

## I. Introduction

Good morning! John the Baptist preached boldly against sin and urged everyone to receive a baptism of repentance. His message was uncompromising and he warned people of a coming day of judgment. But when Jesus came to him, John the Baptist had a new message to proclaim. **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!”** There is no trace of doubt in John’s testimony; he knows that Jesus is the Savior of the world.



*The Sermon of John the Baptist by Pieter Bruegel the Younger, 1604*

But later, when John condemned the sin of King Herod, Herod had John imprisoned at the hilltop fortress and palace called Machaerus on the east side of the Dead Sea. There, John suffered and began to be worried by doubts, even though his disciples were visiting him and telling him of the miracles that Jesus was doing. Luke 7:18-30 tells us what happened.



## II. Scripture Luke 7:18-30 (NIV)

[18] John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, [19] he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" [20] 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?' " [21] At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. [22] 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. [23] Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." [24] After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? [25] If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. [26] But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [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.' [28] I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." [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. [30] But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

## III. Teaching

The fortress and palace of Machaerus was built on the top of a tall, steep, hill at the edge of the desert. Today there isn't much left there, but John the Baptist's prison is said to be among the ruins. It would have taken days for John's disciples to walk from there to go and find Jesus, but they finally found the place where Jesus was preaching and healing the sick. **Luke 7:20, “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?’”**”



At first glance, it may seem that John has started to doubt whether Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah

who was to come. But John's question may be about a different issue. Anyone who studies the Old Testament soon notices that there are both, "suffering Messiah prophecies," and, "triumphant Messiah prophecies." For example, Isaiah 53:5 is a suffering Messiah prophecy. **Isaiah 53:5, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."** On the other hand, **Daniel 7:14**, speaks of a triumphant Messiah, **"He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."**

Because of these contrasting images, a few Jewish scholars thought there would be two Messiahs. And, we don't know for sure, but since Jesus was healing people and preaching, but not raising an army or seeking political power, John the Baptist may have begun to wonder whether or not the, "two Messiah theory," was correct. In any case, in answer to John's question, Jesus told John's disciples to go and tell John what they had seen and heard, and then Jesus referred to some of the Old Testament prophecies that He was fulfilling, strong proof that He was the Messiah. And, John, I think, would have recognized the quote about the blind seeing and the lame walking as being from Isaiah 35, a passage that speaks about the triumphant Messiah. By using this quote, Jesus is rejecting the, "two Messiah theory." And, from the rest of the New Testament, it is very clear that Jesus is the one and only Messiah, and that the complete fulfillment of the triumphant Messiah prophecies will occur at His Second Coming.

For many people today also, this is a difficult teaching, but the Bible makes it very clear, there is one and only one true Messiah. His name is Jesus and salvation is found only in Him. In Jesus, we have all that we need. He has already provided a great salvation for us, forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, His Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, and a home in heaven. And if there is anything lacking, it will be fully provided when Jesus comes again.

In **Matthew 25:31-32**, Jesus spoke of His Second Coming saying, **"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."** And right after Jesus ascended into heaven two angelic men appeared and spoke to the disciples. **Acts 1:11, "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."** So Jesus is the only Messiah, but He comes twice. Jesus came once to suffer and die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. And one day He will come again, in power and glory, and then He will fulfill all of the remaining Messianic prophecies.

After the disciples of John the Baptist had left, Jesus explained that none born of women are greater than John, but those who belong to the Kingdom of God, that is, those born of the Holy Spirit, are all greater than John. This doesn't mean that Christians are any smarter, stronger, or more faithful than John and the Old Testament prophets; it just means that Christians have a higher position in the Kingdom of God. This is because, as **Galatians 3:25-27** puts it, **"Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** John was a great prophet, but through faith in Christ, we are the adopted sons and daughters of God who are clothed with Christ's righteousness. Let's read a little further, **Luke 7:31-35**.

#### **IV. Scripture Luke 7:31-35 (NIV)**

[31] "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? [32] They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' [33] For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' [34] The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' [35] But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

## V. Teaching

In these verses, Jesus points out that the same people who criticized John the Baptist also criticize Him, but for opposite reasons. One simple lesson here is that there are some people that you cannot please no matter what you do. It is a simple lesson, but it is very important. Of course, it is good to try to get along with people. But we cannot spend all of our time and energy trying to please others, because we will get very tired and stressed out trying to please so many different people, a few people of whom will refuse to be pleased no matter what we do.

There is a better way, and that is to live to please the Lord. This is in harmony with loving others, because our Lord loves each and every one and He will teach us to love others also. But if we focus on just one goal, living to please the Lord, then we won't be stressed out from trying to please many different people. By living to please the Lord, we can have peace and joy in our lives.

In the Bible, living to please the Lord is often called, "walking with God." Walking is a metaphor for life, and the Lord is God. **Micah 6:8** puts it this way, "**He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.**"

Do you remember when Jesus walked on the water and Peter stepped out of the boat to go to Him? It is in Matthew 14. The disciples were crossing Lake Galilee in their boat, but the wind was against them. Late into the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the water. Peter then got out of the boat and, as long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to walk on the water also. But as soon as Peter looked around him, he began to sink. Fortunately, Jesus was right there to lift him up again. This story illustrates how a person can rise above the seemingly impossible problems of life by focusing on walking with Jesus. By focusing on Jesus, Peter was able to walk on the water. And, even when Peter messed up by looking around, Jesus was there to lift him up again.



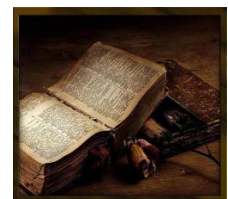
Peter had an intimate relationship with Jesus, and that is what God desires for each of us. But some people resist being drawn into relationship with the Lord. Whether God sends a John the Baptist to rebuke them, or whether the Lord Himself comes to them in gentle peace, these people ignore the message and find fault with the messenger. Jesus speaks of these people's attitude using the example of children playing in the marketplace. **Luke 7:32b**, "**We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.**"



The words are simple, but the message is deep. "*Let's play wedding,*" the friendly children said, and they played wedding songs on the flute. But the others said, "*We will not play, we will not dance*". "*Okay, then, let's play funeral,*" they said, and they sang a funeral song. But the others refused to respond to the sorrowful song.

The message here is that God uses both joy and sorrow to invite us into relationship with Him. God is very present at both weddings and funerals. The Lord is with us in our joy, and He is with us when we weep. God wants to have an intimate relationship with you, and He invites you into relationship through all of life, including both sorrowful and joyful times.

Some people like the New Testament, but have trouble understanding the Old Testament. But both tell the story of how God is seeking to have a close relationship with His people. In the Old Testament, there are many funeral songs, but God is there with His people in their sorrow. In the New Testament, there are more wedding songs, and God is there also, with His people.



But some people do not respond to God's presence, regardless of whether God meets them in joy or sorrow. Others respond to God in both joy and sorrow; their hearts are open to God whenever and wherever

God comes to them. In the time of Jesus, many of the people who responded to the strict preaching of John the Baptist also responded to Jesus. We know this because many of John's followers later became disciples of Jesus. But there were some people who would not listen to John or Jesus either one. In today's passage, Jesus rebuked these people. Those people had hearts of stone that could not be moved by joy or sorrow. But we have hope for them also, because God can change the heart.

## VI. Conclusion

And that is really what God does for all of us when we believe in Jesus. The New Testament calls it being born again, but in the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel saying, in **Ezekiel 11:19**, **“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”**

There is hope even for the hard-hearted, because it is God who does the work. It is God who takes away the heart of stone and gives a new heart. And if we are honest with ourselves, then we know that sometimes we ourselves are also hard-hearted. Is this a time of joy in your life? Do you feel like dancing to the music of the flute? Or is this a time of sorrow in your life, a time when a funeral song fits your mood? Regardless of your mood and feelings, regardless of what joys or sorrows you are experiencing in your life, the Lord is ready to meet with you right where you are. The Lord Jesus desires to have an intimate relationship with you; He will cry with you when it is a time of sorrow and He will rejoice with you when it is a time of joy. And if your heart is hard and heavy, like a stone in your chest, don't worry, because He is ready to give you a new heart. Invite Jesus into your life and tell Him that you want to walk with Him, and He will meet you right where you are, in joy or in sorrow. Let's pray.



## VII. Closing Prayer