

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## To Seek and to Save

### An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

<sup>18</sup>The disciples of John reported to him about all these things<sup>a</sup>. <sup>19</sup>Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else<sup>b</sup>?” <sup>20</sup>When the men came to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, ‘Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’” <sup>21</sup>At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind<sup>c</sup>. <sup>22</sup>And He answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf

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<sup>a</sup> 7:18 **The disciples of John reported to him about all these things.** John the Baptist was likely in Herod’s prison at Machaerus east of the Dead Sea. He heard *about* Jesus but he wanted to hear *from* Him. He wanted an authoritative source. So he sent two of his disciples directly to Jesus.

<sup>b</sup> 7:19 **John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?”** The centurion in the beginning of this chapter felt unworthy to approach Jesus, so he sent messengers. John sent messengers because he was unable to approach Jesus.

I rarely disagree with John Calvin’s commentary, but in it he says that John was not doubting at all. He suggests that John merely wanted his disciples to find out for themselves, so he sent them to ask the question. Of John’s question Calvin says:

The opinion entertained by some, that he sent them partly on his own account, is exceedingly foolish; as if he had not been fully convinced, or obtained distinct information, that Jesus is the Christ.

With no disrespect for the venerable Reformer I have to be classed with the “exceedingly foolish” view. I agree that John boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah because he was fully convinced of Jesus’ identity from the start. But he was in a weak position here. He was asking for authoritative confirmation. In other words he wanted to believe but he needed to hear from Jesus. That is why Jesus did not scold him but comforted him.

When you are troubled about the things you have long believed you don’t run to the skeptics or other doubters for answers. All that does is promote more confusion.

Faith does not rely on logic but neither is it illogical. Taking God at his word does not bypass reason but it puts its confidence in One whose ways and thoughts are higher than ours. Those who need the gospel, for instance, are not in a position to judge how satisfying God’s salvation will be. They are like the person at the top of a burning building who looks down and sees men with a tarp shouting “jump!” When you express faith you are not in a position to judge how accurate are the claims you hear. You just jump. So John does not ask Herod, “Is Jesus the Coming One or should we look for another?” He asks the One who saves.

John was the bold ambassador of Jesus who told all his disciples, “That’s the One! Follow Him!” But maybe the trouble now is that his vision of what this King would do was in conflict with what was really happening. He called people to repent and to show the fruit of repentance in preparation for the true Ruler. Now a couple years later he was in prison under the power of a different ruler. Life did not make sense.

Here is the irony of John’s question: His expression of honest doubt was really a demonstration of faith because of where he directed the question. John took his doubt to the place it belonged, willing to accept whatever answer he received.

Notice that John did not say, “Is there a coming one?”

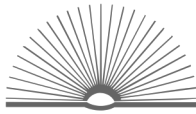
<sup>c</sup> 7:21 **At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind.** Jesus had never stopped demonstrating that He was who He claimed to be. Doubt never changes reality.

The Gospel of Luke  
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM<sup>a</sup>. <sup>23</sup>Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me<sup>b</sup>.”

<sup>24</sup>When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind<sup>c</sup>? <sup>25</sup>But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces<sup>d</sup>! <sup>26</sup>But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet<sup>e</sup>. <sup>27</sup>This is the one about whom it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,

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<sup>a</sup> 7:22 **Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.** Jesus encouraged John with a message of His own. He was saying effectively, “John, the plan has not changed. I’m taking over. Listen to what I’ve been doing.” But the method of the takeover was probably not what John or anyone else expected.

These works were not simply the confirmation that Jesus was Messiah. They were evidence of the kingdom work itself. Romans 8:22 says, “For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.” Jesus was easing some of the groaning, but His great work of redemption was still to come.

It is interesting what Jesus considered the meeting of the need of the poor. The solution for the blind, lame, lepers, deaf and dead are obvious, but Jesus said the poor got good news. That is not to say Jesus did not act compassionately toward needy people but it does identify the kind of people who were ready to receive a message that there is more to life than what people possess on earth.

<sup>b</sup> 7:23 **Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.** The word “blessed” is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes.

The word translated “take offense” can mean “stumble.” It is used of causing others to fall or of getting tripped up. I think Jesus was saying, “I am the key figure in this picture. Don’t be ashamed of Me” (See Romans 1:16).

<sup>c</sup> 7:24 **What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?** John served away from Jerusalem where most preachers served. People usually did not have to go away from Jerusalem to see prophets. Jesus asks the people why this man’s ministry was so attractive. It was because John spoke the truth.

But was John no longer bold for the truth? If he had been a “shaken reed” he would have bent with the winds of persecution and stopped preaching. If he had been shaken he would not have been in prison.

John was doing the same thing Paul did when a question arose about the message he preached. Paul went humbly before the elders in Jerusalem and said, “Am I getting this right?” That is not bending with the wind and rebelling against the truth. It is doubting your understanding of the truth.

<sup>d</sup> 7:25 **A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces!** Jesus contrasted John with the finely-dressed, powerful people in the world. John’s wardrobe consisted of leather and camel hair (Matthew 3:4). The poor had the gospel preached to them not because God favors poor people but to illustrate that displays of fleshly power like wealth and wardrobe do not attract the eyes of God.

<sup>e</sup> 7:26 **more than a prophet.** Calvin points out that John alone got to point men to Jesus personally. John was not just a prophet, he was a specific fulfillment of a prophecy of Scripture. Like Peter said:

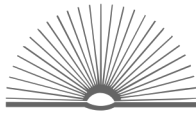
But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. 2 Peter 1:20-21

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WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU<sup>a</sup>,<sup>28</sup> I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he<sup>b</sup>.<sup>29</sup> When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John<sup>c</sup>.<sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John<sup>d,e</sup>.

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In other words, John did not prophesy on his own initiative nor did those who spoke of him hundreds of years ahead of time speak on their own initiative.

<sup>a</sup> 7:27 **This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'** This is the text from Malachi 3:1 that prophesied the coming of John 400 years before he was born.

<sup>b</sup> 7:28 **among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.** Jesus knew true greatness when He saw it.

<sup>c</sup> 7:29 **When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John.** The phrase "they acknowledged God's justice" probably means that the people mentioned said an audible or inaudible "amen" to Jesus' words. It would be like saying in your heart, "Whatever my God ordains is right."

<sup>d</sup> 7:30 **But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.** Just as "justifying God" was an issue of the heart, so was rejecting Him. Look at the contrast Luke made here between the Pharisees and lawyers and the people and tax collectors. There is a reason why the prominent leaders in Israel were not baptized by John. John refused them:

So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Luke 3:7-8

<sup>e</sup> 7:18-30 Have you ever questioned things you have long believed? If your answer is no, either you are lying or you do not do much thinking. Doubts are not good things, but they are part of being human.

Luke is going back and forth between the attributes of Jesus and the qualities of those who have Him as their foundation. Jesus showed Himself powerful in the healing of the centurion's slave. The centurion showed complete confidence in the character of Jesus. Jesus showed Himself compassionate in raising the widow's son. John the Baptist's humble admission of weakness demonstrated that he was among the truly great.

You should always be honest even when it makes you look weak. Here is how to demonstrate honest humility:

1. Do not fear what you will look like if you ask questions. This applies in a lot of settings, but particularly to questions about truth.
2. Take your doubts to Jesus. It seems like circular reasoning to go to the One you doubt to ask if you should be doubting Him. Do not do that with a politician. Do that with the creator of matter. One warning: be prepared to accept an authoritative answer even if it makes no sense in your judgment. As Puritan Thomas Watson said in his *Body of Divinity*:

In the deliverance of the church, it is limiting God, either to set him a time, or prescribe him a method for deliverance. God will deliver Sion, but he will be left to his own liberty; he will not be tied to a place, to a time, or to an instrument, which were to limit him, and then he should not be infinite. God will go his own way, he will pose and nonplus reason, he will save in such a way as we think would destroy. Now he acts like himself, like an infinite wonder-working God. (p. 55)

3. Refuse to measure your significance by worldly standards.

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