

Introduction

1. What is your place in your family? In your work? In your favorite civic organization?
 - a. We all have and fill many places and roles in life.
 - b. John the Baptist had a specific role in the kingdom of God.
 - c. He knew his role and filled it perfectly. May the same thing be said of us at the end of our days.
2. John the Baptist's question to Jesus and Jesus' answer to and teaching about John were recorded by both Luke and Matthew.
 - a. Each account has four verses not found in the other account. Other than that, both accounts are highly parallel with only a few minor differences.
 - b. We will read from Luke's account and supplement with the additional insights from Matthew as well as one minor wording difference in the last verse of both accounts.
3. **Read Lk 7:18-35.**

A. John's Question for Jesus (Lk 7:18-21; Mt 11:2-3)

1. The first two verses in both accounts are highly parallel. Matthew said the John sent his "disciples," while Luke gives the specific number as "two of them."
2. The question that John the Baptist sent them to ask is the same in both accounts: Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"
3. This may seem to be a surprising statement from John the Baptist since he had baptized Jesus and witnessed the miracle of the Spirit descending and the voice of the Father from Heaven (cf., Lk 3:22, Mt 3:17) and had proclaimed that Jesus was "the lamb of God" (Jn 1:29).
 - a. However, think about John's circumstances. He had faithfully proclaimed God's truth and even had baptized the Messiah but was now in Herod's prison.
 - b. He must have had some doubts. He wondered if he had perhaps mis-identified Jesus as the Messiah.
 - c. Warren Wiersbe writes, "John had been in prison some months (Luke 3:19-20), but he knew what Jesus was doing because his own disciples kept him informed. It must have been difficult for this man, accustomed to a wilderness life, to be confined in prison. The physical and emotional strain were no doubt great, and the long days of waiting did not make it easier. The Jewish leaders did nothing to intercede for John, and it seemed that even Jesus was doing nothing for him. If he came to set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18), then John the Baptist was a candidate!....In John's case, his inquiry was not born of willful unbelief, but of doubt nourished by physical and emotional strain....John had announced judgment, but Jesus was doing deeds of love and mercy. John had promised that the kingdom was at hand, but there was no evidence of it so far.....He was perplexed about God's plan and his place in it." (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 93).
4. Luke includes two additional verses in his account.
 - a. In Lk 7:20 he reports that the disciples sent by John did exactly as John had asked by going to Jesus and asking John's question.
 - b. In Lk 7:21, Luke stated that Jesus "...cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind."
 - c. The additional information is Lk 7:21 provides supporting evidence for Jesus' answer in the following verses.

B. Jesus' Answer to John (Lk 7:22-23; Mt 11:4-6)

1. Jesus told John's disciples to report to John what they have heard and seen.
2. Jesus declared that "...the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22).
 - a. Jesus quoted Isa 35:5-6; 61:1.
 - b. It was a declaration that He was the Messiah. He identified Himself as such by what He was doing.

3. Jesus added a blessing that was also a warning to John: “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me” (Lk 7:23; Mt 11:6).
 - a. “fall away” (Gk., *sandalidzo* – “stumble, trip the trap”) – Our term scandal comes from this term.
 - b. Wiersbe notes, “John was in danger of being trapped because of his concern about what Jesus was not doing. He was stumbling over his Lord and His ministry. Jesus gently told him to have faith, for his Lord knew what He was doing” (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 94).
 - c. G. Campbell Morgan concludes, “Very gentle, very beautiful; but a definite warning. He was saying in effect, John, if you cannot understand My method, I ask you to trust Me; and when you are unable to see why I am doing, what I am doing; or why I am not doing what you think I ought to be doing, all I ask is that you follow and trust” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 98).

C. Jesus Speaks about John to the Crowd (Lk 7:24-35; Mt 11:7-19)

1. Jesus asked the crowd what they had gone out to see in the desert when they sought out John.
2. Did they see “a reed swayed by the wind?” (7, 24).
 - a. This would mean that John’s message changed depending on the circumstances.
 - 1) John did not ask himself, “Before I answer, let me see which way the wind is blowing.”
 - 2) John was man of moral greatness.
 - b. A true prophet speaks the truth of God no matter the audience or the reception of the message.
 - c. The people went out to hear from a true, fearless prophet speaking the truth of God.
 - d. The implied answer to Jesus’ question is NO.
3. So, Jesus asked the crowd, “If not, what did you go out to see?”
 - a. Jesus gave them two contrasting choices:
 - 1) Their choices are a man dressed in “fine cloths” from the “kings’ palaces” or
 - 2) “a prophet”
 - b. John was not dressed in regal finery but in the cloths of a prophet (camel hair mantle).
 - c. More important than his dress was what John said. He spoke like a prophet.
 - d. John was a prophet on mission with God.
4. The people wanted a prophet and that is what God had sent to them in John the Baptist.
5. Jesus stated, using scripture from Mal 3:1, that John the Baptist was the promised Elijah who had come to prepare the way before the Messiah and the day of the Lord.
6. Jesus made a profound statement about John: “I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Lk 7:28; Mt 11:11).
 - a. Jesus praised both John’s moral character and his faithful career. He vindicated John even as John had doubts about Jesus.
 - b. John was the last prophet under the Old Covenant of Law.
 - c. Jesus brought the New Covenant of grace which was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.
 - d. John was the greatest and last prophet of the Old Covenant.
 - e. However, the New Covenant of grace is so superior to the Old Covenant of Law that even the least in the New Covenant kingdom of God is greater than the greatest prophet (i.e., John) in the Old Covenant.
 - f. Wiersbe notes, “How is the least person in the kingdom of God greater than John? In position, not in character or ministry. John was the herald of the King, announcing the kingdom; believers today are children of the kingdom and the friends of the King (John 15:15). John’s ministry was a turning point in both the nation’s history and in God’s plan of redemption (Luke 16:16)” (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 95).
7. In addition to this profound statement about John, Matthew included four additional verses elaborating on that statement.
 - a. “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it” (12)
 - b. “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John” (13)
 - c. “And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear” (14-15)

- d. Wiersbe writes, “In what sense was John ‘Elijah who was to come’ (Matt. 11:14 NASB)? He came “in the spirit and power of Elijah’ (Luke 1:17) and even dressed and ministered like Elijah (21 Kings 1:8-8; Mat. 3:4). Like Elijah, John had a message of judgment for the apostate nation of Israel. His ministry was prophesied (Isa. 40:3), and he fulfilled it” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal* , 96).
8. Jesus contrasted the response of the people with that of Pharisees in the unique material in Lk 7:29-30.
- The people, including sinners (i.e., tax collectors), had responded to John’s call for repentance and were baptized as a sign of their repentance.
 - In contrast, the Pharisees, though experts in the law, rejected God’s purpose revealed in John and were not baptized with a baptism of repentance.
 - Wiersbe concludes, that these verses “...answer the question some of the people were asking: ‘If John is such a great prophet, why is he in prison?’ The answer is, because of the willful unbelief of the religious leaders. The common people accepted John’s message and were baptized...But the religious leaders justified themselves (Luke 16:15), not God, and rejected John and his message” (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 95).
9. Jesus searched for an analogy or metaphor to describe “...this generation” of Jews, especially the self-righteous Pharisees.
- Jesus described fickle children playing in the marketplace and putting on mock funerals and mock weddings but not finding satisfaction in either one.
 - Jesus stated that this generation of Jews are fickle and didn’t like what either John or Jesus were doing.
 - 1) They did not like John the Baptist because he delivered his message with fasting and abstinence from wine (Luke specified the drink was wine, while Matthew left the drink unspecified.).
 - 2) They did not like Jesus because he came eating and drinking. They thought that he was “...a glutton and a drunkard.” Worse yet he was “...a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners’” and even had table fellowship with them. (Lk 7:34; Mt 11:19a)
 - Wiersbe concludes, “Jesus compared that generation to people who were childish, not childlike, and nothing pleased them. He was probably referring to the scribes and Pharisees in particular. They wanted neither the funeral nor the wedding, because nothing pleased them” (Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 95).
10. There is a minor wording difference in the last verse of this account in the two gospels.
- Matthew recorded Jesus as saying, “But wisdom is proved right by her actions.” (Mt 11:19b).
 - Luke recorded Jesus as saying “But wisdom is proved right by all her children.” (Lk 7:35)
 - Compare “proved right by her actions” in Matthew with “proved right by all her children” in Luke.
 - 1) The heart of the saying is focused on the actions of the people as the key to revealing their true beliefs.
 - 2) Remember also Jesus’ words about a tree and its source (cf., Lk 6:43-45; Mt 7:15-20).
 - 3) In the Old Testament, especially in Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman. So, the children produced by wisdom should be wise like their mother.
 - 4) Actions are our thoughts and words put into practice. The wisdom of our lives is proven or disproven by our actions.
 - 5) Jesus’ point was that the actions of the Pharisees would ultimately be proven to be folly instead of the wisdom that they believed them to be when they rejected both John and Jesus.
 - 6) Ultimately, the actions of the people would reveal their true wisdom by believing and acting on the words of both John and Jesus.

C. Reflections

1. Are you sometimes perplexed or left in a state of wonder concerning God's methods, His actions, His inactions? Jesus calls you not to stumble but to continue to walk in faith with Him.
2. When you are unable to see why or what God is doing, or when He is not doing what you think He ought to be doing, God simply calls on you to trust and follow Him.
3. Is your faith fickle? Does it change with the wind of culture or persecution?
4. What is it that you want from God?
 - a. Do you want His Truth spoken into your life or just the part of the truth that pleases you?
 - b. Do you want God's will to be done or your will and way to be done?
 - c. Do you want a genuine grace relationship of love with God or just to feel good about yourself without any real commitment to God and others?
5. Do you know the word of God when you hear it? How do you know when God speaks?
6. What is your place of service in the kingdom of God? John knew and filled his place, and you must too.
7. How well are you fulfilling your kingdom mission?
 - a. Are you wholeheartedly following God each day?
 - b. Are you willing to suffer (e.g., John's imprisonment for preaching the truth to Herod Antipas) to be faithful to your kingdom calling?
8. Do your actions reveal a life of folly or wisdom according to God's ultimate standard?
9. Celebrate the blessing that you have not fallen away in your response to Jesus but have placed your trust and faith in Him. Celebrate your life of service in God's kingdom in all that you say and do.