



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,
day after day, and that the people of God
were filled with joy!

first in Genesis 38. The Lord himself uses the term in Luke 15:30, as does Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:16. In all, there are eight references to 'prostitution' in the New Testament. So, Luke's avoidance of the word is not through prudishness, rather his gentle approach is because he wants to guard the woman's newfound reputation in Christ. We should be careful when speaking about others. It is good to speak no worse of a person than we are compelled to by their lives.

How is Luke aware of the change in this woman's lifestyle? He sees it in what she does. First, she comes to Simon the Pharisee's home. Think about the courage that must have taken. So, what motivated her to do so? Did anger drive her? Angry people tend to lose a measure of perspective and will act beyond the usual constraints of life. That is why the believer is not to get angry but rather remain self-controlled, James 1:19-20. Anger was not behind this woman's coming to Simon's home; she was motivated by love, love for the Lord Jesus. Real love is a powerful motivator. It is more powerful than anger because it is pure and sustainable. But how can we say that she loved Jesus? We can tell by what she does. As with everything in life, it is not what a person says that speaks the truth of their lives; it is what they do. And this woman certainly does something which speaks loud and clear about her love for Jesus.

Around the room, jaws drop wide open as they watch this woman. First, as she stands, and then quietly and slowly bends down over Jesus' feet. She begins to cry, and her tears are falling on his dusty feet. Simon had chosen not to provide a servant to wash Jesus' feet. The woman then takes her long hair, and she begins to wipe Jesus' feet. She then kisses his feet; literally, she covers his feet with kisses, and breaking an alabaster flask of ointment she has brought with her, she pours the contents over Jesus' feet. What is this woman doing? She is taking the accoutrements of her former life, and using them to tell Jesus that she loves him deeply and is devoted to him. This is humble, submissive service. Service that is oblivious to what others may think, say, or do. Service that is born out of, and carried along by, a deep-rooted genuine love. And throughout it all, Jesus is compliant in his receiving of this woman's loving affection. Had they met before? I think they may have. I believe Jesus may have spoken with this woman before this and cleansed her heart. I think this outpouring of love was because Jesus had both loved and set her free, in a way that no other man ever could have done. If they hadn't met and spoken, then the woman must certainly have heard Jesus preach the good news of the gospel and been born again. This is new-life behaviour. This is true repentance, turning away from sin and turning in love with all your heart, soul strength, and mind to God. Many books are written about the Christian life. How to live for God, how to become a better believer, how to be an effective evangelist. The bottom line is simple – it is about love. Love cannot be hidden; it will shine through and wonderfully so. A regenerate heart will produce good fruit; it cannot do anything else.

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These notes have been prepared by Rev. Dr Andrew Quigley.

Thursday – Read Luke 7:31-35

V35. Who are the children of wisdom and who, by doing works of wisdom, are justifying wisdom? Jesus is speaking of John and himself, and all who follow them.

As we saw yesterday, the demands of the current generation, when they first called upon John to dance to their marriage tune, and then on to Jesus to wail their funeral dirge, shows clearly their ignorance of who John and Jesus are. This ignorance leads to their pointless attempts to get John and Jesus to play their game. The bottom line is this – Jesus didn't play to the tune of his generation, and he won't play to the tune of any generation. He is King above all, and he is working to bring all things under his feet for the sake of his Bride, using the means he has established. As he does so, he will neither be diverted nor prevented from pursuing his course, no matter what tune the world plays to try and get him to perform as it wants. Satan tried with his temptations in the wilderness, and he failed. The kingdoms of men are constantly plotting against the Lord and his anointed. Their goal is to burst free of Christ's Mediatorial rule, but it is pointless, for he sits in the heavens, and laughs and holds them in derision. The only game in town for them is "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry," and this game can only end in one way if they refuse to do so - they will perish, Psalm 2.

You and I need to learn what it means to stand with Christ on the sidelines and watch as the world plays whatever tune it likes, flip-flopping back and forth. The generation before them did it; this generation is doing it and the next generation will do it. But as we do so, we must never lose sight of the need which the Lord Jesus has laid upon us to be active among them, bringing the Good News of the gospel to them, just as he did. We must be focused and determined in our seeking to get this balance correct, so that those who have been chosen will be saved from the futile ways handed down to them by their forefathers.

Friday – Read Luke 7:36-40

V36. A Pharisee called Simon invites Jesus to his home to eat with him and his colleagues. Jesus accepts the offer, showing his willingness to dine with whoever asks him, regardless of their attitude towards him. Sometimes we can be too quick to cut ourselves off from those who have expressed their dislike of us.

V37. Something astonishing happens as these men recline at the table eating – a woman appears. Why is this astonishing? Two reasons: first, these meals were typically for men; and second, because of who this woman is. Luke says that she is a 'woman of the city'. It's a phrase that indicates that Luke is kind in his introduction of her. The term 'prostitution' was commonly used in the Old Testament; in fact, there are over 35 references to prostitution or harlotry, the

Monday – Read Luke 7:24-30

V24. When the two disciples of John leave, Jesus speaks to the crowd about John. Why? Because he wants to make sure that no one has misunderstood what they have just heard. But note, he waits until John's disciples have left before he does so because that avoids the possibility of them becoming confused. The disciples have what they need to know, to be able to tell John what he needs to hear. So, as soon as they are gone, Jesus turns to the crowd and tells them what they need to know.

There are two lessons to glean from this. First, life is a relatively straightforward process; sin makes it confusing and chaotic. God tells us what we need to know; the problems begin when we start allowing the idols of our hearts to tell us that it's not enough; we need more. Second, Jesus' approach shows the importance of not only saying what needs to be done but giving the reason why. Taking the time to explain our motives and perspective when conveying a decision is often the best course, even if it may come across as 'labouring the point'. A lot of the hurt we experience in our relationships could be prevented if we took the time to do what Jesus did here.

V24. Jesus addresses any potential misunderstanding that may have arisen by asking the crowd a question. In fact, he asks them the same question three times, to emphasize the importance of what he is saying. For Jesus, this is not a 'take it or leave it' scenario, but a 'deal with this' situation.

Crowds had flocked to hear John's preaching in the wilderness. Jesus asks, 'Why?' and he doesn't leave the answer hanging too long. His reference to "a reed shaken by the wind?" means, 'did you go out to see and hear an ambiguous, changeable man? Someone you knew could be easily swayed by the crowd?' They knew that wasn't the case. So, the issue is this – had they taken hold of what John had to say, or had it just been about the experience; 'I went and saw John the Baptist today.' Jesus is testing their desire, not only to hear the truth, but to own it in their lives. A challenge we cannot avoid to take to our own lives.

Jesus' second question continues in the same vein. What do John's clothes have to do with his teaching? Everything! He speaks about John's refusal to play to the gallery, no matter how prestigious. John was languishing in his camel's hair covering, as a destitute prisoner in the fortress jail in the royal palace of King Herod. His crime, known to all – daring to challenge the King about an inappropriate relationship. What type of man had they gone out to see? A soft, effeminate performer or a rugged serious declarer of truth? A performer, John is not. His words are not only to be heard; they are to be considered, weighed up and acted upon. Again, the point is, what are you doing with the words that John declared to you? A question we must ask ourselves every time we hear God's word faithfully preached.

Tuesday – Read Luke 7:24-30

Yesterday we considered the first of the three questions Jesus asks those who had gone out to hear John the Baptist preached. The third question Jesus asks the crowd relates to John's calling to declare the Word of God and call his hearers to face the reality of their plight and flee to God for repentance. Jesus' point is simple - knowing this, did they not have a hunger in their souls to be made right with God or had they been merely interested voyeurs?

As before, Jesus answers his own question, so that there can be no opportunity for misunderstanding. Quoting from Malachi 3:1, he reminds them of who John is, and does so with a measure of force, seen through his use of the words "I tell you...". As far as Jesus is concerned, there is no one greater than John. What an accolade! Had these people any idea of just how privileged they had been, to hear God's message from the lips of this man, John? This uncompromising, honest, godly, fearless man. But then Jesus says something remarkable. He compares John to the least in the Kingdom of heaven and concludes that such a person is greater than the great John. What does Jesus mean when he says this? Well, to answer that, we first need to understand that this is not a comment on John's character but on his 'time' of existing. Although introducing the New Testament era, John, in essence, is an Old Testament character. Yes, John is a prophet who points to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, but he is a prophet from before Christ. And Jesus' coming has changed the world order. That which was before him was different from that which is after him. His coming was a global watershed for time and eternity. That may seem an exaggerated way of expressing it, but it's not. With Jesus came the Kingdom of God. That changed the world. John belonged to the time of promise. Jesus brought the time of fulfilment. (His return will bring in the era of consummation.) So, the 'least' in the time of fulfilment is greater than the 'greatest' in the time of promise, not because of their personal qualities, but because of the time of the existence, and the privileges they are therefore exposed to. Jesus is building to his point, which is - you had the tremendous privilege of hearing John preach, but what did you do with that privilege?

V29. Jesus speaks of the responses to John's preaching and teaching. His call to repent and be baptized. As with all preaching of God's Word, there were two responses. There were those who, by faith, declared God to be just, and were baptized, and there were those who rejected God's Word and were not baptized. What response did you have, is Jesus' basic question? And it's a question that comes to you and to me. When confronted with God's Word, whether by way of reproof, correction, and training in righteousness so that we may be equipped for every good work, how are you and I responding?

Wednesday – Read Luke 7:31-35

V31-34. Jesus is still asking questions. This time he asks the same question twice, one straight after the other. Again, we see him answering his own question, this time using a scene from their everyday lives. He paints a picture of children playing in the marketplace which provided ample space, unlike the narrow streets which were filled with bazaars. Quoting a little couplet which the children would have sung when their friends wouldn't join in with whatever game or activity was being played. Whether pretending to play at 'weddings' or at 'funerals' it made no difference, nothing would draw out the desired dancing and the weeping from those who weren't willing to play.

What is Jesus' point? The issue is not, as some think, that as John played his 'tune' in the wilderness, the people wouldn't play along, so he changed his tune to try and engage them, but again to no avail. That cannot be the case because, as we saw yesterday, John was not a vacillator, flip-flopping back and forth to meet the whims of the people. He had a message, a straightforward, clear message – 'repent and believe'. Nor is it the case, as others suggest, that John led the wedding march, and then Jesus seeing that it wasn't working came along with the funeral dirge. So, what is Jesus saying? The key point is that the leaders of the game are not John and Jesus; it's the people.

When God sent John the Baptist into their midst, a prophet like of old, everyone was happy, God had spoken again, and the people wanted to join in the game. The problem was that John would not join in and play the way they wanted him to. His lifestyle and message didn't fit. It grated on people, and they wanted him to change. They wanted him to join the wedding party, let his hair down, and tell them a positive story of God's love for them as amazingly religious people. When he refused, they didn't like it and walked away, muttering under their breath that he was demon-possessed. Then Jesus came, and the Pharisees began insisting on his adherence to the strict interpretation of their rabbinical laws. But when Jesus refused to dance to their mournful tune and fraternized with the social class that dare not be mentioned, when he refused to play along with their funeral procession and behaved as though he was at a wedding party, well, that was unacceptable. They weren't going to have it. Unable to discern the difference between the messenger of repentance and the Messiah, the people took to abusing Jesus as well. And what abuse they gave him. Look at what they called him. A glutton, a drunkard, a friend of the most disreputable people in our community. Imagine being characterized in this way. What it must have been like for the Lord to be maligned, verbally attacked, misrepresented, scorned, insulted, having his character assassinated. Jesus lived a hard life, hard in the sense of never getting any respite from this in his face, vicious cruelty of men.