

Wisdom's Children

Luke 7:24-35

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When Jesus left his life of obscurity in Nazareth, he went directly to the shores of the river Jordan to be baptized by John. It is significant that Jesus did not seek out the high priest in Jerusalem, nor did he look to submit to the Sanhedrin, the body of elders who oversaw all social and religious activity in Israel. No, Jesus submitted to John, and he did so because that was where God was at work, and not within the religious structure at Jerusalem. John ministered from the wilderness, and not the temple or the palace of the high priest. John did not attend the local rabbinic schools. John had a word from heaven, not from men. John had been baptized in the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, and the time had come for the Spirit-anointed ministry of this, the last and greatest of the Old Covenant prophets to thunder out the truth of God to a people steeped in religious delusion and falsehood. Here's the central point: Jesus submitted to John because that is where God was at work. The question before us today is: Do we know where God is at work today, or are we simply adhering to religious routine?

Those who hungered and thirsted for a word from God went out to John in the wilderness. They went out to see and hear a prophet. They did not go out to see a "reed shaken in the wind," likely a reference to the double-minded hypocrisy of king Herod. Nor did the people go out to see a man dressed in soft garments as would be found in the palace of the high priest. If one was looking simply to associate with worldly power and religion, Herod and Caiaphas (the high priest) were the men to see. But if one longed for a word from God, then it was to the wilderness one must go. To hear from God, the people had to leave the comfort of their homes and make the journey to shores of the Jordan to hear the prophet. But this was no ordinary prophet. John was the forerunner who was prophesied to come before the messiah: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before you" (Luke 7:27; Malachi 3:1). Jesus said there was no greater prophet than John; excepting only the one who is least in the kingdom of God (7:28). Even the least of God's people are prophets in the sense that they possess the prophetic word.

All the people who heard John agreed he was speaking for God, and they submitted to his baptism of repentance. This was a baptism usually reserved for Gentile converts. In essence,

John was telling Israel, “You are no better than the pagan nations. Your ethnic heritage as children of Abraham will not save you from the wrath to come. You need to repent and seek the mercy and salvation of God just like any rank pagan.” Luke tells us, “And when all the people heard him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized by him.” In other words, even those deemed by the religious establishment as beyond saving recognized the voice of God in John, and they submitted. This means people who found only scorn and contempt by the religious elite, instead found the hope of salvation in John’s preaching.

But we then read, “But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him” (v.30). This is noteworthy. For what Luke is telling us is that the Pharisees and experts in the law felt no need for the hope offered by John’s ministry. The Authorized Version reads, “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.” The Pharisees and experts in the law had their own program for salvation, and as insane as it sounds, they felt no need of God’s program. The counsel of their own hearts usurped the counsel of God. Jesus therefore had something to say to them. He called them childish, incorrigible, game-players (v.31-34). But those who heard and submitted to the counsel of God through John, Jesus referred to as wisdom’s children.

The lesson here is there are only two resources available to you: the counsel of God or the counsel of man-made religion. One leads to salvation, the other leaves you to face the wrath of God in your resources. This is what faced the people of Israel during the ministry of John and Jesus: hear and submit to the saving word of God, or face the wrath of God by relying on yourself. The Pharisees and experts in the law chose to rely on their own merits. And this choice stands the same for all people today as well. Each path is offered as wisdom. It is not as though the man-made religion says, “Follow us to hell.” No, they say, “We have wisdom. We know the way of salvation.” So then, if both the counsel of God and the counsel of men present as wisdom, how can one know which is which? In other words, how can one know if one is among wisdom’s children, as Jesus said, or among the children of folly as were the Pharisees and lawyers?

Following Heavenly Wisdom

Our immediate text provides precious discernment as to whether one is among wisdom’s children or not. First, just because a religious organization enjoys wealth and status within the world, does not ensure that organization speaks for God. Indeed, most of today’s leading false

teachers and religious scoundrels are very wealthy people. They have large organizations funneling millions of dollars of donations into their accounts each year. Just because an organization is popular with the masses does not mean it has God's approval. And, this is important now, just because a religious tradition proports to be the one and only true Church, and possesses a clerical hierarchy said to date back to the apostles, means nothing regarding whether there is a saving word from God within that tradition. Period. Jerusalem held the center of power and tradition and yet was a den of thieves, a brood of vipers, and had rejected the counsel of God.

Second, the religious spirit of this world is also chronically immature. There is no spiritual maturity within man-made religion just as there is no freedom from sin and death (Colossians 2:23). And this chronic immaturity shows up as mindless criticism; wherever there is a religious spirit there is a critical spirit as well. You can't win with this religious spirit. John was said to have a demon because of his temperance in food and drink. Jesus was said to be a drunkard and a glutton because he ate and drank with "tax collectors and sinners." I have met many people like this; "contrarians" some people call them. They profess Christ, they attend church, but they are childish and mean. They criticize others; they criticize the ministry; they find fault with everyone, but themselves. It is hard to be around them, they sap a fellowship of any safety, warmth, and Christian kindness. They are children not of heavenly wisdom, but of the wisdom of this age.

Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom

Those who heard and submitted to the counsel of God in the ministries of John, and then of Jesus, proved themselves to be wisdom's children. But the Pharisees and experts in the law followed a wisdom sourced in the demonic. But keep in mind, the Pharisees and lawyers were considered by the average Jew to be the most righteous of the righteous. The Pharisees loved to receive greetings in the market place, of "Rabbi, rabbi." They loved the place of honor in the synagogue gatherings. But their religion led only to destruction.

The epistle of James tells us of two forms of wisdom. At James 3:13-18, we read:

Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-

seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. ¹⁷But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Here we have a clear presentation of the character of those who abide in heavenly wisdom as opposed to those who abide in demonic, though very religious, wisdom. The leading characteristic of those who walk in heavenly wisdom is meekness. The meek are wise. This reminds us of the beatitude: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). The future new heaven and new earth belong to the meek. The truly wise conduct themselves in good deeds, but not to draw attention, nor to earn divine merit, but because such conduct is in accord with the heavenly wisdom they possess. The character of heavenly wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Do you know any Christian who bears such wisdom? If you do, you probably do not know very many. Let me press the issue: Do these traits define your character? Far more common among professing Christians today are those traits James defines as: bitter envy, self-seeking, earthly, sensual, demonic, all of which produce only confusion and “every evil thing.” If we are to be honest, most of what is called Christianity today is defined by the latter group of characteristics. And this is a very sobering assessment. But it is also an opportunity for every church and every individual to assess their own state, and if necessary, return to that wisdom which is from above.

Summary and conclusion

When the time was fulfilled, the forerunner, John the Baptist came preaching, but not in the temple, nor the palaces of the rich and powerful, but in the wilderness. The religion of first-century Israel was an apostate religion which stood opposed to the counsel of God while claiming to represent God, just as so many do today. And while doctrinal statements, creeds, and confessions can be useful, it is not by these things that wisdom’s children are recognized. What defines wisdom’s children is the hunger and thirst for the prophetic word of God which was first thundered by the prophets (of whom John was the greatest), and then by the Lord Jesus and his apostles. For this heavenly word transforms those who hear it and act upon it. And having

received the wisdom which is from above, this wisdom produces a heavenly, Christ-like character in those who possess it.

This means the child of God must discern and reject that wisdom which is from below for it is sourced and energized in the demonic. It may look good, it may sound Christian, but scratch the surface and you find envy, bitterness, and every evil thing. It is of great comfort therefore to know that such religion is a lie, and that true heavenly wisdom is available to those who embrace the counsel of God on these matters. And that counsel is by life in the Spirit, through the word of God, *and* in healthy, loving fellowship—which admittedly, is difficult to find in today’s Christian scene. But we can pray. We can ask God for provision of these things. And most of all, we can determine to be people who walk in heavenly wisdom, and exam ourselves in order to be free of that which is from below. **AMEN.**

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