

The Winnowing Begins

Luke 7:24-30

February 25, 2018

We're in Luke's gospel this morning. So you want to take your Bibles and turn there. We're studying a section of Scripture in which Jesus is helping us understand the ministry of John the Baptist. So go ahead and turn to Luke 7. We're going to start reading from verse 18. Luke 7:18. We'll begin by reading the text. I'll just remind you in our study last week, John the Baptist asked Jesus a question. He asked him, "Are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another?" And to answer the question, Jesus pointed to the fruit of his ministry.

He pointed to the power of God that was clearly present in miraculous signs and wonders as he healed and cast out demons. He pointed to all, in all of that, the fulfillment of Scripture, particularly as he came to preach the gospel. He pointed out the characteristic pattern of the divine as well. Namely this, that sinful human beings are really bent on rejecting the divine,

rejecting Jesus Christ. And that's why he said in verse 23,
"Blessed is the one who was not offended by me."

So Jesus answered John's question, and he simply called him to believe. John needed to believe the fact of Jesus' miracles. He needed to believe the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in Jesus' ministry. And John also need to believe, simply put, you need to believe in Jesus Christ. He needed to put his trust in him resisting any temptation to take offense at what he didn't understand, and what worked contrary to his expectations, even.

We noted, though, that John's question wasn't really an expression of doubt, per se. He came to Jesus with his question and he came to Jesus, that's significant to see that he came to him. That's exactly right. When you have questions, to come to Christ, and when you come, to "Ask in faith without any doubting." John's question as we said, was born out of an expectation. He thought that Jesus would take up the winnowing fork, that he would separate the wheat from the chaff, that he would clear the threshing floor of all that chaff and set it all on fire in a moment.

He expected Jesus to winnow. And John wasn't, we have to note, he wasn't entirely wrong in that expectation. What John couldn't see, is what Jesus was doing in winnowing the heart. John, like all men, was only able to see what was on the surface. He's only able to see what's on the outside. He only could judge by outward appearances. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. And that's where Jesus went, in his winnowing work, he went deeper to the most profound level, to winnow the heart.

That's what we're gonna see in the text this morning. The winnowing that was predicted by Scripture, the winnowing that John predicted and expected, the winnowing that John thought he wasn't seeing in Jesus' ministry. Well, that winnowing work of Jesus actually begins right here.

Let's start, though, back in Luke 7:18, and we'll see this in, as it flows together all the way to verse 30. The disciples of John reported all these things, all these things that Jesus had done since Capernaum. "The disciples of John reported all

these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the one who has to come or shall we look for another?' And when the men had come to him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, "Are you the one who has to come? Or shall we look for another?"' In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who are blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who was not offended by me.'

"When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: 'What did you go out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those are who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell 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."

“‘I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’ When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

Those final two verses help us to see how the Messianic Ministry, which is here represented by both John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah, this messianic ministry was used of God to winnow the people. To reveal hearts, to bring conviction to the conscience. John's ministry, in his ministry was preaching a baptism of repentance. His ministry was necessary to receive the ministry of Jesus, preaching a New Covenant, Ministry of Forgiveness. That's what I want you to see this morning. The connection between John and Jesus. The connection, the necessary connection between repentance and forgiveness. Any gospel, that shies away from using the words “Repent of your sin, and believe in Jesus Christ”, is not the gospel.

In order to receive forgiveness of sins, you must repent and believe. There is a believing that it's a turning from and a turning to, repent and believe. If you're here this morning, and you don't know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, please listen carefully because you need to know that we've been praying for you. Prayed for you just this morning, we pray for you often. We pray that God will open your heart to the Gospel. And we trust his Spirit to be working even now in your heart.

Sometimes even to make you uncomfortable, for things that bring conviction. If you do already know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you also need to listen carefully because we want you to learn to obey Christ fully. To understand this gospel fully, that you might explain it accurately to people who need to know him, to need to come to him. Repentance, forgiveness belong together, never separate them, never tear them apart. John's ministry, baptism of repentance, pointing everyone to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. That's what we need to see here in the text this morning. And it all starts in point one with conviction.

Point one is conviction. It's there in your bulletin. And the conviction is in this, that they recognize God's prophet. They recognized God's prophet. Luke tells us there in verse 24, "After John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John." We tend to think of this section of Scripture all about John the Baptist. We kind of tend to think of this as a bit of an epilogue on John's ministry, after all, he's in prison. He's going to die, he's going to be beheaded. And we think, well, Jesus is just kind of filling us in on how important John's ministry is. And that's sort of true, it's just not the whole story.

If that's as far as we go, epilogue, we will miss the true significance of John and his ministry of preparation for Jesus Christ. Jesus is providing commentary on John the Baptist clearly, but he's helping the crowds and he's helping us to interpret the significance of John's ministry. That phrase there in verse 24, that he "began to speak to the crowds." That is a phrase that signals that there is now a turning to a formal treatment. A solemn discourse on John. Jesus here wants to make sure that the crowds get John the Baptist, right. That is so important, because they need to make sure they are prepared to

receive the Messianic Ministry.

Jesus here is working in tandem with John's work, his work of preparation, and he is helping the crowds here, and us, to pay careful attention to what they heard from John. Because those who are prepared by John, they are prepared to embrace Jesus too. Look what he says there again in verses 24-26. Read that with me. "When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John." He asked them three questions. "What did you go out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold those dressed in splendid clothing and living in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, a prophet."

We're gonna stop right there, mid-sentence, because we want to draw attention to Jesus' point here. What is the point? What is Jesus doing here? As I said from the beginning, Jesus is winnowing. He is here exposing hearts. He is clarifying motives. And he is working right now to bring conviction to the conscience of the crowds who are listening to him. Let's walk through each of the questions and I'll show you what I mean.

First, Jesus asked him, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" What did you go out to see? The verb translated there "to see" it's beyond just the mere sensory perception like an experience of physical sight or vision. It's the word *theaomai*, and it means looking at or viewing. And then it's related to a noun *thelma*, which means astonishment. It means amazement or wonder. So the looking at or the viewing is to view something that brings astonishment, something that brings them amazement.

So Jesus is asking here, what did you go out in the wilderness to gaze at? To gawk at, to gape about? What did you go out to marvel over or to be astonished by? The people went out to the wilderness essentially, when they did that they were making a pretty significant commitment. They're going out into making a pilgrimage into a very harsh environment. The desert was a very inhospitable place. One that required proper planning and preparation, food, water, those kinds of things. And the reason they went to all that trouble, the reason they embraced the inconvenience and endured the discomfort, was for something a bit more spectacular than a reed shaken by the wind, which they could see in the city.

Mental image of a reed shaken by the wind provides a bit of a double entendre here. It's not just that they didn't go out to see something just as common as a reed. This question involves a double meaning. Jesus wanted the people to acknowledge John's character. That he was unbending, he was an uncompromising man, he had a non flimsy character in his ministry. John wasn't all like a reed. There's a huge contrast there.

He had no reed bending with the wind qualities about him. When John spoke, he didn't put his finger into the wind and see which way is the cultural wind blowing. He did not try to be culturally appropriate. He did not try to be politically correct. That thought never entered his mind. That man was born with steel running up and down his spine. He had an iron will. An inflexibility about him, an inflexibility regarding righteousness.

Men like that are not at all common. And when they come on the scene, even in our day, people who seem men of integrity or women of integrity, and they're steadfast and they stand up and they have a voice and they're not politically correct, but they speak it as they see it. They do provide a bit of a spectacle for us, don't they? From time to time we see people rise up like

that, and they seem to be strong. They seem to be uncompromising, rigid, inflexible, but oftentimes they are intolerable as well. And we can hear and sense in them where they veer off in their opinions and judgments.

Where their judgments aren't according to truth. Sometimes, invariably, they crack under constant pressure, they fail the test of sustained public scrutiny. We've come to really expect that with people in our day. When that happens, we realize they are just men, we realize they're just women. They're just human beings. But this John the Baptist, he was a spectacle of integrity, and a manifestation of righteous sincerity without any compromise, without any qualification, and without, without ever breaking.

This man is uncommon. And people found that incredibly attractive. In contrast to their own religious leaders, political leaders, this man did not sway with public opinion. So in both literal and figurative terms here, Jesus wants people to acknowledge the fact that they did not visit the desert to gawk at some common occurrence in nature.

Rather they went out there to see something remarkable. And they're right about that. This first rhetorical question Jesus asks is intended to make people think, cause them to reflect. Yeah, why did I pack up the family? Stop work for a while and go out into an inconvenient, inhospitable place and listen to that guy. Why did I do that? Jesus wants them to examine the nature of their interest. Same thing happening, by the way, in the second question. Second question, Jesus asked them, "What then did you go out to see if not a reed shaken by the wind? What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?" Again, this question is rhetorical.

It's a bit humorous, actually, when you think about John and how he was dressed. Also, it has a double entendre, a little double meaning here. And word soft is *malakos*, which can refer to gentle fabrics, one you'd want to wash on a gentle cycle in your washing machine. Delicates, soft to the touch. Suffice it to say that John did not wear name brands. Truth is, he didn't even buy clothing off the sale rack or sharp, shop at the bargain store. John wore the clothing of a nomadic, desert dwelling caveman. And this guy was rough. Both Matthew 3 and Mark 1, they tell us what John wore, he was clothed with

"camel's hair. He wore a leather belt around his waist." His clothing was tough and rough.

It was sturdy and scratchy. You might think about a pair of thick Dickies, but lined with sandpaper on the inside, it was not comfortable. Nobody went into the desert to get a look at this guy's wardrobe. Nobody was trying to go out and see John to get fashion tips. Behold, Jesus said, those who are dressed in splendid clothing, live in luxury, they are in King's courts, they're in palaces. That's where the fashionistas hang out. They go to palaces to view the latest fashions.

Soft sensual clothing, luxurious living, delicacies of the rich food of the king's court. All of that, requires for people a totally different line of work and a totally different interest. If that's what you want, you better do something else for a living, other than chasing John around.

The word *malakos*, it can also refer to those who are soft in character. That is, people who are really into the sensual, that which feels good. They're driven by their feelings. They're driven by their comfort. They're driven by sensual desires.

They're characterized when it's speaking of *ra*, *malakos* is used to refer to a man. They're characterized as effeminate, as unmanly in the extreme. The word *malakos*, in scripture, it's almost a synonym for a homosexual. And in particular, you can see this in 1 Corinthians 6:9. In particular, the word *malakos* is used to refer to the passive or the submitting partner in a male homosexual relationship.

Jesus is here using that word to provoke us, image of stark contrast here. John was nothing of the sort. Jesus is calling to mind the, the contrast between an effeminate, lily, soft, sensually oriented kind of a man on the one hand, and John the Baptist on the other. Those who live in self centered, self indulgent luxury, they're not found in the desert where John is. They're found sitting in kings' courts, they're, they're fawning over the royalty. They're wandering the palaces of kings and important people, and that's not John.

When he came to the king, king's court, he accused the man of an adulterous relationship that he needed to repent of. It wasn't seeking the favor of anybody, just seeking God's favor. Again, Jesus here wants the people to acknowledge that, that

there is, is nothing about John's ministry that is personally enriching. There's nothing that's going to lead to the fulfillment of self indulgence. There's nothing that's going to secure temporal wealth or health or prosperity.

People aren't attracted to John because he portrayed a comfortable lifestyle, one they might aspire to, one they might attain to. This guy John, is a rather severe man. He's an ascetic, bare essentials, kind of existence. So again, why in the world, would anyone make such an inconvenient trip out to such an unattractive, inhospitable place, like a barren wasteland of a desert? Why go out there to gaze upon this severe, rigid, inflexible man who is by no means going to help you chart your course of upward social mobility, and personal happiness and prosperity? Why go there?

Brings to the third question Jesus asked, this is what he wants to make inescapably plain to the crowd, "What then did you go out to see? A prophet?" At this point, you'll notice Jesus has asked this question three times. And that repetition indicates emphasis, right? By repeating this question three times, Jesus is informing people's consciences. He's taking the

time to do this essential foundational gospel work of bringing conviction to the conscience. He's closing the door here, Jesus is on anyone who had pretend, they just merely went out to see something interesting.

Just merely went out to see someone interesting, someone, someone learned or something like that, as we learned last time, even the unbelieving Jewish historian Josephus, he had to admit that John was a prophet of God. All the people admitted that. So yes, people here had to admit, they had to recognize John the Baptist as a true prophet of God.

And Jesus is calling that to mind and bringing that to the forefront of their thinking. Therefore, if John is a true prophet of God, what does that mean for them? What are the implications for their life? What are the implications upon them for the all the things that they've heard? It means this, the people are obligated to listen to his voice. They must heed his words, they must obey his commands. Why? Because what he speaks in his prophetic ministry is nothing less than the Word of the living God. And if by their own admission, they didn't go out to

see a spectacle, but a prophet than they are accountable for what they've heard.

He's a true prophet. And he is, then they're accountable to hear his word, as the word of the living God, and to obey it. What's required of them is what's required of all of us who hear the word of the living God read, spoken, preached, immediate, complete obedience. This is the word of the living God. How can we turn away and be guiltless? It's not an option. It's a moral duty. It's one for which the people are accountable before a holy God who will call all things to account everything you've heard. You're accountable for.

That's why the character of John's ministry here is so simple, so plain, so direct. His ministry is so rugged. So spartan, so stripped of all luxury, all comforts. Why? Because God intended to use John to draw all the people to the power of his word and is word alone. Nothing else commended John to the people, except the fact that he was preaching the word of God.

Here in our church, we do indulge a bit of comfort, we meet in a climate controlled building, I'm thankful for that,

protected from the elements. We have pads on the chairs, so your legs don't go to sleep. And restroom facilities available and things like that. We're obviously, though, not the Ritz Carlton. No one comes to our church, that I know of any way, to indulge in our climate-controlled building. No one comes here even to enjoy the padded seating, or to even, as excellent as the coffee is, just for the coffee.

You want to know why we're not overly concerned about things like that. Why we're not bending over backwards to make ourselves look cool, to appeal to the world? You want to know why our services are not designed to be eye catching, eye popping, entertaining stuff? We want people to come to our church, and to partner with our church in membership for the right reasons and not the wrong reasons. I do believe we've been successful in not entertaining people.

We're disabusing visitors of the notion that our church is going to entertain them and be easy on the ears and tickling their, their own fancies. Believe me, even as bare essential as we are there is still a host of wrong motives for coming even to a church like this. People come for all kinds of reasons. Social

interaction, they come to avoid loneliness. They come for some level of intellectual stimulation. Some people come because it's religious tradition. Some people have come because they've just always come. Some people come because of the pressure of the expectations placed upon them by a family member.

Some people come to indulge themselves in religious things that they might feel better about themselves. Some people come to look down on other people thinking "Lord, I thank you. I'm not like that man or that woman, that I'm better than that." Some people even come to turn over a new leaf, to reform themselves morally, to get fixed, find little tidbits. Some people even find, come to find a little life coaching, something's going to help them through the week. Someone's going to help them to get that character that's going to get them that promotion. Make them favorable with others.

Look, so many reasons like that, so many others I haven't mentioned, people enter into the doors of the church building. They sit through services, and then they go home unchanged. Those souls, and I pray about this, it troubles me. Those souls go home, in jeopardy of eternal hell. Because they've been to

church, and they think they've been religious. And they listen to all these sermons, and the teaching in all different areas of the church. And they go home and deceive themselves into thinking they are just fine. There's no attitude of repentance or humility, no concern over an arrogant attitude that they hold before God, before others.

There are many churches that people attend that make it really difficult, if not utterly impossible, to call out the false motives from the true. They actually pursue a kind of ministry in a brand that muddies the already dark waters of the heart. They offer a religion of human relationships and social action. They want to attract and entertain, like some kind of a late night talk show. Instead of providing teaching that instructs and exhorts and convicts and calls for repentance.

By appealing to people with wrong motives, they are able to attract. But at the same time they're attracting people, they're also distracting people from the simplicity of the gospel, and beloved, we cannot do that to people and still say we're loving. With God's help, we really do hope to mute the elements of human style, and personality, and hype in any kind of brand propagation, such worldly terms, right? All the things

that this world considers attractive and counts as important, we hope to keep all the attention where it belongs on God and his power.

Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, he says, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom." He's not saying there's no wisdom in his ministry. He's saying he didn't come in the expectations that the people had, of the sophists, the rhetoricians, the good speakers, the public speakers, that the Corinthians and all the Athenians and the people in Greece knew of and, and pander after.

Paul says, 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, or human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." That is what we hope people see in our church. Humble people, meek people, repentant people. Not the things that this world counts as important, like style, familiar music, production value, wit, charm, popularity, familiar elements of

the world. We want people to see the power of God and the gospel.

We want people to see the transforming power of God in people's lives, through genuine salvation, true repentance, real sanctification. You don't have to be a good person to come into this church, in fact, what's required of you to come into this church and to come before God is that you admit you are not a good person. That you admit along with the rest of us, that you are poor, and wretched, and naked, and miserable before a holy God. And that stripped bare of all your accomplishment, and all your achievement, and all that you think commends you before anybody, you strip that away, and you come and you beg for God's forgiveness.

People like that are meek. And they're humble, and they're repenting. That's what people need to see. They need to see that this people counts, as God is so holy, so holy, and worth listening to. When that's what people see, that's what they have to reckon with. They have to reckon with not any elements that they can say are common to men done in the power of a man. No, they come to see things that are only explainable by a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's work, his power, divine

wisdom. When God's word, when the Spirit's power, when those are active, they elevate the person and the work of Jesus Christ, and they do so in the, through the lives of real people, redeemed sinners, that brings true conviction to the conscience of those who come in the doors.

People are accountable to God for what they see and hear and we do not want anything to detract from that. Listen, that's what John's ministry did. That's what his ministry did. And Jesus wanted the people to recognize that. Jesus wanted people to acknowledge that they knew John is a bona fide Prophet, in order that, that might bring conviction to the conscience. By drawing attention to the fact, John is a true prophet, and the people know that, Jesus then turn secondly, to confirm John's message.

To help the people realize the purpose for which John came and prophesied. And that's point two in your outline, confirmation. Jesus gave confirmation of John's message, and the people realized John's purpose. In the ministry of John the Baptist, we are seeing the close of the first chapter of redemptive history. And in Jesus, we're seeing a new chapter

begin. It's an incredibly significant time, redemptively speaking, and discerning the significance of that translation is of eternal consequences.

What I said before in our scripture reading, that the Hebrews, those to whom the letter to the Hebrews was written, they didn't discern the significance of this. They didn't see how important, how uber important Jesus Christ is. That he is, has a priesthood that is, it's far beyond the Aaronic priesthood. He's a king far beyond David. He's a prophet like no other. They didn't recognize how important he was. So how the people listened, how they obeyed, would determine whether they would move forward with new covenant promises or be left behind in an bygone Old Testament era.

When John burst upon the scene, you know what his first recorded words are? "You brood of vipers." Wow, put that on your calling card, that's what he did. Pretty arresting language. But it's interesting how Luke prepared us for this stiff medicine of John the Baptist. He prepared us, he introduced us to John by way of narration. In fact, just turn back a couple of pages to Luke chapter 3.

In Luke 3:1, we just want to remind ourselves of some of that. Luke 3, Luke introduces us to John the Baptist and his ministry. He's none other than this prophesied forerunner of the Promised Messiah. And before we hear word one from John, as the readers of Luke's gospel, we know the significance of John and the significance of his ministry.

It says, "The Word of God came to John the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness, and he went to, into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah, the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill should be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

That's the introduction. He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And that is the sentence that helps us to interpret what his baptism ritual symbolized.

Repentance before God. It helps us to see how he fulfilled Old Testament prophetic texts like, like the one quoted here, Isaiah 40:3-5, the nature of his preparation work. John's preaching repentance would, would prepare the way of the Lord, knocking down high places, leveling the, the high places of the heart, raising up low places, raising up the low, the humble, to see their salvation in God. That's repentance.

So in a word, John would come before Christ, to straighten out what's crooked, to clarify what's not clear, his would be a forthright, bold, direct ministry, uncompromising candor, honesty. Look at verse 7. He said, therefore, to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers," there it is. "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our Father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Strong stuff, that's how John knocked down people who dwell in lofty, high arrogant places. That's the kind of preaching that caused every mountain and hill to be made low. But he also lifted up those who dwell in low places, such that every valley should be filled. The crowds asked in verse 10, "What then shall we do?" Here they are in humility, asking, "Well, how do I do this? How do I repent? How do I follow what you're telling me to do?"

He says, okay. "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none and whoever has, has food is to do likewise. Tax collectors also came to be baptized by him and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you're authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'" Powerful stuff.

So powerful, so effective that people wondered, who is this guy? This guy must be the Messiah. Verse 15, "People were in expectation. They're questioning in their hearts concerning John whether or not he might be the Christ. John answered them all,

saying, 'I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'"

Keep that background in mind. Let's go back to Luke 7. Keep reading, look at Luke 7:26. Crowds are standing with Jesus that day. And keep in mind they did not have this perspective that we have. Because we have Luke's gospel, they didn't come with a printed copy of Luke's gospel, still being all the history, historical facts are still being laid down. We have that though, they didn't. They needed Luke's narration, they needed his interpretation. They're dealing with all this for the first time.

So Jesus stops here, and he gives them a little bit of narration, a little bit of interpretation. "What did you go out to see?" Verse 26, "A prophet? Yes, I tell 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.' I tell you among those born of women none is greater than John."

Now, Jesus here is confirming John's purpose for the crowd. He's, its sealing in the minds of the people, that John did indeed come to fulfill testament predictions of the coming four runner. That means he came and would precede the Messiah. So Jesus is telling the people, "Yes, you're right. John is a prophet, but he's more than a prophet. His role is so singularly special, so utterly unique. It's so one of a kind, that he's not just a prophet, he's more than a prophet. And among those born of women, none is greater than John."

Several reasons for that. Several reasons, first, John's ministry is one of prophetic certainty. That is to say, it was predicted. Notice it says there, "This is he of whom," What? "It is written." It's written. John's prophetic ministry is prophesied in scripture. It's written in the text. And that makes John unique among all Prophets. Read the Old Testament, you will see, historically speaking, prophets, they simply show up on the scene since the time of the patriarchs all the way through Moses and Joshua, through the time of Elijah and Elisha, even all the post exhilarate prophets.

God visits men, calls them into prophetic ministry. Not so with John. He's prophesied by other prophets. It's written in Isaiah, it's written in Malachi. And people could read that for themselves. Four hundred years of silence since Malachi put down his pen. People have the Old Testament scriptures, they knew it was written. That hadn't happened with any prophet before.

Second thing, not only is it a ministry of prophetic certainty, it's a ministry of unparalleled honor. Honor, the coming of the Messiah is the first. It's the only one of its kind. The incarnation of the Son of God is a first, it's never happened before. Never happened again. That means, since John is forerunner to this Messiah, there's only one forerunner as well. No other prophet, but John has had the privilege of introducing the Messiah, the incarnate God, to the world.

It's interesting. The text Jesus cites here comes from Malachi 3:1 which says in the context of Malachi 3:1, if you look at in the Old Testament, it's the Lord speaking. He says,

"Behold, I send my messenger, he will prepare the way before me." That is the voice of God himself. That is the voice of Yahweh, the name of God, and he's speaking about the messenger that he plans to send before him as he comes in judgment. That's the context. It's the great and terrible day of the Lord. The messenger serves Yahweh, and he will prepare the way for Yahweh who comes in judgment.

When Jesus, though, cites this verse, notice that he changes the pronouns. He says, "Behold, I will send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you." In other words, where Malachi speaks of Yahweh, and a way of Yahweh, Jesus puts himself in Yahweh's place so that it's before the face of Jesus. It's his way the messenger is preparing. He's going before Jesus. That is an incredible claim. That is such a radical claim that for anyone else to change the pronouns like that, it'd be outright blasphemy, worthy of death by stoning, immediately, claiming to be Yahweh. But since this is Jesus, we realize in him, he has just revealed to the crowd subtly, but it's there, he's revealed who he really is.

Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh. The messenger is the forerunner. The forerunner is John the Baptist. John has gone before Jesus. Jesus wants the crowd to understand, he wants us to understand, that by going before Jesus, John has gone before Yahweh himself. John has fulfilled Scripture, he's fulfilled Isaiah 40:3-5, he's fulfilled Malachi 3:1, and it tells us in both those texts, Jesus is God.

That makes John the most important of all the prophets, bar none because his ministry is imbued with the greatest honor of all. As a forerunner to the Messiah, John is forerunner to the incarnation of Yahweh God. John's ministry is one of prophetic certainty. It's one of unparalleled honor.

One more thing to note before we move on, third thing, John's ministry is one of covenantal transition, covenantal transition. There's a tran, that's basically just to say that there's a transition between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We're moving out of the Old Covenant era and into the New Covenant era. And this is the point that helps us understand the rest of verse 28.

If you take another look at the verse, Jesus said, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." It's an incredible statement, isn't it? As you're sitting there wondering, wait, I think I might be in the kingdom of God. And maybe I'm not much. But if I'm in the kingdom of God, does that mean? Yea, that's exactly what it means.

John is the last of the Old Covenant prophets. And what's different about John's ministry, different than the rest of the prophets in his covenantal era that he shared, other prophets called Israel back to faithfulness, to the Old Covenant, to the law of Moses. They kept calling for faithfulness and obedience to that law. John, though, he pointed Israel forward, not backward.

He pointed them forward to the mediator of a New Covenant, a covenant that is cut and ratified and sealed and inaugurated in Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews says Hebrews 7:22, that Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant. And he "Has obtained a ministry," Hebrews 8:6, "That is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better,

since it is enacted on better promises." What are those better promises? According to Galatians 3:10, the Old Covenant said this, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Cursed is everyone who doesn't obey everything in the law? Uh, could you say guilty? We're all guilty, right? That condemns everybody. That's what the Old Testament does, that's what the Old Covenant does, it condemns us under the law. The New Covenant, though it contains the promise of forgiven sin, for all who have not abided by all the things written in the Book of the Law. That's us, folks.

Those who have failed and failed miserably, yet believed in God who justifies the ungodly, putting faith in Jesus Christ. This is their covenant promise from God. It's written in Jeremiah 31:31-34. You might want to write that down if you haven't read that before. Jeremiah 31:31-34, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers...."

Skipping ahead, "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least to them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Prayer time this morning with the elders and their wives and others who come join that little prayer group, read Psalm 103. "As far as the east is from the west, so far as he separated our sins from us," is that a blessing? Jesus is the mediator of that covenant. John is his forerunner, what a blessed promise is ours, in him. So by pointing the people to Jesus and not to Moses, John had the honor of being the forerunner of the New Covenant.

It's a hinge point in the covenantal transition, in covenantal redemptive history. And yea, as great as he is, as great of an honor that is, as great of a ministry as that is in him. The very least of the saints in the kingdom of God is

greater than John the Baptist. Why, why is that? We're not walking around with the same strength of John the Baptist, boldly preaching the way he did.

In fact, we have to admit a lot of us in comparison are pure cowards. Come into a little conflict, and our adrenaline starts rushing, we get all, ahh, you know, right? Not John, I mean, we're, we're the least in the kingdom, right? First Corinthians 1, not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty. But God has chosen us that he might glorify his own grace.

How are we greater than John the Baptist then? Because for us, all the things that John looked ahead to, with varying degrees of clarity, for us, fulfilled. We look back on everything as fulfilled. We have a clarity that John never had, could not have. Because he didn't look back on it, he looked forward. He looked forward to prophecies that had yet to be fulfilled.

He looked forward to the prophecy even of Isaiah 53, of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The stumbling block of the cross. Had a hard time understanding, had a hard time figuring things

out. That's why he sent two disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who's to come? Should we look for somebody else?" We, though, we look backward, we look to promises fulfilled.

Listen, have you ever found a Christian, a true Christian, even a Christian who is one day old in the Lord, who wonders as John did about Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come? Or should I look for somebody else?" If you've ever met a Christian who needs clarification on that point, you know what they're not? They're not a Christian. They need to be converted. And once they understand that, they understand clearly. The answer to that question is the essence of the gospel itself. You get that wrong, you're not a Christian.

So the very least of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we look back to all that's been accomplished in Christ, we look back to all that's been written and explained for us and then that New Testament, like Luke's narrative and interpretation for us. We're reading right now from Luke's Gospel, things that John would have loved to have read. Peter helps us to understand this longing of John, is reaching forward, and for the all, all the Old Testament prophets as well.

In 1 Peter 1:10-11, "Concerning this salvation," and we're talking about "The prophets who prophesied about the grace that "Was to be yours," that is ours. "They searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them," that is those prophets "That they were not serving themselves but you," that's us, "In the things that have been now announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit, sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look."

Beloved, we have such clarity. We have a level of understanding that John the Baptist envied, that his fellow prophets envied, things into which angels long to look. We enjoy such a high and holy privilege. One that exceeds the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. We're Kingdom citizens, we're children of light and truth, and we will walk in the clarity of New Testament revelation.

Listen, don't ever take your privilege for granted. Instead, express thanksgiving and quiet humility. Have hearts that are humble and teachable to learn what you've been given. Because the privilege that is yours is one of the least to the kingdom of heaven. It's greater than even John the Baptist.

Jesus helped the people there, clarify, acknowledge that by going out to see John, they knew they were going out to see a prophet. He's informing their conscience. He's letting them know they're accountable for what John taught them. And then Jesus upped the ante. He confirmed for the people that John's not just a prophet. He's more than a prophet because of his unique purpose.

John fulfilled Old Testament written prophecy, which pointed to Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, Yahweh in human flesh. The significance of his role and ushering in the new covenant and its promise of forgiveness. That's John's purpose. How did the people react? How did they receive John's forerunning ministry? Well, that's next.

We've seen the conviction Jesus brought that they recognize God's prophet, we've seen the confirmation, how Jesus helped see the, help the people realize and see John's purpose. And now Jesus provides, third point, he provides clarification. He provides clarification. It reveals here how they responded to John's preaching. Two reactions here, two responses to John's ministry, to John's preaching. Look at Luke 7:28-30. He says, Jesus says, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

And then this insertion of Luke's narrative, "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too," that is, the greatest of cultural sinners. "They declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."

We're going to actually start with these two crucial verses next week when we come back. But I want to reflect just on those two responses to John's ministry, just as responses. On the one hand, you have acceptance and obedience. And on the other hand,

you have rejection and disobedience. They all heard the same word. They all heard the same powerful preaching, they all heard preaching. You ever run into people who fill their heads with preaching, preaching, preaching, but they never do what it says? That's some of these people.

All the people, the tax collectors too, the very worst of the sinners. They declared God just, the word is *dikaio*. They declared righteous, they declared just, they, they confess the truth of God's word, his plan, and they vindicated this plan. They vindicated God's character. The Pharisees and lawyers, though they rejected John's baptism, which means they rejected God's purpose, his plan, his will. They, thinking they're above everybody else, they harbored pride.

They harbored a haughty spirit. And they landed on a judgment about John that rejected him. Reject John, you reject Jesus too, as I said earlier, reject repentance. You reject forgiveness too. We, beloved, are repenters. We're believers, yes. But I think in our day and in our time, we need to call ourselves repenters, as Christians. Because it always calls to mind, that we are not arrived.

That we're living a lifestyle of repentance, that we're looking at our lives in the light of God's pure Word. And we're seeing things that don't measure up. We're seeing things that are foul, that need to be changed and transformed. We have a mind that needs to be renewed continually, daily. We embrace that, as repenters.

These Pharisees and lawyers, woe be to them. They rejected John, they rejected his message. They didn't repent, they didn't get baptized, they, they didn't follow that baptism of repentance and prepare their hearts for the coming of Christ. And so, they rejected Jesus too. And because they rejected Jesus, they got the whole thing wrong. They missed out on all the scripture that they thought they understood so clearly.

They didn't follow into the covenantal transition. They stayed back with the Christ rejecting Judaizers. They had the whole thing wrong. Dead wrong, eternally wrong. Listen folks, Israel's leadership, Pharisees, lawyers, chief priests, scribes, elders, they settled in their rejection from the very beginning.

All the way back at the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. They settled in their hearts, not going there. They rejected John. And so they rejected Jesus. And because they rejected Jesus, they remain steadfast in their unbelief, they remain stiff necked in their rebellion. The people, though, the tax collectors, they justified God. They were convicted as sinners, because they didn't walk around thinking themselves better than anybody else.

They had constant reminders by the shunning of the people that they were dead wrong. They were sinners, they embrace that. They said, "Yeah, I know I'm a sinner. I know I'm making money off of God's people. I know. The people I hang out with, unsavory types. I got it." When John came preaching, he was like bending over a wet leaf. They just, they gave in, they said, "Yeah, I'm guilty. Guilty as charged. What do I need to do, baptism? Okay."

They believe John to be a true prophet. They submitted in humility to his baptism. Their baptism with, baptized with the baptism of repentance, they understood that that came from Heaven itself. So far, so good, right? Shows great promise for

the future for them. Listen, if that's the case, we need to ask a very important question.

Why did most of these people, and the tax collectors too, why did most of these people, these baptized people, why did most of these baptized people, switch sides at the very end? Not long after the events of like, Luke 20, when Jesus brings up John's baptism again, asks the Pharisees, "Is it from heaven or from men?" Not long after he convicted the her, the Pharisees yet again, these people would join the side of the Pharisees. Many of them, and they would cry out, being led by the Pharisees and the scribes and the chief priests and the lawyers,

"Crucify him, crucify him. Let his blood be on us and our children forever." Why would they do that? How can, how can this be? So instructive to us. It's not enough to affirm John and his baptism, but then to pull back at the offense of the cross of Christ. It's not enough to submit a part of God's will, or even most of God's will, and not go all the way to the offense of the cross. That they could not accept. When they saw something that is publicly, socially, historically, culturally offensive, in everybody's eyes, they said, "I can't go that far."

Remember, the last beatitude Jesus gave us in this text? Luke 7:23. "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Beloved, we have to follow Jesus through everything. Through all the offense. This world mocks and scoffs at what we do here. It doesn't make any sense to them. They don't understand why we don't join them swimming through the flood of dissipation that they enjoy. They don't understand why anybody would sit through an hour of boring preaching about a book that is ancient and antiquated. And by the way, the judgment of history says, this is out of date.

Beloved, we got to embrace the offense. Because our Christ was an offense, his cross is an offense. It's not enough to accept John's message of repentance and then fail to embrace Jesus Christ and the offense of his cross. And I'll say this, too, that on the other hand, it's not enough to accept Jesus. That's the quotes right? Accept Jesus. Is that the gospel? Accept Jesus. Here's my concern. Does Jesus accept you? Accept Jesus. It's not enough to accept Jesus.

Accept his message of forgiveness while rejecting repentance. Jesus is making sure we understand both here, both messages are necessary. One must embrace the message of John, which is a baptism of repentance, and one must continue all the way to the cross, the offense of the cross, to come through and find forgiveness of sins. John wanted to see Jesus come and winnow the fields of Israel. He wanted Jesus to come and separate the wheat from the chaff.

Well, here it is. Here it is. Repentance first, then forgiveness of sins, both demand faith, believing in God's message from John first, then from Jesus Christ. Repentance and forgiveness, that is the message of the gospel. Go all the way back to Luke 2 in Simeon's prophecy in verses 34 and 35. This prophecy that Simeon, the old man spoke, while holding the week-old baby Jesus in his arms and looking directly at Mary. He said, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed. So the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Jesus may not have acted according to John's limited expectation, but that's because Jesus was going far deeper than John could have ever perceived being a mere man. Jesus is in

fact winnowing. He's doing so in the territory that belongs to God and God alone. Jesus came in winnowed at the heart level, he got to the level of the thought life, the motives, the true affections.

That's why we've seen in this text, how Jesus first had to inform their consciences, elevating for them the seriousness of what they had heard from a true prophet of God. They're listening to the last Old Covenant Prophet. They are obeying his message of repentance that they might enter into the New Covenant era, inaugurated by the Messiah himself, who provides forgiveness of sins.

What about you? Will you repent of your sins? Will you believe the gospel that involves repentance and forgiveness? Found in the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross? We make it simple. God's holy, utterly holy. You're not, and I'm not. But he extends forgiveness to you. If you'll repent and turn from your sins and all that you are, and embrace Jesus Christ and all that he is. That you might follow him in faith and worship, and receive from him the reward, God himself.

We repent and believe, that's our prayer. Let's pray. Father, we do ask for any here who do not yet know you that you would, by the Holy Spirit, convict their hearts. We ask for any of those of us who have, in our time as a Christian, forgotten these things. And we've let a callus heart of pride to build up in us where we look down on others because we have such great learning, we've been exposed to so much. And yet we find that we're really short on consistency and obedience.

I pray that you keep us humble Father, that you'd humble some to repentance unto salvation, and humble others of us to repentance unto obedience and meekness and humility. We pray for all of us, Father, that we would give glory and praise and honor to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. It would be responsive to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, that we listen to your word and do it. All for your sake, Father, that your name would be hallowed, that your kingdom would come and your will would be done here on earth as it is in heaven. May it be so in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.