



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

More Than Prophet

Sermon Notes

Luke 7:24-35

April 22, 2012

²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell 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 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” ²⁹ (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

³¹ “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.”

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

- For those who have been at GRBC for any length of time, you have heard it said from the pulpit and in Bible studies, countless times, that the purpose of the Old Testament is to point to Christ. That is, in the Old Testament, what we see are types and shadows; and in the New Testament we see the fulfillment (anti-types and substance) that is found in Christ alone.
- Yet, there is one truth regarding this understanding of Scripture that we have not emphasized much, and that is **the seamless continuity** between the two parts of the Bible. It is certainly easy for us to affirm that the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New; however, it is also easy to view both Testaments of Scripture as two chapters that,

although consistent thematically, are unconnected chronologically, separated by 400 years of history. **Yet, like the chapters in any great narrative, there is a beautiful, seamless transition from the Old Testament into the New.**

- And this transition occurs through the introduction of one key figure: **John the Baptist.**
- It is John the Baptist who was, according to Christ, the last of the Old Testament prophets. In fact, as Jesus will explain here in Luke 7, John the Baptist is a unique figure in Redemption History. According to the Lord, “among those born of women none is greater than John.” The reason for this is because, unlike the prophets of Old who merely spoke in terms of distant and far-off types and shadows, John the Baptist – with one foot in the Old covenant – beheld Christ with his own eyes.
- Thus, it is John the Baptist who is the “bridge” between the Old Covenant and the New – between prophecy and fulfillment.
- This morning, Jesus will defend the character and ministry of John the Baptist, ultimately, exalting Himself as the very one to whom John (and all of the Old Testament prophets) pointed.

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I. The Ministry of John the Baptist
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“²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell 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.””

- In this passage, the disciples of John leave to tell him the news about Jesus, and then the Lord turns to the crowd and asks three rhetorical questions that reveal the nature of John’s position as the forerunner of Christ.
- The first of these questions was: **“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”**
 - Of course the answer is, “No.” John was not someone who swayed back and forth, “flip-flopping” in his opinions and teachings based upon the latest public opinion polls.
 - He was not a weak and spineless person who was easily blown about.

- Rather, he was a man of tremendous conviction and fortitude. He proved this multiple times, standing up to the Jewish leaders, calling them “broods of vipers.” He also stood up to King Herod, condemning his unlawful marriage with Herodias.
- Indeed, John was a man of great resolve (“a mighty oak tree, standing firm against the rough and stormy gales of opposition” Philip Ryken), hardly as “reed shaken by the wind.”
- Secondly, the Lord asks, **“What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts.”**
 - Here, the Lord is essentially asking, “Did John’s outer appearance (his “splendid clothing”) bring you out to the wilderness to see him?”
 - Of course, again, the answer is, “No.”
 - If someone wanted to see a person clothed in fine wool or soft linen, they would not go out into the wilderness. They would go to the palace and the king’s court.
- Thirdly, Jesus asks, “What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.”
 - The Lord’s point here is clear: **it was not John’s location (in the wilderness), nor his appearance (“a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist” Matthew 3:4) that drew people to him; but, rather, it was his prophetic message.**
- Then, Jesus explains, in Verse 27:

*This is he of whom it is written,
 “Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
 who will prepare your way before you.”*

- Here, Jesus quotes from **Malachi 3:1**, revealing that John is the fulfillment of the “messenger” spoken of in the last book of the Old Testament.

Malachi 3:1: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”

- Grammatically, there is also likely a parallel to **Exodus 23:20**: ^{c20} Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.”
 - In the Exodus account, the passage speaks of the angel of the Lord who was sent before the people to guard and protect them on the Promised Land of Canaan.

Exodus 14:19: ¹⁹ Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them,
 - To follow the cloud from God meant to trust His provision and protection; however, refusal to follow would result in God’s wrath (Exodus 14:19; 32:34; 33:2).

Darrell Bock writes, “The image [here], influenced as it is by Exodus 23:20, looks at a pattern that pictures the new exodus. The prophet of Malachi 3 [“my messenger”] is compared to the protection that God gave his people by leading them through the wilderness. To respond to John is to be prepared for God’s coming in messiah and to be protected; failure to respond results in judgment.”

- **So, just as the angel of the LORD went before the people and led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land, John goes before the people leading them to the Kingdom of God.**
- There is, most definitely, a parallel that we see in Scripture between the work of Moses in the Exodus and the work of John in the “new exodus.”
 - Moses led the nation of Israel out of bondage in Egypt through the Red Sea and into the wilderness.
 - In fact, the Apostle Paul speaks of the Red Sea crossing in terms of a “baptism”:

“¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

- **And so, just as Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea, into the wilderness and toward the Promised Land, so John the Baptist led his followers into the wilderness, through the Jordan River (in baptism) and toward the Promised One, the Coming One, Jesus Christ. The parallels are unmistakable.**

II. The Greatness of John the Baptist

²⁸ *I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*”

- Jesus then, describing the nature of John’s ministry, makes a rather bold statement, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.”
 - At first glance, this statement by Christ could be seen as elevating John the Baptist because of *what he did*. But, that is simply not the case.
 - Christ is calling John great **as a function of his place in Redemption history**.
 - Unlike the prophets of Old who saw and spoke of only types and shadows, John spoke of the Coming One, **and saw Him with his own eyes!**
 - Because of this, John was great and “more than a prophet.”
- Then, consistent with his assessment of John (as a function of his place in history), Jesus states, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [greater than *John*].”
 - His point, once again, is clear: John is “great” because of his position with respect to Jesus. [To put it another way: it is Jesus who makes John “great”]. In the same way, the “least” in the kingdom is the one who receives the benefits of the work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the “least in the kingdom” is greater than John, also because of Jesus.
 - In other words, those who are “least” in the kingdom of God are those who, through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and are justified by God through faith in Christ alone.
 - It is certainly not that John the Baptist (and every Old Testament prophet and saint before him) was not a part of the Kingdom of God, it was simply that in his life he did not yet have the full benefits of what Christ came to offer every subsequent believer [not to mention the full and final revelation of God in the completed canon of Scripture].

III. The Fruit of John the Baptist

²⁹ *(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)³¹ “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,*

*“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.”*

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

- Then, Luke writes:

²⁹ (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

- Luke describes the crowd as dividing into two groups: (1) "the people" and "the tax collectors"; and (2) the Pharisees and the lawyers.
- The first group, Luke writes, "when they heard this...they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John."
 - First of all, these were the "tax collectors," those who were considered "outcasts in the Jewish culture."
 - Yet, when they heard the words of Jesus, these outcasts, "declared God just."
 - In other words, they declared God's position that all men are fallen and deserving of His wrath as just, true, and correct. That is, they agreed with God's declaration of man's sinfulness and separation from God.

Philip Ryken writes, "They declared that God was just. In other words, they admitted that God was right about their sin and about everything else. The proof that they were willing to confess their sins was the baptism of repentance that they received from John."

Norval Geldenhuys agrees: "they acknowledged that before God they were guilty and worthy of condemnation and that he was fully justified in demanding from them confession of sins and true repentance, not in word only, but outwardly and publicly undergoing the baptism of John."

- Luke goes on to say that "they declared God just, ***having been baptized with the baptism of John...***"
 - The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance that anticipated the Coming One, the Messiah. John spoke of God's coming judgment and wrath, calling people to repent of their sins, turn from their wicked ways, and put their trust in the Coming Messiah. As a symbol of their humility and repentance, John then called them to baptism in the River Jordan.

- Thus, the people and the tax collectors responded to the wisdom of God and their need for repentance.
- The truth that they submitted to baptism was also quite significant.

John MacArthur writes, "...John's baptism [did not] produce forgiveness, for no ritual can accomplish that. And while there were various ceremonial washings in Judaism, there was no baptism of Jews. But while there was no baptism of Jews in Judaism, the Jews did baptize Gentile converts to Judaism. Thus, those who "were being baptized by [John] in the Jordan River...", were publicly acknowledging that they were no better than Gentiles [in the eyes of God]. Their sins separated them from the true and living God and cut them off from covenant blessings. **For Jewish people to place themselves on the same level as the despised Gentiles was astonishing...**"

- Secondly, the... *"the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."*
 - Luke is clear that the Pharisees and lawyers "rejected the purpose of God for themselves." In other words, they **rejected that they needed to repent of their sins and submit to John's baptism.**
 - Like so many Jewish leaders in their day, the Pharisees and the lawyers **trusted in their identity as Jews (sons of Abraham belonging to one of the twelve tribes of Israel)** and their own "righteousness" and ability to "keep the law."
 - Tragically, therefore, they rejected their need for either repentance and baptism or a Messiah.
 - There is a great bit of irony here, given that the Pharisees and especially the lawyers "were a specialized group of upper-class Jews who gave themselves to the interpretation of the law." (Bock)
 - To become an expert of the law, one had to study intensely at the feet of a rabbi for years. Therefore, these "lawyers" were by no means ignorant of the Old Testament and the Law – they were experts in it. Yet, they still rejected the Messiah and their need to repent and receive God's grace.

THE PARABLE OF THE COMPLAINING CHILDREN

³¹ "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,

*"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep."*

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton

and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

- Then Jesus begins to describe those who rejected John’s Baptism and their need for Him (Christ, the Messiah). Collectively, He refers to those who reject Him as “this generation.” **“What are they like?” He asks.**
- He then tells a parable of children playing in the marketplace calling out to one another:

*“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.”*

- As “wise” as the Pharisee believed themselves to be, and as “learned and skilled” in the Law that the lawyers thought themselves to be, Jesus is essentially saying that they are no better than complaining children when it comes to their relationship with the LORD.
 - Some have even called this short parable the “Parable of the Brats.”
 - Here is the imagery that Jesus is giving:
 - Imagine two groups of children who meet in a park (similar to the marketplace in the ancient Greco-Roman world). One group (imagine it to be a slightly younger group) asks the other group (imagine a slightly older group) what game they would like to play. The older group of children says they do not care, so the younger group **begins to play a flute for them, but the older group does not want to dance.**
 - So, in an attempt to involve the older group, the younger group decides to do the opposite, **sing a dirge (a song of mourning like one that would be sung at a funeral). However, the older group would not weep.**
- **Jesus’ point is clear: no matter what the younger group does, the older group will not participate. That is, they will not participate unless they are in charge and everything goes by their rules, the rules they make up.**

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- Then Jesus applies the lesson of the parable to John the Baptist and Himself.

³³ *For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’* ³⁴ *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’* ³⁵ *Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”*

- John the Baptist came preparing the way for the Coming Messiah. He preached concerning the coming wrath of God and called all people to repent, turn to God, and be baptized as a symbol of their death to their selves and self-sufficiency. He, himself, was an ascetic, eating no bread and drinking no wine. He lived in wilderness on a diet of wild honey and locusts. His message was one that was not always happy (i.e., he spoke of God’s coming wrath), but it was true and necessary for the people to hear.
 - But, rather than following John and his message, the Pharisees and lawyers said he had a demon (i.e., that he was possessed).
 - He was too “back-woods” for them; too negative; and too condemning. They must have thought, “Who does this uneducated, wilderness crazy-man think he is telling us to repent of our sins! He must be demon-possessed!”
- Then, when Jesus came along, He ate and drank (like the group of children who played the flute). But rather than following Him, the Pharisees and leaders said, “*Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!*”

○ **The Lord’s point was clear: regardless if the message was negative or positive, happy or sad, the people were going to reject it.**

David Gooding writes, “They would neither have the holiness and wrath of God, nor the love and forgiveness of God. All they wanted was a God small enough to compromise and to pretend that their imperfect keeping of the law was adequate, a salvation small enough for their merits to earn it.”

Michael Wilcock describes the leaders: “When they ‘piped,’ and asked for a message that was undemanding and cheerful, John fasted and talked about sin; he was too gloomy, they wanted something brighter. But when they ‘wailed,’ and expected from the rabbi of Nazareth a solemn discussion on morals and religion, Jesus went to parties and talked about salvation; he was too exhilarating, they wanted something more proper. For the news of the kingdom...will not fit in with men’s preconceived ideas, nor pander to their prejudices. It digs far deeper than their shallow understanding of the evils of Satan’s kingdom, and soars far higher than their low view of the glories of God’s kingdom.”

○ **The Pharisees and lawyers would approach God only on their terms. Further, the god they would worship would be one that would play by their rules!**

- The truth is that no matter what Christ did, they would have criticized it and stood in judgment against it, because their problem was in the heart.

- Even today, fallen man will always have an excuse why it is in his best interest to not follow Christ – He’s too exclusive, He’s too restrictive, He’s too negative, and the list goes on and on.

- **They would reject the message of both John the Baptist and Jesus because they did not make it up. Like the children in the marketplace, the crowd would only engage Christ if He met their standards, the characteristics and followed by their rules.**

³⁵ *Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.*”

- Finally, Jesus concludes with a statement that sums up His message and His parable:

Wisdom is justified by all her children.

- In this context, the message, truth and counsel of God, contained in Scripture is personified as Wisdom. Also, Christ is making a statement of truth that all followers of Christ (“children [of God]”) will declare God’s counsel as just (i.e., will justify Wisdom).
- This places Christians in the same category as the “tax collectors” who “declared God just.”
- Recall the words of Jesus in Luke 6:44: ⁴⁴ “for each tree is known by its own fruit.”
 - In a similar fashion, the “fruit” of Christ’s work is that of all the Father gave to Him, He has lost not one. We are the fruit of His labors.
 - And because of this, we are now children of God (“Wisdom’s children”).

John 1:12: ¹² “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...”

- And we, therefore, as children of God, will declare that our God is, indeed, just and true in all His ways!
- As the Apostle Peter declares:

1 Peter 2:9: ⁹ “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”