

The Parables of Jesus

- The Children in the Market Place

(Matthew 11:16-17; Luke 7:31-32)

This parable is found in both the Gospel of Matthew (11:16, 17) and the Gospel of Luke (7:31, 32). Initially, the use of this parable and its explanation in the accounts of Matthew and Luke might not seem to “line up” time wise. However, if we look closely we

may find that they may very well be in the same time frame in both accounts.

In Luke's account, Jesus gave this parable while He was in the city of "Nain." We are told in Luke 7:12 that as he entered the city he came upon a funeral procession. We read of the account of Jesus raising a widow's son from the dead in Luke 7:12-16.

In Matthew's account we are not quite sure where Matthew places Jesus when He gives this parable. It is given at a time just after He had sent out the 12 disciples two by two to other areas to bring the Good News to others as described in Matthew 10. Jesus, it would seem is by Himself, although that would be highly unlikely. There were many others that followed and travelled with Him as well as the 12 that He chose. Here is where Luke 7:11 may be a clue to letting us know that it may be the same time frame.

Luke 7:11 tells us, *“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.”* A key hint is the phrase, *“...and many of His disciples went with Him.”* It does not specifically mention the 12 but it states *“many of His disciples.”* As mentioned previously, in Matthew's account, He had sent the 12 out. The 12 were not with Him when He went *“to teach and preach in their cities.”* (Matthew 11:1) The city of Nain may have been one of those *cities* that Jesus went to *“teach and preach”* without the 12 but He was with His *“many disciples”* and followers who were traveling with Him. Whichever the case may be we can be quite confident that in both accounts the purpose and meaning for why Jesus gave this parable are the same for the "Parable of the Children in the Market Place."

The constant fact found in both accounts is that John the Baptist was already imprisoned by Herod. While in prison, it would seem that John was getting reports from his disciples about Jesus. After getting one of these reports he sent his disciples to Jesus to specifically ask Him if He truly was the “one” they have been waiting for. In Luke's account we see that, when asked this question by John's disciples, Jesus seems to at first ignore their question. We see Him immediately go into the crowds and heal and deliver many that were ill, blind or were being affected by “evil spirits.” Jesus then comes back and tells John's disciples to go and tell John all that they have “seen and heard,” which ultimately meant that, yes, Jesus was the "One."

We must remember that at that time, there arose a concept or what we could call a “criteria” that would truly point to someone being the Messiah. The Jewish sages and religious leadership of that time came up with this “criteria” as being four signs or miracles that would confirm that someone was the Messiah. The four “Messianic miracles,” as they were called, would be – healing a leper; healing a man born blind; healing those that were “deaf and dumb;” and raising the dead after the third day. We must remember that this “criteria” is never found in the scriptures or the Law. It rose out of Jewish religious tradition. However, many who were sincerely looking and waiting for Messiah did “latch on” to this way of thinking. Up to this point Jesus was fulfilling many of these “criteria.” That is why He told John's disciples to go and tell John about what they had “seen and heard.” In other words, Jesus was telling John's disciples to go and tell John that He was meeting their “criteria” for being Messiah.

As John's disciples returned to give John their report, Jesus then proceeds to explain the ministry and purpose of John the Baptist and who he really was as the prophesied “forerunner” who came to prepare the way for the Messiah. (Matthew 11:7-15; Luke 7:24-28) In Matthew 11:10, Jesus quotes from Malachi 3:1 concerning “one” who will be the “messenger” who would “prepare the way” for Messiah. Other Jewish scriptures that point to John the Baptist is Isaiah 40:3 which states, *“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”* Jesus, in

Matthew 11:13-14, quotes from Malachi 4:5 concerning John coming in the same spirit (ministry) of Elijah. Malachi 4:5 prophetically speaks of one who will come prior to the coming of Messiah as it states, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD..."* So, in what ways was John the Baptist "fulfilling" these prophecies concerning the coming of Elijah and preparing the way for the Messiah (Jesus)?

As we know through the scriptures, John the Baptist preached in the wilderness (desert places) just as Elijah had. He dressed very similar to the way Elijah dressed (2Kings 1:8; Matthew 3:4). Both of them stood before kings because of their message and ministry (2Kings 18:17; Matthew 14:3). However, the most important similarity was that the message they both preached was the same – the message of repentance and turning back to the true things of God. The phrase in Malachi 4:5 – *"...And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."* – refers to a time of turning from sin which would prepare the way for a time of reconciliation, not just in the natural but most importantly between God, the Father and His children. If this was not spoken forth by God through His prophets and the plan of salvation was not brought forth, then the earth with all its inhabitants would be cursed and doomed to eternal separation from God.

John the Baptist preached repentance and obedience to his generation in preparation for them to be able to experience and receive God's plan of salvation (reconciliation) through Messiah (Jesus). This is telling us that "repentance" is the key to receiving Jesus and receiving the gift of God's salvation and being reconciled back unto Him. It is a heart that truly desires to "turn from" their sinful lifestyle, ways and attitude of heart and "turn towards" a loving God. The individual must recognize their dreadful state of sinfulness and that they are "dead" (separated from God) in their sin. They must recognize their state of being "poor in spirit." They must realize their need for God and turn to Him because He is the only one who can "save" them from being "smitten" by the curse of being eternally separated from God.

As Jesus was stating these things concerning John the Baptist, He was well aware that the Pharisees had problems with both Himself and with John. John was well liked and thought of as a "prophet" by the people. Jesus' ministry was growing and was also being well received by the people. The religious leaders were not pleased with both of them. Jesus and John exposed their true lack of understanding the scriptures as well as bringing into a greater light, their corruption. Based on what we are about to hear from Jesus through our parable, we can safely assume that the religious leaders - the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, etc. - were most likely defaming Jesus and John to the people because of the way they were living. Actually, John and Jesus were living opposite lifestyles, not in the spiritual lifestyle but in their everyday living.

John lived and ministered in the "wilderness/dessert" and ate locusts and wild honey. Jesus walked and lived in "moderate comfort" and ate well and preached and ministered in villages and cities. John did not "mingle" much with people while Jesus ate and sat with publicans and sinners. Their "ministry styles" were very different from each other. John was a "fire and brimstone" preacher of repentance while Jesus was more of a teacher and miracle worker. Their ministry styles and their lifestyles were totally opposite of each other, yet the Pharisees were not happy with either one of them and rejected both John and Jesus and their ministries. Jesus proceeds with this parable and addresses the hypocrisy of these religious leaders'.

The following is the "Parable of the Children in the Market Place" as found in both Matthew and Luke.

- Matthew 11:16, 17 - *"But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."*
- Luke 7:31, 32 - *"And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."*

Jesus uses this parable to express and expose the attitude of heart of the religious leaders who had problems with both Jesus and John the Baptist. The Pharisees and others were set in their own ways and ideas of what a "man of God," including the "Messiah," should act and look like. At least that is what they thought. The real fact of the matter was that they really could not know what a "man of God" or "prophet" or the "Messiah" should "look like" because God's prophets came from all walks of life.

The only true way to know was by the moral excellence of their character and by the words that they spoke. It had nothing to do with their "social status." The "man or woman of God" would speak as "the mouthpiece of God" in the situation that God placed them in. However, throughout Bible history it shows that the "self-righteous ones" did not accept the "prophets" and the "mighty men and women" that were sent by God for His purposes to His people. They continually rejected the message by rejecting the messenger. This was the same way the Pharisees were looking and thinking concerning both John and Jesus.

Jesus then proceeds to give the explanation of the parable in Luke 7:33, 34 - *"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"* We see in our parable that no matter what the "children" did to please the other children to get them to come and be with them, they would not respond. This lack of response was an action of being obstinate. It was a way of expressing their pride and arrogance against those calling out to them. In other words, this lack of response was a statement of their rejection of both ways of reaching out to them to come and join them.

John the Baptist came with a message and lived one type of "ministry lifestyle" to which the religious leaders rejected him. Jesus came with the same message but in a different "ministry lifestyle" and they rejected Him. Nothing would satisfy the "religious ones" because of their incorrect attitude of heart. In short, they were not just rejecting the messengers, they were really rejecting the message.

The religious leaders believed that it was they who were the proper "role model" of a Godly man of God. They thought that it was their "ministry role-model" that was what a true man that is sent by God should look like. Whether they realized it or not, in their own minds, they made the Messiah to be after their own "image and likeness." If the man did not fit or measure up to their ministry style then the man could not possibly be sent from God.

The religious leaders were in their own little world as the "wise, mature" religious leaders of the day. They could not grasp the possibility that anyone else could possibly have something useful to say nor did they really want to hear it. The interesting thing to take note of is that when the sect of the Pharisees originated (about 150 years earlier) their purpose was to get back to the purity of the scriptures with a yearning and desire for Messiah to come quickly. Yet, we see at this point in time, when the message of repentance and a call to return to a lifestyle of true obedience to the purity of the Word of God came through John and Jesus, they rejected it. They got so far from their original desires that when the true Messiah that they were originally seeking and yearning for was right in front of them they rejected Him.

Then Jesus makes this statement in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:35 - *"But wisdom is justified by her children."* What does Jesus mean by this statement and how does it relate to the parable and with what He was discussing? In trying to understand what Jesus was teaching we must first grasp the correct definition of what "wisdom" is. Wisdom is the ability to discern, judge and have specific insight of what is true, right, or lasting. It is the accumulation of knowledge **and having the ability to properly use that knowledge** in the most beneficial and efficient manner. The term "knowledge" on the other hand, is the "information and facts gained through experience, reasoning, or acquaintance." Knowledge can exist without wisdom, but wisdom does not exist without knowledge. One can be knowledgeable without being wise.

Wisdom entails having knowledge but most of all wisdom is satiated with and in truth. Wisdom is "self evident." It proves itself by itself because it is true, accurate and sure. It is one thing to know the facts and the truth. It is another thing to properly understand and apply that truth. This was the issue with the religious leaders of that time. They had knowledge of and knew the Law and the Word of God, however, they did not have the proper grasp of its application, both in their lives and in the lives of the people. They had knowledge of the Word of God but lacked the correct understanding and proper application of that Truth. Therefore they were lacking wisdom.

Jesus, in using the term, "Children of wisdom" was referring to those that truly desire and want to know "Truth." Truth can only be experienced and revealed to those who truly desire and want to know the truth. The attitude of heart of the "child of truth" is that they are always open to learning and properly applying that "Truth." They are not "closed minded."

However, this does not mean that they are naive either. These are people who do not think that they know everything. Nor do they think that they understand everything. They are always open to the Truth and they do not immediately shut out or shut down anything that may challenge their way of thinking. These are people who are teachable and are open to admitting that maybe they were seeing things or thinking in ways that may have been incorrect.

If a person "shuts out" the possibility of seeing things differently and never thinks that they may be seeing things incorrectly then their heart may become hardened to only one way of thinking - their own. This is just as dangerous as listening to anyone and everyone who comes with "winds and waves" of "new doctrine." There needs to be a balance in being open to what the Spirit is saying through His Word.

God's Word is so deep and vast that there is no one who can say they have it all and grasp it all. No one that is except Jesus who was, is and always will be the Living Word. Jesus was teaching that God's truth and wisdom will be known and received by a person who has a heart that is open to receive it. It is that person who "justifies," or in other words, will render, proclaim and exhibit God's wisdom in and through their lives, their character and manner of behavior. In doing so they therefore prove that the wisdom of God is true.

So what was Jesus teaching His disciples? What can we "glean" from what He was saying and teaching in these scriptures? First, through the "Parable of the Children in the Market Place" we learn that we are to never be hypocritical and put God and those that He uses to bring forth His Kingdom in a "pre-fabricated mold" of what we think a true vessel of the Lord should look like. We are to hear and discern from the message that is given and not the messenger. By the way, this works both ways. Just because an individual may look and sound genuine, it is the message that they bring and if that message is in line with the true Word of God.

Secondly, through having a better understanding of the phrase, "*But wisdom is justified of all her children,*" we as disciples of Jesus, should always desire to want to know the truth concerning God and His ways. We should never "lean on our own understanding" nor should we lean on another person's understanding of what God's ways and precepts are. They are clearly found within His Word and revealed to us through His Holy Spirit who now dwells within each and every born again child of God. It is the Holy Spirit who is the "Spirit of Truth." (John 14:17; John 15:26; John 16:13)

Are we hypocritical of other brothers and sisters because they do not measure up to our standards or preconceived ideas? Are we one of those who are leaning on man's understanding (our own or someone else's ideas) concerning God and His ways? Are you and I the "children of wisdom" who are seeking truth through the "Spirit of Truth?" These are the questions and truths that Jesus was confronting His listeners with, both then, as well as today.