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Message: Adjusting Our Expectations to Christ's Purposes

Text: Luke 7:18-35

Introduction

- A. William Carey, often referred to as the father of modern missions, dedicated his life to spreading the gospel in India, serving as a missionary and Bible translator from 1793 until his death in 1834. He supervised the creation of the first printing press in India and established a large print shop in Serampore with 20 translators and a number of typesetters, pressmen, binders, compositors, and other writers, hoping to provide the Scriptures in as many languages and dialects as possible.

While speaking in Calcutta, his printing shop burned down to the ground. Carey's entire library, his completed Sanskrit dictionary, part of his Bengal dictionary, two grammar books, and ten translations of the Bible were lost. Gone also were the type sets for printing fourteen different languages. Vast quantities of English paper, priceless dictionaries, deeds, and account books were all gone. When Carey returned to Serampore and surveyed the scene, he wept and said, "In one short evening the labours of years are consumed. How unsearchable are the ways of God." Question: Why would God appoint this?

- B. Does God do things that perplex us? How do we respond? How does Christ want us to respond?
- C. In inspiring Luke to record Jesus's response to the perplexity of John the Baptist, Jesus is inviting us to humble ourselves before Him as our Lord and King, to as it were "bow the knee," trusting in His goodness, submitting to His wisdom when we don't understand the purpose of what He has planned.

I. Luke 7:18-20 The perplexity of John the Baptist.

- A. Shortly after John had baptized Jesus, he was thrown into prison by a son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, for rebuking Herod for his many acts of wickedness, including having his brother's wife.

Luke 3:19 But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done,²⁰ Herod also added this to them all: **he locked John up in prison.**

- B. His imprisonment isolated John, for according to the 1st Century Jewish historian, Josephus, Herod imprisoned him in the Perea fortress of Machaerus on the eastern side of the Dead Sea (show map, picture of Machaerus). Jesus withdrew to Galilee and began calling on all to repent for the Kingdom of God was at hand (because God's promised Messiah/King was now at hand in the person of Jesus).

Matthew 4:12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ...¹⁷ From that time **Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

- C. We saw in the first 17 verses of Luke 7 that Jesus had healed the dying slave of a Gentile centurion in Capernaum, and brought back to life the only son of a widow of Nain (show map, photo). And so in Luke 7:18 we read that disciples of John the Baptist traveled to Perea and reported these and other works of Jesus to John.

Luke 7:18 **The disciples of John reported to him about all these things.**

- D. So John then sends two of his disciples back to Jesus with the following question:

Luke 7:19 Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "**Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?**"²⁰ When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, '**Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?**'"

Matthew 11:2 Now **when John, while imprisoned,** heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to Him, "**Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?**"

- E. John, a prophet of God, was familiar with the prophets who preceded him, and understood for Whose coming he (John) was to prepare the way and Whom he was to proceed - the Lord, Yahweh.

John 1:22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"²³ He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' **as Isaiah the prophet said.**"

- F. John knew who Jesus was, for God had revealed this to him.

John 1:33 "I did not recognize Him, but **He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'**³⁴ **I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.**"³⁵ Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, "**Behold, the Lamb of God!**

- G. So why such a question from John? I think we will see from Jesus's later description of John, John was not disbelieving or doubting, but he certainly was perplexed, puzzled, perhaps even frustrated and impatient over the way Jesus was bringing about His promised salvation and kingdom. Ever feel perplexed, frustrated, impatient over the way God is carrying out His plan for the world, and for us individually?

II. Luke 7:21-23 Jesus's response to John's (and our) perplexity.

A. Luke tells us that before answering John's disciples, Jesus ministered before their eyes.

Luke 7:21 At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.²² And He answered and said to them, "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.**

B. Jesus demonstrated fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies about God's coming kingdom and King/Messiah of which John was familiar.

Isaiah 35:5 Then the **eyes of the blind will be opened** and the **ears of the deaf will be unstopped**.⁶ Then the **lame will leap** like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to **bring good news to the poor**; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted

C. But notice that Messiah's prophesied ministry of mercy was being fulfilled, but His ministry of judgment was being delayed - this John was not expecting. He, a prisoner, was not being set free, nor were his tormentors being brought to justice by God's Messiah. John had different expectations of the timing by which Christ would fulfill what was prophesied.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to **bring good news to the poor**; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, **to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners**;² To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and **the day of vengeance of our God**;

Luke 3:16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but **One is coming who is mightier than I**, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**.¹⁷ "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but **He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**."

D. In 11:6 Jesus gives John (and us) a gentle warning, and an invitation through a promise of His blessing.

Luke 7:22 And He answered and said to them, "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.²³ **"Blessed is he who does not take offense (skandalizo) at Me."**

1. 11:6 This, like all beatitudes, is not only a statement of fact but an invitation by the Lord

to be blessed by the Lord, and in also this case, a gentle warning not to take offense (skandalizo) at or be unsatisfied with Christ - with how He is administrating and executing God's plan for the world, including His plan for our individual lives.

2. The blessing which Christ invites us to inherit is an eternal place in the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20-23). The blessed will not to take offense at Christ but trust Christ by humbly accepting His appointed ways and waiting on His appointed promises. We are warned not to erect in our hearts any obstacle against Jesus's person, words, works, timetable, sovereign rule and appointments. Instead, we are to treat Him as the King His is, bowing the knee to Him in humble submission.

Luke 6:20 And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He *began* to say, "**Blessed** are you *who are* poor, for **yours is the kingdom of God.**"²¹ "**Blessed** are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. **Blessed** are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."²² "**Blessed** are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man."²³ "Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, **your reward is great in heaven.**

3. What God sovereignly appoints sometimes perplexes us. Did you expect Christ to do something that He has not yet done or perhaps will never will do?
 - a. give you a life partner? give you a child? save your child from death or disability?
Jesus says ...

“Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

- b. to keep you from becoming a widow, widower, divorced, separated?
- c. to grant you acceptance or a scholarship at a particular university?
- d. to develop your career beyond where it is today?
- e. to keep you employed? prosper your work?
- f. to raise you up to a particular ministry that you desire?
- g. to heal your body, or that of a friend or family member?

“Blessed is he who does not stumble over Me.”

- D. The faith by which we inherit Christ's kingdom and eternal salvation humbly bows the knee to Christ as Lord and waits for the Lord fulfill what He has promised, through whatever circumstances He appoints.

Lamentations 3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him.²⁶ **It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD.** ...³⁹ Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins?⁴⁰ Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the LORD.

- E. Waiting for the Lord does not occur merely for a moment in life or a week or month here

and there in the life of the believer. Waiting on the Lord is a continual way of life lived by faith in the Lord through the end of this life, believing our greatest expectations will be fulfilled when Jesus returns for us in glory.

Hosea 12:6 Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and **wait for your God continually.**

1 Thessalonians 1:9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,¹⁰ and **to wait for His Son from heaven,** whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

III. Luke 7:24-28 Christ's diagnosis of John's question.

- A. John was not weak in His devotion to the Lord, caving in under difficult circumstances. He was not like a weak reed bending in whatever way the winds of circumstances blew. Jesus's hearers would be used to hearing the Old Testament Scriptures use a reed as a metaphor for weakness. John was not a "soft" man, unable to bear up under hardships.

Luke 7:24 When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? **A reed shaken by the wind?**²⁵ "But what did you go out to see? **A man dressed in soft clothing?** Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are *found* in royal palaces!

1 Kings 14:15 "For the LORD will strike Israel, **as a reed is shaken in the water**

Isaiah 36:6 "Behold, **you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, on Egypt,** on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. **So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him.**

- B. John was truly God's faithful prophet and forerunner of Christ to whom Christ was revealed. John's preaching repentance and pointing to faith in Jesus was truly God's word to Israel and the world. If Old Testament prophets should be listened to, because they spoke the very word of God, then all the more John should be listened to, because he is more than a prophet, and none yet born were greater than John, due to his proximity and ministry to God's Son. John was the fulfillment of God's promise to send Elijah before the day of the Lord.

Luke 7:26 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and **one who is more than a prophet.**²⁷ **"This is the one about whom it is written,** 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'²⁸ "I say to you, **among those born of women there is no one greater than John;** yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

Malachi 3:1 **"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me.** And **the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come** to His temple; and the

messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, **I am going to send you Elijah the prophet** before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.⁶ "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Matthew 11:13 "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.¹⁴ "And if you are willing to accept it, **John himself is Elijah** who was to come.¹⁵ "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 1:17 "It is **he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah**, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

IV. Luke 7:29-35 All respond to Christ in one of two ways.

- A. Those rejected by Israel's religious leaders rejoiced over the gospel proclaimed by John and Jesus, inviting all to receive forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in the Lord, and receive a privileged status in the kingdom of God for which believers of the Old Covenant could only hope.

Luke 7:29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, **they justified God (dikaioo)**, having been baptized with the baptism of John.³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

- B. The Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's purpose/plan of salvation for themselves, rejecting their need of repentance symbolized by John's baptism, and rejecting the inclusion of those they regarded as "sinners." John and Jesus were not playing by their rules.

Luke 7:31 "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like?³² "**They are like children** who sit in the market place and call to one another, and they say, '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, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

- C. But those justified by faith in the Lord, justify the Lord and His Word of wisdom. We say, "Christ is right and righteous in whatever He appoints for life and salvation."

Luke 7:29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, **they justified (dikaioo) God**, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ..³⁵ "Yet **wisdom is justified**

(dikaioo) by all her children."

- D. William Carey took this great loss as an opportunity to reflect on his own level of trust in the Lord versus himself, concluding, "I had lately brought some things to the utmost perfection of which they seemed capable, and contemplated the missionary establishment with perhaps too much self-congratulation. The Lord has laid me low, that I may look more simply to him." Though heartbroken, Carey justified God, accepting His plan and purposes as righteous and wise, and continued to fulfill his ministry by faith, citing 2 Corinthians, where Christ inspired and taught His apostle Paul to say ...

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸ *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; **perplexed, but not despairing**;

Conclusion

- A. Little did William Carey know that the fire, which looked like such a pointless waste, would bring him and his work to the attention of people all over Europe and America as well as India. In just fifty days in England and Scotland alone, about ten thousand pounds were raised for rebuilding Carey's publishing enterprise. So much money was coming in that Andrew Fuller, Carey's friend and a leader of his mission in England, told his committee when he returned from a fund-raising trip, "We must stop the contributions." Many volunteers came to India to help as well. By 1832 Carey's rebuilt and expanded printing operation had published complete Bibles or portions of the Bible in forty-four languages and dialects! (From *The One Year Book of CHRISTIAN HISTORY* By E. Michael and Sharon Rustin)
- B. God granted Carey to see some purposes in His plan, in His appointing the fire. Quite often God does not reveal all or even any of His purposes for the sad and tragic situations He appoints for His people to endure. We honor Him by trusting Him when we can see the purpose of His plan. How much more do we honor the Lord when we trust and justify Him for purposes we cannot see or understand.
- C. These words of Jesus, calling us to trust and submit to His rule over our lives as our Messiah/King reminded me of a song our choir has sung to us entitled, "Bow the Knee," which ends ...
Bow the knee;
Trust the heart of your Father when the answer goes beyond what you can see.
Bow the knee;
Lift your eyes toward heaven and believe the One who holds eternity.
And when you don't understand the purpose of His plan,
In the presence of the King, bow the knee.
- D. Jesus invites us to such faith and submission, saying ...

Luke 7:23 "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

