

God's Way Is Right

Luke 7:18-35

Key Verse: 7:29

"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."

To acknowledge that God's way is right is simple when God gives us what we desire. But can we make such an acknowledgment when our circumstances are adverse? What about when God's way does not meet our expectations? Is God's way right even when it means we are totally wrong? In today's passage, Jesus challenges the people of his time to acknowledge that God's way is right especially in the matter of his world salvation plan. Let's listen to Jesus' words and acknowledge that God's way is right.

I. Is Jesus the one? (18-23)

This section opens with the disciples of John the Baptist reporting on Jesus' ministry. Jesus' ministry was unlike anything they had ever seen and heard. Once, Jesus met a man who was covered with leprosy. The man was repulsive. But with compassion and without hesitation, Jesus touched this man and miraculously healed him. Another time, Jesus met a grieving widow on her way to bury her only son. This woman had lost all hope. But Jesus touched the coffin and said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The man came back to life and was restored to his mother.

John's disciples must have told these and many other accounts of Jesus' healing, teaching and discipleship ministry. They had never seen such a potent combination of love, compassion and life-giving power at work. Many people, even Gentiles, were putting their faith in Jesus.

Why were the disciples telling John about all these things? Why didn't John go see Jesus himself? At that time, John was in prison. John had rebuked King Herod for his lecherous behavior in taking his brother's wife. Out of revenge and anger, Herod put John behind bars. If John had kept quiet, he would probably still be free. However, John was not afraid of Herod and publicly rebuked him to repent. John did exactly what God wanted him to do, to preach repentance. For this, he was imprisoned.

Remaining in prison must have been unexpected for John and his disciples. Suppose God told us that if we obeyed him 100%, he would send us to prison. That would be very difficult to accept. Moreover, if Jesus was doing all of these wonderful things, why couldn't he get John out of prison? Wasn't the Savior of the world supposed to rid the land of injustice and bring peace to his people? Didn't Jesus care about John who had devoted his life to prepare people's hearts for the Savior?

Out of this dilemma came a very important question. Let's read verse 19. "... he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At a time of struggling and doubt, John's disciples went to Jesus to ask this necessary question. Was Jesus the one whom God promised to send into the world to save all peoples? Was Jesus the one who is worth our life devotion, full love and obedience? Was Jesus the one who can truly forgive our sins and give us eternal life in heaven? For these disciples, the answer would determine their life direction.

Living by faith is very colorful. Sometimes, as it was for John and his disciples, circumstances in our lives do not turn out the way we would have wished or expected. We face difficulties, hardships, and things we cannot understand even though we are struggling to please the Lord. We may face misunderstandings from loved ones, ministries that don't seem to grow, financial problems, struggles with our children, struggles with our health or maybe the health of others, struggles with our future direction, struggles with nagging sins, and the list goes on. When we are pressed with doubt, we learn here what to do. We should not complain about people or complain to people or complain about church or give up. We must not focus on ourselves. As John's disciples went to Jesus, so we must also honestly come to Jesus in prayer and Bible study with the question, "Are you the one?" Receiving Jesus' answer will solve our inner agonies.

Jesus was asked, "Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?" Verse 21 says, "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind." John's disciples witnessed firsthand what Jesus was doing. To answer their question, Jesus started with what they were observing. Let's read verse 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.'" Actually John's disciples had already seen and heard

similar occurrences in Jesus' ministry. Such events had probably already been reported to John. Jesus did not directly answer their question but he did point out what was happening in his ministry. He also phrased it in a way that would remind John's disciples what the Old Testament said about the work of the Messiah. According to Isaiah 35, those redeemed by the Messiah would have their sight restored, their ears unstopped, and the lame would leap for joy. Jesus was doing what the Bible already said the Messiah would do. Jesus is the one who was to come. John's disciples could have complete confidence about this because Jesus was doing what God had foretold about the Messiah.

The key was for John's disciples to accept it. Look at verse 23. "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." Jesus' way of working is not always what we might expect. But let's not fall away because of our own expectations or way of thinking. Jesus is the one. We may suffer from unexpected things but Jesus is worthy of any hardship we may face. Verse 23 is a great promise. Those who accept Jesus as the one are most blessed. Even though John was in prison and would lose his life there, he was blessed as long as he held on to Jesus by faith. Jesus wanted them to take their attention off of themselves and their own situation and focus their attention on Jesus.

I heard a beautiful story about this. In the late 1800s, Dr. James and Dr. Rosetta Sherwood Hall became the first missionary couple in Korea. A son was born to them there and soon the wife was pregnant with their second. But the husband died from typhoid fever and the pregnant wife had to return to the States with her young son. After giving birth to her daughter, she went back to Korea with her two young children to teach blind people how to read. But soon after, her young daughter also died. She went on furlough to China and there poured out her agonies in her journal. When her husband died, pioneering Pyongyang in what is now North Korea, it had been very painful. Still she accepted this from God as the price to plant the gospel. But when her young daughter died, it was too much. How could God do that, when what she most wanted was to serve him? She felt that she would lose her faith. It was the most critical moment in her life. But she accepted God's way of working and went back to Pyongyang, the place where both her husband and daughter died. She dedicated her life to serving the deaf and blind. She started a women's medical school. Her son also served as a medical missionary in Korea, opened a T.B. hospital and pioneered T.B. treatment among the Korean people. Later he would also serve as a

missionary in India. When Dr. Rosetta Hall did not fall away at the time of personal crisis, she was blessed and was a great blessing in planting the gospel in Korea.

We each have our own heartache and struggles but Jesus promises that we are blessed when we hold on to him in faith. Before we leave this worship service today, I pray that each of us may know and confess that Jesus is the one. He is the one who saves us from sin and death. He is the one worthy of our life commitment, love and devotion.

II. What did you go out to see? (24-28)

John's disciples left. Then Jesus turned his attention to the crowd. Jesus knew that there was confusion about John the Baptist because he was in prison. So Jesus asked them a series of rhetorical questions about John and his ministry. Look at verse 24b. "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?" Obviously people do not go into the desert to look at grass. Had they gone into the desert to see a man dressed up in the finest clothes? Obviously not, considering that John wore an unfashionable camel's hair cloak. Moreover, John's diet consisted of locusts and wild honey.

Then, why had these people gone out into the desert? They had gone out to see a man they believed to be a prophet. But after John was imprisoned, what were they supposed to think of him? To Jesus, how these people viewed and accepted John was directly related to how they would view and accept him. We like celebrities. In every age, there are always a few people who capture the public attention. Their moves are watched and then after a while, they fade away. When they fade, we don't think much about them anymore. If the crowd treated John like a celebrity, how would they treat Jesus to whom John was pointing? If they doubted John's ministry because he was in prison, certainly they would doubt Jesus' ministry when he went to the cross. To connect John's ministry to Jesus' ministry was very important so that their faith could rest on the unchanging facts of how God has worked and continues to work.

Jesus' message is very timely. People today can be characterized as self-absorbed, present-focused, and feeling-centric. It is good to be concerned with our own present spiritual condition and feelings are important. But unless we learn to see how God has worked in the past and is working now

in the world, our faith remains shallow and selfish. Yet, when we see how God has worked and connect it to what he is doing now, our focus is taken off of us and is put on God. We stop thinking, "It's about me," and start thinking, "It's about God." We find direction in the "big picture" of God's work and history.

How did Jesus connect John's ministry to his own? Look at verse 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.'" According to Malachi 3:1, God would send a messenger right before he would send the Messiah. That messenger would prepare people's hearts. That messenger was John. John pointed people to Jesus. This meant that Jesus is the Messiah. The whole point of John's ministry was to turn people to Jesus. If they missed out on this, they would miss out on Jesus. But if they connected the Old Testament prophecy with John the Baptist, the only conclusion would be Jesus.

In verse 28, Jesus praised John the Baptist as the greatest man born of women. In this way, Jesus validated his ministry as one of the milestones in God's redemptive history. John's ministry of repentance and baptism prepared people's hearts. John's ministry was necessary to help even the most hardened of sinners to realize their need to get right with God. Yet, Jesus also said, "... he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." John's ministry was not an end to itself. A life cleaned up of immorality and bad habits is not enough because even that lasts only for this life. God wants much more for us; he wants to have a relationship with us. He wants us to have the kingdom of God. We need a relationship with God so that we can enter the kingdom of God. Let's all aspire to enter the kingdom of God.

III. Acknowledge God's way is right (29-35)

Let's read 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 experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John.)" We see that there are only two kinds of people: those who acknowledge that God's way is right and those who do not. God is sovereign and almighty. He always accomplishes his will in his own way. However, do we acknowledge that his way is right?

Many people listened to Jesus' words. They understood the connection between John's ministry and Jesus' ministry. John had preached repentance and the kingdom of God. His message was very harsh. He called the crowds a brood of vipers, comparing them to the devil. He told them that they were nothing more than firewood for hell unless they repented their wicked lifestyles. These people were not offended. They humbly accepted John's message. They saw that their lives were empty, that their lifestyles were wayward as tax collectors, cheats, thugs and generally selfish, immoral people. They accepted the truth about themselves. They responded by repenting their sins and receiving baptism.

Then, as they heard Jesus' words, they acknowledged that God's way was right. They acknowledged that this was how God was working out his salvation plan. God's way started with John the Baptist's ministry of repentance and baptism. God's way had then shifted to Jesus. God's way was to demonstrate tender compassion, mercy and love for broken and lost sinners through Jesus. God's way through Jesus was to take ordinary people, like us, and make them his committed disciples. God's way would eventually send Jesus to die on a cross, bearing all of our sin, shame and guilt. God's way was to raise Jesus from the dead. God's way was that anyone who accepted Jesus would have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Let's acknowledge that we are wretched sinners. Let's acknowledge God's way to save and give new life to sinners like us is right and just.

The religious leaders refused to acknowledge that God's way was right. They rejected John's baptism because they did not see their own need for repentance. Furthermore, they had their own expectations about what the Messiah would do for them and for their nation. They were consumed by what they thought and what they expected. They had no room in their hearts when God's way was different from their way. In the process, they rejected God's purpose for themselves. We see from them that unless we acknowledge that God's way is right, we even lose God's purpose for our lives. Secular Europe is a good example of this today. At one time, the gospel spread into all the world from Europe but now there is a danger of it becoming a Muslim stronghold. Let's pray that the fruit of the conference in Europe may be that Europeans may acknowledge that God's way is right.

When Jesus looked at his generation, especially the religious leaders, he was unhappy. He compared them to children in the marketplace, playing a game. When many young children gather to play, we inevitably hear things like,

"That's not fair!", "You're cheating!" and "I'm not playing anymore!" It happens because some children do not accept how the game is being played. This is childish pride.

In children this may be amusing. But in a generation of people regarding their response to God it is dangerous. The ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus were very different. John the Baptist did not go about eating and drinking. His ministry was so austere that people accused him of having a demon. On the other hand, Jesus deeply involved himself in the lives of sinners, even eating and drinking with them. Then people accused him of being a drunkard and a glutton. These two very different styles show us how hard God tried to enter into their lives. But the problem was that many people, in their childish pride, refused to acknowledge that God's way was right. They had in their own mind what they wanted and expected from the Messiah and no matter what God did to change their mind, they refused. They used whatever excuse they could find in order not to repent.

Jesus was not discouraged for he knew the fruit of God's way would prove itself. Look at verse 35. "But wisdom is proved right by all her children." God's way of salvation, through repentance and Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection from the dead, is God's marvelous wisdom in saving sinners. God's way of leading our lives, sometimes allowing hardship and trials to come, is also his great wisdom for us. Those who have repented of their sins, received Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins and have been born again, prove that God's wisdom in salvation and new life is right. The children of God who pass through life's trials with faith in Jesus, also prove that God's wisdom is right by the fruit of their lives.

Admittedly it is not always easy to acknowledge that God's way is right. But whether we have served the Lord for many years or have never made this acknowledgment, let's put aside our own expectations and thoughts and look at Jesus. Let's each of us today accept from our hearts that God's way is right.