

### The Lord's Comments on The Ministry of John the Baptist

#### Luke 7:18-35

*Luke 7:18-35: 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."*

#### Background Notes

Matthew 11, the parallel passage, says that at this time John the Baptist was imprisoned in Machaerus, the southernmost stronghold built by Herod the Great on the east side of the Dead Sea. From his prison John sent two of his own disciples to ask the Lord if He was the Messiah - or were they still waiting for the Messiah? Why would John the Baptist express doubts? Had he lost faith and given up because he was in prison?

No, John hadn't lost faith. John's problem was that things weren't going the way he had expected they would go. After all, John had announced that the Kingdom was at hand. He probably expected that once he had introduced the Messiah, it wouldn't be long before Jesus would take over as King and set up the glorious earthly kingdom that was predicted in the Old Testament. Instead, John was arrested and put in prison, and Rome was still in power. The Lord's program and

timetable were not exactly what John had envisioned. So John the Baptist did the right thing. He sent his honest doubts right to the Lord for some answers.

We should do the same. There's nothing wrong with having honest doubts and questions. We all have doubts - especially when our good plans or life events are not going as we expected, or our lives take a tragic turn. We should bring these honest doubts and questions to the Lord and ask Him to answer them. And He will answer us - maybe not immediately, and maybe not as comprehensively as we expect, but He will answer them.

The answer John the Baptist received from the Lord was a quotation from Old Testament prophetic Scripture. After John's disciples saw some of the healing miracles of Jesus, the Lord told the two disciples to go back to John and say, *"the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor hear the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of me."* These are quotations from the Messianic prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah 35:5-6 says, *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert."* And also Isaiah 61:1, *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives."*

The Lord quoted these Messianic prophecies in response to John's question. In other words, the Lord said: "John, here's your answer. Yes, I am indeed the Messiah. The Messianic predictions are being fulfilled. Even though things are not going exactly as you envisioned, don't let that stumble you." Although John the Baptist did not get out prison, his doubts were removed. As the Lord answered the doubts and questions of John the Baptist with Scripture, so, many times the Lord will clear up our doubts and questions with Scripture. Therefore - read and study God's Word every day!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Believers today are "greater" than John the Baptist.

*Verse 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."* That almost sounds heretical, doesn't it? Let me ask you: are you in the Kingdom of God? You say, "Yes, but I'm not a very great Christian." In other words, you realize that you're one of the least in the Kingdom of God. Well, on the authority of Luke 7:28, you're greater than John the Baptist.

What did Jesus mean by the statement, *"He who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he"*? Let's take the first part of the verse first. Jesus said, *"I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."* That's quite a commendation, isn't it? Think of all those Old Testament saints like Abraham, Moses, David,

Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel and many more! John the Baptist was greater than all these heroes of the faith.

In what way was John the Baptist greater than everyone before him? Like many of the prophets who preceded him, John the Baptist was a man of great conviction and commitment. He was not like a plant that bends whatever way the wind blows. And John the Baptist was a man of great sacrifice – he didn't live in comfort and luxury.

John the Baptist was greater than anyone before him because of his **mission**. He was the forerunner of the Messiah. He was God's special messenger prophesied in Malachi 3:1 (quoted here in verse 27). It is significant that Malachi 3:1 says "*Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me*" - whereas when Luke quoted Malachi's prophecy, we read, "*And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face who will prepare Your way before You.'*" In other words, the "Me" of Malachi's prophecy, who is obviously the Lord God, is also the "You" in Luke 6:27. Jesus Christ is the Lord God of the Old Testament! This Scripture is another proof of the deity of Christ.

"...*he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist*"? In what way is every Christian greater than John the Baptist? We are certainly not greater in character or mission! No, but we are greater in **privilege**. John the Baptist was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the way that He indwells every believer today. John the Baptist was not part of the Church, the Body of Christ - but believers today have the privilege of being part of the **Body of Christ** here on this earth. Old Testament believers all looked forward to the great focus of history, the coming of Christ, but we have a clearer knowledge of the purpose for Jesus' death and resurrection. Believers today are privileged to live in the "fullness of time," now that Jesus Christ has come and His work on the cross has been completed. Believers today are greater than John the Baptist.

## 2. Unbelievers today are like spoiled brats!

A "brat" is an ill-mannered, annoying child – and the Lord said that's exactly what the unbelievers of His generation were like. Verses 31-32: "...*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.'*" Just as unhappy, obstinate children don't want to play make-believe games with their friends, so the generation to whom Jesus spoke was like a bunch of uncooperative children - wayward and perverse, refusing to respond to any approach from God.

John the Baptist was an austere and ascetic prophet - and they wrongly accused him of having a demon. The Lord ate with and related to the "tax collectors and sinners" - and they wrongly accused him of being a glutton and drunkard. The hearts of the unbelieving generation of Jesus' day were hardened. They would not respond to the truth.

This is still true today. For example, this unbelieving generation finds fault with Christians who reach out and try to bring help to people. They're told to mind their own business. At the same time, this unbelieving generation accuses Christians of not reaching out to help people. We can't win! Many other examples can be given.

Unbelievers are like unhappy, dissatisfied, obstinate, perverse children. Although this is not true of every unbeliever, of course, it is in general characteristic of this unbelieving generation. Unbelievers today are like spoiled brats.

## **Practical Application**

### **Let's be "children of wisdom."**

In verse 35, the Lord said, "*But wisdom is justified by all her children.*" What did the Lord mean by that statement? In the context, He meant that the disciples who were following the wisdom of His teaching and the teaching of John the Baptist, were proof of the correctness of this teaching. Even though the majority of the population (including the religious leaders) did not believe, the minority who did believe proved that the scribes and Pharisees were wrong and the Lord and John were right. Why? Because the lives and lifestyles of these folks were changed as a result of the teaching. Love and holiness and justice now characterized them.

Today, the Lord and His Word are still wisdom. When we follow the Lord and His Word, we are "children of wisdom." We are proof of the truth of His teaching because our lives are radically changed. At least they should be, if we are truly children of wisdom!

Let's be children of wisdom!