

The Greatest Man in all the World

Luke 7 (24~30)

Here Jesus seeks to reaffirm John the Baptist in the eyes of the people... both *the man*, and *his message*. No doubt, He does this to dispel any doubt that might have come about, as a result of John's questioning whether or not He was the "*One to come...or look we for another.*" It's apparent, that the event spoken of here in verses 18~23, of John sending two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the one that should come, or should they look for another, it's apparent that it took place in sight of all the people. Given the questions that John had asked Jesus, it very likely had caused some questions to arise in their minds, concerning John. Therefore, to reassure the people concerning John, both of *the man*, and *his message*, Jesus turns to the people and begins asking them a series of questions...

(Vs 24) ²⁴ *And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?***

These "Reeds" Jesus is referring to here, were *long, hollow stemmed grasses* that grew up along the riverbanks. They were so frail, so flimsy, that the *slightest breeze* would cause them to sway back and forth. Isaiah used them as a symbol of "*weakness*", in that of trusting in men. Was John like one of those "Reeds" out along the riverbanks that are constantly swaying back and forth with the slightest wind?

That is to say, was John a weak, wavering individual, who was easily swayed? Was John like a lot of these others guys you see, who are spineless, wavering back and forth, those who don't buck the system, and just kind of go with the flow? You guys know what I'm talking about, the kind of men who are afraid to speak up... those who tip toe through certain things, those who avoid certain things, certain areas, to avoid conflict! Those who will not take a stand on what is right, and say what is right, for fear of rejection, and not fitting in. Was this the kind of man John was?

Notice...of the three questions, this is the only one that Jesus didn't answer for them. No doubt, because there was no question...the people knew this was certainly not the case! Like William Penn, John believed, that "*Right is right, even if everyone is against it, and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it!*" John was no "*people pleaser*," he preached exactly what needed to be preached, to whom it needed to be preached, when it needed to be preached. He was fearless and bold; he called sin sin and sinners sinners. As a matter of fact, John was in prison at the time, for calling sin sin...

I would that God would raise up more men like John in our day, Lord knows we certainly need them! There are "Reeds" springing up all around us in our day. A lot of the men standing in the pulpits across America this morning, will be careful to watch what they say, as to not rub the hearers the wrong way, for fear of losing their job! Rather than standing firm and without reservation, proclaiming the truth of God's word, they tell people what they want to hear, ear ticklers...people pleasers. This is something that John could not be accused of... John boldly preached against sin, calling the people to repentance!

(Vs 24b~25) *What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? **Absolutely not!*** ²⁵ *So... what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.*

This one had to do with *John's dress and lifestyle*... We know by scripture, John wore a "*garment of camels hair, with a leather belt about his waist, and lived on locust and wild honey*..." The contrast here is, between that of a life of comfort, a life of luxury, and life of indulgence and pleasure... contrasted with John's life of sacrifice and self-denial. No one could accuse John as being a man wrapped up in this world, and the things of this world! John's lifestyle made it clear, that "*he was not a man of this world!*" As should be the case with all who follow Christ, it should be clear, by our lifestyle, that we are not of this world, we don't seek the things of this world, ours should be that of seeking Christ, and His things...

Given the line of questioning, who do you think Jesus was comparing John with? Who are like “*Reeds?*” Who are gorgeously appareled, and live in luxury? Right...the Pharisees and Scribes. Those blind, religious leaders of the day. The point is, John is nothing like those men! John’s lifestyle was a living, visual protest against self-indulgence and self-centeredness...both physically and symbolically. He dressed, ate and lived far apart from the hypocritical and corrupt religious system of the day! John refused to conform to the system of his day, and determined in his heart, that he would take a stand for true righteousness, even if it meant that no one wanted anything to do with him! Let’s just say, I don’t think John got any invitations to preach at any of their “*Ritzy Synagogues*” of his day. Just a note, I find the that statement, “*they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts*” interesting. Think about it, John was in prison, at the hands of Herod the King, while the Pharisees lived right there among him, and were good friends with him.

(Vs 26~27) ²⁶*But what went ye out for to see?* It certainly wasn’t those things, you could have found them in the cities there, but you came all the way out here in the wilderness, to see what?

A prophet? ...Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. ²⁷*This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

This is the prophet of prophets...this is the one that was “*prophesied to come...*” This is the “*promised messenger*” of Malachi! This is he, whom would come to prepare the way, for the coming of the Lord!

(Vs 28) “*This is one special man*”... ²⁸*For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist...*

Now think about that, that’s a **big statement**... There’s some pretty big names, some well know, mighty men of the bible that John has had to rise above. Men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Zechariah, Amos...just to mention a few. Yet Jesus declares, that this John, is greater than all of them!

...Among those that are born of women... “*Born of a woman*”...speaks of “*this world*”... Humanly speaking, in terms of those who are born of a man and woman... Of all the men “*born of this world*” (comparison to Kingdom of God), of all the prophets who had both an earthly mother and father, there is none greater than John.

(Vs 28) ²⁸... **(but notice, he adds) but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.**

What does he mean by that? It is a contrast, of “*This world*” and “*The Kingdom of God.*” Jesus is making a point. To be the greatest man in “*This world,*” but yet not be a child of the “*Kingdom,*” would mean nothing. John may be the greatest man in all the world...but *that pales in comparison* to being a child of God! He is stressing *the importance*, of the need for men to heed John’s message! Jesus’ point here in exalting John is not simply to get folks to believe he is a great man, but rather to get people to TRUST John, and to heed John’s message! The lives of men rise and fall upon heeding John’s message!

(Vs 29~30) *There’s two categories of men...those who heed, and those who don’t...* ²⁹*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.* ³⁰*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*

Luke uses the term “*publicans*” as a measurement... ²⁹*And all the people that heard him, **EVEN... the publicans**...* The term “*publican*” doesn’t mean much to us, but it sure did to the audience of Luke’s day. That term “*publicans*” referred to the “*lowest of the lows*” you might say, in their day. There was great disdain for these men, they were traitors, cheats, and such. Think about someone you know, who is living a “*horrific lifestyle,*” one that is anything but godly, one that it’s hard for you to conceive even the thought, that they would ever get into church, and serve Christ, and you’ll understand Luke’s point.

(Vs 29~30) ²⁹*All the people that heard him, **EVEN... the publicans...** justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. (**Which is compared to another group...**)* ³⁰*But **the Pharisees and lawyers** rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*

What's the point? Rather than it being the religious leaders of the day, who would bare witness to the truth of God's word, it would be the harlots, the thieves; the publicans! These Pharisee's and Lawyers were the religious leaders of the day, they studied the word, they taught the word, they were the ones who oversaw the worship of God at the temple...yet, Luke declares, it was not them that would serve as the examples of the kind of people God desired, because they rejected John's counsel...

Beloved, herein we find a glorious truth, one that I want to make sure we get... Luke is speaking to the "**Testimony of men's' lives**"...referring to the *kind of living* that pleases God. And, in doing so, he says that it was not that of the "*Religious folks*" of the day, but rather it was the lives of the "*thieves, the prostitutes, the publican's*" who heeded John's message...that would serve as the "*Witness.*" What does he mean?

Listen, it is here, that Luke defines the kind of "Testimony" of our lives, that is pleasing to God. We often say, we want to "*Set a good example*" for those around us, we want to be a "*good witness*" to the lost around us, right? How is that achieved? What characterizes a "*good example, a good witness?*" Very quickly, somebody name some. Not cussing, not drinking, go to church, do good to others, etc... But what if I were to tell you, that everything you just described, described the Pharisees and Scribes of Luke's day? And yet, Luke declares that they rejected and refuted the counsel of God! Their lives were not the lives that justified God. That is to say, it was not their "*Clean living*" that honored God! Beloved, we do not honor God by our "*Righteous Lives*"... Now I'm not saying we shouldn't strive to live our best, for we should. But that alone is not it! At best, our righteousness is as "*filthy rags.*" And let me reiterate, even though they are filthy rags, I want them to be the best filthy rags I have to offer. But my point is, living clean, moral lives is not the life that honors God!

Then what is it? It is *the life of Repentance*... It is the life that "*Reflects Repentance*" that bears witness to God's word, and brings honor to His name! Remember what John told the Pharisees when they came to be baptized of him? "*Bring therefore fruits meet for Repentance!*" Beloved, if we are going to bear witness to God's word, we are going to have to live "*Separated lives,*" denying ourselves of the desires and will of the Flesh, and live our lives unto God and His will...His Desire, each and every day of our life! If the people around us, can't look to our lives, and "*SEE REPENTANCE,*" by our living our lives unto Jesus Christ and the Will of God...nothing else matters! Listen, the gospel is NOT a call to "*straighten our lives up,*" it is a call to "*give our lives up!*"

Here, Luke points to the publican's, the harlots, the thieves and such, as those who "*justify God,*" in that they heeded John's message of repentance, while these religious men, did not! Though they appeared to "*live right,*" by "*doing right things*"...they were anything but right for the simple fact, "*they continued to live for self!*" They continued to live *self-centered, self-indulgent lives*... They were like "*Reeds,*" there was no real stand for the things of God. They compromised in order to *fit in!* Their lifestyles were "*of the world*" as well; they lived in pleasure and luxury! They were as worldly as the world around them! The only difference was, they went to church on Sunday!

Luke points to *repentant sinners* as the example of the lifestyle that honors God. Think about this, before, this same group served as the supreme "*Example*" of self-indulgent, self-centered people on the face of the earth! Listen, those out here living "*horrific lives*" in adultery, in drunkenness, in stealing, in prostitution, and so on, *serve as an example* of those **who gives themselves fully to the desires of the flesh!** That's really all they are, they show no restraint to the desires and will of sinful flesh. Though the Pharisees and Lawyers did show restraint, by adhering to the Law of God, they were still in the flesh! You

might say they were clean sinners, if there is such. The call of the gospel is to “*turn from Self!*” Repent from that animal inside you, that depraved, sinful will and desire that lives inside you!

Think about it, it is those who lived all out for the flesh...that heeded John’s message, and repented, that are the examples of what God desires of all men! Before, they lived for self, and were self-indulgent, self-centered...but now, having repented, they are God-centered...God serving! People who deny themselves, sacrifice self, to yield their lives unto Jesus Christ as Lord! Let me make this crystal clear, if I haven’t already... Religion won’t help you! The fact you are a religious man, a religious woman...bears no weight with God. For the clear counsel of scripture, is a call for rebellious men and women to REPENT, separating themselves from this world, by living their lives in submission to Jesus Christ as Lord!