**God’s Way Is Right**

(Dealing with disappointment with God)

September 14, 2014

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.”

Has it ever seemed as though God had let you down? Has something happened that caused you to wonder where God was? Did you need an answer from him, only to be left wondering why he was silent? We learned last week that Jesus’ word had power and authority over disease and even death. He has power to do something and solve your problem, but it seemed as though God was sitting on his hands or not even paying attention. And it caused you to entertain doubt. If you have ever felt that way, you are not alone. The Bible tells the story of a man of God who had his doubts – and he was not just any man of God. He was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist.

At that time John was in prison because he rebuked King Herod. He told Herod that the relationship he was involved in was immoral. Herod had married Herodias, who was already married to Herod’s brother. So John said, in effect, “This is wrong. This is sinful. This is immoral.” Herod had John thrown into prison. John may have consoled himself with the thought that Jesus the Messiah had started his ministry and would overthrow the tyranny of Rome. He probably expected Jesus to take him out of prison any day. John had the commonly held view that when the Messiah came, he would establish a kingdom right then and there. It was a misunderstanding about the mission of the Messiah. As it turned out, Jesus was not leading a revolution. In fact, it was reported to John that Jesus was eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. In John’s mind, things were not going according to plan. Did he get this wrong somehow? Was Jesus actually the Messiah? Wasn’t the Messiah supposed to establish a kingdom of righteousness and bring justice? Didn't Jesus care about John who had devoted his life to prepare people’s hearts for the Savior?

How did John deal with his doubt? Look at verse 19. “... he sent them to the Lord to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” John turned to Jesus at a time of doubt. Living by faith is not easy. Sometimes 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 turned 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.

Look at verses 21-22. “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.’” 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 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.

Look at verse 23. “‘Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.’” Here is what Jesus was saying to John and, in effect, to any person who is dealing with doubt today: “Even if you don’t understand my methods or my ways or my timing, I am asking you to trust me. When you are unable to see why I am doing what I am doing or why I am not doing what you think I ought to be doing, all I am asking you to do is to follow me.” In that final day when we stand before God, we are going to realize that Jesus never sat on his hands. Those hands were nailed to a cross, where he died for our sins. In that day, we will understand why God did or did not do what we thought he should do. But until that day, he wants us to trust and follow him.

In the late 1800s, Dr. James and Dr. Rosetta Sherwood Hall met in Korea and became the first missionary couple in Korea. Dr. James is a Canadian and Dr. Rosetta is an American. A son was born to them there and soon the wife was pregnant with their second. But the husband died from typhoid fever at the age of 34 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 died at the age of 3. Then she took a leave of absence to China and there poured out her agonies in her journal. When her husband died, 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. (tuberculosis) 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.

After John’s disciples left, 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?’” 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? 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. The whole point of John’s ministry was to turn people to 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 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.)” God is sovereign and almighty. He always accomplishes his will in his own way. However, do we acknowledge that his way is right?

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 of 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 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 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.

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 it is dangerous if it is our response to God, because our life depends on it. The ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus were very different. John the Baptist did not go about eating and drinking. He lived such a disciplined life 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. 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 that 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.

God always does what is right. God’s way is always right. 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 accept from our hearts that God’s way is right.