

## STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

### JOHN THE BAPTIST EPISODE!

Read Luke 7:18-35

While John the Baptist was a great man, he was not a perfect man. This was the worst moment of John's life, so far as the biblical record is concerned. We will not appreciate this passage of Scripture and its relevance to our lives unless we begin by understanding the seriousness of the error which is depicted here. Set aside your pre-conceived opinions of what happens here for a moment and consider exactly what is taking place when John sends two of his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (vv19-20).

**We can establish the following:**

**1. *The question which John asked was John's question.***

Initially I wondered whether John's disciples might have embellished John's question, but Luke's account repeats the question. The first time the question is spoken by John to his two disciples. The second time the question is spoken by the disciples. The wording of the two questions is the same. The question which John's disciples asked Jesus is precisely the question John instructed them to ask.

**2. *John's question was the result of his unhappiness with what Jesus was saying and doing.***

The section begins with these words: "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things." (v18).

The two miracles recorded in the previous verses of chapter seven—the healing of the Centurion's servant and the raising of the widow's son from the dead—would surely have been included in the report which was given to John. Clearly, John was not altogether pleased with the reports he was receiving as to what Jesus had been saying and doing. The question which John sent to Jesus via his two disciples reflected John's displeasure.

**3. *John is questioning Christ, the Messiah.***

John does not here openly question God, nor does he question himself or his ministry. John does not question the fact that Messiah will come. John questions that Jesus is the coming Messiah. And this is ignoring his own words to the contrary in the past:

*"And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.""* (John 1:32-34)

**4. *John was challenging Jesus to do what He had purposed not to do.***

John was pressing Jesus for a public announcement, a public commitment to be the Messiah. He was demanding that Jesus proclaim Himself as Messiah or John and the others (since in his question, he used "we") would reject Him and turn to another. It is obvious that Jesus did not intend to bear witness to Himself in this fashion. Jesus did not want men to accept Him as the Messiah because He claimed to be Messiah, but because the evidence was compelling that He was Messiah.

To confirm the intention of Jesus, when Peter got the great revelation that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus instructed that they tell no one.

“He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one” (Luke 9:20-21)

### **Why did John go wrong?**

Whilst we cannot say for sure why John became what made him ask this question through his disciples, we can infer some possible reasons why he went wrong.

#### **1. John had very little contact with Jesus.**

John did not have a close relationship with Jesus which might have assured him of Jesus’ identity and of His ultimate fulfilment of the messianic prophecies, especially those John had emphasized. Right from when Jesus was baptised by John and subsequent John’s imprisonment, he was distant from Jesus.

How close are you to Jesus? How do you become closer to Jesus?

#### **2. There were great differences between John’s ministry and the ministry of our Lord.**

John and Jesus were very different men. Jesus was, it would seem, gentle and soft-spoken. John, it would appear, was rough-hewn and outspoken. Jesus was very much in contact with people, frequently found in the cities, and often in contact with sinners. John was a man who lived a very secluded life. He lived in the desert, so that the people had to come out to hear him preach, if they would hear him and be baptized. John did not eat many foods but ate a honey and locusts. Jesus, on the contrary, drank wine and ate foods that John did not and would not. John’s disciples fasted, and Jesus’ disciples did not.

In today’s application, do we appreciate people’s differences and preferences so far they do not contradict scripture?

#### **3. There were differences to an extent between John’s message and the message of our Lord.**

The major difference between John and Jesus, is the difference in the emphasis of the message of each. John’s emphasis was on sin, judgment, and condemnation, while Jesus’ emphasis was on repentance, healing and salvation. Both emphases were biblical and important, but they were very different in tone and in their outworking. The Old Testament prophets contained an emphasis on both areas, but in practical outworking John focused on the judgment side of Messiah’s coming and Jesus focused on the salvation side.

John’s task was to condemn Israel’s sins and to warn of the impending judgment of God. It was also to call on men and women to repent for their sin to avoid the wrath of God.

#### **4. John did not understand the 2 comings of the Messiah**

John’s problem was that he did not understand that there were two comings of Messiah, the second of which was for the purpose of judgment, the first of which was to become a provision for man’s salvation by dying for the sins of the world. Jesus’ first coming was to bear the judgment of God, not to bring it. John’s message was true, and it served the purpose of preparing men for Christ’s first coming by calling many to repentance. Those who acknowledged themselves to be sinners found grace and forgiveness. John was perplexed by our Lord’s mercy and healing, for He expected Him to inaugurate the kingdom in a very different way.

### **Jesus Response: Example of Handling the Offended**

- 1. Jesus did not do what John demanded.** Jesus did not make a declaration that He was (or that He was not) the Messiah. John may have given an ultimatum, but Jesus didn’t take the bait.

2. **Jesus didn't give John His personal attention.** Some would have felt that John was merely lonely and depressed and that he needed some "quality time" spent with him. Jesus didn't think so.
3. **Jesus did not tell John the answers to his problems, which would have put his mind at ease.** John's grasp of the messianic prophecies was incomplete and distorted. Jesus could have straightened John out. He could have laid out the whole "plan of the ages," but He did not.
4. **Jesus, I might add, did not inform John that he was soon to be beheaded at the hand of Herod.** The question we are likely to ask ourselves is if the offended heart of John led to his death

### Jesus Response: Evidence Based Approach

*"Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them." (v22)*

Jesus' response to John was very simple. He simply told John's emissaries to tell John what they had witnessed. In effect, Jesus is suggesting to John the solution to his problem. He is simply telling John to do what every saint must do, compare the prophecies of the Old Testament with the deeds and declarations of Jesus Christ. If Jesus fulfills these prophecies, then the Bible bears witness to the fact that He is the Messiah. For v22, Jesus is pointing John to the prophesy of Isaiah about the Messiah:

*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert." (Isaiah 35:5-6)*

### Jesus Response: Not Offended but Affirm

*"When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who are gorgeously apparelled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet." (vv24-26)*

Jesus was gracious and explained that John was a great man of God, one who did not live for his own comfort or the approval of others. John was a chosen prophet of God, not a man-pleaser. Jesus quoted the Malachi (Malachi 3:1) passage about the coming of John, because the prophets themselves were not prophesied, but John was, and this was one way that he was greater than all previous prophets.

- John was steady, not shaken easily like a reed.
- John was sober, in that he lived a disciplined life, not in love with the luxuries and comforts of this world.
- John was a servant, a prophet of God.
- John was sent, as the special messenger of the Lord.
- John was special, in that he could be considered the greatest under the Old Covenant.

### Jesus Conclusion: Parable of the Flute

*"And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children." (vv31-35)*

Jesus considered the nature of His current generation, and how they were choosy and uncertain in receiving God's message and His messengers. In this parable, Jesus said: "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep:" The idea was that those who have a heart to criticize will find something to criticize. Many people wouldn't be pleased with either John or Jesus. While John was considered to have a demon because of his secluded lifestyle, Jesus who was among the people was considered a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Do you have a ministry of criticism?

***But wisdom is justified by her children:*** However, the wise man is proved to be wise by his wise actions (her children). Jesus had especially in mind the wisdom to accept both Jesus and John for what they were and what were called to be.