

Rediscover Jesus

Part 18: Jesus and John the Baptist | Luke 7:18-35

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 18 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're studying the Gospel account of Luke from chapters 4-9, which record Jesus' public ministry in the area of Galilee.

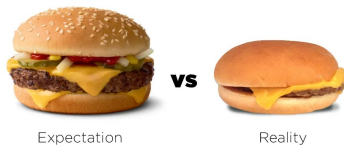
So let's get right into today's sermon: "Jesus and John the Baptist."

Sermon Introduction

Have you ever seen those expectation vs. reality side-by-side pictures?

In most cases, we have a great expectation but then the reality is not as great as we thought it would be.

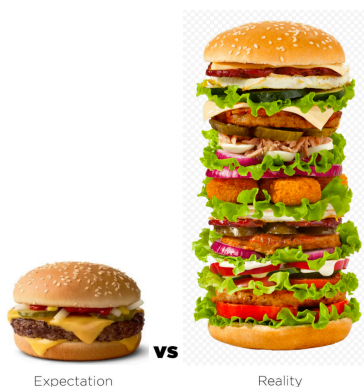
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You can ask anyone and I'm definitely not a foodie by any means. For the most part, everything tastes good enough to me. But if there's one thing that bothers me from time to time is when I expected a burger was going to be big and full, but it ends up being small and skimpy. I think I borderline get offended when that happens. I expected much more than the reality of what I got.

So that's *one* kind of expectation vs. reality situation. But have you ever experienced the *opposite*—where the reality was much greater than what you first expected? I don't mean that you had low expectations, but you had high expectations, but the reality was so much greater than what you could have imagined?

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Perhaps that happens with a burger. Perhaps that happens with a movie. Perhaps that happens with a friend.

You didn't have low expectations at all, but the reality was so much better than you could've even conceived yourself.

<pause>

In the passage that we're going to look at today, we see this tension between expectations and reality especially when it comes to Jesus.

For some, the reality of Jesus was disappointing; he didn't quite meet the expectations they had for him as the Christ.

But for others who were given wisdom to see, the reality of Jesus was far greater and wiser than they could have ever expected.

The One Thing

***God's reality of the Christ is greater and wiser
than any of our expectations of him.***

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 7:18-35.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

So far in Luke chapter 7, Jesus has exercised his authority by healing the servant of a Roman centurion by just saying the word from afar, and he has just demonstrated his compassion as Lord by raising back to life the only son of a widow. After the townspeople witnessed the dead man come back to life, they declared Jesus to be a great prophet and that God had visited his people, and this report about Jesus spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

So let's read Luke 7:18-35.

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."

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.”

This is God’s Word.

Overview

We’ll look at this passage in three parts, which focus on a key question in each part:

- I. John questions Jesus (vv. 18-23)
- II. Jesus affirms John (vv. 24-28)
- III. People respond to Jesus (vv. 29-35)

We’ll identify and highlight the key crucial question in each part as we go along.

I. John questions Jesus (vv. 18-23)

Verses 18-20 say this:

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?’”

So “the disciples of John reported all these things to him.” “All these things” refer to what’s happened so far in this chapter and the news that has spread about Jesus being a great prophet after he healed the servant of the Roman centurion and raised back to life the only son of a widow.

So a report about Jesus’ ministry has been brought to John, who is languishing in prison (Luke 3:19-20), and he sends two of his disciples to Jesus, who Luke calls “the Lord” here, to ask him “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Luke repeats this question word-for-word twice in these three verses, so it’s a key question for us to think about.

“The one who is to come” is in reference to the Christ or Messiah, of which John had previously said, “*he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie*” (Luke 3:16). The Christ refers to the anointed one of God who would restore the people of God in the kingdom of Israel and righteously rule over his people forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 1:6).

So as John is suffering in prison, he is wondering if Jesus *really* is the Christ who is to come.

Remember, this question wasn’t just coming from *anyone*. This was coming from *John*.

John was the *relative* of, but more importantly, he was the *forerunner* of Jesus.

From the *womb*, John's *whole* life has been about preparing the way for the Lord, pointing out to *all* the people that *Jesus* is the Christ (Luke 1:15-17, 41). John proclaimed Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John declared that Jesus is "the Son of God" (John 1:34). John called Jesus "the bridegroom" and referred to himself as "the friend of the bridegroom" who finds the completion of his joy in Jesus coming as the Christ (John 3:28-29). John directed all his *own* disciples to start following *Jesus* as the Christ, and he famously said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

This is the one who is questioning now whether Jesus *really* is the Christ. The one who once, in no uncertain terms, publicly declared *Jesus* as the one who is to come is now *doubting* if he *really* is the one.

So an important question to ask is this: *How* in the world did John the Baptist go from such *confidence* to such *doubt* about Jesus as the Christ?

There could be many factors, but I think two very probable factors are personal suffering and unmet expectations.

First, in terms of personal suffering, John, who once had a vibrant ministry of preparing the way of the Lord by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, has now been completely taken out of ministry. He was no longer with the crowds in the wilderness, but he was now alone in a prison cell. It's one thing to *say*, "He must increase, but I must decrease," but it's an entirely different thing to actually *experience* it. He not only faded into the background, but he probably fell into a pit of misery and despair.

Personal suffering has a way of turning our attention away from *God* and his *Word* and turning our attention towards *ourselves* and our *pain*. We get tunnel vision where our pain becomes the filter and lens by which we see everything. God is no longer the compassionate Lord by which we see everything else, but he becomes the absent Lord who has left us to suffer alone.

And so, for John, I believe his personal suffering was beginning to blur his vision and cast doubt on what he knew to be true about Jesus.

Second, in terms of unmet expectations, John understood the Christ to have a ministry of God's judgment as he ushered in the restored kingdom of Israel. While describing the ministry of the Christ to come, John said this in...

Luke 3:17 = His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, **but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**

To thresh wheat—or to separate the grain from the chaff—a farmer would use a winnowing fork to throw the wheat into the air. The kernels of wheat would fall to the ground and the wind would blow the chaff away. And then the chaff would be taken away to be burned.

This was a picture of the Day of the Lord—the day of final judgment—where the Lord would come and separate all the peoples of the world. God's people would inherit the kingdom of God and experience eternal life, and God's enemies would be cast out into the eternal fire and experience eternal punishment.

And according to John's expectation, this day of the final judgment was imminent. The winnowing fork is already in the Christ's hand and he's getting ready to separate the wheat from the chaff.

So as John hears the report about Jesus' ministry, there was a discrepancy between what he *expected* from the Christ and the *reality* of Jesus. Why was he not hearing anything about God's judgment? Why was Jesus not bringing God's wrath upon the unfaithful in Israel? Why were the pagan oppressors not being overthrown?

And so, he was confused and doubt began to seep in.

[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?'"]

Perhaps some of us here today were once on fire for the Lord at an earlier time in our lives. You had a burning passion to get to know the Lord through the Word and prayer and the church he provided you. You were excited to share about Christ to those around you. You were ready to lay down your whole life for Jesus.

But then, perhaps as you began to suffer and your expectations went unmet, your confident faith began to wane, and doubts began to sink in. Your suffering may not have been in a prison cell, but it's had the same effect on you over the years as it had on John.

Perhaps...

- You lost a loved one.
- Or you've been struggling with singleness.
- Or you're going through a difficult marriage right now.
- Or you're trying to have kids but can't for whatever reason.
- Or you've been hurt by someone and the issues are still unresolved.
- Or you've been in a long "dry season" of feeling apathetic towards God.
- Or you've been putting in long hours at work but still aren't as successful as you had hoped to be.

Whatever suffering or unmet expectations you have, just like John the Baptist, you seem "night and day" different than the person you once were—the "you" who was once so passionate and confident about Jesus.

As believers of Jesus Christ, we may never outright ask the question, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" But we may still doubt.

In one sense, I think it's comforting to know that *even* John the Baptist, who was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, whose *whole* life was about preparing the way for Jesus, and who confidently and publicly declared Jesus as the Christ—even *he*—doubted at some point in his life. That means that if we're followers of Christ, there is room to have some doubts.

Thank God that we are not saved by the *strength* of our faith but by the *object* of our faith.

Jesus says that faith the size of a mustard seed will do (Luke 17:6). All that matters is that our faith is rightly placed in him—and he will bear us up.

That means that if you have doubts, you're in good company. John the Baptist had doubts. We have a whole book in the Old Testament, the Psalms, that is filled with people who had doubts about God given what they were experiencing. That doesn't mean we should leave our doubts unaddressed. John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus. The Psalmists wrote prayers to God. And so, we're called to voice our doubts directly before God in prayer. We can also talk about them with one another in the church and not freak out or clamp down. No, we listen to understand, we respectfully dialogue, we pray together, we point each other to God's Word and remembrance of God's work, and we continue to love each other.

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Verses 21-23 then say this:

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."

So as John's disciples come to Jesus, they *witness* with their own *eyes* what they had previously only *heard* about. Jesus is *healing* people of diseases, plagues, evil spirits, and blindness.

And rather than simply answering their question about whether he is the Christ or not by saying, “Yes I am,” Jesus begins to reference a whole collage of prophetic texts from Isaiah in reference to the Christ (Isa. 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:18; 26:19; 61:1). And this should remind us of the passage from Isaiah that Jesus read and preached from earlier in his hometown, which spoke about the kind of ministry that the Christ would have.

John’s disciples are *seeing* with their very own eyes how Jesus is basically *doing* everything that was written about the Christ in Scripture. And the right conclusion they should reach is that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s predictions about the coming Christ.

So Jesus gives John’s disciples *experiential* evidence and *biblical* evidence.¹ He tells them to look at *him* and then to look at *Scripture*.

And then he says, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me,” which was another allusion to an Isaiah passage. Jesus would be “a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling” for many (Isa. 8:14-15).

Why would people be offended by Jesus? Because he was not what they expected him to be. And it’s not just unmet expectations, but it’s when unmet expectations negatively affect *us*.

If you expected sunshine but it turns out to be rain, you don’t really mind if you had no plans to go out. But if you wanted to spend the day climbing a mountain with friends and it gets cancelled because of the rain, then you begin to mind.

For John, he had expected the Christ to bring God’s judgment on the unfaithful, but that’s not what he was seeing. Instead, while John was wasting away in prison, and as he began to hear about Jesus eating and drinking and having a good time with tax collectors and sinners, he was probably starting to feel a bit offended. This was not the Day of the Lord that John had envisioned.

John didn’t understand what we understand now on this side of redemptive history.

What the prophets saw as happening all at once in the coming of the Christ, Jesus reveals as happening in *two* phases.

There’s an *inauguration* of the fulfillment of these promises in his first coming, but there’s also a *consummation* (or a full realization) of those promises in his second coming.

In his first coming, he comes as the *compassionate* Lord, calling his people to repentance and faith for the forgiveness of their sins. And in his second coming, he comes as the *conquering* Lord, bringing God’s judgment upon all those who have remained hardened in their sins. The kingdom has *already* come in his first coming, but the kingdom has *not yet* been consummated until his second coming.

The time between Jesus’ first and second coming is “the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2), but when Jesus comes again, it will be the day of judgment.

And for John, the last of the old covenant prophets, this was surprising; this was not how he thought things were going to work out. In fact, Jesus actually *never* tells him this. He doesn’t give him the explanation that the rest of Scripture gives us.

Rather, Jesus says that he will be blessed if those unmet expectations that he has about Jesus doesn’t offend him or cause him to stumble and fall away from faith in him. He will be blessed if he holds fast to faith in Jesus as the Christ even if he doesn’t understand everything about him, even if Jesus works in a way that is different than what he expected.

So Jesus doesn’t outright answer John’s question through his disciples about whether he really is the Christ or not, but he exhorts them to examine their experience of him in light of Scripture, he tells them that they will be blessed to maintain belief in him even amidst unmet expectations, and then he basically leaves them to decide for themselves.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, rev. ed., PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<pause>

For us, there will always be things in God's Word that will offend us, and we should expect that. If it's really God's Word, then it should affirm some things about every culture and it should challenge some things about every culture. If God's Word never offends us at some point, then we should wonder if we're really receiving it as God's Word at all, or just as a reflection of our own expectations and desires.

If there's something in God's Word that is hard for us to understand or is different than what we would expect, there are good answers that can be given, but in his perfect wisdom, he may not always give them. Sometimes, he may leave us with the same word he gave John and his disciples: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me [but who continues to hold fast to faith in me even when I don't fit all their expectations]."

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So first, John questions Jesus; and second...

II. Jesus affirms John (vv. 24-28)

Just think for a moment what it was like for *Jesus* to hear this question of "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" from John the Baptist.

Imagine if a close friend and supporter sent a message to you that said, "I am not really sure whether you are who I thought you were. Should I look for somebody else?"² Think about how painful that would be to hear. What would your response be?

For many of us, I think our knee-jerk reaction would be some kind of defensiveness or criticism. But that's not what Jesus does at all.

Verses 24-26 say this:

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.

After John's messengers left, even after such a painful question to hear from him, Jesus doesn't take this opportunity to *criticize* John but to *commend* him.

Perhaps some of the people there heard John's questioning of Jesus and *they* began to doubt and criticize John, thinking, "Maybe John wasn't a prophet after all." Maybe they were beginning to think that John wasn't living up to *their* expectations of him.

For whatever the reason, Jesus begins to set the record straight regarding John.

Jesus assumes that there are many in the crowds who went into the wilderness to see and be baptized by John, and so he asks them essentially the same question three times: "What did you go out to see?" And this is the key question in this part. Essentially, "when you went out to see John in the wilderness, what did you expect to see?"

"A reed shaken by the wind" was probably proverbial for something that was commonplace—something that could be seen anywhere.³ They obviously didn't go into the wilderness to see something trivial, but they went there to see something of substance.

² R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 145.

³ Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

“A man dressed in soft clothing” describes someone “dressed in splendid clothing and liv[ing] in luxury,” as Jesus explains. If they wanted to see someone like that, they would go to the “kings’ courts,” not the wilderness. And for those who saw John, they knew he definitely was anything but luxurious; he was “clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey” (Mark 1:6; cf. Matt. 3:4). His clothes and food were common to nomadic desert dwellers and were thus associated with the poor, but his clothes especially evoked images of prophecies about “Elijah,” who was to return to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (cf. 2 Kings 1:8; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6).⁴

And that’s what Jesus begins to point out. They didn’t go into the wilderness to see something commonplace or see something luxurious, but they went out to see a prophet. And Jesus affirms that John indeed is a prophet, but then he expands their expectations. John wasn’t *just* a prophet, but he was “more than a prophet.”

And then he goes on to explain from Scripture what he means by “more than a prophet.”

Verses 27-28 say this:

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.”

Here, Jesus paraphrases Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 to reveal that John is the end-time prophet foretold in the Old Testament, the “Elijah” figure who would be the forerunner of the Lord (Mal. 4:5-6).⁵

In other words, John is *the* prophet. He was the last and greatest old covenant prophet who would be greater than all the prophets before him and who would inaugurate the messianic age.⁶ In fact, Jesus says that up until that point, “among those born of women none is greater than John.” John was the greatest because his ministry was the greatest up to that point. He was greater than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel because, unlike his predecessors, he had the ministry of ushering in the coming of the Christ.

But after giving John the highest commendation one can imagine, Jesus then says something even more astonishing: “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

That means that if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ right now—if you’re a member of the new covenant kingdom that Christ inaugurated with his blood (cf. Luke 22:20)—then according to Jesus, we are *greater* than John the Baptist. Of course, when Jesus says “greater” in verse 28, he’s not referring to *value*; we’re all made in the image of God and are of equal value and dignity. Rather, he’s referring to *privilege*.

We have a greater privilege than John the Baptist because what he knew and saw only in *part*, we now know and see in *full*. We have the full picture of redemptive history. John was executed by Herod before the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; he didn’t know how the full narrative sequence would play out in his earthly life, which is why he sent messengers to ask Jesus about whether he was really the Christ or not. But for us on this side of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, John’s question doesn’t make any sense to us because we have fuller revelation of who Jesus is and God’s story of redemption.

John straddled two ages—the age of promise and the age of fulfillment. He had one foot in each age, but we have both feet in the age of fulfillment. John had the best seat an old covenant prophet could have of the Christ; he *literally* saw him with his own eyes and even baptized him. But he never got to see and experience Jesus inaugurate the new covenant in his blood (cf. Luke 22:20). But for us, every time we

⁴ Study note on Matthew 3:4, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

take of the Lord's Supper together, we remember and proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:25-26). John never got to participate in that.

And so, we who are believers in Jesus Christ now participate in a greater privilege than John ever knew or experienced.

<pause>

This is how the apostle Peter puts it in...

1 Peter 1:10-12 (NLT) = This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.

The prophets knew that they were prophesying about the Christ—his sufferings and subsequent glories—but they never got to see and experience it themselves. And so, they were not serving themselves but *us* who now know and experience all the blessings of the messianic age and the new covenant to which they bore witness.

<pause>

Essentially, Jesus *expands* the expectations for his disciples of the privilege they have. John experienced the greatest privilege up til that point in redemptive history, but now even the least in the kingdom of God would have a greater privilege than him.

For us, as believers in Jesus Christ on this side of redemptive history, there are many new benefits that we can enjoy, but perhaps one of the greatest benefits that each of us can now enjoy is to know God as our Father.

J. I. Packer, author of *Knowing God*, writes this:

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.⁷

In the Old Testament, we see that God is so holy and we are so sinful that we must keep our distance and we can only approach him in the temple through the blood of sacrifices by the mediation of his priests. But now, through the blood of Christ's own single sacrifice for sins, we are now brought near and adopted into God's family. *He* is now our Father and *we* are now his sons and daughters, and we are heirs to an eternal and imperishable inheritance.

- Because God is now our Father, we have full assurance of his love, protection, provisions, and guidance.
- Because God is now our Father, our relationship with him as children is *permanent*; as surely as Jesus Christ is his Son and we are united to him, our Father will never disown us.
- Because God is now our Father, we know that we have intimate access to him anytime, anywhere, no matter what we're going through, no matter how much we've messed up.

⁷ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers, Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 201, Kindle.

- And because God is now our Father, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not just God's *people* but we are members of God's *family*. We are never alone, but the family of God carries over into eternity.

As great as John the Baptist was, the one who is least in the kingdom of God knows God as *Father*—a privilege far greater than John the Baptist ever knew. In light of what Christ has done for us, we would do well to reflect on, rejoice in, and lean into this amazing new relationship we have with God as our Father *much more*.

<pause>

So first, John questions Jesus; second, Jesus affirms John; and third...

III. People respond to Jesus (vv. 29-35)

Verses 29-30 say this:

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.)

Here, Luke interrupts Jesus speaking to the crowds with a narrative aside.⁸ And he explains two different responses of two groups of people who heard what Jesus was saying about John and his ministry.

There were those who were baptized with the baptism of John who, upon hearing Jesus' words about John, "declared God just," and there were the Pharisees and the lawyers (or scribes) who were not baptized with the baptism of John who, upon hearing Jesus' words about John, "rejected the purpose of God for themselves."

Notice the implied *reason* that Luke gives for the different responses is whether someone was baptized with the baptism of John or not.

Remember, John's baptism was "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3) and he called people to "bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8).

That means that those who received John's baptism recognized that they were sinners before God and that God's purpose for them was to repent for the forgiveness of sins. And so, the Pharisees and the lawyers who refused to undergo John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins were essentially refusing to repent.

They didn't think they needed to repent. Perhaps they thought they could be forgiven of their sins by just continuing to make animal sacrifices. Perhaps they didn't think their sins were that bad to require repentance. Perhaps they thought their good works outweighed their bad works and God would somehow understand. Perhaps they thought that being circumcised and the physical offspring of Abraham was enough.

We don't exactly know what each of them thought, but their refusal to undergo John's baptism was a refusal to repent and so it was a rejection of God's prescribed means for them to be forgiven their sins.

God's purpose for salvation has always been by grace through faith in Christ alone; those in the old covenant had faith in the *coming* of Christ whereas those in the new covenant have faith in Christ *who has come*. But repentance and faith have always been required for the forgiveness of sins; it was never merely just external ritual (cf. Heb. 10:4).

Repentance is not just some external ritual of saying "I'm sorry" or even undergoing baptism, but it is an internal reorientation of the heart. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. When you turn

⁸ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, PCNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015).

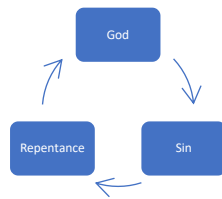
away from something, you simultaneously turn towards something; repentance is turning *away* from sin and faith is turning *towards* God.

You cannot simultaneously turn *towards* sin and turn *towards* God. You will either be turning *away* from sin or turning *away* from God. Repentance is not just saying “I’m sorry,” but it’s the resolve to gouge out an eye or cut off a hand if it causes us to sin. It’s the resolve to have God as King over our hearts and lives, where we forsake our sin and cling to him as our Lord and Savior.

<pause>

But in order to repent, we must see the depth of our sin. And in order to see the depth of our sin, we must see who God is. And these three things continue to cycle for the whole of our Christian lives.

<Show God-sin-repentance-cycle.jpeg>



To state it negatively, when you don’t recognize your sin, you will not repent; when you don’t repent, you will not enjoy much of God.

That means that when you ignore, cover, excuse, or justify your sin, you essentially guarantee that you will not enjoy much of a relationship with God—and the more you do that, the more it becomes questionable whether you have a relationship with God at all.

- Do you ignore pride in your life?
- Do you cover sexual sin in your life?
- Do you excuse bitterness towards others?
- Do you justify lying and deceiving others?

It’s been said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you” (John Owen). Sin will kill your relationship with God, with yourself, and with others—and if you harden yourself in your refusal to repent, it will kill you eternally.

But if you take seriously even “small” sins and allow them to be opportunities to repent, you will not be led *away* from God but *towards* him. By God’s grace, sin will lead to repentance, which will lead you to God, which will lead you to rejoicing in his salvation.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we’re instructed to confess our sins daily; and in our corporate worship, we have set aside time to confess our sins weekly. The purpose of these times of confession and repentance is not to make us feel bad, but it’s actually the opposite.

These are times that we need to be reminded of our sin, so we can repent, so we can see God and rejoice. It’s to bring us back to God—to enjoy him *more*.

But for the Pharisees and lawyers, their refusal to repent meant that they refused to deal with their sin. And their refusal to deal with their sin meant that they were not able to see God for who he is and to really enjoy him. So it had a devastating effects on their relationship with God, themselves, and others.

<pause>

Verses 31-34 say this:

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!’

So Luke’s narrative aside is done and he goes back to Jesus speaking to the crowd. In light of what Jesus has said about John, now he begins to describe “this generation” that has rejected both John and Jesus.

Jesus asks a key question: “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?” And then he answers his own question by quoting the words a popular children’s saying of his day.⁹

He describes them as “children sitting in the marketplace” calling out to one another. So you can imagine that as the mothers are shopping, the children are playing games and they’re inviting other children to join them.¹⁰

They would play different music and then invite the other children to act accordingly. So if they played the flute, they would want everyone to dance and act like they were celebrating something. And if they played a dirge (or a sad song), they would want everyone to weep and act like they were sad.

So they’re pretending and they want the other children to play along, but they’re upset that the other children are *not* playing what *they* want to play, so they would complain: “We played a joyful song, so you’re supposed to dance, but why didn’t you dance? We played a sad song, so you’re supposed to weep, but why didn’t you weep?”

Essentially, they’re upset that the other kids are *not* playing with them on their *own* terms.

And then Jesus says, “for,” so he’s going to explain how the Pharisees, the lawyers, and all those in “this generation” who reject John and him are like these children. Basically, they’re like those kids who want to play on their *own* terms and they’re upset with John and Jesus because they’re *not* playing along with their games; they’re *not* doing what they *expected* them to do.

When John comes along, they say to him: “John, why are you hanging out in the wilderness and not in the cities? Why are you so serious about sin and demanding repentance? Why are you so ascetic and not enjoying life more? You’re supposed to be joyous and dancing. You’re not playing our game.” And so, they reject John the Baptist for not coming in the way that they wanted him to come.

But *Jesus* comes along and pretty much does the opposite. He comes out of the wilderness and goes into the cities. He’s befriending tax collectors and sinners. He’s eating and drinking and enjoying life with his disciples.

But then, they change their tune and say: “No, no, no. We sang a dirge. You’re supposed to be weeping. You’re not playing our game.” And so, they reject Jesus for not coming the way that they wanted him to come.

Basically, they’re never pleased. They want John and Jesus to play on their *own* terms, but John and Jesus don’t play their game, and so they’re never satisfied. They constantly change their tune.

And for the Pharisees and lawyers, such an attitude towards John and Jesus revealed their heart. They have no intention of playing on *God’s* terms, but they want God to play with them on *their* terms. *They* call

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 147.

¹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

out the game, *they* set the rules, and *they* come out as winners—and if John and Jesus refuse to play their games, they don't just *criticize* them, but they *condemn* them.

In their own minds, John and Jesus didn't meet their expectations. But the reality was that their expectations were always moving targets. They had no intention of submitting themselves to God and his Word, but they wanted God and his Word to bow their knees to the fickle desires of their own hearts. And of course, God bows to no one. *He* is the Creator and *we* are the creatures. And one way or another, he will eventually make that clear enough to everyone.

<pause>

For us, we may not outright say, "God, you dance" or "God, you weep," but we're tempted to want God to play our games and by our rules. We don't want *God* to play the tune and tell *us* what to do, but *we* want to play the tune and tell *God* what to do. And if God doesn't do what we want, we're tempted not just to *criticize* him but to *condemn* him.

We're tempted to conclude that if God is not willing to submit to our games and play by our rules, then he is not worthy of worship, and we reject him as God. But if we have a god who lives to bow before the will of creatures, who is made in our own image, then we have an idol—not God.

<pause>

Jesus then closes his speech to the crowds.

Verse 35 says this:

³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

This is similar to the saying, "You know a tree by its fruit." You recognize wisdom by its effects. Wisdom is proven to be *true* wisdom by those who submit to it and walk in it.

Wisdom is not always apparent at first, but it becomes clear later. For example, when God called Noah to build an ark, all the people thought it was foolish. But when the floods came, Noah proved that following God's way was truly wise.

In the same way, it might not have been readily apparent at the time whether those who *rejected* John and Jesus or those who *accepted* John and Jesus were truly wise, but eventually, it will be made crystal clear.

On the final day of judgment, we will either stand condemned for our sins or we will stand justified in spite of our sins. And the difference will come down to whether we humbled ourselves, repented of our sins, and believed in the one whom John pointed to—Jesus the Christ—as our Lord and Savior.

On that day, just like the day of the flood, God's wisdom and God's ways will be justified, vindicated, or proved right.

<pause>

If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, I pray that you would not wait til that day of judgment to see God's wisdom justified. Rather, I pray that you would understand and believe in the gospel—or good news—of Jesus Christ today. The gospel is that though God created us, we have sinned against him and are deserving of his wrath, but because of his great love, he sent Jesus Christ to be our perfect, sinless substitute in his life, death, and resurrection, so that if we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we can be forgiven our sins, adopted as children of God, and inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life with him. *That's* the gospel.

<pause>

Now according to Scripture, Jesus is wisdom *personified*; he is “wisdom *from God*” (1 Cor. 1:30) and “the wisdom *of God*” (1 Cor. 1:24). And so, if we are followers of Christ, then we are wisdom’s children (cf. Isa. 53:10).

But even as we see the Pharisees and the lawyers *rejecting* Jesus, “the wisdom of God,” we should realize that *God’s* wisdom is not like *our* wisdom. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [his] ways higher than [our] ways and [his] thoughts than [our] thoughts” (Isa. 55:9).

Our wisdom and our expectations often lead us to do foolish things. In the case of the Pharisees and the lawyers, they rejected, condemned, and eventually crucified the Christ that they had been supposedly waiting for and that all of redemptive history pointed to. Their wisdom and expectations blinded them to who Christ is and the testimonies of his works, John the Baptist, and Scripture itself.

If we are children of God’s wisdom, then we do *not* walk according to our own wisdom. If we think about the Christian life, it is filled with paradoxes that go against our own wisdom.

- If you want to find your life, you must lose it.
- If you want to be first, you must be last.
- God himself is three in one.
- Jesus himself is fully God and fully man.
- Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
- We are to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

And perhaps the biggest paradox of all that completely baffles our wisdom is the cross of Christ.

At the cross, we get *life* from death, *pardon* from penalty, *justification* from judgment,¹¹ *strength* from weakness, *exaltation* from humiliation, *victory* from defeat, *beauty* from brutality, *glory* from shame.

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). “Christ crucified [is a] stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Cor. 1:23-25), and “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” (1 Cor. 1:27).

The cross of Christ is foolishness to the world, yet it is the supreme example of the wisdom of God.

<pause>

So for us, as followers of Christ, the cross of Christ, the wisdom of God, is the lens through which we see all of life.

Not everything may make sense at the moment, and other options apart from Christ and his Word may seem better, but we walk by faith and not by sight.

Jesus has proven himself over and over thus far, so wisdom says that we should stick with him and “blessed is the one who is not offended by [him].” He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). His ways are true wisdom, and he is true life.

So let’s not allow our faulty expectations based on our faulty wisdom lead us to faulty conclusions about Jesus. But may we be children of God’s wisdom who align our expectations to God’s Word, so that we can see the *reality* of who Jesus truly is. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16).

The One Thing

¹¹ Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee, “The Paradox of the Cross,” March 25, 2022, in *Groundwork*, produced by ReFrame Ministries, podcast, MP3 audio, 24:58, <https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-paradox-of-the-cross>.

***God's reality of the Christ is greater and wiser
than any of our expectations of him.***

Life Application

1. Are there any doubts or questions you have that remain undealt with? Are you “disappointed” by God? Go and talk to him.

Amidst personal suffering and unmet expectations, John began to doubt. He wasn't sure what to make of his unmet expectations of Jesus. But he didn't leave his doubts unaddressed. He did what we see so many of the saints have done amidst their doubts; he went to Jesus—he went to God.

No matter what you're going through, it's always better to go and talk to God than to distance yourself from him. The worst thing you can do is give God the silent treatment. There is no comfort apart from him.

2. Are there any sins that you are ignoring, covering, excusing, or justifying? Repent of them to God and confess them to one another to experience and enjoy God more.

If you take your sins lightly, you will not repent, and you will not enjoy much of God. But if you take your sins seriously and allow them to be opportunities to repent, you will take God's grace seriously and rejoice in his salvation all the more.

3. Are you following your own wisdom or the wisdom of God? Grow in God's wisdom through God's Word, God's people, and good books.

God's wisdom is not like our natural wisdom. Christ crucified is not what we would have chosen for ourselves. As followers of Christ, we ought not to be conformed to the wisdom of this world, but we need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

Very practically, get on a Bible reading plan if you're not already on one; get connected and seek out others in the church who can give godly counsel; and check out the digital library on our church's website that has a wealth of good Christian books to help you in your followership of Christ.

And as we grow in God's wisdom, may we as God's people be able to share to all those around us with greater confidence and joy that God's reality of the Christ is greater and wiser than any of our expectations of him.

Conclusion

Can we all stand as we respond to God's Word together?