

LUKE 7:18-35  
FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS

**The Preacher's dilemma:**

If his sermon lasts a few minutes longer than usual: "he sends us to sleep."

If it is short: "he hasn't bothered."

If he raises his voice: "He's shouting."

If he speaks normally: "You can't understand a thing."

If he's away: "He's always on the road!"

If he stays at home: "He's a stick-in-the-mud!"

If he out visiting: "He's never at home."

If he's in the manse: "he never visits his parishioners."

If he talks finance: "He's too fond of money"

If he doesn't: "Nobody knows what he 's up to."

If he organizes a church fete: "he wears everybody out."

If he doesn't: "the parish is dead"

If he takes time with people: "He goes on and on"

If he is brief: "he never listens."

If he redecorates the Church: "He's spending too much money."

If he doesn't: "He's letting everything go!"

If he's young: "He lacks experience."

If he is old: "he ought to retire."

And if he dies? ... Well, of course: "nobody could ever take his place!"

You realise when you read something like this that there are situations where you can never win! In my job, there will always be some people who are happy and pleased with what you do and others who will be unhappy and displeased. At the very outset of my ministry, a senior minister, now dead, took me aside and said to me "You know that you will never please everybody! Jesus didn't so you have no chance!" Still we like to think that we can, but it's just not possible. It is true that Jesus didn't please everybody and that's what we will reflect upon today in Luke 7.

Even John was puzzled, it would seem. He had come telling world that there was One coming who would bring God's judgement to the world and the axe was already at the root of the tree. Then Jesus came and none of that happened; Jesus came proclaiming that God is King and healing people and helping others and John was puzzled. So he sent some of his followers, his friends to Jesus with the question: "Are you..." (7:20) 'Are you the Messiah? Or is there someone else who is coming? Have I got this right or wrong?' Jesus wasn't quite what John had expected, doing His work in way that was different from the mission even John had envisaged for the Messiah. Jesus didn't give a straight answer; it was too dangerous because Herod would have heard and threatened Jesus life if He had come straight out and declared Himself Messiah and King!

So He answers in a different way: "Go back..." (7:22f) What had they seen? Well, they had seen Jesus do all of these things, or at least a sample of them; the blind receive sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk etc etc. All of these had connections with the Messiah in the Old Testament; these were all promised

in the Old Testament as the work that the Messiah would do for His needy people. 'Tell John what you see and he will understand!' These were Jesus' credentials. When the gasman comes to the door to read the meter, maybe it is a new meter reader that you've never seen before, what we should do if we're at all uncomfortable, is to ask for his card. He will have a card with his photo on it and his name and the phone number of the gas board or the meter reading company and you can phone and confirm that he is who he says he is. These are his credentials, the things that lead us to believe and trust that he is who he says he is. Jesus' preaching, His healings and the other things that He points to – these are His credentials; this is His accreditation from God. For people who had eyes to see, they knew that Jesus had come from God as the Messiah; only the Messiah could do what Jesus did. Jesus didn't say as much, but His credentials pointed people in that direction. So John is content.

There are a couple of these that perhaps John's followers saw or heard about: a Roman soldier, a centurion, was living in Capernaum and had a servant who was ill; he didn't dare come to Jesus on his own, but asked some of the local elders to talk to Jesus for him and ask Jesus to heal servant. "*Say the...*" (7:7) which of course Jesus did and the servant was healed. Jesus ends that story by saying to crowd "*I tell you...*" (7:10) Here was a Roman soldier more willing to show faith in Jesus than many of the Jews, Jesus' own people. The second took place in a town called Nain when Jesus came across a funeral of the son of a widow. "*When the...*" (7:13) He gave her son back to her, the dead are raised. "He brings salvation not only into the realm of disease, but into that of death itself." (Wilcock)

We might think that the person who could do all of this and who would gladly help out anyone in need would be universally popular. I thought I knew a quote from Abraham Lincoln that fitted here quite well and was disappointed when it was different; so let me misquote Lincoln. He used the notion of 'fooling the people' but I have changed it: "You can please all of the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot please all of the people all of the time." We have already seen, on our journey through Luke, that some people were smarting at Jesus because He healed on the wrong day of week, or He healed the wrong kind of people, or He spoke about forgiving people as He healed them in other ways. That rankled with some; you're not supposed to do that!

"How did you react to John?" – that became the opportunity to reflect on people's reactions to both John and to Jesus Himself. "*What did...*" (7:24) a reed swayed by the wind? Someone who would bend to public opinion, tell you what you want to hear? Someone wearing fine clothes? You find men dressed that way in palaces, not in the desert. A prophet? Yes and more than that; one who would prepare the way for the coming King. John had this great role to play in God's work in the world, but still not everyone loved him; he was loved by some and hated by others. That was also true of Jesus. Jesus quotes a children's song: "*We played...*" (7:32) John was too austere – they wanted a cheerful message, but John fasted and spoke about sin and repentance; people didn't like that. Then Jesus came along and He was

exactly the opposite, the life and soul of party and they didn't like Him for that very reason: people expected some serious and solemn discussion about religion and morals and yet Jesus talked about grace and salvation and went to tea with all kinds of people. The people who saw both John and Jesus would not recognise the wisdom of God at work in both ministries; they would not see that God was at work in and through both men to build His kingdom; they were blinded by their preconceived ideas and notions and expectations.

There are 2 things for us to learn from this:

**1)our faith stands on Jesus' credentials:** Hebrews chapter 11 is the closest the Bible ever gets to giving a definition of faith: "*Faith is...*" (11:1) Then it goes on to list some of the people who have lived by faith and by these stories shows us what faith is like, depending on God, trusting God whom we cannot see and learning to trust His promises. It ends that whole reflection on faith by saying "*Since we...*" (12:1f) We have all these stories of faith, all these people who can testify that God is faithful, then we see Jesus and all that He has done and so we believe; faith is founded on Jesus; "*let us...*" (12:2)

Often, sceptical people will describe that kind of faith as 'blind'. We can't see God, so any kind of faith in someone we can't see is 'blind faith'. In fact, faith is never blind if it is really faith. Christian faith is always a reaction and response to Jesus and to what we read of Jesus and see of Him in the gospels. We see Jesus at work, we see the love and compassion in His heart, see His power at work to heal, we see Him on a cross and hear the good news of His resurrection, then we respond: 'this is someone that I can believe in! This Jesus is someone who can do me good; I will believe.' That is not blind faith; that is faith based on the evidence, based on the witness of others, based on His credentials. So we react and respond; faith is that kind of reaction and response.

**2)watch out for preconceived ideas of Jesus:** everyone comes with some kind of preconceived idea of Jesus: 'that boring church person', 'His name is a swear-word', 'gentle Jesus meek and mild', 'sound moral teacher'. There are two dangers: 1)He will not fit the mould, He will blow these expectations apart. 2)our preconceived ideas get in the way of faith – because Jesus is not quite what we expect, or not at all what we expect, we don't listen, we don't respond at all. Because He doesn't fit the mould we expect Him to fit, we reject out of hand all that Jesus really stands for and does, all that He would do for us and all that He would give. "He didn't answer my one prayer that I made in way I wanted it, so I'll never believe in Him again!" – an expectation that Jesus is like some kind of lucky charm figure to dance to our tune. "He promised me joy and happiness, but my life has been so hard!" – an expectation that Jesus will prevent us from having to face hard things. There might be other preconceived ideas of Jesus that we have had or others around us have. Jesus fits none of them; He is always more, always bigger. We must not allow our preconceived ideas of Jesus to get in the way of faith, but trust Him for all that He is and all that He has done for us.

Tell the stories of Jesus to your friends, to people you know, to your family, to others; tell these stories easily and confidently so that they might believe. In

Church we will keep on telling these stories of Jesus so that you will hear them and believe and so that others can hear them and believe. Fix your eyes on Jesus! He is our great reason to believe: the great things He has done, the things to which John's friends were pointed, and we can add in His death and resurrection – all of these are Jesus' credentials, the reasons for us to believe Him. Fix your eyes on Jesus and respond to Him in faith and let nothing move you. Don't let your preconceived ideas of what you once thought Jesus would be, or things that you want Jesus to be – don't let these preconceived ideas get in the way of faith. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Luke is part of that cloud of witnesses that stands all around us, telling us the stories of Jesus; read them and let them feed your faith to make that faith stronger, deeper. Fix your eyes on Jesus.