

SEE WHAT GOD IS DOING

Luke 7:18-35

Key Verse: 7:22

“So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.’”

In today’s passage Jesus is doing the life-giving work of the Messiah. At the same time, John the Baptist was in prison. John sent messengers to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (18) It indicates uncertainty, even doubt. Jesus said to them, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard.” Through this report, Jesus wanted John to see what God was doing and to plant conviction that God was ruling, carrying out his good purpose without fail. Like John, we can doubt God’s love, goodness and power as we see terrible things happening: social injustice, mass shootings, wars, Covid outbreaks, severe storms, wildfires, political scandals, and economic woes. We may also see painful relationship problems in our families and trouble in our church community. When we see these things, we fall into sorrow and distress. We feel helpless and hopeless. We may think that God is indifferent to our sufferings. But that is not true. In the midst of these things, God is doing life-giving work. We need to see what God is doing among us. Let’s pray to see what God is doing through today’s Bible passage. In order to help people see what God was doing, Jesus demonstrated the work of the Messiah, commended the life and ministry of John the Baptist, and revealed the two responses to his ministry.

First, Jesus demonstrated the work of the Messiah (18-23). Verse 18a says, “John’s disciples told him about all these things.” What are “all these things”? These are the things Jesus was doing: proclaiming the good news, healing a centurion’s dying servant with just one word, and raising a dead young man back to life (7:1-17). God was working mightily through Jesus. It was a time of transition. Until then, John’s ministry had been most prosperous; everyone went to him to be baptized (3:7). But when John was imprisoned, his following dwindled (3:18-19). At the same time, Jesus was preaching the good news, healing the sick, and driving out demons, and many people were going to him. This is what John’s disciples reported to him. Then John sent two of his disciples to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (18b,19) Why did John do this?

While sitting in prison, John was lonely. He worried about the future of Israel and his disciples. When he heard about God's mighty work through Jesus, he was happy. Yet he still had some questions in his heart. He was a righteous man. He had expected Jesus to judge evil—perhaps beginning with King Herod—and to establish God's righteous kingdom (Lk 3:8-9). But Jesus did not focus on fighting social injustice. He did not work for John's release from prison, or even visit him. Jesus spent his time among common and even notorious people, humbly serving them. It was not what John expected. So, he wondered if Jesus really was the Messiah. To answer the question, John did not rely on his own insight and understanding. He asked Jesus.

Furthermore, John sent his disciples to Jesus for their sake. John knew that they were in a spiritual crisis. They felt sorry for John and for themselves. People no longer came to them; they felt like "has-beens" in God's work. They worried about their future. John seemed more concerned about them than about himself. He did not send them to Jesus to ask for his release, but for them to find assurance that Jesus was the Messiah. He sent them to Jesus in their time of crisis. He was a good shepherd.

When they went to Jesus, he was doing amazing things: curing many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and giving sight to many who were blind (20-21). Those suffering from paralysis and leprosy were healed completely. They were singing and dancing and praising God. Those who had been tormented by evil spirits were set free, shouting, "Praise the Lord!" The blind received sight, and could see Jesus and their loved ones. People were filled with wonder and awe at the amazing grace of Jesus.

So Jesus replied to the messengers: "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (22). Jesus' answer was not, "Yes, I am the one." Jesus demonstrated that he is the Messiah by his works (Jn 5:36b). Jesus related his works to the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah 35:5-6a say, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy." Isaiah 61:1a says, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." Just as Isaiah prophesied, Jesus was doing the work of the Messiah. It was the work that only the Messiah could do—indisputable evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. As we analyze Jesus' works, we can discover the character of God. God heals; God restores; God liberates; God gives life. God is good, loving and mighty to save those who trust in him.

God's miraculous work is not just an old story. God's work continues today. Did you know that there is a great work of God in the Pacific Northwest? Forty years ago,

there was one small and lonely UBF chapter on the entire west coast—at Oregon State University. P. Abraham Kim’s family and a few students, including me, met for Bible study and worship. We frequently prayed for God to bless the Pacific Northwest. Last month, together with P. John Seo, I visited major cities there: Seattle, Vancouver (BC), Victoria and Portland. We saw six flourishing UBF chapters. They are led by dedicated families with vibrant faith and missionary vision. Through them God is raising Jesus’ disciples. For example, M. Joshua and Helen Park in Victoria have humbly raised their sons, Joshua and James, as their coworkers. Now these men are each teaching the Bible to two or three college students faithfully out of love for Jesus. Joshua Jr. was just engaged to Joanna Cho of Washington. They both pray to establish a Jesus-centered, mission-oriented house church. There are many other growing disciples of Jesus. When I saw them, I was amazed. God is working in many other countries—even in Ukraine. Deborah in Odessa has been actively teaching the Bible one to one. She experienced the power of God’s word as one disciple is being raised. Shepherd Vlad of Kyiv has decided to live as a pastor for the Podil chapter, no matter what may come. At the age of 23, he is preaching powerful Sunday messages. God’s work is going on, even in the midst of the terrible war. God is working mightily in the USA in many ways. Last week, Khari Willis, a 26-year old pro football player, suddenly retired. He gave up millions of dollars and years of fame. Why? He posted on Instagram, “...to devote the remainder of my life to the further advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am both humbled and excited to pursue the holy call that God has for my life which brings me much joy and purpose.”¹ There are always elements of darkness in the world. But we should look beyond them to see what God is doing. Let’s see what God is doing!

After demonstrating that he is the Messiah, Jesus said, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me” (23). It meant that John’s disciples needed to make a decision of faith. There was a danger that they would fall away if they clung to their own concept of the Messiah. They must have expected Jesus to set John free and restore their ministry. But Jesus came to do much more than that. As the Messiah, Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead. Jesus gives us eternal life in his everlasting kingdom. Most of all we need to see Jesus. Jesus reveals God’s eternal love for us and his saving grace that sets us free. Jesus gives us the meaning of life through his mission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus satisfies our souls with real peace and joy. Jesus promises these great blessings to those who trust in him, even amidst their own personal agonies in this world. Indeed, those who accept the Messiah proclaimed by the Scriptures are blessed.

As I looked back on my life, I found times when I expected one thing from Jesus but he blessed me in his own way. When I was a young shepherd, it was very important

¹ <https://www.thescore.com/nfl/news/2373761>

for me to build up a healthy, vibrant fellowship. One day Satan attacked my ministry and several promising disciples left. At the same time, another shepherd's ministry grew and grew. I really wanted to restore my own fellowship, but God was not blessing my labor as before. In frustration, I wondered if I should continue to live as a shepherd. Then Jesus' word spoke to me, "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." I realized that Jesus wanted me to be faithful to him, abandoning my own expectations for fruitful ministry. I decided to remain in Jesus no matter what. Then Jesus opened my heart to see beyond my own fellowship and made me a steward for the entire Chicago ministry. Another time, I was in deep agony over the spiritual condition of one of my children. Though I cried out in prayer, my child did not change. Instead, Jesus changed me. Jesus brought me to the cross and showed me a new depth of his divine love and saving grace. I found new hope and vision. At the same time, Jesus opened my heart to consider all the children in UBF like my own children. There was also a time when I deeply grieved over a conflict with someone. Though I tried hard, it was not resolved, and Jesus did not seem to answer my prayer. This robbed my joy in serving the Lord. Then, Jesus gave me his word that I have a room in the Father's house and that Jesus will come back and take me to be with him there. I could put my hope in the kingdom of God and find true joy and peace while serving in ministry. I believe that the times when our own expectations are not being met are the very times we can experience a spiritual breakthrough, learn of Jesus more deeply, and experience rich spiritual blessing. Let's remember Jesus' words, "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Second, Jesus commended John the Baptist (24-28). After John's messengers left, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John (24a). He wanted them to see John from God's point of view so they could understand how God was working at that time. Jesus began by reminding them of their experiences of God's power through John. He asked them, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." In these verses, Jesus compares different kinds of persons in order to remind the crowd why they had been so attracted to John. One kind of person is like a reed swayed by the wind. Reeds represent weak people. They have no clear identity or value system. They lack conviction based on the truth. They are easily swayed by public opinion, temptations, and persecution. John was not like that. John had such courageous faith that he rebuked King Herod.

Another kind of person is a man dressed in fine clothes. This kind of person pursues money and power in order to indulge in luxury. They care nothing for others. They exploit the weak for their own benefit. Outwardly they are successful, and objects of envy. But inwardly they are corrupt and miserable. They live as the ruling class, like

those in palaces. In contrast, John lived in the wilderness. He ate locusts and wild honey; his clothing was made of camel's hair. No one went to him because he was fashionable.

Finally Jesus mentioned a prophet. A prophet is a godly person who pursues truth and holiness, and fights against evil. A prophet is a person of mission who preaches the word of God for the glory of God. Prophets live for the salvation of others, not personal pleasure. They do not compromise with the world; they live by faith in God in any situation. God recognizes, blesses and uses such people. People went to John because they felt God's holy presence through him. With this reminder, Jesus wanted them to see through the appearance of things and grasp what God was doing.

Jesus went on to call John "more than a prophet," and said, "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (27-28a). Jesus commended John's greatness. John was great because God gave him the mission to be the forerunner of the Messiah. To carry out this mission, John preached the message of repentance to prepare people's hearts for Jesus. Though he became very popular, he refused to receive honor for himself; instead, he pointed people to Jesus. He said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:30). When John poured out his life to exalt Jesus, he became a truly great man and a good influence.

Then Jesus added, "Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (28b). This puts John into perspective in God's history. John was an Old Testament prophet. Old Testament prophets looked forward to and foretold the coming of the Messiah. Among them, John's place was special because he was the direct forerunner. Still, John belonged to the old covenant. On the other hand, those who believe in Jesus become members of the new covenant which governs the kingdom of God. The new covenant is superior to the old because its members experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—who writes God's law on their minds and hearts, transforming them into Jesus' image. This is why they are greater than John. In this section, we learn to remember how God worked in our lives. This gives us the spiritual discernment to stand on God's side in history.

Third, two responses to God's work (29-35). In verses 29-30, Luke explains how people responded to God's work. First, all the people, even the tax collectors, as they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right (29). It was because they had been baptized by John. This means that they recognized their sin and repented publicly. This prepared them to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. This is God's way of salvation. We must recognize ourselves as sinners, repent, and believe in Jesus. This is the only way of salvation that God has provided (Ac 4:12). In Acts 2:38 Peter proclaimed, "Repent and

be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” We must follow God’s way of salvation.

We see the other response in verse 30, which says, “But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” When they heard John’s message of repentance, their pride was hurt and they rejected it. God wanted them to be shepherds for his people. But in refusing to repent, they remained spiritually blind. They could not see Jesus as the Messiah, and rejected him. In doing so, they rejected God’s purpose for themselves.

In verses 31-34 Jesus speaks to his generation. This does not refer to everyone, but to the religious leaders and those under their influence. Jesus compared them to children sitting in the marketplace playing games. In the wedding game, one group played the pipe and the other group had to dance. But they refused because they did not like the song. In the funeral game, one group sang a dirge and the other group was supposed to cry. But they did not because they did not feel like it. They were very capricious and ignored rules and reason. The religious leaders and their followers were just like these children. John the Baptist did not eat bread or drink wine in order to devote himself to God’s mission. They thought his asceticism was too extreme and said, “He has a demon” (33). Jesus ate and drank with sinners in order to befriend and save them. They rejected him as too liberal, saying, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (34). They did not like John and they did not like Jesus. It was because both John and Jesus followed God’s way. In fact, the religious leaders did not like God’s way, no matter how it was practiced.

In verse 35 Jesus concluded, “But wisdom is proved right by all her children.” Here “wisdom” is God’s way, God’s truth. Children of wisdom are not like those in the marketplace; they are followers of God’s way. God’s way is proved right by all of its followers. Anyone who recognizes themselves as a sinner, repents of their sins, and believes in Jesus will be transformed into a child of God. They are filled with love, joy and peace and live the most meaningful and fruitful lives, fulfilling God’s purpose for them. Do you follow God’s way? Or your own way? This is not just a matter of words, but of lifestyle. The truth will be fully revealed by each one’s way of life.

In today’s passage we learn that God is working mightily even in the midst of all the troubles in our world. So we should not be discouraged and fall into despair when we see terrible things. We should see beyond the darkness of the world, and our own hardships to the life-giving work that God is doing. When we see what God is doing, we can live for God’s purpose in our own generation.

