

Luke 7:18-23 - The messengers from John the Baptist

The reports of Jesus' great works had spread. He was up in Galilee, but they had come down to Judea in the south too. One man in Judea was John the Baptist. We met him at the beginning of the book, when the angel Gabriel announced his birth. We met him when he began to preach. He had preached that the Messiah was coming very soon. He told people to repent and be ready. He told them the Messiah would bring terrible judgment. The Messiah would divide – the wheat from the chaff.

1. John's question (v18-20)

John was in prison, suffering for his faithfulness (3:19-20). He was going to be killed there, by Herod the wicked ruler (Mark 6:27). He had preached Jesus as God's Son, the Messiah (John 1:29-36); yet where was the judgment he had preached? What was Jesus doing? Why had he not revealed himself to the nation at Jerusalem? Why had he not claimed the throne of David? Why were the wicked still in power? Do we also, like John, long for God to show his glory and truth? John sent two disciples to ask Jesus to explain what he was doing. In the darkness, John faced fears and doubts. Even great men sometimes fall short – we must not trust in men. We are all much weaker than we realise, when tested. Do not doubt in the dark what you saw clearly in the light! John did the right thing – he sent his question to Jesus. Do you?

2. Jesus' answer (v21-22)

Jesus was gentle and kind in his answer. He never crushes the weak or struggling (Isaiah 42:3), but cares for them. He showed the visitors his works. There they saw many great works. These fulfilled prophecy and showed that Jesus was the Messiah from heaven (Isaiah 35:5-6, 61:1). There is much more in the Scripture about Jesus than we realise – he is bigger than we think. He did not come just to judge the wicked, but also to serve – the poor and lowly. He came to bring liberty and blessing to those who were suffering. He especially loves the poor and helpless. Have you met him yet?

3. Jesus' challenge (v22-23)

Jesus showed great signs, and then sent the two back. He expected John to understand the meaning. These signs were showing the work of the Messiah for our souls. We are lost, blind, dead sinners. We cannot know, choose or love truth. We are slaves to sin and Satan, unless Jesus sets us free and gives us a new heart. We are unclean before God, like lepers. We need Jesus to cleanse us through the blood he shed on the cross. Jesus has power even over death, and will raise up those who believe in him. He not only judges the wicked; he also forgives and cleanses. Do you see him; have you come to him?

4. Jesus' promise (v23)

Jesus said that the person who does not stumble because of him is blessed. The person who does not give up or turn away. Faith faces challenges. Jesus does not do what we long for or expect – there is no easy victory or quick success. There is the way of the cross instead. Jesus tests our faith; will we follow him even to the cross and grave? If we do, then we will also follow him in his resurrection. We must not follow a Christ of our own imagination and wisdom. We must follow the true one. In the proper time he will show his glory. So we must repent and follow him to the end; the blessing will be much greater than we can even imagine.