



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

“Are You the One?”

Sermon Notes

Luke 7:18-23

April 15, 2012

“¹⁸ The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹ 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?” ²⁰ 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?’” ²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² 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, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

- On Monday, January 8, 2007, 13 year-old Ben Ownby when missing from his home in Beaufort, Missouri. Fearing the worst, his family immediately contacted the authorities, and FBI was soon called in on the case. On Friday of the same week – just four days later – law enforcement officers raided a ground-floor apartment in Kirkwood, Missouri, a St. Louis suburb, and found young Ben alive. The apartment belonged to 41 year-old Michael Devlin, the manager of a local pizza parlor.
- But what (or rather, who) the found in Devlin’s apartment, along with Ben Ownby, would shock our entire nation. That is, when law enforcement entered Devlin’s home, they found not only Ben Ownby, another young boy – 15 year-old Shawn Hornbeck. Although Ben had been missing for four days, Shawn had been missing for over four years!
- As details of Shawn Hornbeck’s four year ordeal began to emerge, one of the most shocking truths was that he was essentially “hidden in plain sight” as the media would later report. In fact, immediately after his abduction in October 2002, Shawn’s parents began an intense search for their son, enlisting 1,600 volunteers, putting Shawn’s face on fliers, in the news, and on billboards. His parents even appeared on the Montel Williams Show.

- Little did his parents know that he wasn't "in an isolated cabin in the mountains of Utah," but was living in an apartment complex less than 60 miles from his home. In fact, Michael Devlin even permitted Hornbeck to ride his bike and play with other children in the complex. On one occasion, a resident in the apartment even commented about how similar Shawn looked to pictures of "Shawn Hornbeck" that were seen on the news and around the area.
- Thankfully the stories of Shawn Hornbeck and Ben Ownby ended in them being reunited with their families.

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- But, as we turn to the pages in Scripture, we see something interesting – another case of being "hidden in plain sight." That is, our Lord Jesus Christ, when He "became incarnate from the virgin Mary and was made man" was rejected, ironically, by those who were anticipating a Messiah the most.
 - Furthermore, Christ perfectly fulfilled what was promised about Him in the Old Testament, and he was rejected by the people who knew the Old Testament Scriptures the best. In other words, when Christ came, all of the signs were there, pointing to Him as the long-awaited Coming One. Yet, the religious establishment still did not recognize Him as the "Messiah."
 - Surprisingly, as well, even those who would become Christ's most devoted followers, went through periods of uncertainty and doubt regarding our Lord's identity.
 - And this morning, we read of one of these individuals – John the Baptist.

- I. John's Question**
- II. John's Circumstances**
- III. Jesus' Actions**
- IV. Jesus' Response**

I. John's Question

“¹⁸The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹calling 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?” ²⁰And 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?’””

- We read in Verse 18, the John's disciples reported to him "all these things." That is, the disciples of John the Baptist were informing him of the miracles such as the healing of the Centurion's servant in Capernaum and the raising of the widow's son at Nain.

- After they informed John of the work of Christ, Luke writes, “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?””
 - It is noteworthy that John sent two of his disciples to Jesus.
 - In fact, it likely reflects John’s commitment to the Old Testament. For, by sending two witnesses, he very well may be intentionally acting in accordance with Deuteronomy 19:15 (“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”).
 - This may also demonstrate John’s sincere desire to know the truth.
- Then, Luke writes, ²⁰ *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?’”*
 - The witnesses/representatives sent by John are shown to be faithful men, as they ask the exact question of Jesus that John told them to ask.

II. John’s Circumstances

- In order to understand the background behind John’s question, it is important to understand his circumstances.
 - When we read of John the Baptist here, we know that he has been in prison for months, maybe even as long as a year.
 - Matthew (14:1-12) and Mark (6:14-29) both give an account of John’s imprisonment and eventual execution at the hands of Herod Antipas.
 - Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and ruler of Galilee and Perea (Luke 3:1).
 - As we read in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 6:17-18), John rebuked Herod for his unlawful marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip.

Mark 6:17-20: ¹⁷ For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.” ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.”

- Infuriated by his condemnation, Herodias purposed to have John put to death. However, Herod recognized John “was a righteous and holy man,” and therefore, feared him.
- Instead of beheading John, Herod held him as a prisoner at his summer palace at Machaerus (according to Josephus), just east of the Dead Sea on a hill overlooking it.
- According to Matthew (Matthew 9:14), when John was imprisoned, several of his (John’s) disciples followed Jesus, keeping John informed of what Christ was doing (Matthew 11:2).

John’s Doubt

- John’s question to Jesus, likely, reflects some doubt that he had begun to feel regarding the identity of Christ.
- Given John’s current circumstances, it is somewhat understandable how doubts would possibly arise.
- **First of all**, although he was by no means perfect, John had been faithful to his calling as the forerunner of Christ – the one who was to prepare the way for the Lord. Yet, in spite of this, he found himself in a jail cell of a wicked king.
 - In fact, John had been filled by the Spirit from his mother’s womb and was faithful to the Nazirite vow, thus demonstrating his holy separation from the world (Luke 1:15).
 - John, no doubt, found himself in a similar circumstance as Job, wondering how he, a “righteous” man, would be subjected to such suffering and horrible treatment at the hands of men.
- **Secondly**, in the first century, the Jewish establishment had no concept of a suffering Messiah, even though it was clear in passages in the Old Testament (Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53). What the Jews had focused on was the current circumstances as ones under the yoke of Roman tyranny. Consequently, they had developed an entire messianic theology / philosophy that anticipated a warrior-king who would overthrow the occupying pagans.
 - Even though John condemned the Jewish, religious establishment for their drift from the Scriptures; he was likely influenced, at least to some degree, by the common conception of the Messiah.
 - Recall as well that John had proclaimed that **the Coming One would judge** the wicked (Luke 3:16); but, where were Christ’s judgments?

Luke 3:15-16: ¹⁵As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶John answered them all, saying, “I baptize

you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

Isaiah 40:10: “¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”

David Gooding writes, “It was all right his going about healing an odd slave here and raising a widow’s son from the dead there – John had nothing against that. But what about the big issues? When was Jesus going to start putting oppressive governments right? Abolishing evil rulers like Herod? Putting down the Roman tyranny and giving Israel her political independence?”

- **And when was John going to be released from prison?**
- One can understand how John would begin to doubt if Jesus was the Messiah, for we read that Jesus’ ministry was described in Luke 4:18-19 as “freeing captives from prison.”
- In short, Jesus was not shaping up to be the Messiah that Israel – or John the Baptist, for that matter – had expected.
- Some have suggested that John the Baptist’s questions stemmed more from impatience (in what the Lord was doing) than from doubt. Either way, we see that even John struggled with reconciling what Christ was doing with what the Old Testament had promised.

John MacArthur writes, “Illegitimate, unbiblical expectations can only lead to doubt and loss of joy when they are not met.”

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- What is interesting about the Messianic expectations of the first century is that they were, in part, based upon the Old Testament. However, they were formed through the “picking and choosing” of Old Testament texts that were advantageous to the Jews.
 - And, therefore, since their conception of the Messiah was not based fully on the Old Testament, they had **created a god in their own image**.
 - Herein lies one of the most tragic aspects of the Fall: **man will always worship someone or something, but in our fallen state we will always bow before a god that is weak and powerless before we will bow before the Omnipotent and Sovereign King of Creation.**
 - We will create and seek a god that will meet our immediate and selfish desires, even when we ourselves created the god.

- In fact, I have heard it said that **religion is defined as man's attempt to reach up to [or creation of] god; biblical Christianity involves God's gracious condescension to man.**

- We read of the folly of this type of idolatry in **Isaiah 44:6-18**:

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel

and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

“I am the first and I am the last;

besides me there is no god.

⁷ Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and set it before me,

since I appointed an ancient people.

Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.

⁸ Fear not, nor be afraid;

have I not told you from of old and declared it?

And you are my witnesses!

Is there a God besides me?

There is no Rock; I know not any.”

⁹ All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. ¹⁰ Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? ¹¹ Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.

¹² The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. ¹³ The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. ¹⁴ He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. ¹⁵ Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. ¹⁶ Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” ¹⁷ And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!”

¹⁸ They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. ¹⁹ No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” ²⁰ He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?””

- Consequently, one of the most effective cures for doubt is a careful study of the Word of God. When we do this, our understanding is molded by the biblical text, not human invention.

III. Jesus' Actions

²¹ *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.*

- When John's disciples went to Jesus and asked Him about His identity, He could have [rightfully] become angry and sent them away. However, He did not. For, in His grace, He patiently demonstrated to them the truth of who He is in both word and deed.
- Luke writes, "In that hour..." In other words, when they asked Him what John sent them to ask, He "healed many..."
 - Since the eyewitnesses personally saw what Jesus had done, they could faithfully and biblically bear witness to the truth of not only what Jesus said, but what He did as well.
 - The word indicating that Jesus enabled men to see is *echarisato*, from where we get "grace." One scholar translates the passage as "He graced many with sight."
 - It also links the actions of Christ to the Servant of Isaiah 61 (Luke 7:22 also alludes to this passage).

IV. Jesus' Response

²² *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, the poor have good news preached to them."* ²³ *And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."*

- Then, after He demonstrated His power before them, Jesus told the eyewitnesses what to tell John the Baptist:
 - The blind receive their sight
 - The lame walk
 - The lepers are cleansed
 - The deaf hear
 - The dead are raised up
 - The poor have the good news preached to them
 - Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.
- These are not just random miracles Jesus is performing; rather, each of these aspects of His ministry points back to the Old Testament and His faithful fulfillment of it.

[Emphasis added in each passage]:

Isaiah 26:19: ¹⁹ **Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.**

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

For your dew is a dew of light,

and the earth will give birth to the dead.

¹⁹The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah 29:18-19: “¹⁸**In that day the deaf shall hear**
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.”

[The dead are raised]

Daniel 12:2: “²And **many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Isaiah 35:5-6: “⁵**Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,**
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;”

Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;”

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- Even Christ’s last words reflect the fulfillment of an Old Testament passage.

²³*And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*

- The word translated “offended” is the Greek word *skandalon* where we get our word “scandalous.”
- The late Leon Morris writes, “The word translated “takes office” is picturesque. It derives from the trapping of birds, and refers to the action that depresses the bait-stick and so triggers off the trap. It is a colorful way of referring to the cause of trouble.”

Isaiah 8:14-15: “¹⁴And 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. ¹⁵And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

- In other words, the Scriptures make it clear that when God became man, many would reject Him. In fact, the Rock of our Salvation is also the stumbling block for many.
- Many are down-right offended that Jesus claims to be the only Way of Salvation.

- Going back to Isaiah 44, most people would rather worship a weak, created idol than the One true God. In fact, most are actually offended by the worship of Christ.

Romans 9:33: “³³ as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

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- We conclude with the story of John the Baptist’s death.
 - Herod’s wife Herodias despised John the Baptist, wanting him dead. Then, when her opportunity came, she seized it. At a birthday celebration for King Herod, Herodias’s daughter (according to Josephus, Salome) performed a lewd dance before Herod and his guests. As a reward to Salome and in order to impress all of those present, Herod told the girl he would grant her anything she asked for. When she asked her mother what to ask for, Herodias replied, “The head of John the Baptist” (Mark 6:24).
 - Herod then chose to grant the wish and save face rather than follow his “gut,” thus ordering that John the Baptist be beheaded.
 - After John the Baptist’s death, his disciple came and took away his body. Then, according to Matthew (Matthew 14:12), the disciples “went and reported to Jesus.” Therefore, it appears that John the Baptist’s doubts were no longer.
 - May we, too, seek the truth regarding who God is, finding our satisfaction and sufficiency in His Word alone!