



“Dancing to Heaven’s Music”
Luke 7:24-35

Idea: Sinners must approach their sin from heaven’s perspective.

Intro: Singing, as an act of worship, fascinates me. Do you ever wonder why, as believers and followers of Christ, we lift our voices in bold and passionate singing, declaring “Christ be magnified?” Why do we sing, “Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee?” Why do we call one another to come and “drink of the water” and to “come and thirst no more?” We sing these words, and we join our voices together, in part, because we have seen that the Lord is good. We also, because of what we have seen in God, sing to declare that God’s way is higher and mightier than our way. Singing is our natural response to God’s greatness.

The Newsboys released a song last year called “Stand,” which presents this kind of declaration. Listen to the lyrics:

Who will I be
When trouble comes callin' for me?
Will I live the way I believe
When I'm backed up against the wall?
What kind of heart do I have in my chest?
Does it beat for my Savior or just for my flesh?
What will I do in the moment that everything falls?
I'm gonna stand in a world that's breaking
Stand for a truth unchanging
I'm not ashamed I've considered the cost
I'll stand right here at the foot of the cross, and stand
They can call me a fool
Or stubborn for following You
For trusting without any proof
But I've seen you here through it all

We sing as an expression of our desire to see the rhythm of our lives united with the rhythm of God’s character and voice. You see, many people might call themselves Christians, but the Christian life is not found in the one who wishes to dance to the beat of his or her own drum. No, the Christian life is evident in the person who longs to dance to heaven’s music.

The reverberating message throughout the Bible calls sinners to approach their sin from heaven’s perspective. It calls for sinners to find their rhythm in Jesus, and there is no better example of a life united to Christ and

dancing to heaven's tune than that of John the Baptist. This great prophet was not perfect. He had his own moment of doubt. As John languished at Machaerus, he became increasingly perplexed by the reports he heard about Jesus' ministry. They did not seem to fit together with the prophecies he had made about Jesus. John had declared that through Jesus there would be a great work of the Holy Spirit among humanity and judgment would fall upon those who had rejected God. At this point, however, the Romans still ruled the land. Their pawns like Herod and Herodias lived in comfort. The religious establishment were still as arrogant and self-righteous as ever. And John, who had spent his life in service to God, was suffering in prison and receiving no help from Jesus. While the Baptizer briefly wondered whether he had correctly understood Jesus' identity, he quickly realigned his perspective of Christ with what God had said. He synced himself with the rhythm of the Lord Jesus, and there is no other mention of John's faith wavering in the gospels.

In the next pericope we come to in Luke 7, the author describes Jesus' conversation with the crowd who had heard His interaction with John's disciples. The defense of John that Jesus presented to them holds him up as a great prophet, and it reminds us of the necessity of syncing our lives with Christ. We learn from it the importance of dancing to heaven's music.

Read Luke 7:24-35.

Inquiry: As I have pointed out, Luke 7 depicts five scenes that present five different windows by which we are to see who Jesus is. We also see through them how the people involved responded to Jesus. In the first scene, Jesus reacts to faith as the centurion believes on the Lord for the healing of his servant. We learn that faith is an exercise in reality as we rightly see ourselves and rightly see Christ. In the second scene, Jesus is moved with compassion towards a widow who is burying her son. In response the people stand in awe of His marvelous grace. In the third scene, the Lord receives a question from John the Baptist who is imprisoned and suffering with doubt. From it we learn that Jesus answers and is the answer in our doubt. In this fourth scene, we discover from Jesus' conversation with the crowd that sinners must approach their sin from heaven's perspective. Thankfully, the Lord does not leave us to discover or create our own path. We cannot dance to the beat of our own drum, but rather we must dance to heaven's music. Let's look at what this passage teaches us.

1. A Shining Example

Jesus' conversation with John's disciples (vs. 18-23) occurred amidst the crowd that was following Him. Undoubtedly, many of them overheard John's question and learned of his doubts. As a result, some of the people probably were prepared to question the authenticity of John's faith. This kind of response is typical. Jesus, on the other hand, wanted to prevent this conclusion of John's faith. Instead of the crowd viewing John as another casualty of doubt, Jesus held him up as a shining example of faithfulness and strength.

The Lord asked a series of questions designed to help the crowd remember what they were seeking when they went to hear John preach. He asked, "What did you go out to see (vs. 24)? Did you go out to see a reed shaken by the wind?" This was a metaphorical way of asking, "Did you go out to see something as insignificant as a reed being blown by the wind?" No, they went out to hear from a great prophet.

Next, Jesus asked, "Did you go out to see a cultured and sophisticated preacher?" While the first question was not answered, the Lord offered an answer for the second one (vs. 25). No, fancy people are not found in the desert. They are found in easy places of luxury. John the Baptist, however, was no prosperity preacher in a tailored suit. He was a rough, simple, and powerful preacher.

Then Jesus asked, "Did you go out to see a prophet?" He answered this third question with a surprising twist (vs. 26). "Yes, but John is more than a prophet." This is a puzzling claim. John was *"more than a*

prophet” because he fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3:1. John prepared the way for the Messiah. The angel Gabriel referred to Malachi’s prophecy when he announced John’s birth to his father Zechariah (1:17). Then Zechariah referenced it again in his song after John’s circumcision (1:76), and finally Jesus cites it (7:27).

Jesus also declared John to be the greatest human to ever walk the earth (vs. 28). This is an obvious comparison between John and the rest of humanity with Jesus being excluded. He was a man of great faith and faithfulness, yet the least in the Kingdom is greater than John. In saying this Jesus was pointing out that the Kingdom is superior to its announcer. As such, the people of the Kingdom are superior to its announcer. We have caught a glimpse of this over the last week as King Charles III assumed the throne in England. In the coming weeks, the king will be coronated. In that ceremony, a herald will declare Charles III king. It is an honor to hold the position of herald, but it is more important to be a member of the kingdom.

John the Baptist is a shining example of a disciple who follows Christ. He united the rhythm of his life to the rhythm of God’s character and voice. His example and Jesus’ praise of it highlight for us that it is a choice we ought to make in our own lives. This brings us to a second thing we learn.

2. Two Opposing Positions

Luke parenthetically records two opposite responses to Jesus and then offered some commentary on them.

Read Luke 7:29-34.

The common people and outcasts agreed with Jesus’ assessment of John and his ministry. On the other hand, the religious elite rejected God’s purpose in John’s ministry. They refused to receive John’s baptism. This outward spiritual action had become a spiritual continental divide in Israel. John’s baptism required confession and repentance of sin (Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3). Therefore, a person’s willingness or unwillingness to confess and repent made all the difference.

When the common people and outcasts heard John preach, *“You brood of vipers!”* (3:7) they recognized the danger they were under because of their sin. Their hearts were broken over their sin, so they hurried to confess and repent of their sin, symbolizing their death to sin in baptism. The Pharisees and lawyers refused to consider that John’s message had anything to do with them. They prided themselves on how well they kept the Law. In their estimation, they sufficiently followed God’s Law. They did not consider themselves to be sinless, but they were sure the Lord would overlook their shortcomings and reward their merits. As such, the Pharisees viewed John’s message of confession and repentance as fanatical and outlandish.

How could religious leaders so close to the Word of God completely miss its message? Let me offer four possibilities.

- **Familiarity**
There is a danger that comes with familiarity. It can create numbness, apathy, and a lack of attention. Spiritually, this happens when you start saying prayers rather than praying prayers. It is seen in reading your Bible just to read the Bible. Familiarity is on full display when you mindlessly sing songs rather than worship the Lord. It is offering lip-service to the preaching and teaching of God’s Word.

Familiarity causes one to be satisfied with going through religious motions. As followers of Christ, we must strive to be vigilant rather than familiar with the things of God.

- Shallowness

The Enemy never wants to see people think deeply about their spiritual condition. Likewise, he shudders at the thought of a person meditating on the greatness and beauty of God. He would rather people be a mile wide and an inch deep than deepen their understanding of sin and God.

As followers of Christ, we ought to strive to know Christ and the power of His resurrection (Phil 3:10, 14-15), not allowing ourselves to settle for a shallow faith.

- Self-righteousness

Shallow faith inevitably leads to a self-righteous perspective of one's life. It leaves people sitting in their seat hearing the preaching of God's Word but never moved to do anything in response to it.

As followers of Christ, we need to always ask, "How would Jesus have me respond to His Word?"

- Sin's grip

Perhaps the greatest danger we face is the sin we allow into our lives. It dulls our hearts to the voice of God and causes us to believe the lie that we can hold onto God with one hand and the sin in the other.

As followers of Christ, let's remember that we are called to put sin to death in our lives (Col 3:5).

The religious leaders suffered from these things. Their spiritual shallowness and self-righteousness prevented them from seeing their great need of forgiveness. Therefore, they refused to recognize the message of the gospel. It did not matter which preacher was preaching. The kind of presentation being offered was of no consequence. They rejected the joyful music of a wedding and the mournful music of a funeral (vs. 32). John came as an ascetic, symbolizing consecration to God by his clothing, diet, and insistence on repentance. In response the religious saw it as nothing more than evidence of a deranged mind. Jesus came "*eating and drinking*" He came in joy and inclusiveness, and they referred to Him as a glutton, drunkard, and sinner. Ultimately, they refused to dance to heaven's music because they preferred to make their own. Nothing pleases the heart that feels no sin.

There are two opposing positions when it comes to the gospel. There is no middle ground. The gate leading to destruction is wide and easy. The gate leading to life is narrow and hard (Matt 7:13-14). Jesus tells us that few find the gate that leads to life. Thankfully some do find it, which leads us to final thing we learn.

3. Validation in the Heart

Yet wisdom is justified by all her children. – Luke 7:35

John the Baptist experienced a momentary doubt about God's purpose in his life and the Person of Jesus. We too might have questions when life does not seem to play out the way we envisioned it. However, when believers faith into Jesus and choose to dance to heaven's music rather than their own, their conviction is validated. Today, we have the privilege of reading the stories in the Bible that depict how the Holy Spirit has worked mightily in the lives of Christ-followers. We get to read and believe them, and then witness how the Lord does similar things in our lives. We get to read how Saul came to faith in Jesus. He was a persecutor who literally could not see that Jesus was in fact Lord and Savior, but then on the Damascus Road, he heard the voice of Jesus and later his eyes were opened to see Him (Acts 9).

Then we think about our own journey to faith and how the Lord has opened our eyes to the truth of the gospel. We read of John the Baptist and how he was misunderstood and persecuted. Then we look at our own struggle as a Christian. Just as the Lord sustained John, we too experience His power sustaining us when we feel powerless and defeated.

How do we feel this validation? We get it from God's Word as we read, meditate, and apply it to our lives. We get it as we align our lives to the Lord's purposes. The Holy Spirit validates God's work as we choose to dance to heaven's music rather than our own. In this divine wisdom is proved right, which becomes a powerful testimony to a watching world.

Conclusion: John united the rhythm of his life with the rhythm of God's character and voice. He could have created his own music. He could have danced to the beat of his own drum. Many people do. In fact, everyone does whatever they want to do. They run from God and live out their brokenness. After running for so long and becoming worn out, some do realize the rhythm of their life is off, so they begin to look for something to fix the broken rhythm. The Bible tells us they are looking for Someone rather than something.

My testimony is just like that, and if you know Christ as Lord and Savior, then yours is too. My life was beating to the wrong drum until my eyes were opened to the beauty of Christ and the power of the gospel. On April 24, 1997, I turned my life over to Jesus and began to dance to heaven's music. There have been moments along the way when I have gotten out of step, but the Lord has been faithful to dance with me.

As we prepare ourselves for the Summit Conference that begins next Sunday, this is a timely message for us. There are only two options when it comes to the gospel. There is the choice to follow or reject Christ. There is no middle ground. Have you turned from your sin to Christ? If not, then why not do so today? As a Christian, have you gotten out of sync with the Lord? Why not resync with Him today?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?