

Luke 7:18-35 ESV

Are you the One?

Intro:

There were 2 men spoken of in the Old Testament that never tasted death. These are Enoch and Elijah. Enoch is an enigmatic figure spoken of in Genesis 5 as one who walked with God for 300 years. He fathered Methuselah when he was 65, and when he was 365 years young, verse 24 tells us: “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” Hebrews 11 says that he did not see death. We cannot speak about Enoch in the past because he is. When the Sadducees questioned Jesus about the resurrection in Luke 20, Jesus said in verse 38 “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive.” Four books were written in Enoch’s name, beginning in the Second Temple period of Jewish history, in which we can find some interesting material. There are many parallels between the lives of Enoch and Jesus. The 1st book of Enoch was incorporated into the cannon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and was quoted in the New Testament book of Jude. However, today we will focus on the second Old Testament figure to not see death, Elijah.

Let’s pickup in 2 Kings 2:1 which opens with “Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.” Three times Elijah tells Elisha to ‘stay here’ while he goes somewhere else, and Elisha refuses to leave Elijah’s side. Elisha, the apprentice, knows that Elijah is about to be taken. Elisha was promised a double portion of Elijah’s spirit if he sees him as he is taken away. In 2 Kings 2:11 we read that “And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.” Afterward, those who watched pleaded with Elisha to send men to look for Elijah as they

thought God might have just moved him to a mountain or a valley. Elisha knew where Elijah was and denied their request. They urged him again to the point where he felt ashamed for not taking their request and had them send the 50 men to look for Elijah. Of course, as Elisha knew, they did not find him. Even though Elisha knew where Elijah was, he allowed them to look for their own good.

We see this in life. There are times when you may know the answer but must ask a question anyway. There are times when people need to know something bad enough that you must just let them go to learn it. As a teacher I have encountered this every year. I will present a difficult mathematics topic in a way that my students can understand, maybe in a way that is not 'by the book'. Then when they try to work out the problems in the homework, they need to learn it for themselves and use the book method, or a way that they feel makes it easier. They may struggle along the way. I must reassure them that I have been doing math for a long time and know what they need before they know that they need it. Even though I know how to solve the math problem, I must let them go to try and solve it for themselves. In the end, my students will leave my class, and when or if they encounter these problems later in college, they will do better if they learn it for themselves.

Passage:

Luke 7:18-35 ESV – Stand as we read God's Word

"The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ²⁰ And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to

come, or shall we look for another?’” ²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers^[e] are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus^[f] began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.’

²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” ²⁹ (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just,^[g] having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

³¹ “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a

drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.” – you may be seated

Chronology & Parallel Passages:

There were many questions asked in the passage we just read, ‘Are you the one?’, ‘What did you go out to see?’, and ‘To what shall I compare the people of this generation?’. Before we dig into these questions, I would like to add some context to our study by asking another question. What do we know about John the Baptist? We do not have John’s entire life on record, but let’s look at some highlights and focus on some important encounters between John the Baptist, his disciples, and Jesus.

- Prophecy regarding John’s arrival. Mal 4: 5-6, Isaiah 40: 3-5
- John’s birth. Luke 1: 13-17
- Mary visits Elizabeth. Luke 1: 39-45
- John’s Testimony. John 1: 19-23
- John baptizes Jesus. Matt 3: 13-17
- Two of John’s disciples follow Jesus. John 1: 29-37
- John’s disciples concerned. John 3: 25-30
- John in prison. Luke 3:18-20

We will draw from the parallel passage, Matthew 11: 2-19, as we dig in.

Passage:

Luke 7:18-19 “The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John,¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?””

1. What things did they report? It must be the miracles that directly preceded this. The healing of the Centurion’s servant and the raising of the widow’s son. Colin noted last week how Elijah raised

a widow's son not far from where Jesus did. After the dead man was raised and given to his mother, we read in Luke 7: 16-17 "Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country." They may also have reported that as Jesus went to Nain, in verse 11, His disciples and a great crowd went with Him.

2. Why did they report these things to John? It is clear from our previous review of John's discourse that he regarded Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world and that it is He who comes from above that is above all. John also did not shy away from proclaiming these things to his disciples was not offended when his disciples left to follow Jesus. We know that John has been in prison for roughly a year at this point and one of the statements made by Jesus, in Luke 4, is that he is to set the captives free. John was a captive; shouldn't he be set free? John's disciples, the Pharisees, and Jesus regarded John as a prophet. Why was he locked in prison while Jesus was free to roam?
3. In verse 19 we read that based off what was reported to him, John called two of his disciples to take a message to Jesus. The Greek reads 'a certain two disciples.' Those chosen to represent John's disciples would be his trusted envoy. They may even see themselves as John's servants. Did they know that they were going to talk to the Servant of the Lord?
4. From the question that is asked to Jesus, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?', we can see that there is some level of doubt or confusion surrounding the reports from John's disciples and who they think Jesus is. Again, considering what we have heard from John, it is hard, for me, to imagine that

he is the source of this doubt or confusion. Many scholars have noted that his time in prison, the reference to setting the captives free, and John's knowledge of the Messiah's reign stirred this doubt in his mind. There is another option to the source of doubt and confusion though.

5. Cyril of Alexandria was the Patriarch and Archbishop of Alexandria from 412-444 AD. He was a central figure in the Council of Ephesus in 431 and is considered among the early church fathers. He wrote extensively and was known for his intense research and study of God's Word. In his commentary on the gospel of Luke, translated into English in 1835, Cyril exclaims "What has thou done, O excellent Baptist! Dost thou not know Him who thou preachedst, being thyself the precursor of this rising, as the morning star proclaims the coming sun?" He responds, "I do not imagine so... but what he did was something wise and well-contrived, and fit in no slight degree to benefit his disciples. For they indeed, because they did not yet know Christ, inasmuch as His glory and all-exceeding majesty was concealed from them, were even silently stung at His working miracles, and surpassing the Baptist in greatness of the deeds wrought by Him." We can get an idea of this when John's disciples were concerned that Jesus was also baptizing and that His following was growing larger than John's. Cyril goes on to say that John "puts on an appearance of ignorance purposely, not so much that he might himself learn:- for as being the forerunner he knew the mystery:- but that his disciples might be convinced, how great is the Savior's superiority, and that, as the word of the inspired Scripture had announced before, He is God, and the Lord that was to come." Like Elisha with the men who asked to go find Elijah, Elisha knew where he was but let them go anyway. John knew who Jesus is but let his

disciples go anyway. It may have been prudent for John to make Jesus known to his disciples on a personal level not knowing when or if he would get out of prison. And it was, John was beheaded in prison not long afterwards.

Luke 7:20-23 “And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” ²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers^[e] are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.””

1. Jesus did not give them a lesson on the prophecies regarding the coming Messiah, He proved it to them. The allusion to the words of the prophet Isaiah would not have been lost on them as Jesus reveals Himself with power, as the Holy One of Israel, the suffering Servant of God- Isaiah 29:17-21, 35:4-8, 42:1-9(1st Servant Song). After performing many miracles confirming His authority, Jesus then replied to their question to report all this to John.
2. In verse 23, the word offended refers to a trap, like a bait stick on a mouse trap. The trap was to look for the Messiah to come as the Lion of the tribe of Judah who would rule the earth as Israel’s King. Jesus just told them, I am the Servant of the Lord, the suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They wanted the Messiah to come with iron rod to free them from the oppression of the Romans, but Jesus came in humility, submitted Himself to God, even to death on a cross, to free us from sin and death!

Luke 7:24-30 “When John's messengers had gone, Jesus^[f] began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’

²⁸I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” ²⁹(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just,^[g] having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)”

1. Jesus then focuses His attention on those following Him and certainly some of them had previously followed John. Jesus, anticipating the thoughts that may arise from the question presented to Jesus by John and his disciples, vindicates his ministry.
2. Jesus repeats the question ‘What did you go out to see?’ three times, possibly expecting a response from the crowd. He responds first, ‘a reed swaying in the wind’. Reeds were popular as they became a symbol of the land’s fertility, so much so that Herod Antipas placed them on his coins. They were also fragile and could easily be broken. The symbolism both alludes to the use of reeds in prophecy and how those who are spiritually fragile are swayed by popular thought. Was John fragile and swayed by popular thought? Surely not, John endured years in the wilderness being fed by God, locusts and wild honey. Second, Jesus responds, ‘A

man dressed in soft clothing.’ This is also false since everyone knew that John came to them in camel’s hair. This alludes to the fact that Israel at that time was in search of a coming king as their Messiah. Put together, Jesus is calling them out for searching for the wrong things.

3. Jesus’ 3rd response was correct, and possibly someone from the crowd called it out, ‘A prophet’. John is called more than a prophet and in the Matthew 11 account, Jesus says that if they can accept it, he is Elijah. Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 alluding to the fact that Elijah is to come as a herald before the Messiah. Jesus honors John by saying that of those born by women, John is the greatest.
4. The next statement in verse 28 that ‘the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he’ stands out. This is referring to the fact that John is the last of the prophets of the old covenant and is the one who gets to see the Messiah. However, John does not get to experience the power of the cross and Jesus’ resurrection.
5. John came to baptize proclaiming repentance for the kingdom of God is near. Because the once-for-all kind of baptism in Jewish culture was essentially reserved for pagans wanting to convert, the religious people were unwilling to accept it for themselves. Those who saw themselves as the religious elite questioned the commitment of other observant Jews and especially the tax collectors.

Luke 7:31-35 ““To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’

³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.””

1. It seems that Jesus now turns His attention to those who see themselves as the religious elite. To illustrate His point, Jesus brings up a game played by children in public where they mimic a wedding and a funeral, both major parts of life. The children playing get mad at other children who do not join them in their game. Those celebrating do not want weeping and those weeping do not want celebrating.
2. Likewise, they regarded John as an ascetic whose actions more closely resembled someone who was possessed by a demon. They regarded Jesus as a frivolous partier because He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. In doing so, they disregarded both their ministries.
3. Jesus says they are like children playing a game discounting anyone who does not play with them. They are trapped in the traditions of mankind, not seeing either John nor Jesus.
4. Wisdom, here personified as a mother, calls the righteous to follow her, as her children. The disciples of both Jesus and John are justified in their pursuit of the wisdom of God.

Applications:

1. Confusion and Doubt
 - a. Is there confusion and doubt about who Jesus is in our current culture? C.S. Lewis famously says that there are only

3 options to consider: Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar, or God. How convinced are you that Jesus is who He says He is?

- b. I believe that confusion and doubt are part of flesh. We innately experience these things, and it is not necessarily the confusion and doubt that are the issue. It is what we do when we experience them. What did John have his disciples do in the face of confusion and doubt?
 - c. Go to the source. The entire universe came into existence by the Word of God. The Word was revealed through the prophets and took on flesh, coming in the likeness of a man. Jesus experienced everything that we did and yet did not sin. He told His disciples that it is better that He goes so that the Comforter will come. The Holy Spirit speaks only what is revealed from the Father, His Word.
 - d. If you are confused or in doubt this morning, I plead with you to go to the source to see for yourselves. Ask God right now to reveal Himself to you through His Word. When this happens, be prepared to see your sin and to repent. That is what the Light does, it reveals the darkness in our lives.
2. Don't Get Trapped
- a. What in this world can free us from the oppression of sin and death? Could it be politics? How about sports? How about dying in battle for your country? What about getting rid of everyone who we think is the problem? What about making everyone believe exactly the same things as us?
 - b. Please do not get trapped thinking that there is anything in this world that can free us. It is only by the grace of God that a person can be set free. And this comes through faith, and faith through hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.

- c. The message of salvation to all: Romans 10:5-13 “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.””

Benediction:

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

Communion:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for^[f] you. Do this in

remembrance of me.”^[g] ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”