

A Lesson in Discernment from Children at Play

Luke 7:31-35

March 11, 2018

As we get started this morning, I want to ask you to turn your Bibles to Luke Chapter 7. Luke Chapter 7. We intend this morning to finish up what's been a lengthy section and a wonderful study of instruction from the Lord on the significance of the ministry of John the Baptist. If I could, kind of summarize, so we can get our arms around the significance of what we have learned so far in this section of Scripture. It may be, may be to put it this way, we need to accept God on his own terms. If we're looking at John the Baptist, Jesus Christ the Messiah, looking at the two of them together, looking at everything that Jesus has taught, it's basically summarized in this. We need to accept God on his own terms.

We've been seeing two very different men in John the Baptist and in Jesus Christ. Two different ministry emphasis. Same message, but two very different men, two different characters, two different manners of ministry. Same message, though. Same God has sent both men. And as Jesus stops to

teach the significance of John the Baptist, he wants the people to embrace both of them. Because it's the same message and both have been sent by God. We must accept God on his own terms, and not on our terms.

To embrace God on his own terms, it's going to confront us, isn't it? To embrace God on his own terms requires us to, to humble ourselves. It requires us to come to him in repentance and faith. It requires us to cast aside whatever we might think of our own wisdom and our own experience and our own learning. Our own advancement, our own attainment and whatever that, for whatever that's worth, we, we really like Paul, count it as rubbish. We come to him with a teachable spirit, ready to receive wisdom from God to, to be taught by him. Ready to learn from him.

That's basically what Jesus is commending here in the ministry of John the Baptist, and it's what Luke wants us to see as he spends time covering this section of Luke chapter 7. I find this all the time, really, don't you? Perhaps it's been your experience too. I talk to people who seem eager, at first anyway, they seem eager to learn about Jesus. They seem very

eager to, to talk about Christianity until they hear something that they don't like. Until it conflicts with their preconceived notion of what Jesus ought to be like. Until the Bible requires them to, to change, or to, to give up something that they don't want to change or to give up.

And as they turn and go the other way, departing from the truth, departing from the true Jesus as he's truly portrayed in Scripture. As they turn and go the other way, you could just wish that people would be honest about their thoughts on that. "Oh, that's what Christianity is all about. Oh, that's who Jesus really is? What he really said, what he actually demands of me? Thanks, but no thanks. I prefer to go my own way, to have my own thoughts, to commit my own sins, to do what I wanna do." You'd wish they'd say that. That's not what they say though, right?

I've had some honest rebels against God say that, but mostly they say something like this. "Well, that's your interpretation. That's, that's not what my Bible says. That's not how my Bible reads." Or they say, oh well, "My Jesus is more accepting than that. My Jesus is more forgiving. He's

more willing to embrace me for what I am. We just embrace mystery. You want everything in boxes." And as they walk away, these sorts of people are simply, we understand this, they're really just trying to justify their rebellion by accusing you of getting Jesus wrong. Of misinterpreting the Bible, of misrepresenting Christianity. And they're unwilling to open the Bible and prove their point from Scripture. They say, "Oh, I just don't argue about religion."

They were never really interested in truth in the first place. Like little children, they just want to justify the rebellion, so they blameshift. They make counter accusations about your unfairness, your unreasonableness, your misinterpretation. And they cast slanderous aspersions against you and all you believe and oh that church you go to, of course you're going to get that that way. You know what, that's basically, basically what we're going to see this morning from Luke 7:31-35.

Sadly, Jesus, in this section, he was identifying among the common people those who had followed according to Luke 7:29. Verse 29 there, the common people who followed John's baptism.

He's predicting here and identifying in those common people; he's predicting that in the future they would follow the false leadership of Israel, who, according to verse 30, had rejected God. The prideful attitude of the religious leaders, that was starting to leaven the attitudes of the common people. That pride that's in the heart of all of us. That pride was starting to catch. It was there all along, really.

Take a look at the text. We'll start reading there in verse 29. "(When all the people heard this," that is, Jesus' judgment about John. "(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.)" We talked about all that last week. We saw that the, this parallel of the kinds of people and, and their heart response, their attitudes toward the truth, and then the, the obedience of the one and the disobedience of the other. So we see this dividing line between two kinds of people.

And so then Jesus says this in verse 31, "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they

like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

There in verse 31, starting there, Jesus is predicting and identifying the true heart of the people, which will one day follow Israel's leadership in murdering their own Messiah. The rejection of the Pharisees and the lawyers in verse 30 would eventually take deep root, deeper root than the humility that we found in verse 29. And Luke makes that point in connecting this whole section together very subtly, but clearly in verses 29-35. That whole section, he's presenting these verses as a single unit by means of a *chiasm*. You say what in the world is a *chiasm*? Enlighten me.

We have talked about *chiastic* structures before but just let me remind you. Writers in Scripture, Old Testament and New

Testament will sometimes use literary devices as clues. And they're drawing attention in the text itself to a point of emphasis. And one such device that New Testament Greek writers use is called *chiasm*. *Chiasm* comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which is shaped like the English X, so think about the X.

And basically Luke is setting four separate thoughts or ideas here in the text parallel to one another here. And the structure of the parallel ideas is shaped like the Greek letter X. So you've got the first and the fourth ideas that are parallel to one another and they're positioned at the top and the bottom of that X. And then you have the second and the third thoughts, and they're positioned in the middle of that X, on the inside, and they are also parallel.

All the thoughts are obviously important. This is the Holy Spirit's word, but he is highlighting for us the central point that Jesus is making so we do not miss it. Let me show you. Just look at the text there. If we boil down the thoughts of verses 29 to verse 35 and sort of summarize them, we can see this clearly. In verse 29, "all the people justified God," and then look at verse 35. You see the same term there. Wisdom is

what? "Justified by all of her children." Those two thoughts are parallel and they are at the top and the bottom of that X structure. They are the external outside thought.

But then central, and this is kind of that, it receives the main emphasis. In verse 30, the leaders reject God's will for themselves, and then in verses 31-34, Jesus portrays the people of this generation, rejecting both John and Jesus. Those two thoughts also parallel. They're in, on the inside of that X structure.

So, what's Luke showing us here? What is the central point that is being made? Luke wants us to see that Jesus here is broadening his critique. He's not just talking about Israel's leadership, in specific the Pharisees and the lawyers, he's talking about Israel's people in general. The critical issue addressed here is how anyone responds to God. Because how a person responds to God is the difference between death and life. Between wrath and judgment on the one hand, and blessing and salvation on the other. It's the difference between eternal death and eternal life. How one responds to God. This here

gets to the heart of the matter and, and here's the, the, here's the phrase.

This is actually in your bulletin as outline points. Unconverted hearts will always reject the truth, while converted hearts will always embrace the truth. Unconverted hearts, always rejection. Converted hearts, always embracing the truth. There is no middle ground. There is no middle ground between the two. And we're about to see that illustrated for us in the very next section, which is Luke 7:36-50. There's a contrast there between an unconverted heart attitude toward Jesus and a converted heart attitude toward Jesus. And Luke is here preparing us because he wants to commend the one and dissuade us and turn us away from the other.

So in order to, to do that, to set us up well for what's coming, he needs us to see the heart of the issue here. The difference in the response to God, to his truth is the difference in conversion. And that is a difference between pride and humility. And here Luke wants us to grow in discernment. The Holy Spirit wants us to learn what is at the heart of accepting or rejecting the truth of God. This applies

broadly. This applies to the entire human race, and it applies, yes, to your relationships. It applies to your friendships. It applies to your family members. Accept the truth, reject the truth. It's a matter of the heart. It's a matter of conversion.

And we, beloved, need to grow in discerning the heart by getting this principle down. We need to incorporate this principle into our thinking and make it a filter through which we look at the world around us. Through which we assess all humanity and every relationship. Conversion is the dividing line of all humanity, and it explains the outward response to the truth that we see. Unconverted hearts always, always reject the truth, no matter what it may look like at first. Unconverted hearts reject the truth, converted hearts always embrace the truth. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice." They follow me. They obey.

So our two outline of points for this morning. They follow the line of the thought in the text. The response of unconverted people contrasted here with the response of converted people. Folks, I just want to emphasize that this is

so important. We desperately need to learn this principle and not just learn it as a kind of a theoretical, abstract thought. We need to practice this principle in our thinking, in our speech, in our relationships, in our judgments, our assessments, in our friendships. It's so eminently practical.

Because if somebody you're talking to is unconverted, then what is your posture to them in love? Evangelistic, isn't it? You want to see them forgiven of their sin. You wanna see them know Christ. To know the righteousness of God that comes by faith, that they might be born again, that they might go to be with God forever.

But if the person you're talking to is already converted, what's your attitude and orientation toward them? Discipleship. You want to see them conformed to the image of Christ that they might grow and learn and glorify the God who saved them. So we're always making these judgments and assessments. Why? Because we love people. We didn't know, is this person someone I'm going to evangelize? Or is this person somewhere I'm going to disciple?

And sometimes we start out with discipleship, discipleship, discipleship, we keep hitting walls and roadblocks and obstacles. We say, what is going on? We realize at the end of the day, that person thought he or she was a Christian, but they're really not. They're not Christians, and that's why they have, they have no internal mechanism for receiving truth. Ah, it's clarified. Let me go back to the gospel. Let's talk about the gospel. Let's make sure you know that God is holy and you're a sinner and you need to come to him in repentance and faith. This is really practical stuff.

So if you get this principle down, if you get this principle down, if you own this, if this becomes a grid and a filter through which you look at the world, you will grow strong in discernment. Discernment is such a protection for you, for the church, for your, for your loved ones. You will grow strong in discernment. If you get this principle down, you will gain great confidence in the truth because you'll be able to interpret all things. You won't be unsettled by people's responses, by people's rejection, by people walking away. You'll know what to do and how to identify how people respond

and help them to grow in truth. If you get this principle down, you will also find a sense of settled peace and stability in your heart. You will not be disrupted. You will not be perplexed. You'll stay encouraged even in the face of much rejection.

And I can only point you to illustration case number one. The preeminent case in all of Scripture who is settled in discernment and understood and, and had this principle as a grid through which he looked at everything, it's Jesus Christ. So many people rejected him. His own people rejected him, nailed him to a cross. Was he ever perplexed? Was he ever just like so puzzled? Was he ever wringing his hands and saying, "Oh why, oh why, oh God?" No, he trusted his God. He knew what people were like. He knew what was in a man. We need to get this down.

So let's get started. First point, just two points. First point for this morning. Unconverted hearts always reject the truth. They always reject the truth. Jesus intends here to make, as we've seen, a comparison, verse 31-32, helping us to discern the nature of unconverted people by their response to

the truth, by their response to true ministry. And he says right here in verse 31, "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?"

That right there is kind of like a, a dramatic introduction to his, his simile, his metaphor here. The repetition of the question, "To what shall I compare the people of this generation? Oh, and what are they like?" How do I, how do I make this comparison? He's not trying to, he's not stretching and trying to figure out what he's going to say. He's not buying time. He's just trying to draw attention and set a reflective tone among the people that this is important. He's going to draw a comparison to children at play.

But you need to understand, this is no light-hearted observation. By introducing the comparison this way, repeating the question, Jesus is conveying a tone of gravity here. He intends everyone to consider what he says with the utmost sobriety, with the most seriousness. "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to

one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you didn't dance; we sang a dirge, and you didn't weep.'" What's he saying here?

Essentially this, he has just accused his own generation of acting like children. They are like immature, fickle, discontented, never to be pleased, children. Not a very flattering summation, but it's very accurate. It's the way all unconverted people act in the face of the truth. Apart from the gracious work of God by the Spirit, they respond to God and to his truth like stubborn, rebellious children.

Jesus here is setting the scene in the marketplace, which in this analogy represents the adult world. Adults in the marketplace, they are bustling around. They are busy with buying and selling. They're engaging in business. They're conducting transactions, very responsible. Amid this adult activity, amid the adult sense of purpose and responsibility and productivity, what are the children doing? They're sitting, it says. And it says that they are, "calling out to one another."

Think about those two ideas for just a moment, sitting and calling out to one another. The first picture, sitting, is of inactivity. And as we'll see, it's a decidedly stubborn inactivity. It's like the little kid with his arms folded, just saying to you, I dare you to make me move. Maybe one of you have had a child like that before. I was such a child. I know the heart of that kind of child. They have no intention of doing your will. They have no intention of getting up and doing anything. That children just intend to sit there to do nothing to go nowhere, they are immovable. And decidedly and stubbornly so.

Second picture, calling out to one another. This shows the children. You might picture them separated into several groups and, and this portrays a, a bit of an argument. They're kind of complaining against each other. One group criticizing the other group and the other, in kind, criticizing them. We have a term for people like this. Who want to call people into activity and then sit and do nothing and just criticize. What do we call them? Armchair quarterbacks, right? This is football country. We can say armchair quarterbacks, right? These children are will, unwilling, completely unwilling to get up to invest any

skin in the game. They don't want to work hard, they don't want to sweat. They don't wanna bang up against anybody else, they just want to sit there. But they are very willing to voice their complaints and their criticisms.

So here they, they come off as haughty and critical. They're possessed of a censorious judgmental spirit, and they're really, really eager to talk about it. It's very clear in what they're saying to each other. "We played the flute for you, you didn't dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep." You can picture them again, two groups of children sitting around in the marketplace, and each group of children is making the same charge against every other group of children. Playing a flute, singing a dirge.

This provides a third picture of these children. Then, not only is this inactivity, not only is it, is it criticism, but also, it's, it's, this portrays them as being kind of whimsical. They're self-indulgent in their attitudes. They're only interested in doing what pleases them. They're, they're sitting around, criticizing each other because they're not getting their own way, and it's a pretty typical attitude of a child, right?

But playing a flute, singing songs for children in the marketplace, don't, I mean, don't picture them as accomplished musicians, okay?

They're sitting around playing on a thin reed flute. Something you can, you can make out of grass or pull out of a, pull out of the field. They're playing on a reed flute. They're singing a song. Doesn't take any real training, doesn't take any practice, doesn't take any study, doesn't take much effort. And both things by the way, done from a seated position, which is where, exactly where they want to be. Not much skill required, no risk involved, no real investment. By fluting and singing, it's an expression of whatever's in their own heart, whatever is on their own mind. And they're calling to the other kids, and they want those other kids to respond to them. They want the other kids to exert all the effort to get up to dance their tune. To respond to their whimsy.

Now, when trying to find the connection between these children in the marketplace, and then the ministry of John and Jesus. A number of commentators tried to figure out who represents whom in this little simile. Is Jesus the one playing

the flute and John playing the flute and the children refusing to dance? Or, or, or is it John singing a dirge because he's kind of a somber and hard guy, and the children, they refused to mourn? Or do we have the children here singing a, fluting and singing while John the Baptist refuses to dance for them because it's too hard of a guy, doesn't, he is a Baptist, he does not dance, okay? Or Jesus, who refuses to mourn, to sing a dirge because he's too busy partying with the tax collectors and all that kind of stuff, right?

I don't think any of that really is the point of Jesus little word picture here. I don't think we're supposed to insert John and Jesus into the marketplace and see which groups they fit into. I think the point is simple and it's this: Jesus is just simply in the marketplace. He's comparing the people of his generation to these children in the marketplace. He and John are not there. If they're there, they're among the adult folk.

That which characterizes these immature, fickle, discontented, never willing to be content children, that is the attitude that characterizes his own people. They just sit

around, they play flutes. They sing songs, but they have no intention whatsoever of doing anything. No intent to get up and go anywhere. They act like selfish little brats. All they want to do is call the tune, get other people to do their bidding, get other people to do the work. And then they criticize anyone who doesn't do what they want, when they want, how they want it done. Just like a little kid.

That's how Jesus has characterized the people of his generation. They're a generation of ignorant, critical, little brats. And it's pretty funny actually, when you think about this, this word picture. I mean for us it's funny. If you're among the generation there that he's criticizing, if you're the target of this critique, that humor is lost on you. I'd imagine you'd feel pretty insulted and deeply offended by his sarcasm. But if, if we put Jesus into our marketplace in our day, the tone police would come rolling up and cast the flag, write him a ticket, because that is an unkind use of humor. That is not right. You cannot be like that and be the son of God. You have to be nice.

His humor here is sharp. It's cutting. It's like, it's like a filet knife that has cut open his generation and exposed the heart of what they really are. He is not, by his humor, by his sarcasm here, he's not just trying to insult them. But he is trying to get their attention. And sometimes humor can be used that way to cut into hardened hearts. So they get the seriousness and the consequences of their childishness. His intention is always love. Notice in verse 33 and 34, the evidence of his judgment. "John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

That's how unconverted people are. This is what the unregenerate are like. They will find any reason, any excuse for staying exactly where they are, not budging. They want to stay seated. They wanna do what requires them the least effort possible. They want to do only what pleases them, like playing a flute, singing a dirge. Whatever mood strikes them at the time, they want everybody else around them to do their bidding, to dance their tune, to do it their way. But they're totally

unwilling to reciprocate that attitude of submission. Not only that, but they are ever ready to criticize, to judge, to censor others. The criticism comes out here.

Because it's interesting the way God has wired man, they feel the need to justify their act, inactivity. They feel the need to justify the fact that they're not going to do anything. Notice how Jesus has used here, verses 33-34, he's used titles. He says "John the Baptist." He says the "Son of Man." Why use titles? Because Jesus is here informing their consciences. He's heightening the sense of accountability. He is speaking to them to provoke a sense of fear about who they're trifling with.

Their critical judgments are made here, not just against anyone, but against these two agents of the living God. At a turning point in dispensational history and redemptive history. These are agents of the living God. Have they no shame? Have they no fear? Would they dare to judge the agents of the living God? This is no time for trifling. This is no time for childishness, for fickleness. This is no time for self-justified laziness. God sent the forerunner of the Messiah to them. God sent the Messiah himself. The one John the Baptizer

baptized. The one who is revealed to be the son of God by the voice from heaven. The one who is the son of David, the Son of Man, that Messianic title that comes from Daniel's prophecy. How dare they criticize God's agents of such a remarkable grace.

Notice again the conclusions that they draw about John and then about Jesus, by which they justify their stubborn inactivity, their unwillingness to move. John came, as we know, he came as an ascetic. He was eating no bread and drinking no wine. That is to say, he didn't live like everybody else. He didn't come normal. He came a bit odd. He came from the wilderness. "A voice crying in the wilderness" is what he was. He didn't grow up going all the birthday parties. He didn't grow up going to Chuck E. Cheese. He didn't grow up doing all the things that kids do. His diet was very different. His clothing and his apparel is very different. No social interaction.

He was a voice cutting through all of that. There's nothing in his life, nothing in his associations that could justify any accusation against him. There's no way to make a charge against his motivations. I mean, you live in the desert.

What, for your own self-aggrandizement? Alone out there for your own wealth, making money off what? So what they come up with here? How do they charge him? How did they accuse him?

Against all evidence to the contrary, they said he has a demon. Oh, that's it. Right, he's possessed. Demonic possession as one explains his odd lifestyle choices. Odd, it's, he's, he's odd in every way and it's got to be a demon that's responsible for that. His fiery rhetoric yeah, it's demonic. Never mind that his behavior was impeccable. Never mind that his message was an unadulterated call to righteousness. Oh yeah, he's got a demon. You kidding me?

To their minds, that explanation justified their inactivity, their failure to respond. They're basically saying this, listen, our refusal to obey is absolutely justified. We have good cause not to listen to his preaching, not to follow his command to be baptized. You wouldn't ask us to listen to a man possessed by a demon, would you? So you might think, if that's really the charge, if that's really the issue, you might think that when a man of quite the opposite character came to him, the Son of Man, this man, who did not isolate himself from

the people but chose to mix in with them, you might think that they'd be really eager to listen. Really eager to follow.

They were just waiting for someone with a different approach, right? Different style, not someone who is so, so demonic. It's not about style. Jesus ate and drank with the people. That is to say, he just lived normal life. He did grow up going to Chuck E. Cheese, and all the rest. He did grow up in a carpenter's house. He did grow up, mixing with the people, the villagers in Nazareth. He did grow up with all the issues of life. He spent time with people. He attended, as we saw in Luke 5, a tax collector's banquet. He met all that guy's unsavory friends.

Did that satisfy them? No, not at all. They simply found a new excuse for their inactivity, their lack of submission, their disobedience. And all of a sudden, they've changed their tune, right? They're worried about matters of diet and social associations. These people have, have swung the opposite direction. Now when considering following Jesus and his demands, they've turned into a bunch of moralizing teetotalers. Oh, I don't, I don't drink, I don't wanna be around him. I

don't drink. They've turn into a bunch of people on a Weight Watchers program or some, you know, vegan or something. Oh, I, look at him, his diet, you know, I just can't. I, meat is murder, I'm just not into that.

There's an expression here. Look at him. It's the word "behold." There's a, a expression of shock, of, of dismay. It's really a totally false, it's a fake expression of shock and dismay to mask their hypocrisy. My friend, he's drinking and eating. So against all reason, with no evidence, they accused Jesus, the Son of Man, of possessing no self-control, of preferring the company of, of wicked people, because after all, that's probably what's in his heart. We can't follow this man. He's a, he's a glutton and a drunkard. A friend of tax collectors and sinners. We though, are people of self-control. We are people of good discipline and good morals. We're not interested in mixing with those kinds of people.

Where are these ridiculous unreasonable judgments coming from? Who would draw such conclusions about John the Baptist? About Jesus the Christ, Son of Man? Again, these condemning judgments are just thinly veiled justifications. They're just

justifying their wicked behavior. They're just masking their true sinful motivations, and their motivation is to remain exactly as they are and not move an inch. They don't want to humble themselves. They don't want to repent.

But instead of admitting that, they blame shift and they make counter accusations. "Who, us? Oh, we're not the problem. It's not our fault. Of course we wanna do the will of God. Of course we want truth. We wanna listen. We want to obey, but these two men, don't ask me to obey these two men. One of them is a demoniac, the other is a man of loose morals. God wouldn't want us to follow them. So in the interest," get this, this is the height of the hypocrisy here, they say, "in the interest of righteousness, we're going to stay exactly where we are. We're not moving.

You know what that says? It says that they see their own seated position, doing nothing, going nowhere as righteous. They are self-righteous people. These Pharisees and lawyers are their perfect leaders. Incredible hubris from these lazy, childish people. But that, folks, is the nature of unbelief. When you boil it down, when you pull away all the hypocrisy and

all the masks and all the justification, all the self-righteous excuses, when you boil it down, this is the nature of unbelief. This is what God can see and what Jesus here exposes to us. It's what you and I have a hard time seeing a lot of times, right?

Time and truth go hand in hand, though. We give enough time. We bring enough pressure and scrutiny from the Word. You know what we see? This, exactly this. This is the attitude of unregenerate, recalcitrant sinners, who simply want to go their own way and never change. Unconverted hearts always reject the truth and the rejection of the truth here is no small thing. Their rejection would eventually lead to the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah.

He'd later tell his own disciples, Matthew 17:12-13. He says, "I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased." He's talking about John the Baptist. "So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." How could Jesus discern that? When everything seems to be, goes, going so swimmingly well, how could Jesus discern this? I mean, apart from his divine nature,

how could he perceive that he and John would suffer the same fate of ultimately, ultimate rejection by the majority of Israel?

Because early on, here especially, and even before this, things look so promising. Weren't most of the people according to verse 29, willing to acknowledge God's justice? Having been baptized with the baptism of John? What happened to them to make them followers of the Pharisees and the lawyers in verse 30, who ignored God's truth, rejected, spurned God's will for themselves? We find an answer to that at the beginning of John's gospel. You don't need to turn there, but just jot down John 2:22 or 23-25, John 2:23-25. If you're quick, you can get there.

But that section tells us that Jesus, there in John 2, he's able to look beyond the superficial. He's able to see deeper than the external affirmation. Jesus could see the heart of men. Because there, early on in John 2, in his ministry, Jesus had an extremely high approval rating among the crowds and the popular people in Jerusalem. Remember he had come in and cleared the temple? That was popular among the common people,

that was, that gained him a high standing and a high approval rating. He was standing up to all those politicians and all those priests who were fleecing the people, the flocks of Jerusalem and the people loved him for it. He's standing up to the man.

But he could see beyond their popular approval ratings. He knew that their professed belief was only skin deep, it says, "Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in a man."

You know the next man that comes to him? John 3, Nicodemus, Pharisee, teacher of Israel. High respected leader of the people, and he's unconverted. Listen, within unconverted people is an unregenerate heart, which Romans 8:7 tells us, "Is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law, nor indeed can it do so." Unconverted people are not simply ignorant of the truth. They are hostile to the truth. No matter what they

profess, they don't love God. They don't want God. They don't love any of his people.

I like the way J.C. Ryle summarized this section. He got right to the heart of the matter when he said this, he said quote, "The plain truth is that the natural heart of man hates God. The earthly mind is at war with God. It dislikes his law, his gospel, and his people. It will always find some excuse for not believing and obeying. The doctrine of repentance is too strict for it. The doctrine of faith and grace is too easy for it. John the Baptist goes too much out of the world. Jesus Christ goes too much into the world. And so the heart of man excuses himself for sitting still in his sins. All this must not surprise us. We must realize that we will find unconverted people as perverse, unreasonable, and as hard to please as the Jews of our Lord's time." End Quote.

True words. We see all this kind of thing all the time in ministry, don't we? When people leave sound churches for ones that are going to be softer, ones that they call more loving, more gracious, but which is just code words for: they're not going to hold me accountable. People don't want shepherds to

feed and care for them and tend them. They want prophets, prophets to prophecy to them falsely, proclaiming, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. I realize there may be exceptions here, and there are not many, but there may be when people walk away from a sound ministry. But they come to a critical, unfavorable judgment against sound ministry, the issue is always a matter of the heart.

It's always a matter of a response to the truth. And unconverted hearts will always reject the truth. And converted hearts will always embrace it. And none of this is a matter of style. None of it's a matter of personality. It's not a matter of preference. It's not a matter of the, of the, the physical environments, not about the musical style. It's not a matter of the church culture. It's nothing to do with better lighting, paint on the walls, or the color of the pads on the pews, or if there are pads on the pews. It's not to do with that. It's not about the giftedness or the lack of giftedness of the preacher. It's not about the length of the sermon. It's not about the lack of personal stories and the message, or he's just not applicational enough.

The issue is true conversion. The issue is, is, is, it's a matter of redeemed or unredeemed. It's a matter of saved or self-deceived. That's the issue, folks. And beloved, we need to grow in discerning the true condition of the heart according to people's response to the truth. Do they embrace it, or do they reject it? This principle of discernment doesn't only apply to our churches, the judgments people make about a church in whole. This principle applies to personal relationships too, to friendships. This gets down to the practical. This, the individual, personal, relational level. This is especially where it's apparent.

This principle of discernment should inform your evangelism. That when you preach the truth, when you explain the gospel to an unbeliever, that you see their response to it, yay or nay? Embracing or rejecting? This principle of discernment should inform your discipleship. When you attempt to disciple somebody who professes Christ, or more to the point, when you confront someone in sin or error, you do so accurately. You do so winsomely, lovingly, generously, and that person rejects the truth, listen, it's not you, it's them. Their response is evidence of what's in their heart.

That's what I hope you get out of the text this morning. I want you to discern the true nature of people's hearts by their external responses to the truth. Because that discernment is going to give you great confidence. As you see more clearly what's happening when people respond favorably or unfavorably to the truth, you know the nature of their heart. I realize it's really hard to see this up close and personal. It's hard to live through this when it's in living color, when it's, when it's close, when it's family, when it's friends, when it's loved ones, it's really hard. When it's manifest in real life relationships that we navigate through every day.

But listen, as hard as it may be for you, try to imagine what it must have been like for John the Baptist, who rejoiced in the one coming after him and people rejected that one. Try to imagine what this must have been like for Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, the Savior and King of Israel. He came to his own people in the integrity of his impeccable righteousness, in the sincerity of his heart, with full divine love unmitigated. And his own people did not receive him.

Beloved, if you ever feel sad and downcast as someone you love has rejected the truth and turned from your ministry and turned away from you. Know that your Lord has experienced that same sorrow, but to an even greater degree. The apostle Paul expressed it as great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart over Israel's rejection of the Messiah. Our Lord knows that sadness. We read earlier from 1 Peter 2, that our Lord is none other than the chief cornerstone. And yet, as the cornerstone, he didn't, he wasn't embraced by his people. "He was despised and rejected of men. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

When we experience that same kind of rejection, when we feel that same kind of sadness and sorrow for the sake of the Son of Man, get this, we're blessed in the fellowship of his sufferings. For the many who are not the Lord's Sheep, they will be repelled by the Lord's voice.

But for the few we recognize, and here's a second point in our outline. For the few, we recognize that converted hearts always embrace the truth. And we need to move forward on that basis. We need to know that converted hearts always embrace the truth, always. May take time, may take a little consternation,

may take a little challenge, a little ruffling of the feathers here and there. But converted hearts will always embrace the truth. Why? Because they're converted. Because they're regenerate. Because they are a new creation in Christ. Because the Holy Spirit of God indwells them. And the Holy Spirit recognizes the truth that comes from the voice of the Lord and draws near it and brings that person to it.

It's a comfort to know that, when you preach the truth, when you're faithful with the message and when your manner of preaching and teaching is consistent with the message that you bring. That is to say, no hypocrisy. It's a comfort to know that the Lord's sheep will hear his voice. They will draw near. Take a look at the conclusion there in verse 35. Jesus is no doubt saddened by the popular judgment, but at the same time he understands the spiritual nature of what's happening, he says, "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

Over in Matthew's account of this same occasion, Matthew 11:19, Matthew records Jesus as saying, "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." "Wisdom is justified by her deeds." Justified by her *ergon*. *Ergon*, her works. There's no contradiction in the

two sayings, really. When we combine what Matthew recorded, "Wisdom justified by her deeds." We combine it with what Luke recorded, "Wisdom justified by all our children." We get the entirety of what Jesus said.

Jesus is here using the form of Hebrew poetic parallelism to emphasize the point to his original audience. And if we put both those accounts together we, we understand what Jesus originally said. He said, Je, "Wisdom is justified by her deeds." "Wisdom is justified by all of her children." That's parallelism. Or he may have just used like a, a staircase form of parallelism. That is to say, "Wisdom is justified by her deeds, indeed, by all of her children." Same meaning either way. The works or the deeds of wisdom are the children of wisdom.

On the one hand, the works, deeds which we which we find in Matthew's account, that's an impersonal product of wisdom and it emphasizes the energetic effect of wisdom, the power of wisdom. Here, in Luke's account, children of wisdom. That emphasizes the power that wisdom has to give birth, to produce children, and to reproduce after its own kind. So the children of wisdom

justify wisdom. Same word we saw used in verse 29. Same meaning, the children of wisdom.

They acknowledge the wisdom of God, not merely verbalizing that, they demonstrate God is righteous in the rightness of God's wisdom, and they show they believe him by submitting to him. They show the works and the fruit of faith by obedience to the revealed wisdom of God. And those kinds of people, they and they alone are the true offspring of wisdom. This personification of wisdom, kind of picturing wisdom like a wise mother who bears her children, who trains them up in the ways of wisdom. A mother who teaches her brood to always justify God's ways and always to embrace God's truth as truly wise.

Anything come to mind when you think about the personification of wisdom in that way? Proverbs 8? Jesus here is alluding to an Old Testament passage, also personifying wisdom like a mother, teaching her children to follow her ways. Go ahead and turn there for a moment to Proverbs 8. This is the call of wisdom to the children of men. And we find Jesus here in Luke 7 using this same form of appeal to his own generation. It says in Proverbs 8:1-3, "Does not wisdom call? Does not

understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in the front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud."

Where is she standing? Where is she pictured as, as taking her stand and calling out? These are verse, these verses are an illusion to the marketplace. Once again, this is where the adults are bustling about, transacting business. This is where the children are at play. Look at verse 4, "To you, men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man. O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth." That affirmation of wisdom's truth, the integrity of her speech, that leads her eventually to an indictment.

Look at verses 12 and 13, "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate." Now, connecting that indictment to our context in Luke. Anyone who condemns the words of wisdom,

like those childish, stubborn, unconverted people of Jesus' day. We're the same kind of people in our own time. They're filled with pride and arrogance. They pursue the way of evil, which is their own way, whatever way that is. Their judgments against wisdom are inherently perverted speech. They're utterly corrupt.

Look at verse 32, as wisdom turns her attention to her own children, as she speaks tenderly to them, she says this. "And now, O sons," Or "Now my children, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death." How does one become a child of wisdom? How does someone hear her instruction and listen to Wisdom's voice?

Look across the page, if it, maybe turn the page to Proverbs 9:10. Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is insight. For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added

to your life." That is, you wanna become sons and daughters of wisdom? Fear the Lord. Fear the Lord. Gain knowledge of the Holy One. Know him, understand him, and you're a child of wisdom.

Let's turn back to the gospel of Luke and wrap this up. The final part of this section on John the Baptist, it's meant to help us understand. This whole section, starting from verse 18 and all the way to verse 35, this section on John the Baptist is meant to help us understand the, the connection between the call to repentance, the gospel, divine forgiveness. It's also here meant to provide us with both warning and comfort. It's a warning for those who turn away from God's wisdom, God's truth. But it's a comfort for all those who are following the truth. The warning has been clear.

But let's end this way. What's the encouragement to the converted? What is the, the comfort and encouragement to those of us who, by God's grace, embrace the truth? It's really tough sometimes to be rejected by those who spurn God's truth. Who you've invested so much in, who you've loved over and over again, and they malign and reject. They remain steadfast in

their pride. They remain immovable, and then even worse, they turn and criticize, and they're critical spirited. It's really hard, isn't it? So what comfort did the humble find? Even though they are counted among the poor, the hungry, the weeping and the, the hated.

Words of comfort and encouragement are the punctuating statements at the end of each part of the section on John the Baptist. The first section is verses 18-23, and at the end of that he punctuates it with comfort. Verse 23 says, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." There's a blessing, a blessedness to us. Look at the next section, goes from verses 24-28. And our Lord encourages us there in verse 28, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. And yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God, greater than he."

Finally, our Lord assures us here, the final section, verses 29-35. Our Lord assures us that, "Wisdom is justified by all of her children." Beloved, by God's redeeming grace, we are those who fear the Lord. We're those who are not offended by Christ, but we run to him. We are those who, though least in

the kingdom of God, we are more blessed than John the Baptist because we know so much more. We are those who are Wisdom's children and we are able, by God's grace, to turn back and see wisdom in God's plan, in God's ways. We listen to the voice of wisdom. We obey the truth of God. So let's conclude this morning, as we should, by thanking him for his manifold grace and kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Father, thank you. What can we say but, but thank you. We're humbled beyond measure that you have produced within us the fear of the Lord, that we might listen to the voice of wisdom, that we might gain the instruction about you, the Holy One. That we might find in you grace and salvation. Many will find in you wrath and judgment. Many, many who will find in you, rightly reason to fear. They cower before you because Your holiness is dreadful. As they remain stubborn and steadfast in their sins.

But Father for us, you've been so kind to us. You've caused us to be born again to a living hope. You've caused us to draw near to find your truth. Suitable to our taste, we find ourselves hungry for it. We start, find ourselves hungering and

thirsting for righteousness because you've put that within us.
What can we say but thank you, thank you in the name of Jesus
Christ, our Savior and Lord, amen.