

Responding to Jesus

Luke 7:18-35

Sunday, October 5, 2025

Before we jump into our text, I want to remind us of where we've been. A few weeks ago, we looked at Luke 7:1-10, where Jesus healed a centurion's servant. In that passage, we saw the Lord's authority over sickness and his power to heal. Two Sundays ago, we looked at the next passage in Luke 7, the account of Jesus raising a widow's son from the dead. Once again, Jesus' power and authority were on display. This time, he demonstrated his power over death. We're told, those who witnessed Jesus' miracle,

"were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.' This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country" (Luke 7:16-17, NIV).

Many people were hearing about Jesus of Nazareth, the one who spoke with great authority, and who could cast out demons, heal the sick, and raise the dead. It was hard to deny God's power at work through him, and many considered Jesus to be a great prophet.

Notice, then, how our passage begins.

"John's disciples told him about all these things" (v. 18a).

The "things" Luke refers to in verse 18 are the things we've been reading about in Luke 7, the miraculous works of Jesus. Then, rather abruptly, Luke reintroduces us to John the Baptist. We haven't talked about John since last January, so you might have forgotten about him. By way of review, let's remember how John fits into the story of Jesus.

Back in Luke 1, before the events surrounding Jesus' birth, we were introduced to the one who would in time be known as John the Baptist. An angel of the Lord appeared to John's father, Zechariah and said,

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:12-17, NIV).

Fast forward roughly thirty years, and in Luke 3, we meet John as an adult, engaging in the prophetic ministry God called him to before he was born. Luke tells us,

"The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:2b-3, NIV).

Crowds gathered in the wilderness to hear God's prophet warn them about placing their confidence in their status as descendants of Abraham. Instead, John told them to,

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:8a, NIV).

For centuries, God's people had waited for their promised Messiah to come and set things right. God spoke in the past "at many times and in various ways" (Heb. 1:1) through his prophets about the one who was to come and deliver his people. God would one day send his people a rescuer. So, when John arrived on the scene, preaching about God's kingdom, people started to wonder if the promised rescuer had finally come.

"The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them" (Luke 3:15-18, NIV).

John was preparing the way for the rescuer by calling people to turn from their sin in repentance, and return to God in faith, professing their faith publicly through baptism, and showing evidence of faith at work by bearing spiritual fruit.

But not everyone welcomed John's warning to turn away from sin. Luke tells us that,

"When John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison" (Luke 3:19-20, NIV).

I hope you're still with me after covering all this background material, because now we're ready to unpack our passage starting in Luke 7:18.

"John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (Luke 7:18-20, NIV).

As news began to spread about Jesus, some of the Baptist's followers reported back to John—still in prison—about all they had heard and seen Jesus do. However, as they brought him up to speed, the picture of Jesus and his ministry didn't conform to John's messianic expectations.

Remember, John preached that with "winnowing fork" in hand, the Messiah would "gather the wheat into his barn," and "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17, NIV). So, John needed clarification. He sent two of his disciples back to Jesus to ask,

“Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Luke 7:19, 20, NIV).

It’s good to ask questions. Asking questions helps deepen our understanding. Asking questions helps correct our false assumptions. Asking questions helps to solidify our thinking about what we believe and why it’s true. So it was good for John to ask this question.

That said, there may have been a hint of doubt behind John’s question. Perhaps you’ve had occasions where you’ve asked some hard questions about your faith that arose from a place of doubt. That’s okay. Don’t be afraid to ask, because the Lord isn’t afraid to answer. However, sometimes the answer isn’t as black and white as we might like.

Luke reminds us in verse 21 that much of Jesus’ ministry at the time was manifested in his power to cure disease and sickness, cast out evil spirits, and give sight to the blind. In answer to their question, Jesus invited John’s disciples to consider what they witnessed and to draw their own conclusion.

“So [Jesus] replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Luke 7:22, NIV).

Jesus’ response was more than a summary of his ministry. John’s disciples would have heard echoes of Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah in Jesus’ words. For example, the prophet Isaiah, speaking about the coming messianic era, wrote,

“Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy” (Isa. 35:5-6, NIV).

Like John’s disciples, we as Luke’s readers are meant to follow Jesus’ logic. When the prophets spoke of the Messiah, they predicted he would open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. Like the formerly-paralyzed man we read about in Luke 5, when the promised rescuer comes, “the lame [will] leap like a deer.” When the Messiah comes to his people, he will enable the mute to “shout for joy.”

“Now,” Jesus says to John’s disciples, “What have you seen *me* do? What are people saying about *my* ministry?”

“Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Luke 7:22, NIV).

But notice, Jesus’ reply was more than an invitation to draw a logical conclusion. Based on their conclusion, Jesus called upon those who saw and heard to respond. Listen to what the Lord says in verse 23,

“Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me” (Luke 7:23, NIV).

Jesus could have stated this positively by saying something like, “Blessed is anyone who sees and hears, and responds to me in faith.” But he doesn’t. He states his call in the negative.

“Blessed is the one who *does not* reject my claims or refuse to come to me in faith.”

The most important question anyone can answer is, “Who is Jesus?” But this is more than an intellectual question. Philosophers have their answer. Historians have their answer. Archaeologists have their answer. Theologians have their answer. Even the demons have an answer to this question.

It’s more than a question of getting our facts straight about the individual whom history identifies as Jesus of Nazareth. This is a question that demands a response.

Whether John the Baptist’s original question arose out of curiosity, a need for clarification, or from a place of doubt, his inquiry serves as our opportunity to respond to this most important of questions: Who is Jesus?

The remainder of this passage, verses 24-35 are all about responding to Jesus. After John’s disciples leave the scene to report back to him, Luke highlights two categories of people: those who respond to Jesus with obedient faith, and those who reject him out of stubborn resistance.

What was true in Jesus’ generation, is still true in our own. **The question, “Who is Jesus?” demands a response** from every one of us.

We’ll come back to the question, “Who is Jesus?” in a moment. But first, as we pick back up in verse 24, Jesus raises a new question: “Who is John?”

From our perspective, that might seem like a less significant question compared to who Jesus is, but the Lord didn’t see it that way. Jesus’ question about John’s identity boils down to two considerations: the purpose of John’s ministry, and the significance of John’s place in history.

Jesus speaks about the first, the purpose of John’s ministry in verses 24-27.

“After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 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. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: “ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you’” (Luke 7:24-27, NIV).

In verse 24, Jesus turns his attention to the crowd and invites them to think back to the early days of John the Baptist’s ministry in the desert.

Someday I would like to backpack a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail, also known as the PCT. The PCT extends from the Southern California-Mexican border to the Washington-Canadian

border to the north. Those who attempt to hike the entire PCT typically take the northbound route, which means the early part of the journey takes hikers through the desert. While it's true that the desert can be scenic and beautiful, most people don't go to the desert just to sight see. They are there for a specific reason.

Three times, Jesus asks the crowd,

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see?" (Luke 7:24: cf. 25, 26).

It wasn't a trick question. They didn't travel out into the wilderness to see desert reeds blowing in the wind. Nor would anyone have expected to find members of the royal family dressed in their finest attire. No, these people flocked to the desert to see and hear a prophet. They went to the desert to see John the Baptist.

Some might have made the trip just to check out a man who, according to Mark's Gospel, wore "clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, ...[who] ate locusts and wild honey" (Mark 1:6, NIV). But most went not just to see John, but to hear God's prophet speak a word from the Lord.

To answer the question, "Who was John?" Jesus first identified the purpose of John's ministry. Look at what Jesus said in verses 26-27.

"But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: " 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you'"

Quoting Malachi 3:1, Jesus said that the purpose of John's ministry was to serve as God's messenger, preparing the way for the Messiah.

Second, in answer to the question, "Who was John?" Jesus also wanted the crowd to consider John's place in history.

Do you remember where you were on January 9, 2007? This was a significant turning point in world history, maybe not as significant as April 15, 1865, December 7, 1941, or September 11, 2001, but still significant.

On January 9, 2007 Steve Jobs announced the debut of a revolutionary piece of technology: the iPhone. That was the unofficial start of the smartphone era. Many of us now have trouble imagining a world without that little piece of technology in our pocket.

On a more serious note, when Jesus says in verse 26 that John was "more than a prophet," and in verse 28 says,

"I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John,"

Jesus wasn't calling John the Michael Jordan or Tom Brady of prophets. Jesus was saying that John's prophetic ministry marked a new era in salvation history. In that sense, no human being had a more significant place in history.

And yet, finishing verse 28, Jesus went on to say,

"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."

Folks, we're privileged to live in the most significant era of human history, not because we belong to the smartphone era, but because we belong to the messianic era. Though we are the least in the kingdom of God, because spiritually speaking we are blind, deaf, and even dead apart from Christ, since the kingdom of God has arrived and Christ has come, we are in a position greater than John the Baptist.

But knowing this is true is not sufficient. What we know demands a response. And there are two—and only two—possible responses: obedient faith or stubborn resistance. We'll see this illustrated as we bring this passage to a close.

Luke narrates the scene in verses 29-30.

"(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. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)" (Luke 7:29-30, NIV).

Luke mentions two groups here. One group heard John's preaching about sin, the coming wrath of God, and our need for repentance, and they took it seriously. They confessed their sin, acknowledged that God's way was right, and publicly demonstrated their repentance and faith through baptism. These are the ones whom Luke identifies in verse 35 as the children of wisdom. These are the ones who demonstrate obedient faith.

The other group, ignored John's call for repentance, rejected God's purpose for themselves, and refused to identify with God's kingdom through baptism.

In verses 31-35, Jesus ends this section with a parable. One New Testament scholar has called this "The Parable of the Brats."

"Jesus went on to say, 'To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: " 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 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.' But wisdom is proved right by all her children'" (Luke 7:31-35, NIV).

When Jesus spoke elsewhere about childlike faith, he considered behaving like children to be a positive trait. This was not one of those occasions. Here, when Jesus says that the people of his generation were behaving like children, his intent was to call them out as brats.

John the baptist came on the scene preaching a message of repentance, and they had no appetite for it. John wouldn't play their game. He didn't dance to their tune. So they demonized John and rejected his ministry.

Jesus came on the scene preaching a message of grace to the least of these—the blind, deaf, poor, oppressed—and (gulp) even tax collectors. But his own generation wanted nothing to do with a friend of sinners. Jesus wouldn't play their game. He didn't dance to their tune. So they maligned him as a glutton and a drunkard.

Two very different groups. Two very different responses.

As we go to prayer, and prepare to respond with our closing song, I want to leave you with three questions to consider.

First, **what is your response to the question, "Who is Jesus?"** Don't settle for a merely intellectual answer. The question is too important to leave to philosophy, history, or even theology. The question demands a response.

Second, **what is your response to the command to repent?** Are you bearing fruit in keeping with repentance? Would you number yourself among the sinners who acknowledge that God's way is right? In obedience to Christ, have you been baptized as an outward sign of the inward transforming work the Lord has done in you?

Third, **what is your response to Jesus' offer of grace?** Is what Jesus offers you too good to refuse or too good to be true? The Scriptures record for us the many things Jesus said and did. You've seen and you've heard. "Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of [him]" (Luke 7:23, NIV).