've talked so many times about so many things in these classes, whether I've mentioned for you, I probably did, Hannah White-Ole Smith in her book, *The Christian Secret of a Happy Life*, she gives the illustration of a woman who is a maid to a single widower. I think he's a widower, and he's got children.

And she keeps house for him and cooks for him, and she takes care of the children, and she's a nanny and so forth, and she works for a wage. And there's times when, you know, it's hard for her to do that. It impinges on her freedom and on her own pursuit of happiness elsewhere.

But later she falls in love with her master, and he with her, and they marry. And she still does all the same things as before. She takes care of the children, she takes care of the house, she cooks and so forth, but it's an entirely different thing.

It's not burdensome anymore. It's not a slavery for her. It's not interfering with her happiness.

It is her happiness. You see, a person who doesn't have a heart after God, who doesn't love God, obedience to God interferes with what they perceive as their real happiness. Their real happiness would be to have a good time doing things that God interprets as sinful.

But they don't have the liberty to do that. It's too dangerous, and therefore they have to obey God, though they really see their happiness as lying elsewhere. But when a person loves God with all their heart, soul, and mind and strength, then where can their happiness be but in his service? And while it may be burdensome in terms of the amount of effort put into it, because you do it with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength, there's certainly a great deal of effort that it takes, it's a burden that's light.

It's a burden, but for some reason it's a very light burden because of the relationship. And Jesus says, I've got something different for you than what you're accustomed to from these religious leaders. They put burdens on you and don't lift them.

I've got a burden for you too, and a yoke too. But it's a comfortable yoke. It's an easy yoke.

It's a light burden because what I have to give you is a change of heart. And that makes all the difference in the world in terms of how burdensome you find to obey God. This is the love of God that we keep as commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

There is an old tradition, I think it comes from Justin Martyr, second century church father. Whether it's true or fiction, we don't know. He lived early enough that he might have had access to authentic information on this.

It is said that Jesus, when he was a carpenter in Nazareth, specialized in making ox yokes. Each carpenter was actually an artisan, and while they did a number of things, they would often have a specialty that they became known for being the best in town or the best in the area for. And according to, I believe it was Justin Martyr, he said that

Jesus, after Joseph's death, when Jesus took over the carpenter shop, that his specialty was making ox yokes.

And that he actually had an ox yoke hanging out as sort of a shingle or a sign out in front of his shop with his slogan on it. His slogan was, My yokes fit well. Now, this may not be a true story.

It's possible that Justin Martyr made it up or someone before him made it up to jive with this statement, My yoke is easy. But it obviously has a similar sound to it. It's interesting that there is a possibility that it is a true story.

And that Jesus might have been here alluding to what had possibly been a well-known slogan that he himself had used when he was an artisan, when he was a carpenter. And according to Justin, Jesus' fame as an ox yoke carpenter was broad, so that these people of Galilee, he was now a stigma, might have even known his former slogan, My yokes fit well. And now he says something very similar to that.

It's not identical. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. But he applies it, of course, spiritually in a totally different way.

Now, we could say more, but we can't say more because we have so little time. Let's go over to Luke chapter 7. In Luke chapter 7, we're going to pick up the story at verse 36. If you wonder whether this is chronologically justified, you'll notice that the immediately preceding passage is where Jesus likened his generation with the children playing in the marketplace and the John the Baptist and stuff.

That we just discussed a moment ago. Luke, however, includes a story at this point that Matthew does not include. Luke 7, verse 36, Then one of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him.

And he went to the Pharisee's house. Now, he's just finished saying that he is a man who eats and drinks and is accused of being a glutton and a wine-bibber and a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Immediately afterwards, we have a story that illustrates this very accusation in the context that he is eating and drinking.

This time, he's eating and drinking with Pharisees, not tax collectors and sinners. But a notable sinner comes in. And Jesus definitely shows himself to be a friend of this sinner and gets some criticism for it.

So he went to the Pharisee's house. We're not told at this point what the Pharisee's name was, although later we're told his name was Simon. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at his feet behind him, weeping.

And she began to wash his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.

And she kissed his feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now, when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answered and said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he said, Teacher, say it. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors.

One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which one of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, I suppose the one whom he forgave more.

And he said to him, You have rightly judged. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in.

You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

And those who sat at the table with him began to say in themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? This is not the first time this criticism has been raised with him. And he says it right in the midst of those who are the most critical of that kind of talk. He is so unconcerned about the way they react.

Then he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. He ignores the fact that they are criticizing him and thinking him to be a blasphemer.

And he just goes on and relieves her of her guilt, as it were, and says, Go in peace. Your faith has saved you. Now, let's talk about this a little bit.

There is a story somewhat like this one in the Gospel of John. Like it in enough ways that, of course, the critical scholars have tried to say, Well, it's two versions of the same story. Now, the problem with that is the differences in the stories are so great that if they are, in fact, two versions of the same story, then what we have is a very poor representation of the story in one case.

And it speaks poorly of the ability of the early disciples to preserve the story intact. John 12 is where we have it. It says, in the beginning of John 12, Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus, who had been dead, and whom he had raised from the dead, lived.

There they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray him, said, Why was the fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? Then he said, Excuse me, this he said not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it. Then Jesus said, Let her alone. She has kept this for my day of burial.

For the poor you have with you always, but me you do not have always. Now this story is actually told in a number of the Gospels. Matthew has it in Matthew 21, and it's here.

But one of the things here is that, of course, Jesus has someone who anoints his feet, in both cases, with costly ointment, wipes his feet with the hair, a criticism is raised, and Jesus answers the criticism to speak in favor of the party who did this. And in fact, in one account, I think it's in Matthew 21, I'm not sure, of the story we just looked at in John 12. In one account, it actually says that Jesus was in the house of someone named Simon.

Did someone find it? I'm not sure. I may be wrong about it being in Matthew 21, but there is a parallel to this story in which Did someone find it? Simon the leper, he's called. Thank you, 26.6, that's way off.

Does it say Simon the leper there also? Okay, great. In Matthew 26.6, it says that when Jesus was in Bethany, the house of Simon the leper, a woman came in having costly alabaster flasks and so forth. The story we just read.

Now, here are the parallels, or the similarities. There is, in both cases, a house of someone named Simon, where Jesus is eating. In both cases, a woman comes in and does something extraordinary, which has to do with anointing his feet with perfume and wiping his feet with her hair.

In both cases, a criticism is raised by the host or by some guest, and Jesus vindicates them. Now, those are the similarities, and they are enough for many scholars to feel that we have in Luke chapter 7 just a corrupted version of the other. Or maybe the other is a corrupted version of this, but that they are both one incident that are simply told in different ways.

This takes a very low view, of course, of the integrity of the Gospels, because there are significant differences. The Simon in the story of what took place at Bethany is said to be a leper, no doubt a cured leper, I think we would have to say, because any leper who is not cured would not be in society. He would be unclean, he wouldn't be able to live at home, and he wouldn't be having guests at his home.

In all likelihood, this is one of the many lepers Jesus cleansed in his ministry. Whereas the Simon in Luke chapter 7 is a Pharisee, and obviously one that, while he invites Jesus to his meal, is not particularly friendly to Jesus. He doesn't wash his feet when he comes in, doesn't anoint him, doesn't give him a kiss, and is very quick to criticize.

Not what you would expect of someone who had received a healing from leprosy from Jesus. The parties are too different. In this case, in Luke 7, the woman is said to be a sinful woman.

Now, it doesn't say what particular sins she had committed, but I think it would not be hard to imagine what kinds of sins would stigmatize a woman. It doesn't say a woman who had violated the social mores, let's say who had gone outside with her head uncovered or something like that. The Bible suggests that she really was sinful.

Jesus himself said her sins are many. This would suggest that she was probably, I mean, probably was not a bank robber or whatever, she was most likely guilty of sexual sins. Either she was married and an adulteress or possibly even a prostitute.

There is a tradition that says this was Mary Magdalene, though there is nothing in the Scripture to say so. When we are told background details of Mary Magdalene's life, in other passages in the Scripture, we are only told that she had had seven demons in her, and Jesus cast them out. This could have been her, and there are some who feel that it was, but there is certainly no exegetical reason to equate this sinful woman with Mary Magdalene.

But there certainly is no reason to equate her with Mary of Bethany, who was Martha's sister and Lazarus' sister, and who hardly seems like a sinful woman, certainly not a woman who was stigmatized by a sinful lifestyle. There is every indication that she was a very godly and pious woman, and had many friends. By the way, at the house in Bethany where Mary did what she did there, we are told that Lazarus was present, and Mary and Martha were present, and that would hardly be the case at the Pharisees' house.

Jesus' friends Lazarus and Mary and Martha would hardly be invited to the Pharisees' house. For one thing, this Pharisee apparently lived in Capernaum, whereas Mary and Martha and Simon the leper lived in Bethany. So there are too many differences.

It can't be the same story. It can't just be another way of telling the same story. Now, if it seems too much a coincidence that all these things could have happened twice, I don't think so.

The name Simon was not an uncommon name. There were two Simons in the band of twelve disciples. Remember, Simon is just another form of the name Simeon, which was the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Many people named their sons after the twelve patriarchs. There were many Judases,

which is Judah, many Simons, which is Simeon, many Levites, lots of Levites. And many of the Old Testament heroes and patriarchs provided names for an abundance of later generations that wished to revere them.

So the name Simon is certainly not a hard one to find. It's probably about as common as the name John or Bill in our own society. So the fact that both houses were owned by someone named Simon in no sense makes it the same story.

This woman was a sinful woman, probably of Capernaum, whereas in the other story it was Mary of Bethany. Obviously the stories are too different. We can't make them out to be the same story unless we wish to simply suggest that the gospel writers were very inept and the Christian community was very poor at remembering the details of the story and that they got it wrong somewhere here.

Now, as for the story itself, of course it's more important than anything we've said about it so far, here was a woman who was a sinful woman and obviously a woman who would never be permitted into the house of a Pharisee. In fact, she wouldn't be allowed in the synagogue. In fact, she probably was not allowed in any respectable company at all.

And here she comes brazenly into a Pharisee's house, somehow gets past the servants at the door, comes barreling in to the meal table where Jesus is there, and she ignores all the Pharisees, all the people whom she certainly must know in her heart are condemning her and despising her, pays no attention to them, and just lavishes this affection on Jesus, takes this expensive stuff, pours it on his feet, kisses his feet, wipes them with her hair and so forth. And she seems to be totally absorbed with Jesus and totally unaware or unconcerned about the people who were there who certainly would have seen this as an intrusion. And she certainly would not be unaware that they were and that they would.

But this shows that she was willing to risk the rebuke, possibly the violent throwing out of the house or whatever, that she was perhaps subjecting herself to by coming in there in order to show her affection and gratitude for Jesus. Now, Pharisees, of course, would not allow themselves to be touched by a sinner. Jesus was allowing himself to be touched by a sinner.

And therefore, the Pharisee assumed that Jesus must not know what kind of woman this was. Jesus was regarded widely as a rabbi. Although many knew he was a friend of sinners, this Pharisee suspected that no rabbi would allow, at least in public, a sinful person to touch him like this.

I mean, even if Jesus secretly had friendships and alliances with sinners, certainly in the house of respectable Jewish company like these Pharisees, any rabbi even who had secret friendships with sinners would not allow this public association to be made in such a setting. And therefore, the Pharisee assumed that Jesus didn't know what kind of woman this was and said, well, he certainly wouldn't let her do this if he did. But Jesus

did.

He knew that her sins were many. Now, did Jesus know this because he had intimate knowledge of her past, that he had met her before, perhaps, and she had confessed her sins, or that he had a word of knowledge about her, which is not impossible. He could have had a word of knowledge and known something about her past.

Or did he just deduce that she was a sinful woman? I'd like to suggest to you the latter case. When he knew that the Pharisee was having these judgmental thoughts, he told the parable of two people who had been forgiven debts, one a larger debt than the other. Both of them, of course, would have gratitude because the forgiveness of the debt was an act of mercy and any decent person would be grateful to someone who forgave them a debt.

But obviously, the one who had been more burdened with debt previously and forgiven would feel more relief, feel more gratitude, more love, as Jesus put it. And he said, Simon, you know, you're critical of this woman and you're critical of me, but look at yourself, why don't you? Look how little you love me. I mean, I came into your house, you didn't even provide water to wash my feet.

Now, it seems very strange that this would be the case. In any respectable home, guests would be met at the door by a servant with a pan of water to wash their feet. It's hard to believe that a man would invite Jesus to dinner and not subject Jesus to the customary courtesy of having his feet washed.

It's possible that what Jesus is saying, that he's not denying that his feet were washed when he came into the house. In fact, a servant of the house may have washed Jesus' feet along with everyone else's. But he's saying, Simon, you didn't wash my feet.

It may, well, I don't know, I can't read too much between the lines. It seems to me unthinkable that this common courtesy would have been denied to any guest who had been invited to a feast in your house. I suspect Jesus had had his feet washed when he came in there by a servant, which would be the normal thing.

But he's saying, this woman has personally washed my feet with her tears and cleaned them with her hair. You didn't give me any such personal attention as that. Now, by the way, even if you were a disciple of Jesus and he came to your house, even if you had a servant to wash his feet, wouldn't you be more likely to want to wash them yourself? Wouldn't you want to be personally involved in showing respect and affection and humbling yourself before him? This woman did.

But the Pharisee didn't. He didn't give him even a customary kiss. He didn't anoint him with oil, which was not too unusual to do to guests.

But this woman had done all these things. She had shown far more love for Jesus than

the Pharisee did. Now, the Pharisee was no doubt showing tremendous generosity toward Jesus.

In all likelihood, it was a feast worthy of a Pharisee. It was probably a very handsome feast. This man was showing some measure of hospitality and may have felt like Jesus should be grateful to him for having him over to such a nice feast.

After all, Jesus didn't have a lot of rich friends. So to have a rich man invite him over for a feast, Jesus should have been very thankful. But Jesus suggested the other way around.

Having him over to this feast was not really a demonstration of love at all. In fact, we don't know why the Pharisee invited Jesus over, but in all likelihood, it was for the same reason that most Pharisees engage Jesus in conversation or approach him, is to trap him, to find something wrong with him. In this case, the Pharisee quickly found what he thought was something wrong with Jesus, namely his willingness to associate with these people.

But Jesus said, essentially, Simon, your lack of affection for me simply shows that you have no awareness of being forgiven of much. In fact, you haven't been forgiven of much. Because if you did, you would love much.

That's the point. This woman loves much. Therefore, her sins, which are many, are forgiven her.

Now, verse 47, Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much. Sounds like it reverses the message of the parable he just told. It sounds like it's saying, because she loved much, she has had her many sins forgiven her.

Meaning, I mean, one way it could be understood, is that God has honored the fact that she loved Jesus so much, and therefore, he has rewarded her by forgiving her sins. But the parable goes the other direction. The parable is about people loving because they've been forgiven.

The one who's been forgiven much is the one who loves much. And therefore, I don't think that it's the correct reading here to say, well, God forgave her of her sins because she loved much. I think what he's saying is this.

According to the message of the parable, her sins, which are many, are forgiven her. That can be deduced. Why? Because she loved so much.

Because she loved so much, you can understand, you can deduce the fact that she must have been forgiven much. This tremendous love and affection and gratitude she's showing should tell you something about her. She has been forgiven a great deal, because this is the sign of someone who is very grateful for great forgiveness.

And it may be that Jesus didn't even need a word of knowledge to know that she had sinned much. Her very gratefulness and her great love would tell him that she had been forgiven much, that she was a woman who had great sins. Now, Jesus had just been out telling people, come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, I'll give you rest.

Perhaps she was one of those who found the Jewish regulations a particular burden, and maybe even the law itself a great burden, a burden she had failed to carry or refused to carry and had lived in sin. But Jesus had rest for her, and she had perhaps known that forgiveness, maybe not by a personal encounter with Him, but maybe just by believing His words. It's hard to say.

We don't know anything about the prior contact Jesus may or may not have had with this woman. But He could have deduced that she had been very sinful by the lavish display of affection that she had, and He deduced it from the fact that those who are forgiven much, love much. So verse 47, rather than saying that God has forgiven her because she loved much, would be saying something like, you can deduce that much sin has been forgiven in her case, because she loved much.

Now, I don't know if you see it that way. I find it quite easy to see verse 47 that way. The way it's worded, however, that's not the only way, or even maybe the most natural way that we take it.

Once again, Jesus gets criticized here for forgiving sins, but in this case, He doesn't give a sign like He did in chapter 9 of Matthew. He said, well, you don't think I can forgive sins? Watch, I'll tell this lame man to get up and walk, and that will show that I have the authority to forgive sins. He didn't even defend His authority in this case.

He was more concerned that this woman go away with her guilt alleviated. And so, while they're grumbling and saying these things in their hearts about Him, even talking out loud, saying among themselves, who is this who even forgives sins? Jesus ignores their murmuring and just says to them, your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

And so she did, presumably. And whether this was Mary Magdalene or not, no one knows. No one can know.

That's a traditional thing. But we do know that Mary Magdalene became one of His most devoted followers, but that would be explainable without recourse to saying that this was her in the story. I mean, the fact that He cast seven demons out of her on some unrecorded occasion would be reason enough to explain her devotion to Him.

Now, I had intended to take this story along with the story about the unforgivable, the unpardonable sin, in one session. That's the way it's scheduled. But because I had to finish Matthew 11, we only got through part of what we would have ordinarily covered today, so we're still about half a session behind.

We'll make up for it somewhere along the line, but we'll stop here because we've run out of time.