

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. David Pulman

Luke's Gospel: Jesus and John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-35)

Good morning. We are continuing in Luke 7 and this morning we will consider the central section of the chapter, Luke 7:18-35.

Recap from last week

Let us recap where we ended last week. We ended with the raising from the dead a young man as he was being carried to a cemetery for burial (Luke 7:11-17). The young man was restored to his widowed mother alive and well. The news of this and other miracles that the Lord Jesus had done was being reported around the country (Luke 7:16-17). Even the disciples of John the Baptist reported to John the works of the Lord Jesus (Luke 7:18).

Background

We need to look at the background, John was currently in prison, incarcerated by king Herod (see Matthew 14:3). John, who was always forthright in proclaiming what was right and wrong, had admonished Herod about his immoral activities. John had specifically told Herod he was wrong in stealing away another man's wife (see Matthew 14:4). Herod had therefore apprehended John and placed him in prison. John was now reliant upon his disciples to keep him informed of the progress and activities of the Lord Jesus. It is at this point that we start today's radio talk.

John's concern

Let us read Luke 7:18-19, *"Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. 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?'"* We should remind ourselves that John had proclaimed the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah: Luke 3:4 states, *"Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight."*

Although the Lord Jesus was doing many mighty works and multitudes flocked to hear Him or be healed by Him, there was no sign of the establishment of the looked-for kingdom. When the Lord Jesus was presented in the temple as a small baby, an old man called Simeon had held Jesus in his arms (see Luke 2:25-35). Among the many things Simeon said in his praise to God, as he gazed on the Infant Jesus, was, *"the glory of Your people Israel"* (Luke 2:32). Simeon saw in Jesus the fulfilment of all God's promises. So it is little wonder that John also held to the same conclusions and yet it was not happening in the way he thought it should!

This is a lesson for us. We sometimes have preconceived ideas of how God should be working and then we discover that things are not working out the way we expected. God appears to be doing things differently and things are working out contrary to our own expectations. It is hard sometimes to realise that we have got on the wrong track and we need to realign ourselves to where God wants us to be. This, apparently, seems to be the difficulty for John - he is in prison and there is no sign of the kingdom being established. Therefore, John sent two disciples to Jesus with a question. John is looking for answers. There will no doubt be times in our lives when we need to turn to the Lord Jesus, looking for answers!

The Lord's Answer

John's disciples came to the Lord Jesus and faithfully relayed John's message, *"They said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'"* (Luke 7:20). From Luke 7:21 it appears that the Lord Jesus had been very active. Let us read the verse, *"And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight."* Although not specifically stated, these two disciples witnessed what the Lord Jesus was doing at that very moment. We read that many were cured of infirmities, afflictions and evil spirits and to many blind He gave them their sight. This would take time to witness. With the Lord Jesus it was not just the occasional ill person; here it is many with all kinds of problems. God's people, the nation of Judah, were in a sad state both physically, spiritually and possibly morally too. In Deuteronomy 7:11-15 we read these promises from God for His people Israel, *"Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep*

and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the LORD will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you."

From these verses we see the promised spiritual, material and physical blessing for an obedient people. But what do we see while the Lord Jesus was here? Just the opposite! A people ruled over by another nation, a Gentile nation. A puppet king Herod ruling the actual nation under the authority of Rome but who was a descendant of the Edomite nation. And they were not free from disease and many other afflictions. So we can well understand John's concern. Everything was still a mess. It is just the same today; the nations of the world, ours included, are in a mess in every sphere of life and it is all because God and the Lord Jesus are rejected.

The Lord Jesus, however, was unperturbed and first demonstrates another aspect of God's kingdom. The Lord's power demonstrates His Messiahship. Secondly the kingdom would be in the hearts of His disciples and then the Lord Jesus gives a very personal message to be relayed back to John. Let us read Luke 7:22-23, *"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. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."* In this way, the Lord Jesus reaffirms who He is and that John and his disciples do not need to look for anyone else. No doubt this would provide the assurance and comfort John needed as he sat in his prison cell. It would encourage John's disciples also.

We, too, might wonder why there is so much wrong, evil and so many destructive forces in the world. It is not unusual to hear people say "Why has God allowed this to happen?" And yet it is not God but people who are destructive and do so many evil things in this world. Asaph, in Psalm 73, expressed the same type of concerns, but when he drew near to God in the sanctuary he then realised the end of the wicked, see Psalm 73:17.

The Lord gives testimony to John

Let us read Luke 7:24-26. *"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? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who are gorgeously apparelled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.'"* The first thing to notice is that the Lord Jesus lets John's disciples depart before turning to the crowd and He asked them a number of searching questions concerning John the Baptist. The Lord first challenged their motives when they went out into the wilderness. Was it someone of no importance? Was it of significance? If significant, was it only temporary like a reed moving in the wind?

Again, the Lord Jesus challenges the crowd. Did you expect someone who would display wealth and power by his clothing and where he actually lived? John, we know from Matthew 3 and Luke 3, seemed to spend a lot of his time in the wilderness and his clothing was rough, made from camel's hair. People went to John in this wilderness setting. He did not seem to venture into the towns and cities. The Lord Jesus said that if the people wanted to see those who were well dressed and lived in luxury then they needed to go to the courts of kings.

With the third and final challenge as to their motive for going out into the wilderness the Lord also provides the answer with His last question. A prophet? But the Lord Jesus was not going to leave the crowd with this general answer that John was a prophet. The Lord gives testimony that John was *"more than a prophet"* (Luke 7:26). What did the Lord Jesus mean by such a statement? Of all the prophets John was someone special. We only need to read again the early chapters of Luke's gospel to see how special John was.

The Lord's summary of His special prophet

Let us read Luke 7:27-28, *"This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' 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 Lord Jesus takes His quote from Isaiah 40 and presents the Old Testament scripture as that which spoke of John as a messenger - a messenger who was coming just before the Messiah to make the people ready to receive their Messiah. The Lord Jesus makes a number of points about John. These are:

1. John was the subject of prophecy, *"This is he"*;
2. John had a specific role as a prophet, *"of whom it is written"*;

3. John was Jehovah's messenger, "*I send My messenger*";
4. John was coming just before the Lord Jesus, "*before your face*"; and
5. John's function, "*who will prepare Your way before You*".

The Lord Jesus recognises and speaks of John as a very special person and that he was the greatest of prophets. In Luke 1, John's father, Zacharias, spoke of his son at his birth in this way, "*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways*" (Luke 1:76-77). After this broadcast it would be good to read again the praise of Zacharias as he celebrated the birth of his son in Luke 1:67-80. However, we find the Lord Jesus indicating that there was something better - being in the kingdom of God.

John's work was preparing the people to be ready to receive their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's work was to bring people spiritually into the kingdom of God. The kingdom physically was, and is, not yet. But some day for Israel and the whole world the kingdom will come about and the Lord Jesus will be its King and Lord.

The impact of John's preaching

Let us read Luke 7:29-30, "*And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.*" In Luke 7:29-30 we have those who accepted John's message and those who rejected what John had to say. In the Pharisees and lawyers we have the upper class, educated and religiously correct. The people and even the tax collectors were considered to be uneducated, lower class, irreligious and, in the case of tax collectors, also traitors because they worked for the Romans. John's message was a leveller of men: all were sinners and needed to repent and to be baptised to show the reality of their repentance to all around. Pharisees, lawyers and others of a similar standing found the thought of being a sinner a hard pill to swallow, whereas when you find yourself at the bottom of the pile and everyone and everything seems to be against you, then the message that brings deliverance and something better is much easier to accept.

Those who repented and were baptised were declaring that God was right in His condemnation of their sin. What we need today are more people who say God is right instead of trying to find ways around God's straightforward declarations of what is right and what is wrong. Satan has been using people, as he always has done, to counter God's word. So much so that we have legislation which directly opposes God's clear instructions and standards as found in His word.

The Lord's assessment of the current generation

Let us read Luke 7:31-35, "*And the Lord said, 'To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? 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." For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, "He has a demon." 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!" But wisdom is justified by all her children.'*"

In these verses the Lord Jesus is speaking to all the people in general. Those we spoke about earlier, in Luke 7:29, as having accepted John's message we would call a godly remnant and, as such, were different from the mass of people to whom the Lord Jesus was now speaking. The Lord uses an illustration of what people in general are like. The Lord calls them children, young children, whose minds and attitudes are often as changeable as the wind. The Lord uses two expressions which represent two extremes, "*We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep.*" John and the Lord were in agreement; John announced the Lord's coming and the Lord came just as John had foretold. They were in accord but the mass of people complained both about John and the Lord Jesus.

John lived his life devoid of any comforts, being in the wilderness. John was clothed simply and ate plain food. There was nothing extravagant about John and he was certainly not seeking to amass wealth or to become a popular hero. This was in keeping with his serious message which had at heart the blessing of the people under the coming reign of the Messiah. John, however, was unaware of the fact that the people and their rulers would reject and crucify their Messiah. The Lord Jesus in His public ministry brought a different approach to His message. The Lord, being both God and man in one person, came to accomplish many things.

1. The work of salvation;
2. The Lord demonstrated that God was accessible;
3. No one was out of reach of the Saviour, high or low, man or woman, adult or child;
4. The untouchables He touched to heal their leprosy;
5. The dead He restored to life;
6. The incurables He cured;

7. Demons were no match for the Lord; He broke their power;
8. Creation bowed to His commands;
9. He was rightly worshipped as God; and
10. He declared the Trinity and announced that the Father was seeking worshippers (see John 4:23).

As we close with Luke 7:35 we find that those who act wisely will become proof of what is right. A wise person believes God, accepts the Lord Jesus for who He is, acts upon the words of the Saviour and believes in Him to the saving of their own soul. They know that this brings eternal forgiveness concerning their sin and results in an eternal peace which is both a present reality and goes on into eternity.

Conclusion

To conclude our talk this morning, let me briefly recap what we have covered:

1. Make sure we always seek to be guided by Scripture and not sidetracked by our own thoughts;
2. We are to be witnesses in a world which is so badly wrong. Only when the Lord returns in power will this world be put right;
3. As we make the Gospel message known, God will bring blessing; His word never fails;
4. The Lord gave testimony to John. The New Testament encourages faithful service now and promises rewards in a coming day as God is no man's debtor; and
5. We must be prepared that some will refuse the Gospel message and persecute the Lord's servants. They did the same to John and to the Lord Jesus.

Are we prepared to live the challenging Christian life?

In closing a few verses from a poem by Mrs J D Gleghorn, its title being, "A Day's March Nearer Home."

*"To waken in the morning
And find that Thou art there,
Listening intently
To my every prayer
For guidance and endurance
In the tasks of each new day,
Feeling Thy loving presence
With me all the way.*

*So as on the threshold
Of another day I stand,
To ask for grace and mercy
From Thine own loving hand,
Thy strength imparted to me
If weakness I should feel,
Thy peace to calm my spirit
And all Thy love reveal.*

*Help me to witness for Thee
As through each day I go,
To glorify my Saviour
And love to others show,
Till when I end life's story
And my work on earth is done,
With joy I shall behold Thee,
God's well beloved Son."*

May the Lord bless and encourage you all this day. Thank you for listening.

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