



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### Are You the Expected One?

#### Luke 7:18-23

There were two crowds moving in each other's direction. One, the one outside the city, was following Jesus and it was enormous, maybe as many as two or three thousand people. Inside the small city there was another crowd, large by the city's standard, but smaller than the one following Jesus. It was led by men carrying a body on a funeral bier, something like a stretcher carried on their shoulders, and by a poor, pitiful brokenhearted Jewish mother.

It's not hard to imagine the difference in the demeanor of the two groups as they approached each other. The one outside the city...the one with Jesus was lighthearted, jubilant and filled with expectation...it was characterized by...by laughter and by singing and hope. But the other group was different. It groaned under the weight of its own unceasing sorrow...as it wept over the death of the young man on the bier...as it ached...ached for the mother of the boy, for the body on the bier was her son, her only son.

Now as the two groups came to the wall of the city and approached the city gate they ran headlong into each other. For a moment the two groups, so terribly different in their nature, pressed toward each other until they become one large group. I can imagine the momentary, unlikely combination and awkwardness of

crying and laughter...of singing and of wailing. Of course, the group following Jesus soon realized what had happened and I am sure a hush fell over the crowd.

And as they grew silent they began to step to the side so the funeral procession could pass through their midst...all of them that is, except Jesus. His eyes and His great compassionate heart were fastened upon the poor Jewish mother. He watched her as she wept...oblivious to the crowd, oblivious to Him, oblivious to everything but the enormous hole she felt in her soul. Luke tells us that Jesus felt compassion for her. He moved silently over to the bier and placed His hand on it and the men carrying the bier stopped. Jesus turned to the boy's mother and said, **"Do not weep."**

I am sure that the crowd must have thought, **"Isn't He compassionate. Isn't he tender and kind to take the time to speak to this poor, grieving mother."** And, of course, they would have been right. But then Jesus did something that no one expected. He turned to the dead boy on the bier and said, **"Young man, I say to you, get up!"**

And Luke tells us that the young man sat up, and that he began to speak and that Jesus then gave him back to his mother. Now we have no way of knowing what the mother or the young man said to each other. Oh, how I wish we did. But the Spirit of God has chosen not to burden us with all of the details of their restoration lest we lose sight of what the story was meant to convey. You see, the importance of the story is conveyed in the reaction of the crowd and in the reaction of John the Baptist.

Luke tells us that fear gripped the crowd, and that it began to glorify God, and that it kept on saying, "**A great prophet has arisen among us!**" and, "**God has visited His people!**"

And the crowd's reaction concerning Him, that is, concerning all the things He had done and especially this last extraordinary miracle went out all over Judea, and to the surrounding district. And then finally Luke tells us that the report even reached some seventy-five miles away to the rocky hills on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, to the depths of the dungeon in the armed fortress of Machaerus, where John the Baptist was languishing in chains.

You see, John had been imprisoned there at the height of his ministry by Herod Antipas. Now the reason John had been imprisoned was because he had the gall to point out publicly that Herod's marriage to Herodias, Herod's own niece and former sister in law, was incestuous.

And that is where I want to put in to the text this morning. So, if you have your Bibles you can turn to Luke 7:18-23 and follow along with me as I read.

Now as I read the text, I want you to keep two things in your mind. First, I want you to remember that the miracle...the raising the dead boy on the bier back to life...is purposely given to lead up to this exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist. That is, what I want you to see is that this story of the mother and the boy is not told simply for its own sake but to point out the reaction to the miracle of the crowd and more specifically the reaction of John the Baptist. And then secondly, I want you to notice that the six verses before us this morning are

divided into two equal parts. The first three verses form a question and the last three form an answer.

Now, with that in mind let's look at the first three verses; that is, let's look at John's question.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 7:18...**John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, <sup>19</sup> he sent them to the Lord to ask, "**Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?**" <sup>20</sup> When the men came to Jesus, they said, "**John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'**"

Now when I read that text, it makes my heart pound and my knees knock. It is not the kind of thing I expect. It is certainly not the kind of question I expect from John the Baptist. I mean this is not some weak-kneed, limp-wristed, pale-faced academic. Brothers and sisters, this is the voice of the great heroic prophet, John the Baptist. This was the man who was unafraid to point his finger at Herod Antipas in the eye and shout, "**Incest**".

This was the man that went toe to toe with the Pharisees and had them back down. This is the voice of the same John the Baptist who had said to the Pharisees...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 3:7...**John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "**You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.**"

He was the one who had announced to the nation...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 3:4...**As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "**A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. <sup>5</sup> Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.**

You see, John the Baptist fulfilled a role of extraordinary privilege. He had the honor of being the last prophet before Jesus. On the one hand, he had to announce terrible words of impending judgment. On the other hand he was the prophet who was permitted to say,

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 1:29...**The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**

He was the one, who saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus at His baptism and said,

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 1:32...**Then John gave this testimony: "**I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.**

That is why this question, "**Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"** seems so strange.

It sounds like doubt.

It sounds like John had perhaps lost his certainty and yet it is hard to imagine such a thing could have been possible from anyone who had spoken so boldly about Jesus. John had not just declared Jesus to be a prophet; he had declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He had declared Jesus to be the Son of God. But now...after hearing about this last great

miracle...he sends his disciples to Jesus with the question, "**Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?**"

Because of the way it sound, this passage and the question it contains have been a real terror to commentators over the years In fact, most of the great theologians of the past deal with the passage by saying that John sent his disciples to Jesus for his disciples benefit. In other words, they say that John did not really want an answer for himself. John knew he would never leave Herod's prison alive. John, they argue, was trying to get his disciples to see the truth for themselves.

Listen to Luther.

Why then did John ask this question? It is certain that John asked it for the sake of his disciples, as they did not yet hold Christ to be the one he really was. And John did not come in order to make disciples and draw the people to himself, but to prepare the way for Christ, to lead everybody to Christ and to make all the people subject to him.<sup>1</sup>

And Calvin says,

The opinion that he sent them on his own account is exceedingly foolish; as if he had not been fully convinced that Jesus was the Christ. It is clear to me that John perceiving that he was not far from the end of his journey, and that his disciples still remained in a state of hesitation, resorted to this last expedient for curing their weakness.<sup>2</sup>

And Spurgeon writes,

Some think that John sent these disciples not at all for his own sake, but for theirs, and that strikes me as being the more probable. He wished to transfer them from himself to his Lord, and he, therefore, bade them go and enquire for

themselves. He felt that the answer which Jesus would be sure to give would be the best means of convincing them that they ought to follow the servant no longer, but cast in their lot with his Master.<sup>3</sup>

Now, what I am going to say may surprise you. But I think Luther and Calvin and Spurgeon were wrong. Let me hasten to add that they transcend me in terms of scholarship and character in the same way a great white shark transcends a guppy. But my conscience is bound by the Scripture to tell what I think is the truth. And our Lord did say, **“Go back to John and report what you have seen and heard and say....”**

You see, I think John wanted an answer for himself. It is not that John doubted Jesus was the Messiah. Rather, I think it was because John had his own idea of what he thought the Messiah would accomplish and Jesus seemed to be doing part of what he expected but not all that he expected. You see there were a number of prophecies concerning the Messiah and they were of such a varied nature it was hard for John to understand how Jesus' ministry was going to accomplish everything that was prophesied. John himself had already prophesied...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 3:16...John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**

I think John was wondering, **“Where is the judgment? Where is the unquenchable fire?”**

And there were all of the other prophecies about the coming Messiah, prophecies like Isaiah 35?

<sup>NIV</sup> **Isaiah 35:4...** say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." <sup>5</sup> Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

I think John wondered, **"Where is the vengeance of the Lord? Where is the divine retribution?"**

Certainly, John knew that Jesus had inaugurated his ministry at Nazareth by preaching on Isaiah 61. You remember that wonderful scene where Jesus sat down in the synagogue at Nazareth and looked until He found His place in Isaiah and read these words.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 4:18...** "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,

I think John wondered, **"Am I not a prisoner? Am I not oppressed?"**

So I think John wanted to know the answer for himself. And he sought his answer the only way he could by sending two of his disciples as official witnesses to ask the question directly of Jesus. And Luke 7:21-23 gives us Jesus' answer to John's question. And it too, is comprised of two parts. First, Jesus tells John's disciples to tell John all about the kind of things he was doing and then secondly Jesus tells them to give John a personal word.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 7:21...** At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."**

You see, at the very moment they were asking Jesus the question about whether He was the Expected One, Jesus was healing people of diseases, casting out evil spirits and giving sight to those who were blind. The two witnesses, the legal number to testify concerning another, saw everything He did. But Jesus went beyond that and interpreted what they saw. **"Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them."**

Now the six things he mentions are a combination of things listed in Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61:

- the blind receive sight,
- the lame walk,
- the lepers are cleansed,
- and the deaf hear,
- the dead are raised up,
- the poor have the gospel preached to them.

It is an extraordinary list and all of the items on the list are used elsewhere as metaphors to describe deliverance from sin. That is, the spiritually blind receive sight and believe the gospel; those with spiritual leprosy are cleansed by the gospel and so on. But it is also an interesting list because of what it leaves out.

From Isaiah 35 Jesus leaves off this phrase, **“Behold, your God will come with vengeance;”**

And from Isaiah 61, he leaves off, **“To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; And the day of vengeance of our God;”**

The answer is one John would have understood. I went something like this, **“Yes John I am the Expected One and no John I am not coming to set you free. I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. It is not yet the Day of Judgment. Join me brother in the fellowship of suffering.”** You see, it is the answer of the now and the not yet. And it is the reason Jesus adds the last line **“And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.”** That is, **“Blessed is the one who does not stumble over what they think I have left undone but who keeps their focus on what I am doing and what I am yet to do.”**

You see brothers and sisters, it was not yet time for the consummation of all things. Nor is it yet the time.

The Lord Jesus, even this morning, is gathering His elect from every tribe and nation on earth and all things cannot be put right until He is done with that task. And yet because of that we groan...we groan with the rest of creation for that day in which everything will be put right.

And it is right that I remind you of such things because I know that there are those among you that are suffering. There are those among you that are suffering now and long with expectation for the consummation of all things. There are

those of you that are struggling with your families, with your jobs, with your children, with your mates, with aging, with illness, with continual pain, with financial difficulties, with remaining sin, with heartbreak and disappointment. That is why I want to remind you brothers and sisters that we are moving toward that day when we will see Him and will be satisfied. There is the now...the forgiveness of sin and the hope of heaven...and there is the not yet...the end of sin and the realization of being in His presence. You know in a few weeks I am scheduled to go to Tyler to officiate at my niece's wedding. And as I thought about this message and that upcoming wedding I was reminded of a sermon I once heard by Sinclair Ferguson in which he talked about Scottish weddings. He noted one striking difference between Scottish weddings and American weddings that I thought was fascinating. In American weddings, when the groom hears the wedding march he turns around and watches his bride come down the aisle. In Scottish weddings, the groom does not turn around at all. Oh he longs to see his bride just as much as an American groom does but still he does not turn around. His bride never sees his face until she comes immediately in his presence. And Ferguson goes on, **"You know the Scottish picture is the biblical picture."**

You see the church is like a bride moving down the aisle. We can see the groom up ahead but we cannot see His face. We are moving forward...at the beat and cadence of His wedding march...to the consummation of that glorious day when we will indeed see him face to face...no longer through a glass darkly but just as He is.

Now, because that is true I have a word from the Lord for all those who have placed their faith in Jesus. If you have placed your hope in Jesus. I want to tell you

all is well with your soul. You may be alienated from your family. You may have lost friends along the way. Things may have indeed turned out differently than you expected but, brothers and sisters, you are at peace with God. I know that is true because we have His own good promise.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 6:37**...All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

And again He says.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 13:5**...Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**"

And again,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 9:33**...and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

To you I say, "**Rejoice and be glad. You know peace that will carry you through...all the way through to the consummation of all things.**"

In 1870, a forty-two year old Presbyterian lawyer named Horatio Spafford and his wife lost their son...their only son to pneumonia. The boy was only four years old. The next year Spafford invested heavily in real estate on the shore of Lake Michigan, and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 wiped out just about everything he owned. For the next two years, Horatio poured himself into his work in an effort to recover what he had lost and by the fall of 1873 he had recovered enough to take a much-needed vacation. So desiring a rest for his wife and four daughters, Spafford planned a European trip for his family in 1873.

Their trip was planned for November but due to some last minute business developments, Spafford had to remain in Chicago; but he sent his wife and four daughters on ahead as scheduled on the S.S. Ville du Havre. Spafford expected to follow in a few days. But on November 22, 1873 the ship was struck by another an English vessel, and the Ville du Havre sank in just over twelve minutes. Two hundred and twenty-six passengers drowned. Several days later the rescued survivors were finally landed at Cardiff in Wales, and Mrs. Spafford, one of the few rescued, cabled her husband two short words, "**Saved alone.**"

Spafford was undone. Shortly afterward he left by ship to join his bereaved wife. The story goes that Spafford had asked the Captain of the ship to awaken him when they came to the spot where his four daughters had drowned. And when the ship came to the spot where the Ville du Havre had gone down one of the hands woke Spafford up. He went up on deck and in the early morning darkness Spafford prayed for God to grant him peace. After that he went back to cabin and penned these words...

*When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
"It is well, it is well with my soul."*

*Tho' Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded, my helpless estate,  
And has shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin (Oh the bliss of this glorious thought)  
My sin, not in part, but the whole  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,  
The clouds rolled back like a scroll,  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,  
"Even so" - it is well with my soul.*

*Chorus: It is well, It is well.  
It is well, it is well with my soul!*

You see Jesus is the expected one...but it is not yet time for the consummation of all things...still, His kindness sustains us and will continue to sustain and in the end...He will grant us more than we could ever expect...for no eye has seen and no ear has heard all that He has prepared for those that love Him.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther's Sermons v.1, p.88

<sup>2</sup> (Calvin's Harmony of the Gospels)

<sup>3</sup> (Spurgeon Volume 24, p. 109)