

Luke 7:24-35
March 10, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

You will recall in our study last week that John the Baptist was in prison. He kept hearing from his disciples all that Jesus was doing and the crowds that were following, so he sent two of them to ask Jesus “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus answered by performing miracles. He then told the messengers to tell John the Baptist that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”

Transition: In today’s lesson, Jesus uses the occasion of John the Baptist’s inquiry as a springboard to teach the people about John’s ministry and to commend him. Let’s start with verses 24-30.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.24:

- After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?”

V.25:

- If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces.

V.26:

- But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

V.27:

- This is the one about whom it is written: “‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”

V.28:

- I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

V.29:

- (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.

V.30:

- But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.24: Let’s set the scene. Who are the characters? [Jesus and the crowd]

Q: How would you describe the make-up of this crowd? [Jews, Gentiles, and religious leaders like Pharisees and Scribes]

Q: What does Jesus ask them? [What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?]

Q: These are interesting questions! When Jesus talks about “going into the desert,” what is He referring to? [He’s referencing the “desert” of Isa 40:3.]

X-REF: Isa 40:3-5 Who is Isaiah referencing in these verses? [John the Baptist]

Q: So who was Jesus alluding to when he asked, “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?”

Q: What’s the significance of asking if they “went to the desert to see a reed swayed by the wind?” [Let people engage - A "**reed**" is the cane-like grass that grows on the banks of the Jordan River. It grew twelve feet high with beautiful blossoms at the top. It was so slender that it yielded to a gust of wind by laying flat and then would stand upright again when the wind ceased. To compare a person to a reed was to say that the person was without moral fiber or courage, easily tossed about by various opinions, never taking a stand on anything. In addition, reeds were everywhere; they were commonplace. Obviously, the people did not flock into the wilderness to see something commonplace, nor did they go to see a weak and fearful person.]

Q V.25: What does Jesus ask next? [If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes?]

Q: What’s the significance of asking if they went to the desert to find “a man dressed in fine clothes?” [There were probably people in the crowd who knew the backstory of John the Baptist and knew the prophecy of Isaiah.]

X-REF Mark 1:1-8 What kind of clothing did John the Baptist wear? [Clothing made of camel’s hair, leather belt around his waist, and sandals]

Q: Jesus answers His own question. Where do people normally go to see someone in expensive clothes? [Palaces where people have fine linens and indulge in luxury]

Q V.26-27: Jesus then asks a rhetorical question, “What did you go out to see?” How does Jesus answer his own question? [A prophet, and more than a prophet]

Q V.27: What does Jesus quote to the crowd to support His answer that they came to see a prophet? [He quotes Malachi 3:1]

Q: What do you think Jesus meant by referring to John the Baptist being “more than a prophet?” [Let people engage - because he was sent to fulfill Malachi's prophecy, which was to introduce the Messiah (Jesus) who brings us the gospel of salvation]

Q V.28: When Jesus states that there is “no one greater than John the Baptist, what do you think He means? On what basis is John the Baptist greater? [He was speaking about the greatness of John’s *position*. No other prophet had the privilege of being the forerunner of the Messiah. It

does not mean that John had a better character than any of the Old Testament prophets, but only that his was the unique assignment of introducing the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.]

Q: Jesus then states, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” What does He mean by that? [John’s greatness among all the OT prophets, all those who came before the arrival of the kingdom of God, comes from his function as direct forerunner of Jesus the Messiah. But John was not part of the kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming and bringing to reality, for he was still part of the old covenant system. Therefore, the one who is least in the kingdom of God (one who has believed in Jesus and has become a member of the new covenant kingdom) is actually greater than John, for those who come after John live in the age of fulfillment, following the coming of Jesus. This underscores the qualitative difference between the old age and the dawning of the new kingdom age.]

Q: Let’s hit the pause button for a minute. Why do you think Jesus is going to all this trouble to defend John the Baptist? [He defends the reputation of John the Baptist, as soon as his messengers were departed. He saw that the people around him were apt to think lightly of John, partly because he was in prison, partly because of the inquiry which his disciples had just brought. But John the Baptist was a prophet, and prophets have a message from God which he is willing to tell at whatever cost to himself.]

Q V.29-30: Both the tax collectors and the Pharisees heard Jesus’s defense of John the Baptist. How did the tax collectors respond and why? [They acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John.]

Q: What did Luke mean by “God’s way was right?” [The common people and the outcast tax collectors who heard John the Baptist’s preaching acknowledged that a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins was required by God, who was just and righteous.]

Q: According to Luke, how did the Pharisees and the experts in the law respond? [They rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.]

Q: What was God’s purpose for them? [To receive God’s offer of salvation. They refused to avail themselves of the door of repentance which was offered to them by John the Baptist’s preaching. Instead, they refused to admit the need of confession of sin on their part and so set aside the baptism of John. They annulled God’s purposes of grace.]

Transition: Since the religious leaders were rejecting the message of John and of Jesus, the Lord told a short parable to explain their treatment. Someone read verses 31-35.

V.31:

- “To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like?”

V.32:

- They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’”

V.33:

- For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’

V.34:

- The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’

V.35:

- But wisdom is proved right by all her children.’

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.31: What “people of this generation” is Jesus referring to? [He is referring to the religious leaders of verse 30, the rejecters of John and Jesus.]

Q V.32: Jesus describes the children playing games, but what’s going wrong? [They play “wedding” (v. 32b) and they play “funeral” (v. 32c). And they complain when others won’t play their game. And that, Jesus said, is what the religious leaders had done. They’d been playing games, and they whined because neither John nor Jesus, a social, friendly Teacher, played their games with them! “If you won’t play our way,” Jesus pictured them saying, and we can clearly see the pout on petulant, childish faces, “we won’t play at all. So there!” But Jesus wasn’t playing games.]

Q V.33: Jesus continues to defend John the Baptist. Jesus depicts John the Baptist as straight-laced, yet what were the religious leaders saying about John the Baptist? [He has a demon]

Q: Why did the religious leaders say that John the Baptist had a “demon?” [John the Baptist was too separatist and ascetic (someone who practices self-denial as a spiritual discipline) for some (**eating no bread and drinking no wine**), and so he was accused of not being directed by God, but by a demon.]

Q V.34: Jesus highlights another criticism from the religious leaders. What do you see? [The Son of Man didn’t practice self-denial like John the Baptist. He refused to fast according to Pharisaic expectations. Accordingly, He’s accused of being friendly with the tax collectors and sinners.]

Q V.35: Who are the “children” in this verse? [The “children” do not refer to John the Baptist and Jesus, but rather to those who follow them.]

Q: What does Jesus mean by “wisdom is proved right by all her children?” [These children have heard Jesus’ deeds (7:22) and “did not fall away” (7:23). On the contrary, they see these deeds as signs of the messianic age (12:56) and prove the wisdom of Jesus’ and John’s preaching by putting it into practice (8:21)]

LOOK: As long as we base our life choices on the Word of God, time will be our defender and will validate the wisdom of our choices. If, over time, we clearly see we are wrong, ask God’s forgiveness and seek a fresh word from God through the Scripture. Then obey that word and watch to see God confirm His wisdom in our lives.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 197). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

John the Baptist: His Response to Doubt (Luke 7:24–35)

Commendation (vv. 24–30). What we think of ourselves, or what others think of us, is not as important as what God thinks. Jesus waited until the messengers had departed and then He publicly commended John for his ministry. At the same time, He exposed the sinful hearts of those who rejected John's ministry.

John the Baptist was not a *compromiser*, a reed blowing in the wind (note Eph. 4:14); nor was he a popular *celebrity*, enjoying the friendship of great people and the pleasures of wealth. John did not waver or weaken, no matter what people did to him. John was not only a prophet, but he was a prophet whose ministry was prophesied! (see Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1) The last of the Old Testament prophets, John had the great privilege as God's messenger of introducing the Messiah to Israel.

How is the least person in the kingdom of God greater than John? In position, not in character or ministry. John was the herald of the King, announcing the kingdom; believers today are children of the kingdom and the friends of the King (John 15:15). John's ministry was a turning point in both the nation's history and in God's plan of redemption (Luke 16:16).

Luke 7:29–30 are the words of Jesus, not an explanation from Luke (see Matt. 21:32). They answer the question some of the people were asking, "If John is such a great prophet, why is he in prison?" The answer is: because of the willful unbelief of the religious leaders. The common people accepted John's message and were baptized by him as proof of their repentance. They "justified God," which means they agreed with what God said about them (Ps. 51:4). But the religious leaders justified themselves (Luke 16:15), not God, and rejected John and his message.

Condemnation (vv. 31–35). Jesus compared that generation to people who were childish, not childlike, and nothing pleased them. He was probably referring to the scribes and Pharisees in particular. John was an individual who declared a stern message of judgment, and they said, "He has a demon!" Jesus mingled with the people and preached a gracious message of salvation, and they said, "He's a glutton, a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners!" They wanted neither the funeral nor the wedding, because nothing pleased them.

People who want to avoid the truth about themselves can always find something in the preacher to criticize. This is one way they "justify themselves." But God's wisdom is not frustrated by the arguments of the "wise and prudent." *It is demonstrated in the changed lives of those who believe.* This is how true wisdom is "justified."

Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 223)

b. Jesus' condemnation of Israel for rejecting John's ministry and His ministry (7:24–35).

7:24–28. **Jesus** used the occasion of John the Baptist's inquiry to teach the people about John's ministry and to commend him. He noted that John was not conviction-less, like a **reed** blowing in **the wind**. Nor was he **dressed** luxuriously. Instead, he was rightly understood by the people to be **a prophet**. Jesus added that John was **more than a prophet** in that he, as prophesied in Malachi 3:1, was also the Messiah's forerunner. In Malachi 3:1–2 two messengers are spoken of. One is

the forerunner, revealed here as John the Baptist, and the other is “the Messenger of the Covenant” who will purify His people, that is, the Messiah Himself.

Jesus paid John a great compliment by stating that **no one was greater than John**. And yet **the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he**. Jesus was not declaring that John was not a part of “the kingdom of God,” for John had been preaching the same message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus was saying that being a great prophet is not nearly so great as being a member of the kingdom. Implied also is the fact that citizens of the kingdom have a distinct advantage over the prophets who were seen as great men of God in the Old Testament. Citizens of the kingdom will be under the New Covenant and have the Law of God written on their hearts (Jer. 31:31–34). Even the least person in the kingdom will have a greater spiritual capacity than John the Baptist himself.

7:29–30. Luke showed deep division in the thinking of **the people** who listened to **Jesus’ words**. Those who **had been baptized by John**, that is, had repented of their sins and had been baptized to show their sincerity, agreed with Jesus and **acknowledged that God’s way was right**. In contrast, **the Pharisees and experts in the Law rejected God’s purpose for themselves**. By refusing to be **baptized by John** they showed that they did not accept his message of repentance or accept the kingdom. Thus, they rejected God’s plan of salvation for them. The ironic fact was that the Pharisees and the experts in the Law were the ones who should have known best about the ministry of the forerunner (John) and the Messiah (Jesus).

7:31–35. The editorial interjection by Luke (vv. 29–30) into the narrative account explains the following five verses. Since the religious leaders were rejecting the message of John and of Jesus, the Lord told a short parable to explain their treatment. When Jesus mentioned the **people** (*anthrōpous*) **of this generation** He was not speaking of the people (*laos*) mentioned in verse 29 who accepted His message. Instead the people in His parable were the religious leaders of verse 30, the rejecters of John and Jesus. Jesus described them as capricious **children** who wanted others to respond to their music. They were not satisfied with the behavior of either **John** or Jesus. John was too much of an ascetic, and Jesus was too much of a libertine (in the Pharisees’ definition of the term). Neither extreme could make the religious leaders happy. Jesus applied the parable by stating that **wisdom is proved right by all her children**. The ones who were following Jesus and John were proof enough of the correctness of their teaching.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 229-234). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

As in the Matthean parallel (11:2–19), Jesus’ testimony to John the Baptist is attached to the preceding account. Having described how Jesus fulfilled the OT promises of Isaiah (see comments on 7:22), the present account now describes how John fulfilled the OT promises of Mal 3:1. There is no reason why the connection between these events cannot be historical, unless one assumes *a priori* that a chronological link between such accounts is impossible or that Jesus could not have quoted the OT. We treat Luke 7:29–30 as the conclusion of the present pericope rather than the beginning of the next.

Comments

7:24 What did you go out into the desert to see? The “desert” refers less to a particular geographical location than to the “desert” of Isa 40:3. See comments on 3:2. There are several ways of translating this passage. The two main ones are: (1) “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed?” This is found in most translations. (2) “Why did you go out into the desert? To see a reed shaken?” The latter is found in GT 78, but the former is more likely. There is little, if any, difference in meaning between the two. It is assumed that people did indeed go out into the wilderness to see John (cf. Mark 1:5).

A reed swayed by the wind? This can be interpreted by either (1) “such an insignificant thing as a reed being swayed by the wind?” The implication then is that they of course did not go out to see such a commonplace and trivial thing as one of the many reeds that exist in the wilderness being moved by the wind. (2) “A weak and wavering person?” Here the implication is that they of course did not go out to see such an insignificant person. The former interpretation is to be preferred.

7:25 The first part of this verse stands in synonymous parallelism with the latter part of Luke 7:24.

A man dressed in fine clothes? This can also be interpreted in two ways. (1) Did the crowds go out to see a finely dressed person? This might have been worth the trip, but such finely dressed people are not located in the desert. (2) Did the crowds go out to see a timid, frail ruler? The former interpretation is more likely. Whether Luke intended to contrast the fine clothes of such a person with the dress of John the Baptist (cf. Mark 1:6) is uncertain, for he did not mention John’s dress in his Gospel. However, Jesus could have been alluding to such a contrast.

No, those ... are in palaces. Whereas the question of Luke 7:24 is not directly answered, this one is. The people did not go into the desert to see a finely dressed person, for such people do not live in the desert but in palaces.

7:26 What did you go out to see? The people did indeed go out to the desert. If they did not go to see a common desert sight (a reed swayed by the wind) or an unusual sight (a finely dressed man), what did they go out to see? The answer was clear both to Jesus’ hearers and Luke’s readers.

A prophet? This is why the people proceeded out into the desert. Jesus’ audience would readily have agreed with this answer (7:29). Yet although this answer is correct, it is not entirely adequate, for John was not just “a” prophet.

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. The assessment of John by both Jesus and Luke was that he was far more than “a” prophet, and this is explained in the next two verses.

7:27 The first reason John was more than a prophet is that he was the one who fulfilled the prophecy of Mal 3:1. John was “the” prophet who was awaited, “the” prophet and messenger who would precede the Messiah’s coming. See comments on 1:76.

I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. The “you” referred to is understood by Luke as referring to Jesus. We should therefore interpret the “Lord” of 1:17, 76; 3:4 as Jesus. There is no evidence that pre-Christian Judaism believed that Elijah would return as the Messiah’s forerunner. Elijah’s coming was associated with the consummation and with judgment (Mal 3:1), and for many this consummation was associated with the Messiah’s coming. As a result, it is not unlikely that for some Elijah’s and the Messiah’s comings were connected (cf. Mark 9:9–13).

7:28 I tell you. This highlights the following statement.

Among those born of women there is no one greater than John. The second reason John was more than just “a” prophet is that he was the greatest of all men. The expression “born of

women” is a synonym for being human. Luke assumed that Jesus was excluded from this comparison. The greater quality of Jesus over John the Baptist has been a recurring theme in Luke 1–2 (see 1:26–38, “The Lukan Message”), and Luke’s readers know that Jesus was greater than John. The comparison here was between John and other humans.

Yet the one who is least —The term “least” (literally *lesser*) can be understood as (1) the least person in God’s kingdom. The use of the comparative pronoun (*lesser, mikroteros*) for the superlative (“least”) was common in koine Greek (cf. 9:48). (2) The “lesser” in the sense of “younger.” This then refers to Jesus, who although younger was greater than John the Baptist in God’s kingdom. The first interpretation is more likely.

In the kingdom of God is greater than he. The expression “in the kingdom of God” is better understood as modifying the verb “is” than the adjective “least.” (Cf. 13:28–29; 14:15; 22:16; and possibly 22:30.) Although in the thinking of the world this is not true, in God’s kingdom the “least” is greater than the greatest prophet. This should not be interpreted as a denigration of John the Baptist. The main contrast in this verse involves the contrast between human greatness and membership in the kingdom of God. Even being the greatest prophet is less important than being a lowly member in God’s kingdom (cf. 11:27–28). Membership in the kingdom is more wonderful than being the greatest of human beings.

This interpretation understands 7:28a, b as an example of step parallelism, in which the second line or thought is advanced a step higher than the first, rather than an example of antithetical parallelism, in which the second line stands in opposition to the first. (That John the Baptist would share in the final consummation of the kingdom is evident from 13:28.) There may also be a sense that although John was both a bridge crossing the ages and part of the inauguration of God’s kingdom (note he too preached the “gospel” in 3:18), yet he lived before the greater realization of the kingdom at Pentecost. Thus, although John marked the beginning of God’s kingdom and overlapped it, he may be viewed here as the last great figure of the old era. See comments on 16:16.

7:29 All the people. Compare 1:10; 2:10; 18:43. See comments on 4:15.

When they heard. In light of 7:22, 24 this is best understood as referring to Jesus’ testimony to John rather than John’s preaching.

Acknowledged that God’s way was right. Literally *justified God* (cf. RSV). “Justified” is used here in its forensic sense of *declaring right*. Compare also 7:35; 10:29; 16:15; 18:14; Acts 13:39.

Because they had been baptized by John. The means by which the people “justified” God was by their submission to the baptism of God’s prophet.

7:30 But the Pharisees and experts in the law. The “experts in the law” (literally *lawyers*) are also referred to in Luke 10:25; 11:45–46, 52; and 14:3. This is essentially a synonym for “scribe” (cf. 11:52–53). For “Pharisees” see comments on 5:17.

Rejected God’s purpose for themselves. How they did this is shown in the last part of this verse. By not submitting (an instrumental participle) to John’s baptism (and, of course, the repentance it demanded), the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God’s purpose for them.

The Lukan Message

The main emphasis in this passage involves understanding the role of John the Baptist in salvation history. John was truly a prophet (3:2; 7:26), but he was more than a prophet. He was humanly speaking the greatest of all human beings, Jesus excepted. He furthermore was that prophet spoken of in Mal 3:1 whose task it was to go before the Lord Christ. He was the one who

would bridge the two eras and announce the coming of God's kingdom. He, not Jesus, was *Elijah redivivus* (Mal 3:1; 4:5). This is evident from Luke 7:27, even if it is not as clear as in Mark 9:9–13 and Matt 11:14. With John the Baptist's coming, God's kingdom was announced as at hand, and with Jesus' coming it was inaugurated.

Another theme we find in the Lukan comment of 7:29–30 involves the great reversal. This is most clearly seen in the Lukan reference to the tax collectors in 7:29. The religious leadership, represented by the Pharisees and experts of the law, rejected the coming of the kingdom because they rejected John's baptism and the one he announced. The tax collectors and the people, however, responded positively. As a result, those who were last became first, and the first became last (13:30; cf. 1:48–53; 6:20–26; 16:25).

Context

This third account concerning John the Baptist builds upon 7:29–30 and forms a chiasmus with it (*A*—7:39; *B*—7:30; *b*—7:31–34; *a*—7:35). This material is part of the common tradition (Q) which Matthew and Luke used in writing their Gospels, and in both Gospels these three accounts occur together in the same order. The two accounts contain some minor differences (Luke added “bread” and “wine” in 7:33 and used “children” instead of “works” in 7:35), but these differences possess no theological significance. The key issue of interpretation involves the relationship of the parable (7:31–32) to the sayings (7:33–35).

Comments

7:31 To what, then? This indicates that 7:29–30 serves as a bridge connecting 7:24–28 with 7:31–35.

Can I compare? Compare 13:18, 20.

This generation? This refers to all those who in this age oppose Jesus and the gospel and who stand in contrast to the sons of light (16:8). For a similar pejorative use of this expression, cf. 9:41; 11:29–32, 50–51; 16:8; 17:25; Acts 2:40.

What are they like? A more complete translation of this thought would be, “The situation (not just ‘the people of this generation’) about which we are talking can be compared to the following analogy/parable.”

7:32 The parable involves the following components: (1) children, who represent Jesus' contemporaries, sitting in a marketplace and (2) other children, who represent Jesus and John the Baptist, inviting the first group of children to play. The first group, however, finds neither the ascetic John nor the non-ascetic Jesus to their liking.

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. The flute was frequently played at a wedding dance.

We sang a dirge, and you did not cry. This involved taking part in the mourning associated with a funeral. Compare 8:52; Matt 2:18; John 11:31–33. The picture is that of children inviting other children to play “wedding” or “funeral” and being turned down.

7:33 The rejection of the gospel message is not due to the form of its presentation. John preached the gospel while living an ascetic life-style (Luke 5:33a). Jesus preached the gospel in the joy of the kingdom's arrival, but both were rejected (5:33b–35). Neither satisfied the wishes of this generation because their message was the same. Both preached a message of repentance (cf. 3:3, 8 and 5:32; 13:3, 5), and both offered salvation to the outcasts (cf. 3:12–14 with 4:18; 5:27–32; 7:22).

Neither eating bread. Compare Mark 1:6.

Nor drinking wine. See comments on 1:15.

He has a demon. That is, he was mad (cf. John 7:20; 8:48–49, 52; 10:20).

7:34 The Son of Man. For Luke this served as a title paralleling “John the Baptist” in the previous verse. Whether in the original setting it was used by Jesus as a circumlocution for “I” is uncertain, but for Luke the title “Son of Man” refers to the person described in Dan 7:13.

Came eating and drinking. Compare Luke 7:36–50; 11:37; 14:1. The difference between the form of Jesus’ message and of John’s message was striking. John understood the coming of God’s kingdom as requiring repentance and portrayed this via his fasting; Jesus saw the coming of God’s kingdom as a time of great celebration and portrayed this by the analogy of a wedding feast (5:33–34). Both are valid expressions of different aspects of God’s kingdom, and if either is totally ignored, an unbalanced portrayal will result.

A friend of tax collectors and “sinners.” Compare 5:30; 15:1. For “tax collectors” see comments on 3:12.

7:35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children. Matthew’s “actions” (11:19) is probably less authentic than Luke’s “children.” Wisdom, which is personified and corresponds to “God’s way” in Luke 7:29, is justified (declared right) by her offspring. The “children” do not refer to John the Baptist and Jesus but rather to those who follow them. They have seen and heard Jesus’ deeds (7:22) and “do not fall away” (7:23); on the contrary they see these deeds as signs of the messianic age (12:56) and prove the wisdom of Jesus’ and John’s preaching by putting it into practice (8:21). The children in the parable who did not respond represent the Pharisees and experts of the law (7:30).

The Lukan Message

We find in this account a clear emphasis both on the unity of the message of Jesus and John the Baptist as well as the rejection of that message by the Jewish leadership. Despite its different appearance, the message of Jesus and John was the same. It was not therefore the form of the message that caused its rejection but rather its content. The message was rejected because it demanded repentance. For the Pharisees and law experts such a message was received with hostility (7:30). Others might need to repent, but they were confident in their own righteousness (18:9–14). But for those who knew they were sinners and needed to repent, for tax collectors and sinners (7:29, 34), the good news of John and Jesus offered hope and forgiveness, and it was gladly accepted. They saw the ministries of Jesus and John as evidence of the arrival of the messianic age (12:56). Thus, once again we see the great reversal.

Along with the description of the rejection of John’s and Jesus’ message, we have a hint of future problems. If their message was not accepted by the leaders of the nation, what would happen? Luke’s readers, of course, know. As a result, this passage foreshadows the ultimate rejection and martyrdom of John and Jesus.