

## **“Children of Wisdom”**

### **Luke 7:29-35**

The last time we were in Luke 7 we saw what Jesus said about John the Baptist. Particularly important for our text this morning are verses 26-28 where Jesus called John a prophet, much more than a prophet, the messenger prophesied about in Malachi 3, and the greatest prophet. In our text this morning we see how the people responded to what Jesus said about John the Baptist. Then we see a very strong rebuke from Jesus. And this text ends with a wonderful statement from Jesus in verse 35, “But wisdom is justified of all her children.”

#### **I. The Response of the People (v. 29-30)**

In verses 29 and 30 we are told of three groups of people and how they responded to what Jesus had just said about John the Baptist. The first group is “all the people.” Verse 29 begins, “And all the people that heard him.” This is speaking of the general multitude that followed Jesus at this point in his ministry. This group would have included people from Galilee and the surrounding regions and would have been nearly exclusively Jewish. And the opinion among the common Jewish people at that time was that John the Baptist was a prophet. In Luke 20:6 the chief priests and scribes said, “[The people are] persuaded that John was a prophet.” The common people had accepted John and his ministry.

The end of verse 29 tells us that they had been baptized with the baptism of John. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. The people had responded to his call to repent in preparation for the coming Messiah. Verse 29 also tells us that this group "justified God." We are going to examine that statement, but first, let's look at the second group mentioned in this text.

The second group is "publicans." Publicans were the tax collectors of the first-century Roman world. Verse 29 specifically mentions publicans as a group separate from the general multitude. Why were they a separate group?

We know that the publicans were a particularly hated group in first century Israel. We studied this in depth when we were in Luke 5, when Jesus called Levi the publican, to be one of his disciples. But to summarize, the publicans were hated because the Roman tax system was prone to corruption and universally abused. The common Jews believed that it was unlawful (that is, against the Law of God) to pay taxes to the Romans, thus publicans were seen as people who despised God's Law. Jewish publicans were also seen as traitors, having sided with the occupiers, the Romans, instead of their own people, the Jews. They may be mentioned separately in this text because, though they were with the general multitude following Jesus at this time, they were still despised and shunned.

Jewish publicans were also seen as one of the preeminent classes of sinners in first-century Israel. They are sometimes used as a figure of the worst sinner imaginable to the first-century Jewish mind. Remember the parable Jesus gave of

the Pharisee praying in the temple who said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” (Luke 18:11)

Along with the general multitude, the publicans, this group that was viewed as the worst type of sinners, they also “justified God.” What does it mean to “justify God?” To declare that God is just, that God is right, that God is true. This is a response of faith to the revelation of God. This is worship. This is the highest form of worship: Man freely confessing the truth, the goodness, and the righteousness of God.

And if a response of faith to the revelation of God justifies God, then what does this mean about a response of unbelief? Unbelief is a form of blasphemy. It is refusing to give God the glory, the honor, the praise, the worship that He is due.

We live in a post-modern world where people say things like, “If you believe the gospel and it means something to you, great. But it doesn’t mean anything to me.” It doesn’t make any difference if I believe it. It doesn’t make any difference if you believe it. The gospel, the revelation of Jesus Christ, this is how God has revealed Himself to humanity. A response of faith justifies God. A response of unbelief heaps up for yourself further condemnation. The people and the publicans justified God.

When God justifies a man, something has changed in that man because he was not just before. And when man justifies God, with a true confession from his

heart that God is just, that God is right, and that God is true, once again, something has changed. But it isn't God. God is just, God is right, God is true. Whether or not you and I confess that, it doesn't make any difference to the intrinsic nature of God. When a man truly justifies God, once again it is man who has changed. It takes divine revelation to bring sinful man to a place where he justifies God.

In our text we are specifically told why the common people and the publicans justified God: the end of verse 29 tells us they had been "baptized with the baptism of John." Again, the baptism of John was an outward symbol of repentance. These people who justified God had heeded the call of John the Baptist to repent and prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah.

The final group is mentioned in verse 30: the Pharisees and lawyers. The Pharisees and lawyers were religious leaders of the time. Specifically the Pharisees were a group that was zealous for the formal keeping of the law. The term "Pharisee" comes from an Aramaic word which means "to separate." They were separated by their manner of life from the general public. They were known for their high level of discipline and stringency as they sought to follow the law. They were not so much concerned about the righteousness of any given action, but it's formal correctness measured against their understanding of the Law. They became formal, external, and mechanical in their religion. Their approach to the Law did not lead to confession of sin and humility, but rather a proud self-righteousness.

Because of their discipline and separation from the common people, they were admired and even seen as a standard of righteousness. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) Jesus was not teaching that they were righteous. But that is how they were viewed by the common people and Jesus said, “It isn’t enough. You must have a better righteousness.”

Jesus routinely and strongly rebuked the Pharisees and called them hypocrites. This is the entire theme of Matthew 23. Seven times in that chapter Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”<sup>1</sup> That’s who the Pharisees were.

Now let’s look at the lawyers. This word is fairly common in Luke’s gospel. He used it 6 times. It is used once in Matthew and twice in Paul’s epistle to Titus. But this term “lawyer” is interchangeable with the much more common term “scribe.” The lawyers (or scribes) had various roles from the teaching of the law in the local synagogues to copying the Scriptures and other documents to serving on the Sanhedrin. A lawyer could also be a Pharisee, though not all were Pharisees. But like the Pharisees, they were far more concerned about their appearance before

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<sup>1</sup> For further study I would recommend the notes on Pharisees found in the *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* and in *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*. I consulted both of these resources in this section.

men than their righteousness before God, and thus they were often rebuked by Jesus along with the Pharisees.

In our text this morning, in verse 30, the Pharisees and lawyers are mentioned together and we are told that they “rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” The common people and the publicans “justified God,” they declared or demonstrated that God is just. In contrast, the Pharisees and lawyers “rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” That is (or should be) a terrifying statement.

What does it mean to reject the counsel of God? God had clearly revealed His will to them. Jesus preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. The Law of God which they claimed to revere convicts men of sin and calls men to repentance (Galatians 3:21-24). They knew what God required of them, but they “rejected the counsel of God against themselves.” And their rejection was clearly demonstrated by their actions.

The end of verse 30 tells us that the Pharisees and lawyers were not baptized by John the Baptist. They did not repent. God called them to repentance but they hardened their hearts and continued in their sins.

The common people and even the publicans had accepted the ministry of John the Baptist. The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves.

At first glance, this appears to bring reproach upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Messiah, and Jesus who was the Messiah seemed to only be able to gather common people, or worse, the uncommonly bad people. Those who had a reputation for holiness and knowledge rejected Jesus.

But woe unto us if we judge the gospel by the approval of men. I Corinthians 1:27-29 says, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

The foolishness of God is wiser than men. The weakness of God is stronger than men. The true gospel demands humility. The gospel of Jesus Christ leaves no room for man to glory in himself. Those who place their confidence in men, in man’s ability to be righteous, to satisfy God on their own, they will never humble themselves as the gospel demands. And thus, they reject the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That was the position of the Pharisees and lawyers in this text. Jesus rebuked them because of their rejection. In verses 31-35 Jesus delivered a strong rebuke.

## **II. Jesus Delivered a Strong Rebuke (v. 31-35).**

Jesus began this rebuke in verse 31 with a question: “Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like?”

Who was Jesus rebuking? The “men of this generation.” It is clear from the context that Jesus was specifically rebuking those who had claimed to reject the ministry of John the baptist because he was too ascetic, and who then went on to reject the ministry of Jesus because they claimed his life was too lavish. They had taken a hypocritical position and Jesus rebuked them for it.

Jesus compared them to petulant children in verse 32. The picture Jesus gives here is of winey children who will not be satisfied. They are not getting their way and they are not happy about it. “We piped for you and you did not dance. We mourned for you and you did not weep. Why aren’t you happy? Why aren’t you sad? Waaaaaa!”

When children act this way, we understand. They are young and immature. It takes patience and child training and discipline to help children mature beyond this sort of behavior, but Jesus was not talking about child training.

Jesus was illustrating the attitude of the men of his generation. Grown men. Religious leaders. People who knew better. And Jesus said, “You are acting like children.” And not well-behaved children.



And in case there was any question what Jesus was referring to, he told them directly in verses 33 and 34. Look at verse 33. Again, John the Baptist led a very ascetic life. He lived in the wilderness. He wore rough clothing.

In particular, Jesus drew attention to his diet. He did not eat bread or drink wine. Rather, he ate the food found in the wilderness where he had his ministry. Matthew 3:4 tells us he ate locusts and honey.

And how did the religious leaders respond to the ascetic life of John the Baptist? They said, “He has a devil.” They didn’t like John’s message. They didn’t like John’s ministry. They didn’t like John’s methods. They rejected the counsel of God delivered to them through John. And in their sin, in their blindness, in their hardness of heart, they said of John, “He has a devil.” He is demon possessed.

Did John have a devil? Was he demon possessed? No. In fact, the exact opposite is true. John had the Holy Spirit upon him as a prophet of God. Yet his ministry was rejected. Because men love darkness, because their deeds are evil. This is the nature of man. This is the power of sin.

The religious leaders had rejected John the Baptist and called him demon possessed because of his manner of life. Or at least that’s what they claimed. His life was too ascetic to please them. Well, how about Jesus?

Look at verse 34. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus came “eating and drinking.” Jesus ministered in cities as well as in wilderness areas. Jesus wore nice clothing. When he was in populated areas Jesus often went to weddings and feasts. Several

times when he was in the wilderness he miraculously provided good food for his followers to eat. Jesus ate normal, and even fine, good-quality food.

If some had been offended by John's ascetic lifestyle, then certainly they would be pleased with the lifestyle Jesus led. "Phew, John's lifestyle is too harsh. Thankfully we see in the life of Jesus that there is some liberty here."

But no, like petulant children who cannot be satisfied they criticized Jesus at this point as well. They called Jesus "a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

This account is the only time these words "gluttonous" and "winebibber" are used in the New Testament. Our text and the parallel account of this event in Matthew 11:19 are the only times these words are used and they are used to accuse Jesus. They said of Jesus, "He is gluttonous. He eats too much. He is a winebibber. He drinks too much."

And then they go on and make this accusation: "He is a friend of publicans and sinners." If you believe you can attain righteousness on your own, and you believe you have attained some degree of righteousness on your own, then you will look down your nose at those you deem to be unrighteous. They have not worked as hard as you. They are not as committed as you. They are not as serious as you. They are not as religious as you. They are not as good as you. You will shun them because you believe they are sinners and you are righteous. This is what the Pharisees and lawyers did. This is how they lived. And when they saw the life of

Jesus they said, “He must not be righteous, because look at the company He keeps.”

But in reality, Jesus Christ was the only person in history who was ever in the situation the Pharisees and lawyers thought they were in. He is the only person who has ever lived who was perfectly righteous and surrounded by sinners. And what did Jesus do? Praise God He was a friend to sinners. He lived among us, He ministered to us, and He died for us. Never have sinners known a greater friend. This accusation against Jesus, far from dishonoring Him, will be a point of honor, praise, and glory to God for all eternity.

The Pharisees and lawyers claimed to reject John because he was too ascetic. They claimed to reject Jesus because he was too loose and liberal. The reality is that “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.” (Romans 1:21-22)

This comparison between the lives of Jesus and John the Baptist demonstrates the goodness of God, God’s longsuffering nature, and God’s mercy toward sinners. What lawful method has God not used to draw sinners? Has God delivered warnings? Yes! Harsh and terrible warnings. The pages of the Scriptures are full of examples which warn us to flee from the wrath to come.

Has God shown kindness and mercy? Yes! Every day that God suffers this sinful world to go on is a demonstration of mercy and patience beyond our

comprehension. God promises deliverance. God promises rest. God promises reward. God sent austere prophets like John the Baptist to deliver stern warnings. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who came eating and drinking and who was a friend of sinners.

But what does sinful man do with the goodness of God? In God's rebuke and in God's blessing, sinful man turns from God. From the rod of discipline and the staff of comfort, sinful man flees from a holy God. If there were any way for sinful man to come to God apart from grace it would happen. It would happen for everyone. If it were possible, God would do whatever man needed. He has left no stone unturned, not avenue unexplored, no effort spared in giving people reason and opportunity to turn from their sin and to Himself. God has done this, not to satisfy His curiosity, but to humble us. To show us that if a person will be saved, he must be saved by the grace of God.

Maybe you are hear this morning and you say, "I want to be saved, but I don't know how. I've heard that I must repent of my sin and believe, but what does that mean? How can I do that?"

I don't want to discourage you, so please listen carefully. There is nothing you can do. There is no formula you can follow, no good deeds you can accomplish, no ordinances of the church you can partake in: baptism or the Lord's supper. None of these things can save you. There is no work you can do. The work of salvation was finished at the cross of Jesus Christ.

How can you be saved? Only by the grace of God. Do you see from God's Word that you are a hopeless sinner? Do you see from God's Word that Jesus Christ is your only hope? Then come to Jesus Christ. In John 6:37 Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." God is pleased with the simple prayer, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13) This is a response of faith to the gospel. This is a response that "justifies God" as we saw in verse 29.

Look at how Jesus concludes this rebuke in verse 35 of our text. The Pharisees and lawyers believed that they were the "children of wisdom." They believed they had cornered the market on wisdom. They believed that they were not only the possessors of wisdom, but the arbitrators of wisdom.

Listen to this exchange found in John 7:45-49. "Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? [referring to Jesus] The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed."

They claimed that the people, who were generally positive toward the ministry of Jesus at that time, were only receptive toward Jesus because they did not know the law. Again, they said, "This people who knoweth not the law are cursed."

“We have wisdom, and the people do not.” And in their “wisdom” they rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

But though the wisdom of God be slandered and maligned and abused, it cannot be defiled, it cannot be rendered ineffective, and it cannot be stopped. The wisdom of God is seen as foolishness by the world. The first part of I Corinthians 1:18 says, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.”

How often do men look upon the wisdom of God and call it foolishness? We see it in our text. John the Baptist abstained from eating bread and drinking wine. Foolishness! Jesus came eating and drinking. Foolishness! Jesus was friends with sinners. Foolishness! The world, those who are dead in trespasses and sins, when confronted with the wisdom of God, reject it. They call it foolish. They despise the wisdom of God.

But what does Jesus say in this text? “Wisdom is justified of [or by] all her children.”

The children of God are and will be saved through the wisdom of God. Again, in I Corinthians 1:21 the Bible says, “It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Verse 20 says, “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

And again, I Corinthians 1:18, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” The

wisdom of God is clearly revealed to be the wisdom of God in or through the salvation of God's children.

And notice this word "all" in verse 35. "All her children." All God's children will be saved. Though some resist the wisdom of God, like the Pharisees and lawyers in this passage, they will not stop the wisdom of God from perfectly accomplishing all that God has intended for it to accomplish. God's work of salvation will not be stopped. It cannot be stopped. And any accusation made against God's plan of salvation is shown to be hollow and baseless as God's wisdom is revealed in the salvation of His people.

How is the wisdom of the gospel proven? Not by logic and reasoning. Not by the man's labor or man's wisdom. But by the power of God working through the gospel to bring about the salvation of God's people. "Wisdom is justified of all her children."

Are you a child of wisdom? Have you been born again? Are you saved? If you can say yes, that is only by the grace of God. That is not the result of any work you have done but of grace God has provided through Jesus Christ. As believers, we need to leave this text with two key areas of application.

First, rejoice in the salvation God has provided. How wide is God's mercy? How deep is His love? How great is His wisdom? How marvelous are His works? The greatest manifestation of all these things is our salvation. He has saved us for His glory. Justify God in your salvation. Praise Him. Honor Him. Glorify Him.

And second, live your life in such a way as to not bring shame and reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian you are a child of God, made so by the power and wisdom of God. Your salvation is a testimony to the power and wisdom of God. May our confession match Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” By the grace of God may we measure every action, every thought, every attitude in our hearts by the salvation God has worked on our behalf. “If I do this thing, will it glorify God who has redeemed me? Or will it bring reproach upon the name of Jesus Christ?”