

Luke 7:18 – 35

¹⁸ The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. ¹⁹ Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’ ²⁰ When the men came to him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to you, to ask, ‘Are you the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’’ ²¹ At that very time he cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and he gave sight to many who were blind. ²² And he answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. ²³ ‘Blessed is he who does not take offense at me.’ ²⁴ When the messengers of John had left, he began to speak to the crowds about John, ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?’ ²⁵ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! ²⁶ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ²⁸ I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’ ²⁹ When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. ³¹ ‘To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like?’ ³² They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ ³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵ Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.’

Historical and Cultural Background

- *John the Baptist* was Jesus’ cousin and herald (Lk.1:5 – 25; 57 – 70; 3:1 – 20).
- ‘*The Expected One*’ was another term for the long hoped-for Messianic king of Israel from the house of David.
- *The signs of healing* (blind receive sight, the lame walk, etc.) are a series of quotations, perhaps from Isaiah (35:5 – 6; 42:1 – 7; 61:1 – 2), about God restoring Israel/humanity to who He always meant for them to be.
- *The Pharisees* were a right-wing political and religious group in Israel focusing on Jewish nationalism and religious piety. They believed that Jerusalem and the Temple had become corrupt because the Jewish leadership in the capital collaborated with Rome. Many also supported militant, revolutionary groups of Jews who were trying to retake the capital and oust the Romans. They Pharisees focused on trying to stay religiously pure by following the Jewish Mosaic Law.
- A ‘*reed shaken in the wind*’ may have been a reference to Herod Antipas, who ‘minted coins with reeds on them because reeds symbolized cities on a river or lake, specifically the city of Tiberias. A ‘shaken reed’ could have become a name for the king who swayed with and survived many a political wind, who wavered between wives, and even between Sepphoris and Tiberias as his place of residence... The vivid phrase goes back to Jesus himself and reflects local color of the day, as he contrasts the uncompromising prophet with the ‘shaking reed’ of a kinglet from the Hellenistic Roman power elite.’ (Reumann, p. 672).

Questions

1. Possible introductory questions:
 - a. Talk about the salvation imagery of the movie, *The Matrix*. Why is the search for the 'expected one' so important? Who could be 'The One' for people today?
 - b. Read a story about a Jewish person struggling with the idea of Jesus as the Messiah. Many stories are found on the Jews for Jesus homepage.
 - c. Read a portion of Lee Strobel's search to understand Jesus in *The Case for Christ*.
 - d. Think back to when you were deciding whether to believe in Jesus or not. What was that process like?
 - e. Is anyone you know processing the question of who is Jesus? How are they approaching that question?
2. Refresh on John the Baptist. What brings on John the Baptist's doubts?
 - a. A time factor, that Jesus hadn't claimed the throne of David yet. Personal endurance of deprivation out in the wilderness. Maybe ministry was becoming difficult. A sense of personal suffering and loneliness.
 - b. On the one hand, John's searching question is surprising, since there was no indication from chapters 1 – 3 that this cousin of Jesus had any doubts about Jesus' identity in the early portion of the narrative. In 1:41, John had leapt in his mother's womb in the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb. In 3:15 – 17, John as an adult had announced the coming of his cousin the Messiah. And in 3:21 – 22, at Jesus' baptism, Luke does not suggest, as does Mark, that only Jesus saw the heavens opened and heard the heavenly Voice. The phrase 'he saw' in Mark 1:10 is absent in Luke 3:22; so we are left with the suggestion that John the Baptist heard and understood the divine Voice at Jesus' baptism as well. John's doubt at this point seems odd.
 - c. On the other hand, his question is understandable on the human level. Human doubts arise easily, and we can take some encouragement in the fact that the great prophet John the Baptist needed clarification and reassurance from Jesus as well. The question, 'Who do you believe Jesus is?' is not always easy to answer. Even John the Baptist, who is recognized in Israel as a prophet, who is indeed 'more than a prophet' (7:26) and the greatest 'among those born of women' until then (7:28), needed a reminding word from Jesus. Luke must have anticipated his readers having at least as many doubts.
 - d. Thus, at this critical juncture, Luke brings John the Baptist back onto the scene to interpret Jesus. The burning question in the minds of the Israelites, including John the Baptist, is this: 'Is Jesus the Expected One? Is he the one who can raise Israel from the dead?' The occurrence of John the Baptist's question provides a way to emphasize the previous episode and its deep significance to Israel. We have already seen opposition to Jesus as early as the two synagogue scenes (4:14 – 44) and in the midst of Jesus calling his disciples to form a 'new Israel' (5:17 – 6:11). This story (7:18 – 35) and the next (7:36 – 50) illustrate the increasing division within Israel in response to Jesus, a division Jesus then explains (8:1 – 21).
 - e. Application: Why is it natural to doubt when we suffer for the gospel?
3. What encouragement does Jesus give John? Why would this have been encouraging to John?
 - a. When Jesus turns to the multitudes and talks about John, what does he say about him? That John's the greatest of Israel's OT prophets.
 - b. Is there any encouragement for us when we suffer or doubt? Yes, in .v.28, that we're greater than John the Baptist!
4. Why do the people and the tax collectors believe Jesus?
5. Why do they call it God's justice? Justice is really a term for God's faithfulness to His covenant promises to Israel. God is just when He fulfills His promises. God was fulfilling His promises through Jesus.
6. At this point, why don't the Pharisees and scribes believe Jesus?
 - a. They interpret the Scriptures in an ethnocentric way (Lk.4:14 – 30).
 - b. They don't like who Jesus is healing and drawing to himself (Lk.5:17 – 32).
 - c. They don't connect the healing miracles to the Scriptures, especially in Jesus' use of Isaiah.
 - d. They exclude messianic passages about a suffering messiah (Gen.37 – 50; Isa.52:13 – 53:12; Zech.12).
7. What retort does Jesus give to that? Wisdom is vindicated by all her children. That is, we'll see what the results of your choices are because the principles you live by are false.

- a. What would be the results of the Pharisees' choices? Jerusalem would be destroyed. Israel the land (the vineyard in Lk.20) would be taken away and given to others. How does this confirm our faith in Christ?
 - b. Note that one of the current reasons today for Jewish denial of Jesus as Messiah is that he did not rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But various passages deny the significance of the Temple (e.g. the Pentateuch chiasm demonstrates that God's Plan A was for Israel to meet Him on the mountain face to face, and that God used the Plan B of the sanctuary because of Israel's failure to do so; 2 Samuel 7 shows that God did not claim sponsorship of David's idea to replace the Tabernacle sanctuary with the Temple; Daniel 9 shows that the Temple would be destroyed around the time of the Messiah; etc.) Jesus instead restored humanity to God's Plan A, as God wanted to live among and within human beings, not in a building.
8. Think about what evidence there is to affirm Jesus as Israel's Messiah who lives today? Who else could be 'The One'?