

### 23. Jesus Spoke of the Greatness of John the Baptist

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how Jesus showed the mighty power of God by raising a young man from the dead. We saw that word spread throughout Galilee, Judea and the whole surrounding region when Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain. In this topic, we are going to see that the disciples of John the Baptist went to tell John about what Jesus was doing.

Luke 7:18-23 says, “Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. And John, calling two of his disciples to *him*, sent *them* to Jesus, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ When the men had come to Him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”’ And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised, *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is *he* who is not offended because of Me.’” In Luke 3:20, we saw that Herod had put John in prison.

That is why Matthew 11:2-3 says, “And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” John had prepared the way for Jesus and then Herod had put him in prison. That could have been discouraging to John. As a result, when John heard from his disciples that Jesus had raised the young man, John sent two disciples with a question for Jesus. Instead of answering the question of these two disciples immediately, Jesus encouraged the two disciples of John to watch what He was doing; we read that in the same hour Jesus performed many more miracles.

Then, Jesus answered the question of the two disciples of John. Jesus told them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.” In this statement of Jesus, we see the variety of miracles that Jesus did as the two disciples watched. We see that it is even possible that Jesus may have raised additional people from the dead while they were watching. In Isaiah 35, Isaiah had predicted hundreds of years earlier that the Messiah would do many of these things. As a result, Jesus told John that He was the Messiah that came to fulfill those promises that had been given by Isaiah. Jesus chose to encourage John by telling the two disciples to tell John that he would be blessed because Jesus was doing the very things John had predicted.

Luke 7:24-28 says, “When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is *he* of whom it is written: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.” For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is

least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Here, we see that Jesus used this opportunity to remind the people of the message that John had preached about Jesus.

Jesus asked the multitudes six questions as He talked about John the Baptist. First, Jesus asked the people what they had gone out into the wilderness to see. When the Pharisees sent people to question John about who he was, John answered in John 1:23, “He said: ‘I *am* “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord,” as the prophet Isaiah said.’” John had quoted from Isaiah 40 to describe his ministry. Now, Jesus said that He was fulfilling the ministry that Isaiah had predicted for the Messiah.

Second, Jesus asked the people if they had gone out into the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind. Of course, the answer was clear from the question. They did not go to see a reed or bush shaken by the wind but rather to see and hear the message of John. Third, Jesus asked, what did you really go out to see in the wilderness? He immediately followed that question with a fourth, did you go out to see “a man clothed in soft garments?” Jesus made it very clear that they did not go to see a man who was clothed in fancy clothes and lived in a palace. In fact, Matthew 3:4 says, “Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.” John certainly did not live like a king or other important person.

Then, Jesus asked questions five and six, “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.” Jesus said that yes it was a prophet, in fact even more than a prophet, they went to see in the wilderness. Jesus then explained the ministry of John by quoting the first part of Malachi 3:1. That verse says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ says the Lord of hosts.” Jesus did not quote the last part of that verse that day but many of the Jesus knew that promise because they were looking for the Messiah. As a result, Jesus was actually pointing to the fact that He is that promised Messiah.

Then, Jesus said in Luke 7:28-35, “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’ And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. And the Lord said, ‘To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not weep.” For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, “He has a demon.” The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!” But wisdom is justified by all her children.’” Here, we see that Jesus said John was the greatest of all of the prophets.

However, what Jesus said next was a very important statement. Jesus said, “But he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Like all of the Old Testament prophets, John was put to

death before the death and resurrection of Jesus. In contrast, the person who is the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist because those in the kingdom of God have had the privilege of knowing about the death and resurrection of Jesus that took away the sin of the world. As a result, every Christian has had a greater privilege than John the Baptist. The tax collectors were very glad to hear what Jesus said because they had been baptized by John when they repented of sins.

The Pharisees and lawyers had rejected the message of John the Baptist. They did not want to believe that they needed to repent of their sins and so they rejected the message of John. This caused Jesus to say that the Pharisees and lawyers were like the children playing in the marketplace. While their parents were selling or buying at the marketplace, the children would play games with each other. Sometimes, the children would get angry when other children would not do what those asking them wanted them to do. Jesus said that the Pharisees and lawyers were acting just like those children.

Jesus used two sayings to describe the childish words of the Pharisees and lawyers when He said, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not weep.” In Luke 3:7, we read what John had said, “Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’” John warned the Jews about coming judgment. The tax collectors did express their sorrow for their sin and repented of that sin. As a result, they were baptized by John to show their repentance. The Pharisees and lawyers refused to repent of their sins because they were depending on their own works.

Jesus came and invited the tax collectors to follow Him. One tax collector that Jesus invited to follow Him was Levi (Matthew). Luke 5:29-30 says, “Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, ‘Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” Here, we see that Jesus came with great grace and love and even joined the tax collectors for a feast in the home of Levi. This time the Pharisees complained about the joy and celebration that Jesus had as He ate with sinners. Like children in the marketplace, the Pharisees refused to be happy with either John or Jesus. John warned of judgment for sin and Jesus offering grace to sinners. The Pharisees rejected both messages.

Jesus then said, “But wisdom is justified by all her children.” The Pharisees depended on worldly wisdom. James 3:15 says, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.” The tax collectors came with an attitude of repentance because they wanted godly wisdom. James 3:17 says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the difference between worldly and godly wisdom. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain this difference.