

Luke 7 • (Part 1): 1-30 • Ministry at Capernaum

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

We're in Luke chapter 7, beginning at verse 1. It says,

“After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.”

⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” ¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.” (ESV)

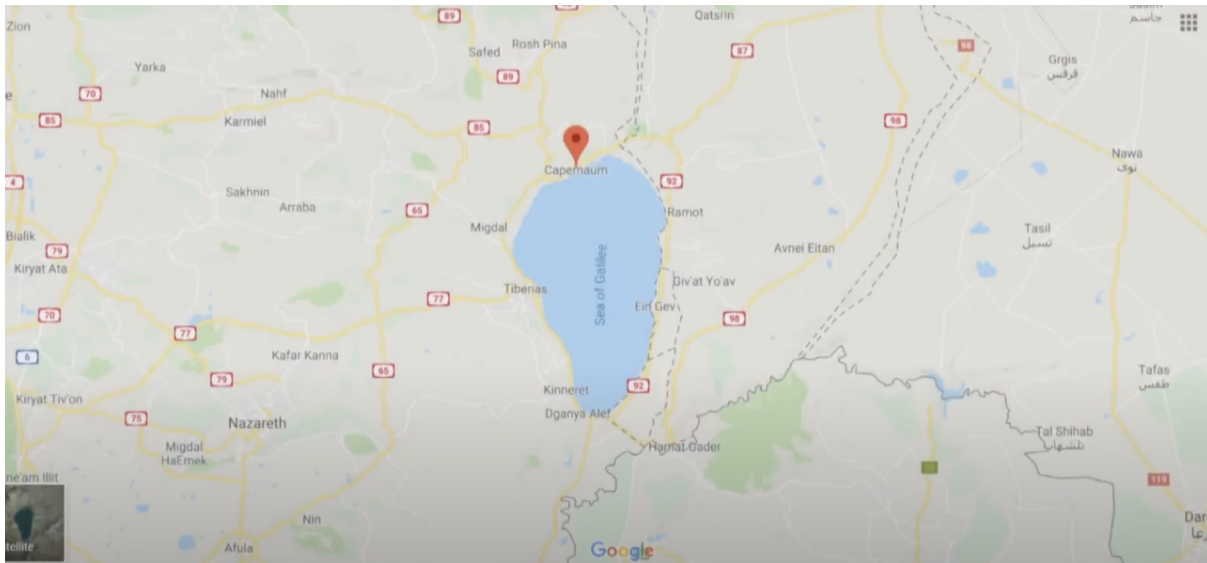
Let's pause there please for a moment and let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we open our hearts to You today that you would speak to us through Your Word, and that You would make alive this Word to us in such a way that we would be able to lay hold of it. First of all in our understanding and spiritual insight, and then Father God we pray for the strength to be able to apply Your Word in every way.

Lord, I'm so thankful as I get up here to teach this morning that it's Your Holy Spirit who makes the Word come to life in people's hearts and minds, and it's not mine. I thank You, Lord, that you are the one who is able to apply Your Word to every single person, every single heart and every single situation.

You're so good, so gracious. We ask You to do that today. May we be hearers and then also doers of the Word. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

After Jesus spoke, preached if you will, what is called the Sermon on the Plain, which took up the majority of the last chapter that we looked at, we're told here that He entered the city of Capernaum, and by the way, I want to show you just in case you maybe need to see it or would like to see it I have a this is actually a current map that I'd like to put on here of the Sea of Galilee.



And you can see where the little pin marker there is on the top where Capernaum was, and is, located. It's really cool when you think about... We're reading things here, that were a couple of thousand years old in terms of their age, and yet the cities are still there. In some places they've been moved slightly off, distant. But modern-day Capernaum is built right there where ancient Capernaum was, and what's interesting is they dug down and found a 4th century synagogue, and beneath that, below that, they found a first century synagogue right there in Capernaum which would have been the one that this centurion built or had built.

We don't know if he actually built it. He probably gave the money to have it built. But either way the very synagogue that they're talking about here, and the fact the one that Jesus actually preached in, has been unearthed in Capernaum. You can go there; you can see it. It's one thing I love about the Bible, we're not reading about things that like, well, sure, it would be nice if we could find that. It's there, very, very cool. By the way, the city of Capernaum had about 1,500 people, as far as a population, back during the time of Jesus, it was also considered to be Peter's home.

We're told that as Jesus walked through the city, He was eventually approached by a group of Jews who came on behalf of a Roman centurion. That's a strange sort of a situation because the Romans were considered to be the enemy who are now in control of Israel because militarily, they had taken that control. But this man had really garnered the affection of the people. He was a Godly man. He was a man who loved Israel, and he was a man who, as we saw here, helped to build the synagogue there in Capernaum, and this centurion had a servant whom he cared about greatly.

The servant was ill, very near death, he feared, and so he sent messengers when he heard that the Lord was in the area, to ask the Lord to heal his servant. Jesus agreed to go with them, but we're told that when they had gotten close to the centurion's home, he sent another messenger to tell Jesus not to trouble Himself, but just to give the Word, and he knew. He knew that he knew, that was all it would take, and his servant would be healed, and he even explained how he knew.

In verse 8, if you look with me again in your Bible, this is where he describes the hierarchy of authority. He says, "*I'm a man, I'm a man under authority.*" In other words, I got people telling me what to do, and I've got people under me, and he explains it.

He says, I say to one of my servants or one of the officers or soldiers underneath my control, hey, go do this and they go do it, and I don't have to follow up on them. This guy's not a micromanager. He's like, I don't have to follow up and see that the thing got done. I know that it got done because they know that I have the authority to give that command. People give me commands, and they don't have to follow up. I do what I'm told because I have people in authority over me.

And so, here he's describing to Jesus the hierarchy of authority which was set up in the Roman military at that time, and he used that as an illustration to describe the authority of Jesus. And he basically is saying here, I understand that you're a man of authority. I get it. And I know that you don't have to physically come to my house. All you got to do is give the word and it's done. So, he said, give the word, and Jesus hears this response. Notice here how He reacts.

In verse 9, it says, "*When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and he turned to the crowd that was following along (which, you know, it was probably huge, and he said) I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.*" It's a pretty amazing story. Luke tells us Jesus marveled, just in case you wanted to know what it takes to make God marvel. Now you know it takes faith.

Or the lack of it. In fact, Mark's Gospel gives us that side of it. Let me put this on the screen for you. Mark chapter 6. Look at this.

Mark 6:4-6a (ESV)

And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief....

And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he (look at this) marveled because of their unbelief....

It's interesting in all of the Gospel accounts, we only have these records of Jesus marveling at either faith, or lack of it. That's what He marveled at. He was amazed. He was amazed at faith.

He was amazed at the lack of faith, and it makes us aware of just how important faith is, that Jesus would marvel at it, or the lack of it. It really can't be overstated.

I've told you guys that back when I was in my 20s, and just starting in the ministry, seems like that was a long time ago. It was about 150 years ago. I was surrounded by a group of people who had gotten into the faith movement. And some of you might remember that this was back in the early 80s. Like 81, 82. How many of you were alive back then? Let me just see your hands. Thank you. It makes me feel a lot better, appreciate that. And some people are going no, no, no.

Anyway, these people had really gotten caught up in what we referred to as the hyper-faith movement. And I felt that a lot of what they were espousing as it related to faith was not only unbiblical, but potentially dangerous. And I was pretty new in the Lord myself, but I just had a really bad vibe about what these people had embraced and so, I overreacted. You ever done that?

I overreacted for like a lot of years, and my overreaction essentially caused me to look at faith as a relatively unimportant thing. Because these people had blown it up into something that was unbiblical I actually overreacted and began to treat it in a way that was unbiblical as well, and frankly, just as dangerous as they. And that was a challenging thing, but as I began to study the Gospels more, and in fact, it was really when I came here, I was in my early thirties

when I came here to start teaching or pastoring this church, and I started teaching through the Gospels and I started seeing how much Jesus talked about faith.

I was like, man, Jesus, what, why are You talking about faith so much? Don't you know, this is dangerous. I mean, I was like trying to advise Him. It's like, if I were You, I'd back off a little on the faith lingo, because let me tell you something, some people have really gotten ahold of this and they've gotten weird, like big time, weird.

Jesus never has to answer for anything to me but as I kept teaching through the Word, I'm just faith, faith, faith, faith. In fact, when we get to the end of this chapter, which we won't do today, but when we get to the very end of this chapter, Jesus is going to say to a woman, your faith has saved you.

And I remember I used to read statements like that and go, oh, you shouldn't have said that. Or He would say things like, “*your faith has made you well,*” and I'd read that and I'd go, yeah, see, there you go. Kenneth Copeland is going to get a hold of that one, right, and he's going to go wacko.

And I was just at odds with the Lord and His Word until I began to realize over time that faith is, in fact, a critical element of our walk with the Lord and I was the one who needed to get back on track as it relates to understanding biblical faith. Now, listen, I still believe that the word faith movement was and is dangerous. I still believe that.

I also believe that my overreaction was dangerous because I was undermining the role of faith, just as much as they were, perhaps, building it up into something beyond what the Bible has to say. I also noticed how often the apostle Paul talked about the topic of faith, and I found out that he was incredibly concerned about people's faith.

When he would write them letters he was always trying to take their spiritual temperature to find out how their faith was doing, and I want to show you a couple of quick examples. The first few are from Romans. Let me just barrel through these. Romans 1:8,

Romans 1:8 (ESV)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because (you've got a really big church and comfortable chairs. Doesn't say that he says, because) your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

Romans 3:21-22,

Romans 3:21-22 (ESV)

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...

Romans 5:1,

Romans 5:1 (ESV)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Colossians 2:5

Colossians 2:5 (ESV)

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

And then 1 Thessalonians 3,

1 Thessalonians 3:5-7 (ESV)

...when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

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I mean, I haven't even scratched the surface of how the topic of faith is repeated over and over and over again as a critical element, and the apostle talking again and again about the quality of your faith, the strength of your faith, the vitality of your faith. I have come to learn as a pastor, it's everything. It's everything.

The righteous shall live by faith, it says in Habakkuk, right? When I see that people aren't doing very well from a pastoral standpoint, and they're talking about their life, I can practically see now that they're driving on like, four flat tires of faith and they're wondering why they're not making any headway.

And I'm realizing now that what they need more than anything is to be built up in their faith because, I don't care what kind of problems you've got. I don't care if you've got marriage problems, or if you've got financial problems, or if you've got family issues, or parenting issues, or you've got sin issues where you're struggling with some sort of a, whatever, doesn't matter what it is. I'm telling you right now, you build up your faith and you are down the road to finding healing and victory in that area. Build up your faith. Build up your faith in the Word.

I am now prescribing the Word of God to people because I know that it's going to build up their faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, right? So how are we going to get built up in our faith? By drawing close, bathing our hearts in the Word of God. I literally prescribe it like a doctor. I consider myself a spiritual practitioner in that sense. Somebody comes in for counseling and I'm like, all right, here's the deal. And I'm just going to, I'm going to say, all right, here's what I want you to do.

I want you to study through the Book of John and I want you to take the next month, and I want you to go through the book of John from beginning to end and then we're going to get back together and we'll talk about what you've learned, and it's incredible what happens. I get notes from people about halfway through it, and they're like, I can't believe how my faith is being built up, and I've seen things in a completely different light, and what I thought was the problem really isn't the problem, and God is showing me this, and God is opening my heart to that. And it's, and I just sit back and go, that is so cool.

Faith is so incredibly important. My question to you is how's your faith doing? How's your faith doing? If we're struggling, it's probably a direct result of our faith not being that strong, and there are things that we can do to build up our faith. But the most critical element is being in the Word in such a way that you're receiving. Can I just say very quickly here, that just because you're in the Word, doesn't mean your faith is being built up. Let me explain that, and please don't think I'm saying anything negative about the Word.

I have learned over the years that people have very different ways of embracing and learning and hearing the Word of God. And people ask me all the time what's the best way to study the Bible? And I go, I don't know. It's whatever it is for you because see not everybody's the same, and we do that. We try to compare ourselves with other people and how they study the Word of God, and it may not work for us, because we may be auditory learners, or we may be visual learners, or what have you. And I'm sitting here trying to study the Bible like my brother or my wife or whatever studies the Bible, and I'm just going.

And then people get discouraged, they're like, I just don't get it, I'm just not receiving like you receive. Why do you get all excited about the Word and I'm just like, yawn, sort of a thing. I mean, there can be some other elements behind that as well, but the point is, learning to figure out how you best receive the Word is really critical in your life, and you've got to figure out what works for you. How do you hear the Word best? How do you receive the Word best? Is it listening to the Bible? Is it listening as someone reads it? Is it listening to a teacher basically expound the Word of God? Is that the way you learn the best?

Then don't just do it on Sunday. We've got all 66 books of the Bible on our website, and I've been prescribing them lately. I've been telling people, and I used to apologize for this. Like, I thought I was tooting my own horn, but it's not my horn. It's God's horn. I'm like, okay, pick a book on our website and go through it in the next month. Just take the month and you're going to go through this book of the Bible. I want you to listen to one message every day. And it's

just, it's amazing what's happening. People are, yeah, the lights are coming on and people's faith is being built up.

You've got to figure out what works for you. Okay. You might be one of those people that just reading through the Bible just does it for you. Then great. My wife reads through the Bible every year and I used to be really convicted by that and I was like, yeah, I need to do that too. It didn't work for me the way it works for her. I have to have a different approach. Reading large sections of Scripture, I get lost and I'm very distractible. Anybody else relate to that? Yeah. I mean, I read like a paragraph and then by the time I'm in the second paragraph, I'm thinking about the football game.

And I go back, I've got to go back and read it again and stuff. And so, I had to find different methods of studying and getting into the Word of God that were going to work for me to build up my faith, right? Don't pattern yourself after other people. Do what works for you. Just ask yourself the question, where do I seem to learn or lay hold of the Word best? Then do that. Every day. Okay? Let's keep going.

Verse 11. *“Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, (And by the way, that's not how it's pronounced. It's na-eeen. But then again, we're Americans and we mispronounce everything. I just wanted to let you know why) and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”*

¹⁴ “Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized them all, (I bet) and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” (They have no idea) ¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.”

I'll have you pause there once again. Luke tells us here about an outstanding miracle in this section of verses where Jesus raises a dead man to life, but it's more than that. And if you look beneath the surface, you'll see that it's actually more than just, you think, well, what's more than raising a dead guy? That's pretty big stuff. Well, yeah, it is, but I want you to notice that Luke makes three comments that are very critical for you and I to really understand what's happening in this story.

The first two comments are in verse 12. If you look with me there again, first of all, Luke tells us that she was a widow. What does that mean? It means her husband had passed away. Okay?

Now, secondly, he also tells us in that same verse that the man who had died, was her son, and not just her son, her only son. Now, those are two very important facts because see, we forget when we're reading stories like this, how vulnerable women were in that society. Very vulnerable.

If your husband and your sons preceded you in death, a woman could easily be left destitute unless she had some friendly relative who would take her in and feed her, and clothe her, and take care of her. But often women truly became destitute when they were widows and had no children to support them.

There's a third comment here that's very interesting to note as well that Luke tells us, and that is that Jesus had compassion. Jesus had compassion on this woman, and when you look at it, you might just say to yourself, well, yeah He had compassion on her because her son had died, but it was more than that. Her livelihood, her ability to live, her survival had been taken away. And yeah, He had compassion over the fact that she had lost her son, but He also had compassion on the woman who was alive in the sense that He wanted her to continue to live.

And so, Jesus raised the young man, well, we don't know his age. Raised the man back to life and this funeral service became something other than a funeral. By the way, that's an interesting side note. Do you know that in the Gospel accounts, whenever Jesus was found at or near a funeral or among people who were mourning the dead something always extraordinary happened.

In fact, there's a humorous story about D. L. Moody. Some of you may know who he was. Great preacher. But he was asked in his earlier years to do a funeral and so, he decided to look through the Gospels to see how Jesus preached at funerals.

He couldn't find anything because every funeral Jesus went to, it stopped being a funeral because He raised the person from the dead, and it's like man, with this Jesus guy around, you can't even get a good funeral off the ground. It's like sort of, I can only imagine funeral directors back, saying, oh, Jesus is in town, we're out of business. This guy's going to raise up everybody we were going to plant, sort of a thing, but anyway, ruining their business. We laugh about that a little bit, but there's a reason behind the fact that Jesus responded that way to death, and the reason is very significant.

It's because He came to ultimately overturn death. We forget that sometimes. We think of the cross as what saves us from our sins so that we can go to heaven, but the fact of the matter is the cross of Christ was the first step in God's plan to restore His creation to its original design. We forget that. And by the way, I don't care what you've heard. God's original design did not include death. Death is an intrusion in God's original creative order, and He did not create it. It came about through sin. Let me show you this on the screen. Romans chapter five.

Romans 5:12 (NIV)

...just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men because all sinned...

...just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all men because all sinned...

And that tells us right there, this was not part of God's original design. Death was not part of what He intended. Can you imagine a God who creates death? How fun would that be? I'm going to create these people and then I'm going to create them to die. I mean, that's pretty morbid when you stop and think about it. Listen, He is the God of life. He literally has life in Himself. He is life. And when He created this universe, there was no death. Death came about through sin, but God promised, He'd been promising for a long time, that He was going to overturn that particular element of our existence. Let me show you a passage that was written down about well, 700 years or so before Christ was born. It says,

Isaiah 25:7-8 (ESV)

He will swallow up on this mountain, the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people, he will take away from the earth. For the LORD has spoken.

(And) He will swallow up on this mountain, the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. (And in case you don't know what he's talking about, he makes it very clear) He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people, he will take away from the earth. For the LORD has spoken.

Did you notice what the Lord speaks and calls death in this passage? I mean, other than the fact that He refers to it symbolically as a covering and a veil and stuff like that, toward the end of that passage, He calls it the reproach of His people. Death is a reproach. It's not something God created. It's something man brought into the equation through sin and disobedience. It's a reproach. Right. It's a reproach on us. It's on us. And we mourn over the reality and the existence of death, but we rejoice that God has a plan. Let me show you what the Apostle Paul has to say from First Corinthians 15. He says,

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 (ESV)

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the perishable (and he's talking about our earthly bodies as they exist right now) puts on the imperishable, (now he's talking about our new heavenly bodies we will receive) and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul rejoices that even though death exists, God has a plan to overturn it, and He gives us that victory through Jesus Christ, His Son. Verse 18, *"the disciples of John reported all these things to him..."*

Now you've got to remember, John the Baptist is now sitting in prison. He's been arrested by Herod, and his disciples are obviously coming back and forth between the prison and what's going on with the ministry of Jesus, and they're reporting to him what they're seeing and hearing. It says

"¹⁹ and John calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ²⁰ And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" ²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

²² And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the

deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” ²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Stop there for just a moment here, please. John the Baptist was the man who, during his ministry of baptism, was the one who would see Jesus walking by, and he would say, behold, the Lamb of God. And his disciples, in fact, were so amazed by that some of them left John and started following Jesus.

So, here's John the Baptist, during his time of ministry, openly, publicly, declaring, behold, the Lamb of God. He was saying more than just this is the Messiah. This is the sacrificial Lamb of God who will die for the sins of the world. But things have changed now.

Now he's in prison. And a prison cell has a way of changing your perspective, changing how you think. In fact, in prison, it's even possible for discouragement and doubt to enter in, and John the Baptist was no different than you and I. He was a man. He was a man subject to all of the challenges, difficulties, temptations and discouragements. that you and I are subject to, and so, he sent some of his followers to Jesus to ask a simple question. Are you the One or should we wait for another? And by asking, by the way, are you the One, they're saying? Are you the Messiah?

Again, John had had no doubts earlier, but now confusion, doubt had begun to set in. Was Jesus really the deliverer that God had chosen, or should they look for someone else to fulfill the role? People don't miss how Jesus responds to John's disciples.

Look at verse 22 with me once again, please. In your Bible, it says, “*And He answered them. Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind received their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.*”

What is Jesus doing? Is Jesus telling the disciples of John to go back and tell them what they've experienced so that John's faith would be based on experience? You know why I'm asking that question? Because there's a lot of Christians today whose faith rests on experience. Is that what Jesus doing? It sounds like what He's doing, because He's saying, well go back and tell John what you've experienced. What did you see while you were here and so forth. But actually, that's not what Jesus is doing at all.

He's actually sending back Word to John that is directly consistent with what the Word of God had prophesied about what the Messiah would do when He came. I want to show you these on the screen from Isaiah chapter 35.

Isaiah 35:5-6 (ESV)

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...

And then Isaiah 61:1, a passage that Jesus even read in a synagogue.

Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me (to do what?) to bring good news to the poor; He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

You know what those passages are? They're messianic prophecies. So, what is Jesus doing to the disciples of John? What's He's telling them to go back and tell John? He's saying, John knows the Bible. Tell him what you saw and have him compare it with what he knows in the Word of God to be true of what Messiah will do and let him choose.

What's interesting about this is that rather than Jesus just saying to the disciples of John, yeah, go back and tell him I'm the one dudes to get out of here. Instead, He points to the Word.

He points to the Scripture and He demands that even in prison, John exercise his faith in the living Word of God. I find that just really incredible. It's like, I feel bad for John. I know that his ministry is over, and Jesus probably knew what awaited John. He was going to be beheaded in that prison. But you know what? He still needs to exercise faith.

And so, here's what we're going to do boys. John knows the Word of God. He quoted from the Word of God concerning his own ministry. He knew the prophecies of Isaiah. He knew which ones applied to himself, and he knew which ones applied to the Messiah.

He knew what Messiah was supposed to come do, and it was all the things Jesus was doing, and so Jesus says, go back and tell John, here's what I'm doing. There you go. He needs to exercise faith just like you, and me. And then He begins to ask these questions after the disciples of John depart.

Verse 24. He says, *“What did you go out in the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind? (In other words, did you find a man out there who was bending to public opinion? No, that wasn't John. That's why he was in prison. He says) “well, then what did you go out to see, a man dressed in soft clothing?”*

No. He wore camel's hair. I can't imagine what camel's hair feels like, let alone smells like, but, he had this rough kind of clothing. He says, well, then what did you go out to see?

Verse 26. *“A prophet, (and then Jesus affirms that John is the biblical fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy, which He quotes there in verse 27, saying) Behold, I send my messenger before you.*

So that is a fulfillment, Jesus says. John's ministry is a fulfillment of what Malachi prophesied. And then he makes this statement. Look at verse 28. *“I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John.”*

Now that speaks of John's calling out of all the Old Testament prophets out of all the heroes of the Old Testament, there's nobody who's greater than John the Baptist.

But then he adds this at the end of verse 28. “*yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is Greater than John.*” And we read that we go, what is that all about? Well, basically Jesus is comparing the relative blessings that are connected to the two Covenants that are extended to God's people because you see John was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and as such, he was connected to the Old Testament.

And although there were wonderful blessings and promises that were contained in the Old Testament, it doesn't even begin to hold a candle to the promises and the blessings of the New Covenant, because Israel, as we've said many times, had a physical covenant with God. You and I, through Christ, have a spiritual covenant with Him connected to what He did on the cross, His subsequent resurrection from the dead, and the superiority of the Covenant that we are under, related to, or compared to, the Covenant that Israel was under, is one of the great themes of the Book of Hebrews.

The writer of that book goes to great pains to talk about the superiority of the Covenant that you and I are under versus that of the Old Testament. Let me show you from Hebrews chapter 8 and 9. It says,

Hebrews 8:6; 9:15 (ESV)

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance...

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Guys, Israel did not have an eternal inheritance. They had a temporary physical one, okay. Their inheritance was related to the land, the blessing of the land, the blessing of their families, the blessing of them against standing against their enemies and so on and so on.

But this says that you and I have received a promised eternal inheritance, related to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which I would call that superior to the Covenant that the Jews were under. And this is the point where some people say, well, they didn't have an eternal inheritance, then how did Jews back in that day get saved?

Same way you and I get saved. By grace through faith. The Law never saved anybody. You can't be saved by keeping the Law. Paul makes that clear in the Book of Romans. No one will be declared righteous, he says, by keeping the Law. You can't be a good person, so don't even try. That's not going to get you to heaven, right? So how were Old Testament saints saved? They were saved by trusting in the mercy of God. They were simply looking toward the great sacrifice of Messiah. We're looking backward at it.

For us, it's past history. For them, it was future. But they were putting their faith in it the same way we're putting our faith in it, and that's how they were saved. They were not saved by the Law. It's not possible. We're told over and over again that the blood of goats and bulls cannot take away sin. It was merely meant to be a picture of sacrificial offering, which of course would be fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. So let me show you a quote. I like this.

“The one who is leashed in the Gospel of grace stands on higher ground than the greatest saint under the Law.”

“The one who is leashed in the Gospel of grace stands on higher ground than the greatest saint under the Law.”

Isn't that well said? Yeah. Because of what is ours in Jesus. Then the last two verses we're going to look at here today, verses 29 and 30, they speak of the effect of John's ministry of baptism. It says,

“When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, (or righteous if you will) having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers (meaning the experts in the law) rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

We've brought this verse out or these couple of verses out in the past. This speaks of the significance of John's baptism. Remember this, you guys, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Okay? It is not what we're going to do this morning over here. We do not do John's baptism. We baptize people into Christ. John baptized them unto repentance so that they could hear the Lord, so their hearts and minds would be open to hear what Jesus had to say, and Luke tells us how effective it was. It says that all the people who got baptized by John heard Jesus and they agreed that His words were right and good.

But those who refused to be baptized, their hearts were closed, because repentance is what opens your heart to God and so forth. Christian baptism,

again, has an entirely different meaning, and it's very important that we understand what that is, because John went around preparing people to hear the words of Jesus and to accept the Messiah. That's not what we're doing. Christian baptism is something that we do after somebody has come to Christ, and what that tells you is, Christian baptism doesn't save you. Nobody's getting saved today in this tank. This is not what we do to get saved. We do it after we're saved. The Bible says go and make disciples, followers of Jesus, baptizing them.

Who's supposed to be baptized? Disciples. Those who have already made that decision to follow Jesus because He's the Savior. He is the Lord. And what the people who are going to be baptized today will be doing is making a very beautiful declaration of their faith in Him, and they will also be identifying themselves, and this is very important that you guys understand this. When we do this baptism here in just a couple of minutes, I want you to just take special note of what these people are doing here, because they're doing what Jesus did, and that is they're doing something by identification.

Do you remember when Jesus got into the water when John was baptizing? You guys remember that? Jesus walked down into the water and John looked at Him and what did he say? He said ahhh!, I need to be baptized by you and yet you come to me. Well, what was Jesus doing? Why did Jesus get baptized? Because He came to this earth to identify with you and me. We're the sinners. We're the ones who need to be saved, and Jesus came to identify with us. He came to identify with sinful man to say, I'm going to be one of you, and this was a precursor to him actually representing us on the cross.

I'm identifying with you. When we get into the waters of baptism we then turn around and identify with Him, and everything that we do in the waters of baptism is a picture. As we get into the waters and we begin to lay back it's a picture of death. As we go under the water, it's a picture of burial. As we come up out of the water, it's a picture of resurrection. Not only that, but we come out of the water cleaner than we went in, and that's a picture of what happens when we come to Christ, how we've been cleansed.

And there's even a further symbolic statement that's being made in the waters of baptism, and it has to do with that whole death process. Not only are we identifying with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, but we're also picturing our own death to sin to the old life, the old man, the old me, the old me that just, I remember somebody telling Pastor Chuck years and years ago back when they were baptizing the hippies out in the ocean there, he came up

for baptism and he said to Chuck, he said, hold me down a long time I got a lot to die from.

And there's that sense that I need to be, I need to be raised up to new life and water baptism is that picture. We come up out of the water with that individual and that just, there's that beautiful picture of the old me. I'm not going to live for the old me anymore. I'm done living for the old me, the old selfish, dog eat dog world of living for myself. I'm not going to do that anymore. It's wrong. I'm going to live for Jesus from here on out. That's the beautiful picture that water baptism conveys.

And I want you to see that because it's almost like these people are going through a pantomime or something similar as they get into the waters of baptism. And they're, it's just like making a declaration to you guys. It's just like they were coming up here and grabbing the microphone and saying, I just want you to know that I've given my heart to Jesus Christ and I've confessed my sin to Him and He saved me from all of my sin.