

## LUKE 7:24-35—REPENTING AND REJOICING

**INTRO:** People are an interesting mix of contradictions, aren't they? On the one hand, we all would like to have a relatively good and fulfilling life. Most of us think that we are pretty decent people and therefore—maybe without saying it out loud—we think we deserve a relatively good and fulfilling life. That may be behind why we get so upset and think it is abnormal when things don't go our way, particularly when we are beset with significant health or financial or relationship problems.

On the other hand, if we look deeply enough at ourselves, we realize that our entire lives are all about “me”—what I want for myself and those I care about. IOW, we are all radically self-centered. And more than that, we realize, “I'm *not* really that good and decent on the inside, so I *don't* really *deserve* a good, easy, satisfying life, because I can't even meet my own standards, let alone God's.

Think about it. God is perfect, so that is his standard—perfection. Jesus said, **“Be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”** Jesus brought this home more specifically when he also said that the entire Bible is summarized in just two commandments: **love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.** How are we doing with that? “Love God with *all* my heart, soul, mind, and strength?” I'm lucky if I even *think* about him 5 minutes a day. And “love my neighbor as I love myself?” That means I would have to spend the same amount of time, thought, energy, and money seeking the wellbeing of others as I do seeking my own wellbeing.

So what do we do? We want—and part of us feels that we deserve—God's favor and the fulfillment that living a life in his favor would bring, while the rest of us realizes that we are so far from deserving God's favor that we really have no hope of ever getting it.

Today's passage of Scripture—**Luke 7:24-35**—addresses this issue that all of us face. It is all about the gospel, IOW the only way we can obtain God's favor and the fulfillment that living in God's favor will bring. **[READ]**

**O/S:** We will briefly look at the background of our passage; then we will go through the passage in order and see two things: (1) the significance of John the Baptist; and (2) the nature of the gospel and people's responses to the gospel.

**Background:** Jesus had just healed a centurion's servant and raised a young man from the dead. John the Baptist's disciples reported back to him what Jesus had done. So John sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you really the expected Messiah or should we look for someone else?”

Why did he ask this? Remember, John the Baptist had previously acknowledged that Jesus *was* the expected Messiah when he said in **John 1**, **“Behold, the lamb of God—he has higher rank than I have because he is pre-existent.”** But then John the Baptist had been thrown into prison by Herod, and Jesus had neither freed him from prison nor ushered in the Kingdom by overthrowing the Romans as John the Baptist and others probably had expected the Messiah to do.

So when John's disciples ask Jesus, “Are you the expected one?” Jesus heals the sick, gives sight to the blind and says to John's disciples in **v. 22 [READ]**. In saying that, Jesus was quoting from **Isa 35** and **Isa 61** about what would happen when God himself, in the person of the Messiah, came to earth. Jesus was saying, **“Yes, I am the Messiah; I am the fulfillment of these prophecies; in fact, I am God himself come to earth.”**

**I.** Then John's disciples leave and Jesus speaks to the people, beginning with the significance of John the Baptist. In **vv. 24-26** Jesus in substance says, **“You people went out into the wilderness not to see a reed shaken by the wind or a comfortable, well-off man. Instead, you went to see someone different, someone who rejected an easy life but lived a hard life in the desert. You recognized that he was a prophet—but he was not just any prophet. He was a unique prophet, because he was the one appointed by God to directly prepare the way and proclaim the coming of the Messiah.”**

Then in v. 27 Jesus quotes from **Mal 3:1** concerning John the Baptist **[READ]**. These fulfilled prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi—which had been written 100s of years beforehand—show us that there *is* a God who is orchestrating history in accordance with his plan. Jesus then concludes this part of his discussion of John by

saying in **v. 28a [READ]**. Why is no one greater than John the Baptist? The reason can only be his unique role in proclaiming to the world: **“This Jesus is the long-awaited and expected Messiah.”**

But note what Jesus then says [READ v. 28b]. Jesus is saying that, despite John’s unique calling and his fulfillment of prophecy, John the Baptist was only the forerunner. You might say that John was the last of the Old Covenant prophets. John did not know what God would do through Jesus to bring about the salvation of people through the cross. He did not know about the coming resurrection and ascension, the pouring out of the HS on the day of Pentecost, or the baptism, indwelling, and sealing of believers by the HS.

Jesus is telling us that every believer today has a more intimate relationship with God through Christ than even John the Baptist had. Every believer today has **“the whole counsel of God”** through both the OT and NT. Thus, every believer today can testify to God’s plan and his or her personal experience with Jesus in a way that John the Baptist never could.

What are we doing with this vastly greater spiritual knowledge and experience? We are the light of the world. If people do not *hear from us* of the new life that only Jesus can give, and if people do not *see* that new life *in us*, then how can they come to new life themselves?

John the Baptist’s message essentially had been, **“Repent and be baptized, and then go and bear the fruit of repentance in how you live because judgment is coming.”** The people Jesus is talking to in this passage had all heard John the Baptist preach. And in **vv. 29-30** Luke observes [READ]. Notice that it was the religious leaders who had not repented, been baptized, or changed their lives even though they also had listened to John the Baptist. This is of huge importance, because Luke says in **v. 30** that the Pharisees and the lawyers **“rejected God’s purpose for themselves.”**

That has got to be one of the most sobering statements in the Bible. But it should cause every one of us to ask, **“Have I rejected God’s purpose for my own life?”** or **“In what particular ways am I rejecting God’s purpose for my life?”** You are here and listening to this message for a reason. It may be because you know that in some area of your life you are rejecting God’s lordship over your life. If that is the case, please repent, change, and bear the fruit of true repentance.

**II. Jesus picks up on this in vv. 31-35 where he talks about the gospel and people’s responses to the gospel.** These verses are directed primarily to religious people like the Pharisees—IOW people, perhaps like us, who outwardly are leading respectable, decent lives but in one way or another are rejecting God’s purpose for their lives. We know these verses are directed primarily to people like the Pharisees because in **v. 31** Jesus talks about the **“people of this generation.”** In the NT, the phrase “this generation” almost always has a negative connotation. It is not limited to the generation living 2000 years ago when Jesus walked the earth. Instead, it refers to people of any time and place. **Heb 3:10** quotes God regarding “this generation.” He says, **“They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways.”**

In v. 32 Jesus himself then describes “this generation.” He compares people to self-centered children who always want their own way. In Jesus’ day, the biggest happenings in the villages were weddings and funerals. Wedding celebrations could last several days, with music, drinking, and dancing. So the children would say, “Let’s play wedding” or “Let’s play funeral.” But Jesus observes, **“One person says, ‘Let’s play wedding and dance,’ but you say, ‘No, that’s too happy, I don’t want to do that’; so the person says, ‘Then let’s play funeral,’ but you say, ‘No, that’s too sad, I don’t want to do that either.’”** What Jesus is saying is, **“You’re not satisfied with anything and you are finding no lasting fulfillment, because you’re not getting your own way, you want to set the rules—but even if you did that you won’t be satisfied or find the fulfillment you are seeking.”** He makes this clear in the next two verses.

The example of the children is epitomized by people’s reactions to John the Baptist and to Jesus himself, as Jesus explains in vv. 33-34. You might say that John the Baptist represents the dirge of death. He himself didn’t drink alcohol. He forsook a comfortable lifestyle. His message was one of repentance in the light of coming judgment. Yet the respectable people attacked him. On the other hand, Jesus himself represents the dance of life. He drank wine—in fact his very first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding celebration. He miraculously fed people, and he hung out with people of all types, including not very respectable types. And the respectable people attacked him, too.

You see, Jesus is really talking about the gospel and people's reactions to the gospel. This is the key to understanding this passage. And this is the key to obtaining God's favor and finding satisfaction and fulfillment in life.

The word "gospel" means "good news." What is this "good news"? The good news begins with the bad news. And this is what makes Christianity and the gospel different from every other religion, worldview, and philosophy that has ever existed. You see, only Christianity has a credible answer to people's innate need for God's favor because only Christianity has an accurate diagnosis of people's inherent problem.

There are lots of religions and worldviews in existence, but there are actually only two kinds of religion: there is Christianity and everything else. What do I mean? Every other religion or worldview essentially says, **"Yes, we have our faults and flaws—after all, we're only human—but if we work hard enough, make enough sacrifices and do enough good deeds, then God or the gods or the powers that be will accept us and we will go to heaven or nirvana or whatever good may exist out there."** For example, here are Buddha's last words to his followers. He said, **"Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation."**

Christianity is different. Christianity alone says that every one of us is worse than we think we are. We all have a problem inside of us, in our heart—in the very core of our being—and we cannot change that no matter how hard we try. We are all warped, and no amount of time, effort, resolutions, praying, fasting, meditation, volunteering at homeless shelters, or anything else changes that. IOW, Christianity says, **"If you want God's favor and the fulfillment that that will bring, it's not what you can do to bring that about—because you can do absolutely nothing—instead, it is all about what God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, has done for you."**

But first we have to admit this. That's where John the Baptist comes in. I said earlier that John the Baptist represents the dirge of death, or the bad news of the gospel, namely, there is something fundamentally wrong with you; you are a sinner; and you cannot save yourself no matter how hard you try. You need to look deeply at your own heart, see yourself for what you really are inside, and cry out to God in repentance. In fact, Martin Luther recognized the true state of our hearts. In the 95 theses he posted on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg which began the Protestant Reformation in 1517, the very first thesis was, **"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."** Luther knew that even Christians have the power of indwelling sin in us. Therefore, in our hearts, as well as in what we say and how we act, repentance has to characterize our lives.

But that gets us to the good news. While both John the Baptist and Jesus himself preached that people needed to repent, there was a difference in focus between them: John's focus was on repentance in view of the soon coming judgment on sinners and sin; Jesus' focus was on repentance **"because the KOG is at hand."** IOW, God is present, and his kingdom, and all that means for our lives, has been inaugurated and may be entered *now*—you can obtain God's favor *now* through Jesus.

That's why Jesus represents the wedding dance. His very first miraculous sign at the wedding in Cana in **John 2** was turning approximately 150 gallons of water into the best wine people had ever drunk. What he was doing in Cana and what he is telling us in **v. 34** of today's passage is, **"I have come as the Lord of the Feast. The suffering, self-denial, and life of repentance are just the means to an end—I, the Lord of the Feast, am the end. I have come to be your bridegroom and have a deeper, more loving, more intimate, more joyous, and more lasting relationship with you than the greatest, most loving, most committed bridegroom the world has ever seen. I have come so that every day will be a wedding feast and every night a wedding night."**

Many people's experience of Christianity, or their impression of Christianity, is something like: **"Suck it up; just say no; deny yourself all the things you really like; try harder; be better, etc., etc., etc."** People who think that way really don't understand Christianity at all. In effect, they are stopping with John the Baptist and are forgetting Jesus. Of course, Jesus himself talked about denying ourselves and going and sinning no more. But how can we do that and yet not live in the dirge but have the joy of the dance Jesus promises?

The answer goes back to we said earlier, that every other religion essentially says, "If you want to obtain God's favor, it's all up you and what you do." Christianity alone says, **"To obtain God's favor it's not what**

**you do at all but it's all about what Jesus did for you.** We cannot earn God's favor; Jesus earned it for us. And he offers it to us as a free gift. That is called "grace." Grace is getting a good thing—acceptance by God, God's favor, a new life—that we have not earned and do not deserve. All we can do is receive it by repenting of our worthless attempts at self-salvation and receiving Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This gives me the ability to repent, freely and fully, knowing that Jesus has paid the price for every internal and external sin I commit. When I truly repent, although I feel sorry and ashamed for what I thought, said, or did, I have the peace and joy of knowing that my sin has been completely forgiven because Jesus has already taken that sin, and the penalty it deserves, onto himself. Knowing that does *not* give me a license to keep on sinning. Instead, it gives me a motive to *stop* sinning, because now I think, **"How can I sin against the one who loves me and has done so much for me? How can I sin against the great love and lord of my life?"**

Additionally, Jesus makes extraordinary promises to us when we turn to him, which help me not only overcome my tendency to sin but enable me to live a better life. When we come to him, we receive a new heart (like his own). We receive his mind, his Spirit, and eternal life (which is not just living for a long, long, long time, but is a new *quality* of life). He actually comes and lives inside of us so that, slowly by slowly, he purges the sin and evil that is within us and make us into the people he created us to be—the true you; the true me. That means a wholeness, an integrity, a peace, a joy, a satisfaction, a fulfillment we never could hope to achieve on our own.

**Prop:** This whole passage is telling us that: **Life with God is a life of repenting and rejoicing.**

But we need to understand something. If we come to true, saving faith in Christ, that means that Christ has bought and paid for us, so we are no longer our own. That means that *he* now is the one in charge of our lives. And *that* means that there is nothing he cannot ask or demand of us. Some people find that scary. But you will only find that scary if you really haven't seen the true state of your own heart but instead think, **"Yeah, I have certain foibles, but I can lick this on my own—maybe Jesus can top me up a little."** Don't be naïve.

Instead, if we look deeply at who Jesus really is and what he has done—living the life we should have lived, dying the death we should have died, and paying the penalty for our sins that otherwise we would have to pay but never could—we can trust him all the way to the end. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He's smarter than we are (because he is God who came to earth), and everything he does is because he loves us and wants the ultimate best for us. We are foolish to think we should try to control our own lives—which is doomed to fail anyway—when we can experience true life in him.

As Jesus himself concludes in v. 35, "Wisdom is justified by all of her children." IOW, true wisdom recognizes our need and acts upon it. John the Baptist was right: we need to repent and bear the fruit of repentance. Jesus also is right: he came to call the lost and the broken—and we are all lost and broken. Of course he was the friend of the outcasts of society—but we are all outcasts from God, and only Jesus is our friend to lead us back to God.

Christianity is the only religion or worldview that can put the dirge and the dance together. A life with God is a life of repenting and rejoicing. If you have not yet seen yourself for who you really are, spend the time and thought necessary to see yourself clearly and deeply. Call out to God for him to reveal to you the real you inside. Then turn to Jesus for a new life. If you have already done that, we need to continually be asking: **"Lord, show me in what ways—in terms of my money, my time, my thought life, my relationships, or anything else—how am I rejecting your purpose for my life or your lordship over my life?"** When he shows you, make the changes you need to make—and he will enable you to do it.

**CONCL:** New life in Jesus is not scary. It *is* an adventure. It is a life of repenting and rejoicing. In fact, we can rejoice in our repenting because we know and can trust the Lord of life. So keep repenting and rejoicing.