

Luke 7:11-35: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 7 verses 11 to 35. And he said, Young man, I say to you, arise.

And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people.

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. 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 is 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 is 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 were 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 is not offended by me.

[1 : 38] When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John. What did you go out into 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 who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's 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 sent 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 baptised with the baptism of John.

But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptised by him. To what then shall I compare the people of this generation? And what are they like?

[2 : 45] 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. In Luke 7, following the healing of the centurion's servant, Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain.

Jesus, in his sermon in Nazareth, in chapter 4, verses 25 to 27, compares his ministry to that of Elijah and Elisha. But in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. We've already seen parallels between Naaman the Syrian, and the healing of the centurion's servant.

[3 : 57] We might notice a further parallel between the widow of Zarephath, and the widow of Nain. In both cases, their sons are raised by a prophet. In 1 Kings, chapter 17, verses 8 to 24, we read of the widow of Zarephath.

It seems to me that Luke wants us to remember this story, to connect this with the sermon at Nazareth, and to see that Jesus' ministry is proceeding after the pattern of these great prophets,

Elijah and Elisha.

In the centurion and the widow of Nain, we have a male-female pairing, as we see on many other occasions in Luke, where Luke will often bring forward a man and a woman to express something of the scope and the comprehensive nature of the kingdom ministry of Christ.

Just as the healing of the centurion's servant is particularly done on behalf of the centurion, so this raising of the widow's son is done for the widow. The healing is performed not primarily for the dead man, but for his mother, upon whom Jesus takes compassion.

The bereaved mother is restored in the gift of her son. John has heard accounts of Jesus' ministry, but he is himself now in prison. He preached an imminent judgment.

[5 : 03] But Jesus is healing and restoring people. You might be uncertain whether Jesus is in fact the one that he awaited. You might be wondering where the promised fire is. While John's messengers are with him, Jesus performs a number of miracles which serve as signs.

They confirm the nature of his identity and the character of his mission. Are you the one who is to come? Jesus is judging by showing mercy. You can see allusions back to Isaiah chapter 61, verses 1 to 3, for instance.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Then in Isaiah chapter 35, verses 3 to 8, Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, Be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance.

With the recompense of God, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

[6 : 30] For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. In the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes, and a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness.

The unclean shall not pass over it. These passages talk about the vengeance of God. They talk about the fire, as it were, but they speak much more about this restoration of the people, about healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and enabling the lame to leap.

Blessed is he who does not stumble because of me. I don't believe Jesus is rebuking John the Baptist here. John the Baptist may be confused and uncertain, but that doesn't seem to be the same thing as stumbling.

Indeed, Jesus goes on to praise John the Baptist in some of the highest possible terms. He takes the occasion provided by the messengers from John to discuss the character of John's ministry with the crowd.

Who was John? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone who's weak, easily moved, or pressured? The Lord will strike Israel as a reed is shaken in the water and root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their fathers.

[7 : 41] It's 1 Kings chapter 14 verse 15. Maybe an example of this imagery being used elsewhere in scripture. John the Baptist wasn't that sort of person. He was a man of strong character, a man who stood firm as a prophetic witness.

See, a man dressed in soft clothing, a dignitary such as you might find in king's houses. No, he's a prophet, and more than a prophet. As we know from elsewhere, he is the Elijah who is to come. John the Baptist and Elijah are connected in a great many ways, not just in their clothing. He's prophesied in Malachi. He's a man associated with the wilderness, a forerunner of a man who's a prophet in the land.

He's a man clothed in camel skin with a leather belt. He fulfills the words of Malachi chapter 3 verse 1. Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Something that is connected to Exodus chapter 23 verse 20. Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

[8 : 46] The common people and the tax collectors recognise the justice of God, but the Pharisees and the lawyers reject God's saving justice. John the Baptist and Jesus as the Son of Man come in contrasting ways, and the Pharisees and the scribes reject both, for different and perhaps contradictory reasons.

They do not know the times. They're so out of sync with God's justice that they want to dance when they should be mourning, and to mourn when they should be rejoicing. We've seen this already earlier in the context of Jesus' teaching concerning fasting.

Why fast when the bridegroom is with you? They describe Jesus, the faithful son, as a glutton and a drunkard. And to understand the meaning of this reference, we should look back to Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 18 to 20.

Of course, Israel is actually the rebellious son, Of course, Israel is actually the rebellious son, the son that rejects the word of the father.

But Jesus will suffer the fate of the rebellious son, taking the judgment of the nation upon himself. Our passage ends with a peculiar statement that wisdom is justified by all of her children.

[10 : 13] The meaning of this statement, most likely, becomes plain as we look back to verse 29. When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptised with the baptism of John.

Wisdom is justified by all her children is then paralleled with that statement that the tax collectors and the people declared God just. The children of wisdom recognise her ways.

They affirm her ways and align with her purposes. While the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus are misunderstood and subject to great slander by the Pharisees and the scribes, the common people and the tax collectors recognise what's going on.

They see the signs, they recognise the times, and they act accordingly. Wisdom is justified by her children. A question to consider.

How does this discussion of John's mission further underline the importance of John the Baptist within the theology of Luke?