

The Church of the Servant King ***Survey of the Bible Series – Luke***

Luke 7:18-50

SB_LK7B_John Sends Messengers and the Sinful Woman

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus and Jesus Responds (7:18-35)

John expected that Jesus as Messiah would immediately judge Israel and the nations and establish His kingdom (see Matt 3:2-12; Lu 3:1-20 and Isa 2). However, Jesus was healing and teaching His followers about the type of attitude that He was looking to find that would warrant and be receptive to the establishment of the kingdom (see the Beatitudes in Matt 5-7). This was not what John had expected, so John began to doubt whether Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah. The “Coming One” is a title for the Messiah (Ps 118:26; Mk 11:9; Lu 13:35; 19:38; Heb 10:37).

Jesus told John’s messengers to go back and report to John all the miracles that Jesus had performed (7:22). The miracles in and of themselves should have been enough to convince anyone that Jesus was the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1a). Although Israel’s rejection of Him was causing a postponement of the establishment of the kingdom, all who correctly perceived His Person and work would be blessed.

Jesus knew that some may have questioned John’s commitment to the Messiah based upon John’s questions. Therefore, Jesus made supportive statements about John in verses 24 - 28.

Jesus explained that John was not a papyrus reed that could be shaken by every breeze that blew (7:24). John would not have survived in the wilderness had he been weak and vacillating in nature. He was a man of strong character and conviction who had cast aside this world and its comforts. He did not wear soft garments (7:25). He was a true prophet and more. If Israel would accept the Messiah, John would have been the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1 and the forerunner of the Messiah before His establishment of the Kingdom. Because the nation rejected the Messiah, Elijah’s coming is still future (Acts 3:21 cf. Mal 4:5-6).

Elijah and Moses appeared in person along with Moses at the Transfiguration of Christ which offered the disciples a glimpse of the Kingdom (Matt 16:28 – 17:8). Elijah will also appear with Moses during the Tribulation (actually the first half of the Tribulation) and call fire down from heaven just as Elijah did (1 Ki 18:36-40 cf. Rev 11:1-6). Note: These two unnamed prophets in Revelation have been identified as the resuscitated Moses and Elijah for two primary reasons: 1) they appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and 2) the miracles that are attributed to them in Revelation 11:6 most resembles the miracles performed by these two prophets in Israel’s history.

In verse 28, the phrase “least in the kingdom” refers to those who will be living in the coming kingdom. Even though John was a significant and great man, he would be insignificant in comparison to even the least in the Kingdom to be established. The reason – even the least in the Kingdom would have seen and understood the finished work of Christ on the Cross and witnessed His resurrection. John would not witness these events. This is why Jesus had been so adamant in His exhortations in Matthew 10:32-42 to not miss out on the opportunity to participate in the Kingdom because of unbelief.

In Matthew’s account, we find three verses (11:12-14) that have no parallel in Luke. In Matthew 11:12, Jesus indicates that the violent (religious leaders hostile to the gospel of the kingdom) desire to establish the Kingdom through force. They took John the Baptist by force and eventually the King Himself would be taken by force. They wanted a kingdom, but they did not

want it to be established in the manner that Jesus and John promoted. Because the nation rejected the Messiah, Elijah's coming is still future (Mal 4:6 cf. Acts 3:21). In verse Matthew 11:14, Jesus notes that if Israel had been willing to receive the King and the kingdom, then John the Baptist would have served the role of the prophesied Elijah who would be one of the two prophets to precede the establishment of the Kingdom on earth by the Messiah.

Jesus likens the religious leaders of Israel to a group of little children sitting in the marketplaces who could not be pleased by anything. They were not satisfied with John the Baptist because he did not eat or drink and they were dissatisfied with Jesus because He did. No matter what style the messenger of God used, the religious leaders complained and rejected Him. In the end, the wisdom of the message of both John and Jesus would be proven.

Jesus Forgives a Sinful Woman (7:36-50)

This passage presents the stark contrast between the self-righteousness of religion and the humility associated with the spiritual believer. The Pharisee could have been a believer in Jesus as the Messiah; however, if so, he carried over all of the religious baggage associated with his background.¹ That religious baggage included the distorted view of the Mosaic Law as a system of works righteousness – versus the correct interpretation of the Law as it was originally intended (i.e. to set a nation which consisted of a redeemed race of people – Ex 14:31 – apart so that they might draw Gentiles away from false gods to the one true God, Yahweh).

The Pharisee was proud of his heritage and of his record of keeping the Law. He had status in the eyes of men. He was a respected member of his community. Yet, in God's eyes his self-righteousness was relative – relative to other people. On the other hand, the woman knew that she had no righteousness acceptable to God. She knew her life fell far short of God's standards. She was not deluded by a false sense of security that is provided by the self-righteousness of religion.

Most likely, this woman is not Mary Magdalene since she is introduced in 8:2 as a new figure in Luke's account. Whoever she was, she had sinned much (v. 47) and she was responding to Jesus' messages that included forgiveness for sinners.

She manifest a great deal of courage to perform such acts as washing Jesus' feet with her tears and anointing them with expensive oil. In Jesus' analogy, a denarius was a day's wage and five hundred denarii was approximately one and one-half years worth of wages.

Evidently, the Pharisee had a large house or at least the meal was held in a rather open atmosphere for the woman to have been present and able to make her way to Jesus. In addition, many of the Pharisee's other self-righteous friends are there. This is also a different setting than the incident in Matthew 26:6-13 since in that scene, Jesus is at the house of Simon the leper and a Pharisee would have never come into the presence of a leper. Also, the woman poured the fragrant oil over Jesus' head in the Matthew 26 passage. The woman was not forgiven because of her love, but because of her faith.

¹ The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* opines that the Pharisee named Simon perhaps wanted to trick Jesus in some way. "It was the custom of the day when one had a dinner party to provide for the guests' feet to be cleaned before the meal. Because most roads were unpaved and the normal foot attire was sandals, it was common for people's feet to be dusty or muddy. As pointed out later in the episode, Simon did not provide for Jesus' feet to be cleaned at the beginning of the dinner party (v. 44)." John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 223.