

A SENSE OF GOD'S HISTORY

Luke 7:18-35

Key Verse: 7:22

"So he 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 cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.'"

Study Questions:

1. Read verses 18-20. Where was John? (Mt 11:2) With what question and for what reason did John send his disciples to Jesus? Explain this part sufficiently.
2. Read verses 21-23. What was Jesus doing? How did he answer John's disciples? What does his answer reveal about him and the work of the Messiah? (18; 4:18; Isa 35:5,6) Why is it important to know the difference between worldly history and the history of God? (23) Think of some people with a sense of history--Isa 6; Rev 1:7,8.
3. Read verses 24-28. How did Jesus rebuke the ignorant and indifferent people? How do Jesus' questions expose the indifference of the people? Even though John was in prison, Jesus taught them that John was the great man in history. Why do you think so?
4. Ordinary people were baptized by John and said, "God's way is right." What does it mean? How did the Pharisees respond? What was their sin before God?
5. How did Jesus describe these religious leaders? How did they show their childishness? Why must leaders not be childish? Why was Jesus happy in spite of their rejection? Who are the children of wisdom? How can we have a sense of God's history in light of this passage?

In today's passage, Luke the historian deals mainly with the transitional period from John to Jesus. Luke also tells us the characteristics of Christian faith. He is indeed a genius in explaining the difference between world history and Christian history.

First, John sent two disciples to Jesus for spiritual help (18-20).

At that time, John was in prison because he rebuked Herod the

tetrarch's immorality (Mt 11:2). Like many plots of fiction, John's life did not have a happy ending. John's life seemed to end in tragedy. And those called to be John's disciples were used for the time and all of a sudden they were no longer useful in the work of God. They became like rejected stones to the builders. John's disciples had once been high in morale when John delivered the message of the baptism of repentance. They thought that they were the main characters in God's history. But John was imprisoned on account of rebuking Herod the tetrarch. John's disciples were demoralized to the lowest degree. On the other hand, the disciples of Jesus were full of spirit because those who had followed John were all coming to Jesus, and there was visible the work of life. The disciples of John felt like dying to watch the disciples of Jesus, who looked like the main characters of God's history, while they were all dropped out.

What did John do for his disciples? Look at verses 18b and 19. "Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At that time, John was in prison. So he should do something for his release. But he did not care about himself.¹ John wanted to help his disciples to know, by visiting Jesus, that John came as the forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. John knew that they were envious of Jesus' disciples. They were also fearful because of possible disaster on account of their master John's imprisonment. John knew that his disciples turned out to be fifth wheels.

John sent them to Jesus so that they might know who Jesus really was, for knowing Jesus himself was the only solution to their problem. In addition, John wanted them to know that John himself was the forerunner, and that his mission had been completed, and that Jesus the Messiah must take over so as to fulfill God's will. John's disciples were sent and asked Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (20) The purpose of this question was to ascertain the fact that the forerunner of the Messiah, John, had come and had completed his mission. Now the Messiah came as was promised and was full of Spirit doing the work of God.

¹Many scholars worried that there might have been doubts in John's mind about Jesus. But their doubts were no more than scholastic assumption.

Second, Jesus answered that the work of God is going on (21-23).

Jesus did not answer their questions directly, because it would require more than three years even to explain basic theological facts. Still, to draw their attention to the key point would be difficult. So Jesus showed them that the work of God is going on. And through an audio-visual class, Jesus showed them that the Messiah's work is definitely life-giving. There is a saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. Look at verses 21-23. "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he 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 cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.'" The class lasted less than five minutes. Jesus showed them what was happening by showing them what he was doing at the moment. In Luke 4:18,19, Luke quoted Isaiah's prophecy freely to support that Jesus was promised to come as the Messiah of the world. Here, Luke also emphasizes that Jesus was doing the work of the Messiah.

Isaiah 35:5a says, "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened...." In history, no one ever opened the eyes of a blind man. Once Jesus opened a blind beggar's eyes. Then the man confessed, "I was blind but now I see" (Jn 9:25b). He also said, "Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind" (Jn 9:32). The work of the Messiah is the life-giving work of God. Although the world was dark and the righteous man John the Baptist was arrested (3:20), the work of God was marching on mightily.

According to God's promises, finally Jesus came. Jesus gave sight to many who were blind and wiped their tears away. Lame men live powerlessly, limping throughout their lifetimes. But Jesus restored the dried legs of the lame. Jesus cured men with leprosy and gave them new flesh and new life and a new hope. Jesus raised men from the dead (Lk 7:15). Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God to the poor. All the work Jesus did was the work which uniquely the Messiah could do. The work of the Messiah is life-giving work.

Third, John's disciples report to John.

To John's two disciples, Jesus' answer may have sounded incoherent,

and his answer did not seem to solve their desperate situation at all. However, it was based on God's promises and it was the best answer Jesus could give them (22,23). The followers of John wondered what was going on even when God was working most powerfully through John, and now through Jesus and his disciples. To them, the work of God seemed to be suffering from one adversity after another. John had been arrested and put in prison by Herod the tetrarch. Jesus' healing and preaching ministry was going on. But the work of God was not so impressive. The problem of John's disciples was that they didn't know it was the transitional period of God's work and history. What is more, John's disciples did not understand the character of Christianity. The world is compared to Caesar's throne on high. But Christianity is compared to a baby in a manger of an animal stable. John's disciples did not understand that they were chosen by God and used by God as John's disciples. And now they became nobodies. They had been main stars of God's history. And now they were discharged. In short, their mistake was that they did not know the character of God's history. May God give us a sense of God's history.

We can see many examples of those who overcame their personal problems and gained spiritual insight to see the work and history of God. In the year that King Uzziah died, when Isaiah saw the world situation, he despaired and became a slave of his own problems. By chance he entered the temple and saw God seated on a throne, high and exalted; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:1-3). In this, Isaiah realized that the world is not ruled by men but by God Almighty. In the past he blamed others for the evils of the world. But when Isaiah saw God on the throne, he realized his own sins. Then God cleansed his sin of unbelief. So he could proclaim the message, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7)

When gospel work began, most Christians were severely persecuted and scattered. The Apostle John was in exile on the Isle of Patmos. But he was neither burdened by his own problems nor harassed by the suffering of early Christians who were in the flaming fire of persecution. Rather, he saw the future according to Jesus' promise. John wrote in Revelation 1:7,8, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

Fourth, Jesus rebukes ignorant people (24-28).

John had come as was prophesied and completed his mission, and Jesus emerged to take over his work. However, to Jesus, the people of the time were like onlookers and were too childish. If they knew something, it was potato chips. So, by asking the same question three times, Jesus taught them who John really was, and how great he was.

Look at verse 24. The question was, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" Did they go out to see "a man dressed in fine clothes"? (25) Then Jesus asked them the same question a third time: "What did you go out to see? A prophet?" (26) Yes, they went to see the prophet and received the baptism of repentance. Still they did not know who John really was. In verse 27, Jesus told them who John was by quoting Malachi 3:1: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." It was prophesied that John would come as the forerunner of Christ. As the forerunner of Christ he lived a pure life, against the corruption of the world. He preached a baptism of repentance. Once he rebuked Herod to repent because he had taken his own brother's wife. On account of this, John was put in prison. Because of his spirit and his holy life of faith, people once wondered if he were the Messiah. Therefore, they should have demonstrated for the sake of a righteous man's life. Instead, they were totally indifferent to John's imprisonment. They were like spectators who were sightseeing at a palace or those who went out to see the reeds in the desert to refresh themselves. In short, they were indifferent.

To these indifferent people, Jesus taught who John really was. Look at verse 28a. "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." Why was he the greatest among men? It was because he knew what his mission was and carried it out at the cost of his life. Jesus went on in verse 28b, "...yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." This statement does not derogate the importance of John. Jesus explains the character of the kingdom of God: everyone is equal in the kingdom of God.

Fifth, John and Jesus were rejected (29-35).

What were the responses of the people? Look at verse 29. Ordinary

people and the tax collectors responded to Jesus' words by saying, "God's way is right." They knew that they were terrible sinners. So they humbly came to John, confessed their sins and received the baptism of repentance, beating their chests as the expression of deep repentance. Now John was in prison. But they did not doubt God's sovereign rule in his work and history. Rather, they said, "God's way is right."

The others were the Pharisees and experts in the law. They were originally chosen as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God intended to use this chosen people as a shepherd's nation as well as an exemplary people in teaching the divine moral standard. But these highly privileged people were rotten. Finally, the Pharisees collaborated with the Herodians. John was put in prison and Jesus was put to death.

Look at verse 32b. "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry." This verse indicates that the religious leaders of the times were very childish. They were so selfish that they did not care about God's work and history. They did not care about their bad influence to others. They only cared about themselves. They were like children playing around in the marketplace, looking at bananas (32a). They were grown up. But they were like children playing in the marketplace. Childishness is good for children. But for grownups it is a great sin. The Pharisees were also spiritually very proud. They criticized whoever they did not like. John the Baptist came and lived a holy life against the corrupted and sinful generation, neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and they said, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came and ate and drank with any kind of people to embrace them all, and they said, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners.'" Usually unrepentant people criticize others. Despite their criticism, Jesus was not burdened; rather, he was happy because there were still a few children of God through whom the word of God was proved right. Look at verse 35. "But wisdom is proved right by all her children." The children of wisdom are the children of God who have a sense of God's history.

When we compare Russian history and U.S. history, one thing is clearly different. Russians have never had a national motto stemmed from people's hearts. So they were frequently enslaved by dictators. The U.S. has also committed crimes in order to violate other nations' territories. But America had a tacit law in the hearts of Americans, which sprang from their hearts by the forefathers' influence. People did not make it the motto. But it was

inherited and sprang naturally from one person to another. So we call this, "tacit law." It was "In God We Trust." As long as they had this tacit law, "In God We Trust," Americans had national direction in God. As long as America had this tacit law, "In God We Trust," God blessed this country abundantly. Most of all, God gave peace to this nation.

However, in 1963, school prayer was forbidden. So America cast God out of schools. Now high school students carry guns illegally. One high school even made only one school entrance so that all students must go through a metal detector. Prayer has been exchanged for a curse on the lips. One Christian school dismissed a devout Christian English professor when she was supposed to be promoted and put a public lesbian in her place. One judge hung a scroll in his courtroom on which the Ten Commandments were written. Someone filed a suit against him because of this. But the judge refused to take it down, saying, "It is my life direction and life principle." (Actually, in each courtroom the hanging scroll, "In God We Trust" has been placed.) When we carefully observe, there is a strong impression that this nation has lost its tacit national motto. Most people of America are as indifferent as children in a marketplace. Indifference is a source of selfishness and ignorance.

World history is like the throne of Caesar. It is glamorous. But it is nothing but political intrigue and in character it is destructive. But Christian history is the life-giving work of God through his Son Jesus Christ. May God give us a sense of Christian history.