

## SERMON OUTLINE

# SESSION 4: John the Baptist Wrestles with His Fate

TEXT: LUKE 7:18–35

## INTRODUCTION

John has been arrested for speaking against Herod. While he is in prison, his disciples and closest friends are keeping him updated on current events. Jesus is really beginning to ramp up his ministry and is gaining a larger following. It is important to note that Jesus has just raised someone from the dead and healed a sick person. News is spreading quickly about Jesus and the work he is doing.

We pick up the story as John is in prison, awaiting his unknown fate when he receives an update about Jesus. This week we will consider the following:

1. John's question for Jesus
2. Jesus' interesting response to John's question
3. What Jesus thinks about John's life and message

## 1. JOHN'S QUESTION FOR JESUS. (LUKE 7:18–20)

John hears about Jesus' miracles and following (verse 18).

He sends his disciples to ask Jesus if they should look for someone else (verse 20).

- John is beginning to doubt that Jesus is the Lamb of God that he talked about in John 1.
- John may be wondering why he is still in prison if Jesus is who he claims to be.

It is probably safe to say that John expected to face some difficult times in his life, but things are not playing out the way he had anticipated.

Fasting is good for us, because it reminds us that following Jesus does not mean that things will always be easy and comfortable.

Consider the following portion from the reading in Day Seventeen:

*God provides all we need, and yet we tremble in fear when a new challenge rears its head. It would be like Lazarus being raised from the dead and a week later hearing him scream, "God, where are you? You have abandoned me. That raised-from-the-dead thing was last week ... what are you going to do for me today?!" The children of Israel have been rescued miraculously out of slavery in Egypt, and it seems that every step of the way they are forgetting what God has done for them. We are no different. I think we go through the same thing spiritually. We would love to live in a constant spiritual high, but God does not part the sea every day. It is a once-in-a-lifetime event that we have to cling to as a reminder of God's love and grace. It would be wonderful if every day was your wedding day, but marriage does not work that way. Life and faith do not work that way either. There will be ups and downs. The trouble is, if you can't remember the ups, the downs feel really low.*

It is certainly okay to have questions, doubts, and fears. But we also need to remember God's goodness and faithfulness.

## 2. JESUS' INTERESTING RESPONSE TO JOHN'S QUESTION. (LUKE 7:21-23)

Jesus first doesn't answer the question. Instead he begins to act and performs some miracles (verse 21).

Jesus performs the same miracles that John heard about in prison (verse 21).

Then Jesus simply tells John's followers to go back and tell John what they have seen (and what John already knew) (verse 22).

- In other words, Jesus is just trying to remind John of everything he has already seen with his eyes and knows to be true.
- Jesus does not offer any new information.
- Jesus is very direct and to the point in this moment.

Jesus' next remark is particularly striking. He says, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (verse 23).

- Is this Jesus' way of telling John that he will die in prison?
- It is both terrifying and comforting to think that Jesus offends people like John the Baptist.
- Comforting because I see that I am not alone when Jesus makes me uncomfortable.
- Terrifying in the fact that I can expect no different treatment than John.

It is probably safe to say that John did not dream of dying in prison for speaking out against Herod.

Instead, like many of us, he probably dreamed of seeing Jesus' Kingdom come into fulfillment with his own eyes.

What if following Jesus means that our dreams won't always pan out the way we have wanted (read: the American Dream)? Or that we won't have some of the things we've always hoped for?

- Essentially, are we content with following Jesus? Or do we also need success, health, wealth, and so forth to be a part of the deal?

Consider the following portion from the reading in Day Twenty-Four:

*Paul takes us back to the first command. When Jesus is at the center for me, I can be content with whatever he gives me. He could give me much, he could give me little, I could be hungry, I could be well fed, I could be at perfect peace with my neighbor, my wife, my children or I could be in conflict, but as I abide in Jesus I find a contentment that flows into all that I am.*

*I believe that when we as a people focus on Jesus and rest in the contentment of what he's blessed us with, we become a different people. **When our attention is fixed on Jesus, when our life is about a right relationship with our Creator, the daily struggle to prove ourselves falls to the wayside.***

This is a sobering thought for us. Are we content with following Jesus?

### 3. WHAT JESUS THINKS ABOUT JOHN'S LIFE AND MESSAGE. (LUKE 7:24–35)

Jesus comments on the fact that people sought John (verses 24–25).

Jesus also puts him on a different level than even the prophets (verse 26).

Jesus even says there's no one before John who is greater (verse 28).

Jesus also makes an interesting statement about “wisdom being proved right by her children” (verse 35).

- How well do the people live who rely on us, who depend on us, and for whom we are responsible?
- What is our direct impact on those who come after us? That is the true test for whether we live rightly and wisely.
- Does the state of our families, workplaces, neighborhoods, cities, and world suggest that we live wisely?

Please join in this prayer from Day Thirty-One:

*God, we believe that you are taking us to a place where there will be abundance for all. Give us the insight, **wisdom**, creativity, and resources to rid the world of the great divide between those who have and those who do not. We realize that the resources you have given us are a blessing, not a curse, and we need to learn to utilize them well. May we see extreme poverty end in our lifetime. May we give from the overflow of our hearts. May we know in our own lives how much is too much—and seek wisdom in how to share. May we come to you asking how we can care for one another well, and how we can provide for those in dire need. May God give each of us the wisdom to walk the path of generosity. Lead us, Lord, to the Promised Land, where everyone has enough.*

What would the world be like if we lived out the message of John the Baptist?

What would the world look like if we lived the way he lived, generously and passionately?

Jesus makes an intriguing statement that even the person who is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Next week, we will consider what that might mean as we look at how Jesus responds to the news of John's beheading.