

Scripture Reading:

Luke 7:16 “Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." **17** And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. **18** Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. **19** And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" **20** When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' " **21** And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. **22** Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. **23** And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." **24** When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning 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 clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. **26** But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. **27** This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' **28** For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." **29** And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. **30** But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. **31** And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? **32** They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not weep.' **33** For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' **34** The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' **35** But wisdom is justified by all her children." ”

The Question from John the Baptist

As with the Centurion who had great faith, both Matthew and Luke give us accounts of John the Baptist sending a question from his jail cell to Jesus. Jesus gives John a simple answer, discusses the ministry of John the Baptist and then gives a sober warning for the disciples and skeptics alike.

- As we study this section we will see that we should be ready and willing to give, AND receive, honest answers to honest questions
- We will see that our perspective as Saints in the New Covenant is greater than any in the Old Covenant including John the Baptist
- And finally we will see the importance of heeding Wisdom's calling in our lives!

It has been a special experience to study this passage this week because it is one that I pondered a great deal as a young Christian:

- First it seemed a strange question coming from John the Baptist
- Second, the answer from Jesus seemed strange as well
- Not until I better understood those "crowds" in the Gospels did it make sense.

We have discussed the people who have surrounded Jesus during his ministry and will continue to do so as we proceed thru Luke's Gospel

We have seen:

- Those who are his disciples and loyal followers
- Those who are there for the show
- Those who are the enemies of Jesus

These are not rigid groups, but we see movement in and out of each

- Judas is the betrayer, and other disciples cease to follow when Jesus says they must eat His flesh and drink His blood

- **Some Pharisees are converted like Nicodemus**
- **I believe that many in the crowds are those who in the end are cut to the heart by Peter's sermon on Pentecost**

We discussed how these have interacted with the authority of Jesus, which Luke has focused on:

- **His authority captivates His disciples and followers.**
- **It intoxicates the crowds**
- **It confounds His enemies.**

If we understand all of this, I think we can make better sense of John's question and the Lord's answer, but I have to disclose that it is not a popular position! Commentators down through the ages, even those like John Calvin, have tread lightly when it comes to saying that John was doubting at this point in the ministry of Jesus. John had proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and was present when the Spirit descended on Jesus and the Father declared from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, hear Him."

- **How can this John have come to doubt? -- There must be other options!**
- **If John had doubts then what hope do the rest of us have!**

I will content that John was doubting at this point and was asking an honest question to which Jesus gives an honest answer.

AND I will content that properly understanding what happens here will help us with our doubts and help us instruct our covenant youth.

We can make two mistakes when raising faithful disciples for Jesus [those two cliffs to avoid!] The first wrong approach is what I call "shut-up and believe." Here we teach our children that they are to just accept everything that we say because we say it is so and that asking questions or having doubts is sinful.

The second wrong approach on the other side of the road is more common in America today: Every covenant child must "make their decision for Jesus" and claim the Christian faith as their own!

Here they are allowed to put God in the Dock; putting Him on trial by comparing what He has to say with all the other gods and even atheists! Then they judge with their own wisdom and will what is true.

Both of these are disastrous and in large part account for why the modern church loses so many of their young people.

We saw in the sermon on the faithful Centurion that we are to believe God's promises regarding our covenant children. When they have doubts and when they bring honest questions, we bring them back to their baptisms and their faithful Father in heaven. We remind them that to have faith means that they believe that God created everything there is from nothing, we believe that He is and is the rewarder of those who seek Him. IF we approach God in this way He will give us honest answers to our honest questions.

So what happened with John the Baptist and what can we learn:

I believe that the key is found in verses 17 & 18 of Luke's account that we read last week and again this morning: Remember, this comes right after the miracle at Nain. Here we read: "And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. 18 Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things."

What was reported to John?

- **Not first-hand accounts!**
- **They were passing on the circus reports – same that Herod heard**
- **ProLife 'reports' as an example**

This is what caused John to doubt: These reports did NOT reflect the suffering Messiah that Isaiah had prophesied, the Lamb of God that John had proclaimed. John is honestly saying, "Could I have been wrong?"

- **However, we must note that he is NOT doubting God or His Word: But rather whether he has understood things rightly**

SO, John sends his faithful disciples to ask a straightforward question: Are you the Messiah or should we look elsewhere.

When we see it in this light, then the answer from Jesus make sense:

He is not showing them what they already reported to John, but rather tells them to look at how He is REALLY ministering telling them to take back honest first-hand reports to John with the actual words and deeds of Jesus! They and John would immediately understand that His ministry was exactly what Isaiah said the Messiah would be doing:

From Isaiah 35: “Then the lame shall leap like a deer, the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” and Isaiah 61: “to preach good tidings to the poor, the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

Jesus then gives John a gentle warning, reminding him that “blessed is he who is not offended because of me.” Again, we must believe that God is and is the rewarder of those who seek Him even when we don’t fully understand everything! This offense is what caused many of the disciples to turn back when Jesus taught them about what real union with Him would involve.

- **The disciples of John carry the answer back to John and then Jesus goes on to discuss the ministry of John the Baptist.**

We have covered most of this during the prologue of Luke’s Gospel, but I don’t want us to miss the conclusion that Jesus draws near the end:

In verse 28 we read: “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

The commentators give many opinions as to what Jesus means here, but I think it is best to accept it as a straightforward statement about the coming of the Kingdom! Jesus has come to save His people from their sins and to establish His Kingdom.

Of all the Saints who lived under the Old Covenant, Jesus here declares that there is none greater than John: He has the fullest understanding, was called to announce the coming of Jesus and he baptized Jesus in the Jordan witnessing one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the Trinity in all of Scripture.

HOWEVER, even John did not fully see the salvation that Jesus would bring His people in His death burial and resurrection!

We in the New Covenant know and see clearly what the Old Covenant Saints could only see through a glass darkly: As the Book of Hebrews states right at the beginning: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son”

- **This is why Jesus considers the least among us as Saints of the New Covenant to be “greater than John the Baptist.”**

This is a second great lesson for all of us and especially for our covenant young people:

- **Our calling in the Christian life is to simply BE who we are truly in Jesus!**
- **And just as the Book of Hebrews has severe warnings for us as God’s Saints, so Jesus has warnings for those who do not take His teachings seriously.**

First He uses children to explain how difficult and obstinate some of the religious leaders have been:

- **They rejected John and now they are rejecting Jesus.**

Jesus puts them in their place by comparing them to play-yard children who will not be pleased! -- *Give an account of play* --

- **Here is another great lesson for us and our covenant youth: We must be teachable!**

An important part of rightly asking honest questions is that we are willing to LISTEN to the honest answers given and to be taught!

An important part of wanting help is being willing to accept help that is offered and a willingness to change our ways when needed!

- **Jesus finishes His discourse with a simple and direct statement that should have cut to the heart of all those who were present:**

Verse 35: “But wisdom is justified by all her children.”

The religious leaders and most in the crowds, would have been very familiar with the Book of Proverbs as we certainly should be as well.

In chapters one through eight, Lady Wisdom is compared with the harlot and Jesus is simply reminding them:

- **That He is Wisdom in the flesh**
- **God's Wisdom will prevail!**

We have a contrast between John who came with an honest question, willing to be taught, and the rebellious Pharisees who will not listen no matter what is said.

- **If we are not sure which camp we are in , then we should listen carefully to the call of wisdom given in Proverbs chapter one:**

20 "Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. 21 She cries out in the chief concourses, at the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: 22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?" [or fools loving foolishness] "For scorers delight in their scorning, And fools hate knowledge. 23 Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

24 Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, 25 Because you disdained all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, 27 When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. 28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. 29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord, 30 They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke. 31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. 32 For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them;

33 But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil."

- **We will all face those times where we lose our way and even doubt our salvation**

If we turn away or are just complacent at that point God's Word says that it will bring destruction—

BUT, if we listen to Jesus, not only will He rightly answer our honest questions: We have HIS promise that we will dwell safely, be secure, and without fear of evil!

Let us be a people of great faith who LISTEN to Jesus!

Communion Meditation:

What follows in Matthews accounts...

More warnings and then a prayer:

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. **26** Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. **27** 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 the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. **28** Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** 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. **30** For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."