

Sunday Jan. 10, 2021

Lesson 6: Jesus Announces Good News

Scripture: Luke 7: 18-28

Context:

Our series continues to focus on God's hope for humanity. For the season of Epiphany, we will look at "The Good News" found in scripture and the hope God gives us as found in God's Word. This week we will learn how our expectations of Jesus affect our life of faith.

This lesson on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday does not visit the baptism scene, but instead looks at an encounter between John and Jesus after the event. The lives of John the Baptist and Jesus have been intertwined even before birth. Earlier in the gospel of Luke and in the season of Advent, we learned of Mary's journey to her cousin Elizabeth with John leaping in his mother's womb in hearing of the forthcoming arrival of Jesus. From that point on, John is a herald of Jesus coming to the world.

Today's lesson is one of the few exchanges of conversation we have between Jesus and John. The first two chapters of Luke have contained parallel stories about their lives with both fulfilling prophecies made of their existence.¹ Yet there is little interaction between the two.

In chapter three, John preaches a stronger one is coming and yet doesn't mention Jesus.² Even the baptism scene in Luke is less direct than others as there are no words from John to Jesus or vice versa. Only in the Gospel of Matthew do we have John recognizing Jesus as greater and only in the Gospel of John does John reveal the Messiah is Jesus.³ Thus, the encounter today gives us a glimpse into several dynamics we have not considered such as John coming to know Jesus as the Messiah and the implications of his followers going over to Jesus to discover his true identity.

As Jesus does ministry, John sends two of his disciples to question him by what power he does these things. While others contend John asked of the identity because he had doubts or was upset at being relegated to prison due to preaching about Jesus, we will never know. Whatever his reasoning, the disciples of John go to Jesus and are amazed at his abilities as he heals people of various illnesses and evil spirits.

Once the messengers leave, Jesus discusses John and the role he has played in Jesus's ministry. As Jesus elevates him beyond royalty, he points to scripture as telling of his role. He then makes a statement about the greatness of John as well as the role of all those who are to be a part of God's kingdom. The crowds see both the elevation and humility to come with John's role as the one who welcomes and prepares the way for the Lord.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 98.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 98-99.

Application

In the past there has been much made about this passage as preachers and Christian educators have tried to unpack the relationship between Jesus and John. Was John depressed and attempting to figure out if he had wasted his life only to be imprisoned for someone who was not the Messiah? Was John prodding Jesus to get on it and show he was the Messiah so that the news would get out? Countless scenarios have been focused as the setting for why John's disciples approached Jesus to inquire of his identity.

I do not know if these questions are necessarily helpful though. We will never know John's motives nor can we assign them to him. Instead, we can look at the story and see how God was at work and Jesus was revealed as the Lord. And we also learn about the role of a prophet as well as our calling as followers of Jesus

At this point in the gospel we see Jesus fully coming into his role as the Messiah. He has been born, baptized, tempted, preached, and is now coming to full fruition as he becomes a healer. Every chapter in the gospel of Luke, and all the gospels for that matter, reveal how Jesus is at work in the lives of those around him. The puzzle pieces of the prophets are coming together and the messenger has done an excellent job in telling the truth of the one who is to come. As Jesus states: "Happy is anyone who doesn't stumble along the way because of me."

This phrase sticks out to me as I think of the various kinds of healing Jesus brought to those around him then and today. Because of him, people have found redemption and belonging. Those who were lost become found and those who are poor in different senses of the word are given hope for the future.

We still hear of those things happening today as we think of Jesus helping us to see new things and hearing new ways of being. We think of reading the Bible and either have our toes stepped on or experience a renewing we did not know we needed until we read it. We are reminded of our many blessings and the gifts, which have been given to us. Jesus continues to make a powerful difference in our lives.

The second thing we learn is how a prophet can do great work in preparing us for the Messiah. And yet the prophet also reminds us we have a role in following Jesus. We are not exempt from service as we continue to receive goodness from the Lord.

One of my alma maters is Vanderbilt University Divinity School, also known as "The School of the Prophets." The focus of receiving a degree from the school is not just the education though. The school also encouraged us to be ongoing learners seeking to speak truth to power, remembering how the prophets of old encouraged and critiqued the institutions and powers of the world to remember the rules of justice, mercy, and justice from God. It is a privilege to be a prophet, at times both dangerous and lonely, yet always an honor to receive such a call from God.

Every prophet knows they are not the one who is the revolutionary change in the world. The one who changes the world is Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ brings the redemption and hope, the people of God are called to step up to the roles and callings God has given them to follow.

Prophets like John the Baptist play an important role, yet the most important work is already being done in Jesus Christ. The role of the prophet is to remind the people of God of how the Spirit is still calling and at work and we best all get ready to follow Jesus into places and nooks of the world we have not ever dwelled.

How have you felt Jesus at work in your life? How has knowing our Lord changed you? Who are prophets you see at work today? What do they teach you about yourself and your walk with Christ? Do you feel you are called to be a prophet? What calling do you think God has placed on your life?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009