

December 2, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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WISDOM IS VINDICATED Luke 7:18-35

Satan loves to cast doubt in the minds of people. He has used that tactic to cause relational conflicts from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, Satan questioned the veracity of God's statement to Eve which caused her to doubt God, which led her to sin. Once sin had infected God's creation, doubt became a standard glitch in relationships. Did Cain doubt God's plan or purpose for offerings? Did he murder Abel because he doubted God's law or God's concern for His image? And on and on the consequences of doubt have run.

Have you ever doubted God? Have there been times when you seriously wondered if the whole Bible—God—heaven—sin thing is true? Have you ever doubted God's promises to hear and answer prayer when you have prayed for months or years about a matter only to feel like the heavens are brass?

Even some of the most devout and sincere believers have walked off the road to the Celestial City into the swamp of doubt. Abraham doubted that God could care for him and ended up in Egypt where he lied about his wife. David doubted at times that God would deliver him. Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah, and probably all the prophets battled periods of doubt.

And John the Baptist, the unique, specially chosen forerunner of God the Son, the Christ, fell into doubt. He wondered if Jesus was actually the Messiah he was supposed to announce. Jesus answered John's query by affirming His deity through signs and wonders. He praised the Father's choice of John and assured the people that anyone who followed Him was highly privileged. And then Jesus drove home this important truth. The best antidote to doubt is a firm grasp of or deep relationship with "Wisdom." That is not to conclude

that human wisdom is sufficient to keep us from doubting. Rather, divine wisdom, the living wisdom of God embodied in the person of Christ is the means by which to live with unshakeable confidence in God.

Doubt and Affirmation (vv.18-23).

John doubted (vv.18-20) because of the news his disciples reported to him. *The disciples of John reported all these things to him [John] (v.18)*. John had disciples because there were people who were drawn to John's ministry. They had heard him preach repentance of sins. They had submitted to baptism, identifying with repentance from sins. Even many years after John's death, there were still followers of his ministry (Acts 18:25, Apollos; Acts 19:3).

Some of those followers of John came and reported *these things*. What were the *things*? Surely the disciples reported about Jesus' teaching that astounded the people (6:20-49). But more exactly they probably reported about how Jesus healed the centurion's servant without even being present (7:1-10). And even more astonishing was how Jesus raised the widow's son from death (7:11-17). That was great stuff. Massive crowds were gathering daily to hear authoritative teaching from heaven and to have their friends and family members healed from sickness and demons.

John was confused about the whole matter. *And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (vv.19-20)*. Why was he confused? Hadn't John fulfilled his calling by preparing the way of the Lord? He had acknowledged that he was *making straight the way of the Lord (John 1:23)*. He had preached that the Messiah who came after him was greater than himself (John 1:30). He pointed to Jesus and declared on at least a couple of occasions, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)*. All of that was true and was what Isaiah promised the Messiah's forerunner would declare.

So what did John expect from Jesus that Jesus wasn't doing? John had also taught things like, *Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Luke 3:9). And His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17)*. That was some pretty direct teaching about God's response to sin.

It is quite obvious that John's view of Messiah's work was tempered by a desire for destruction of evil, release from foreign tyranny, and the reestablishment of the independent nation of Israel. This was the common view among Israelites based on Old Testament promises. Therefore, the most popular conclusion was that Messiah was going to level God's vengeance against the Roman dictators. In particular John probably was sure that Messiah would pay back people like Herod who had put John in prison and would eventually execute him.

Even the twelve apostles shared that opinion so that even after the resurrection, they were still a bit confused. When they gathered on the mountain as Jesus was about to ascend to heaven and leave the ministry with eleven remaining apostles, they expressed their confusion about Messiah's work. *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)*.

John had preached that Messiah would wreak vengeance on wickedness, but that kind of divine justice against evil didn't appear to be happening. Often this is the same rock over which modern Christians stumble and fall into doubt. It is a desire for Messiah to make things comfortable for us according to our interpretation of God's will. We pray and pray, asking God to remove agitations similar to the over-ruling powers of Rome from our lives. The self-absorbed attitude of our culture will lead to disappointment in Christ when He does not answer our prayers to make us wealthy, comfortable, popular, or satisfied with sin and stuff.

Jesus responded to John's doubt by immediately continuing to do the work the Father sent Him to do (vv.21-23). *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight (v.21)*. From the picture Luke

drew in this account, it appears that while the messengers, the disciples from John, were standing there observing, Jesus proved again who He was. At the moment many people stood nearby who were plagued by the effects of the sin principle. With words of authority from the Creator, Jesus healed them all.

Messiah's answer to John was to offer His good works as proof that He was the promised One. *And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up" (v.22a)*. Having healed many, Jesus turned to the messengers from John and told them to go and report what they had observed as eyewitnesses.

Jesus did the very kind of things Isaiah (who had promised John's ministry) prophesied. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy (Isaiah 35:5-6a)*. There are two important things to notice about that promise. It was given in the context of God pouring out vengeance against evil. *Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you" (Isaiah 35:4)*. That was the very thing John was expecting.

Furthermore, the larger context of this promise is the promise of life in the Millennial kingdom. In His signs and wonders, Jesus simply gave a little flash of insight about what life in His kingdom will be like.

But in response to John, Messiah reminded John that the Christ's chief purpose was to offer salvation. He told the representatives to go back and tell John, *"The poor have good news preached to them" (v.22b)*. That was to be the ministry of Messiah. When He introduced Himself as the Christ in His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus applied the promise of Isaiah 61:1 to Himself (Luke 4:18). Jesus read: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18)*. Then He began to say to them, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21)*.

All of Jesus's teaching of the good news was to remind John of Messiah's chief ministry. He didn't come to release Israel from pagan bondage yet. He didn't come to preach that the financially poor can be financially well off. Jesus came preaching the good news that spiritual beggars can find free salvation in the sacrifice that God offers in the blood of Christ.

Therefore, (because Christ's first ministry is to offer salvation from sin) "*Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me*" (v.23). This was also the warning from Isaiah. *And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken (Isaiah 8:14-15)*. The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to apply this truth to us Christians for our encouragement and the doubter's challenge. *So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do (1 Peter 2:7-8)*.

That was all the answer John needed. John needed to stop doubting. John simply needed to read the entire message of Isaiah in order to know the entire ministry of Jesus. A lot of people need to do the same thing.

Who is Greater Than John (vv.24-32)?

Messiah challenged the people in the crowd to realize that John was not a socialite (vv.24-25). *When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts" (vv.24-25)*.

John was a very popular preacher. Crowds thronged to him in the wilderness. Obviously, God drew the throngs even though many would simply remain curiosity seekers. God had to draw the crowds because John didn't fit the mold for the messenger preparing the way for the king. John was not like a reed that responded to the latest wind

of popularity. No, he stood staunchly for the message of repentance God gave him. He was not a pansy or weakling dressed in the latest fashions or living in the luxury of the palace. John was a lot like old Elijah – rough, tough, independent, and determined to be faithful to God.

The crowds who flocked to hear John were not like him in character. Crowds in any age typically have shallow commitment. Surely not all the people who went out to hear John submitted to identification with repentance from sin. Nor were all the people in the crowds who followed Jesus committed to denying themselves and taking up their crosses to follow Him.

John was a great preacher (vv.26-28). He had to be because he was the preacher God sent. Jesus reminded the crowd how great John was. He asked, "*What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet*" (v.26). Then Jesus explained why John was more than another prophet. *This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you" (v.27)*. John was great because God called him to be great, equipped him to be great, and gave him opportunity to be great.

All the Old Testament prophets looked ahead by faith and promised that God would one day send the Seed of the woman to crush Satan. John alone had the privilege of announcing to the world, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29).

And yet, Jesus assured the crowd that even John was not greater than the least saint. "*I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*" (v.28). On one hand, Jesus exalted John above all other humans. Of course Jesus was born of a woman, but His father was the Holy Spirit. Even so, citizens of God's kingdom are greater than John. That is to say that mere humans who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, receiving the miracle of salvation, eclipse even John's natural condition. John, too, was born again. But the comparison here is between mere mortals and born again saints. To be born into the kingdom of God through His grace is the greatest of all privileges.

Wisdom is Justified (vv.29-35).

The people revealed a conflict of opinions (vv.29-34). In response to what Jesus said about John, it became obvious that the common people were in conflict with the religious leaders. *When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John (v.29).* This seems to be parenthetical material supplied by Luke through Holy Spirit inspiration.

All the people, including the tax collectors, heard what Jesus said about John. They concluded that God justified John's ministry, vindicated his message. Therefore, they were satisfied that God had proven that He had called and used John. Of course, they had already sided with John, having submitted to His baptism for the repentance of sins. They had already identified themselves as sinners so that all the people saw themselves as no better than Gentiles or, worse, tax collectors.

But not everyone in the crowd agreed with that assessment. *The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (v.30).* The lawyers were the experts on the Law. They interpreted it. In fact, they destroyed it by adding all their personal preferences to it. Most of the lawyers were Pharisees. The Pharisees had rejected John's ministry and baptism. They disagreed that they needed to be identified with repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Jesus illustrated the problem. He spoke of a common scenario. *"To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep'" (vv.31-32).*

Everyone would have observed children playing their games in the market place. Two popular games were the mimicking of popular adult activities, weddings, and funerals. In the illustration, a group of children played a pipe but the others refused to play wedding. So the group of children sang a funeral dirge, but the others refused to play funeral. So what did they want to do? What can satisfy them?

Jesus applied the principle. John played funeral and the people didn't like it. *"For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and*

drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'" (v.33). Eating bread and drinking wine was normal daily living. But John didn't eat bread. He had honey and wild locust. John didn't drink wine because He was a Nazarite who had made a vow not to drink wine. Rather, John's message was a call to repentance from sin which sounded like a funeral dirge to the people. John's message was a warning that God was prepared to send judgment against the people's sins.

Jesus played wedding and the people didn't like that. *"The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (v.34).* Unlike John, Jesus attended weddings, banquets, and dinners given in His honor. In fact, the Pharisees criticized Him for celebrating with sinners. In John 2, we find Jesus at a wedding. In Luke 5:29, He was at a banquet Matthew hosted. In Luke 15:2, the tax collectors and sinners drew near and He had meals with them. According to Matthew 26:6, Jesus ate with Simon the leper and He also had a banquet with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:6). Of course, there are three records of Jesus attending funerals (sort of), but He interrupted them by raising the dead.

The people were not satisfied with John, and they were not satisfied with Jesus. What was their problem? Actually, they suffered from the same problem that John was dealing with (though his was much less of a problem). The people failed to embrace wisdom. What did Jesus mean when He said that *"wisdom is justified by all her children" (v.35)?*

First we must identify what wisdom is. The quick definition from Solomon is: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).* Throughout the Old Testament especially, wisdom generally defined is simply the ability to make truth work. However there is supreme wisdom, divine wisdom that begins with a right relationship with God.

Solomon personified the supreme wisdom, the wisdom we find in a right relationship with our Creator (Proverbs 8:22-30). Wisdom was with Yahweh at the beginning of creation (v.22). Before anything was created "Wisdom" already was (v.23). This truth applies to every aspect of creation (vv.23-29). Wisdom was present at creation and involved in it (v.30). From this and other texts, we learn that supreme

wisdom, perfect wisdom is the character of God and, therefore, the essence of His grace. Wisdom says, *For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD (Proverbs 8:35).*

Ultimately then, Wisdom is the Word, the Son of God. Compare what Solomon wrote with what John wrote in the opening of his “Good News.” *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:1-4)*

Therefore, we conclude, to know wisdom is to know Christ. To embrace wisdom is to embrace Christ. By faith we know Christ, love Christ, embrace Christ’s work and depend only and wholly on Him to bring us into right relationship with our Creator. Therefore, *a right relationship with our Creator is found only through Christ who is wisdom (Proverbs 9:10).* Paul taught that same truth. *But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). You are partners with Christ Jesus because of God. Jesus has become our wisdom sent from God, our righteousness, our holiness, and our ransom from sin (1 Corinthians 1:30 GWV)*

That brings us to Messiah’s argument for John and for the people in the crowd. The faith of wisdom is proven in the end. *“Yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (v.35).* Salvation (faith in Christ) is validated by what it produces. Or maybe even a better rendition of the statement is from Matthew’s account: *“Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matthew 11:19).* Salvation (dependance on Christ) will definitely be vindicated in eternity.

Faith in Jesus Christ holds us steady in the face of trials and questions. When faith in Christ wavers, we will doubt. The best cure for doubt is to reaffirm our faith in the truth about Jesus Christ. That kind of faith produces fruit, works, deeds, “children” that bring glory to God.