

Blessed Is The One Who Is Not Offended By Me  
Luke 7:18-35  
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Read Luke 7:18-35

*"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed (rather) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* (Luke 11:28)

### **Introduction - Armchair Quarterbacks**

How many of you have sat through sporting events with someone who was convinced that they could have made a better play call than their team just called? How many of us are diehard fans who think that we are qualified experts who could make better draft decisions than our team's management? With sports fans, there is that unique phenomenon of the "Armchair Quarterback," where every slob sitting on his couch could clearly make better personnel decisions than management and better play calls than the coaches. The offensive and defensive coordinators are obviously all idiots who should consult us at least before each game, if not before each drive. And if push came to shove and it had been us in the game, we never would have thrown that interception or let the receiver get past us in the secondary.

But as with all things in life, it's a heck of a lot easier to criticize and analyze other people's choices and abilities than it is to actually do it ourselves. The problem with me being an armchair QB is that I have never actually put on pads and played tackle football. I've played plenty of flag football (mostly against teenagers) and I've watched a ton of football on TV, but I have no idea what it's actually like to tackle a 200 lb. running back who is going full-speed and trying to stiff-arm me.

Maybe sports don't resonate at all with you, but we see this "Armchair Quarterback" phenomenon in so many areas of life. Every male in my family of origin is a "brilliant" movie critic, despite the fact that none of us have actually directed, acted in, or been a part of the movie-making process at all. And how easy is it for us to make fun of politicians for their speeches or their positions when the most politically active most of us get is voting once a year, maybe signing an online petition or two? Have you been guilty of criticizing your teacher or your child's teacher, or your boss in things that you have never had to teach or lead?

In today's passage, Jesus goes after the armchair quarterbacks of His day. The people who sat on the sidelines judging those who were actually playing the game. We're out of the realm of sports, we're talking about how Jesus and John lived their lives and ministered to people. And Jesus is going to point out that people have very sharp criticisms of Him and His fellow minister of the gospel, but that those criticisms fall flat because the critics aren't part of the game. They're not involved in the kingdom work that Jesus is saying needs to happen. And ultimately, their criticisms are contradictory and are merely a smokescreen to avoid God's work in the world. Perhaps we'll see ourselves in some of these discussions.

Before we get to those criticisms, though, we're going to see John and Jesus' identities and callings established. The first six verses of this passage start with questions and doubts about Jesus:

#### **I. Jesus' Ministry Reminder (vv. 18-23)**

*<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, <sup>19</sup> 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?" <sup>20</sup> 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?”<sup>21</sup> In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

I’m not going to ask for a show of hands, but I wonder how many of us who are committed Christians have had times of intense doubts about our faith. I think it’s very common for believers to step back from what we have always believed and said, “Is this all really true? Is Jesus really who the Bible says that He is? Am I following the right God?” There’s a big difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is still willing to seek answers and be given the truth; unbelief closes the door on hearing and understanding. John’s example lets us know that it’s OK to ask questions, bring our doubts to Jesus. I pray that when you have those times of doubt that you seek the Lord in prayer, in His word, and you share your thoughts with other believers who can strengthen your faith. If that has ever been you, then this incident in Scripture should be a great encouragement to you.

John was Jesus’ cousin who was called by God from birth to testify to who Jesus was. His whole life was a ministry of preparing the way for Jesus by getting God’s people baptized and aware that the kingdom of God was coming to earth in a radical way. He preached sermons about Jesus, and then He got to baptize Him. John even witnessed Jesus’ anointing from God the Father: John 1:32-24 says, *“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him (Jesus)... he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.’”* Of all the people ever, you would think that John would never doubt who Jesus was! But he did. Luke doesn’t say exactly why, but keep in mind that at this point John was sitting in prison. He had harshly criticized Herod, the ruler of the area, for taking his brother’s wife, so Herod threw him in prison, from which he would never be released. Maybe he was deprived of food and water. Maybe he was disillusioned, or thought that since Isaiah 61 said the Messiah would release prisoners, that his still being behind bars meant Jesus wasn’t the real Messiah. Maybe he had bought into the popular view that the Messiah would be a political Savior, but since Jesus didn’t seem intent on overthrowing the Roman occupiers, perhaps the true Messiah was still to come?<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the reason, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus a really direct question *“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”* “Are you the Messiah or not?” Have we put our hopes and faith in the wrong person? Jesus answered first with actions, then with words. Verse 21 says that as the two disciples were asking Jesus those questions, that Jesus healed a bunch of people of diseases, cast out demons, and gave blind people sight. And then He turned to the two disciples and said essentially, “There’s your answer. Tell John what you’ve seen and he can figure out whether I’m the Messiah or not.” His final phrase is *“blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”* What did He mean by that? Isaiah 8 had referred to the coming Savior as a *“stone of offense and a rock of stumbling... many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”* Those who do not stand on the rock of Christ Jesus trip over it. Those who do not accept Jesus for who He said He was will be offended and put off by Him. Jesus was telling John not to doubt Him, but to believe and be reassured based on the evidence.<sup>2</sup>

The next six verses pivot from answering who Jesus was to who John was.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/luke/luke.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), pp. 331-2.

## **II. John's Ministry Reinforced (vv. 24-29)**

*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." 29 (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,*

Jesus did not seem hugely disappointed by John's doubts. He could have turned to the crowds and said, "Wow, I thought John was a smart guy, but he's really lost it in prison. People who doubt me have no share in my kingdom." But He didn't, He turned and reminded the people how solid John was. He assured the crowd that John was not a man who had lived in luxury or who had trouble standing firm and strong. They knew he was more like a strong oak tree than a thin reed easily shaken. All these people had gone out to see John in the wilderness and be baptized by him. So verse 29 says that they all accepted what Jesus was saying, even the tax collectors!

Verse 28 can be tough to understand, upon first reading it seems that Jesus was contradicting Himself: are there others greater than John or is John the greatest? What Jesus was doing was comparing the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. John belonged to the age of the old covenant, and while he was the culmination of everything that had come before him, the greatest in that covenant, he pointed ahead to the new covenant. The new reality that was being ushered in with Jesus' life, death and resurrection. All things would change, and suddenly the new kingdom of heaven was available to all those saved by faith in Christ. John was put to death before he could witness the complete work of Christ. The least of today's believers knows and experiences things that John never did, we have a fuller understanding and experience of Christ. We are greater than John, not because we do greater things than John – he preached with the strongest of conviction and followed God no matter what it cost him – but because of what God has done for us! Jesus is not criticizing John or saying that he won't be part of the kingdom or anything like that. He's building John up as high as he can, but then springing off that to say, "if you think John was blessed spiritually, wait until you see about being part of my kingdom!"

Not everyone accepted Jesus' words about Himself and John, though, and they were in for a rebuke.

## **III. John's & Jesus' Ministries Rejected (vv. 30-35)**

*30 but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.) 31 "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' 33 For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."*

Have you ever listened to children decide what game to play? Apparently, Jesus did. He had heard children arguing among themselves, not agreeing on the activity that they could all join in on. One group of kids wants to be joyful and happy, perhaps pretend that they're at a wedding. But the other kids want to be somber and pretend they are at a funeral. They can't agree so they don't end up playing anything. That's who Jesus compared the people with, and maybe He was insinuating that they're just as childish. John's ministry and lifestyle of calling people to repentance and austere

living was like the kids who wanted to be somber and sing the dirge. Jesus' lifestyle of being among the people healing, teaching, and generally bringing joy links with the kids who wanted to dance. Jesus was saying that He and John approached life and ministry in a different way, but the people criticized both approaches. John lived out in the wilderness rebuking people and playing the role of a prophet, and people said that he was mean; he must have a demon! Jesus, on the other hand, lived among the people, healing and loving, eating and drinking with them; and He got accused of being a hedonist and an addict with the worst choice of friends. Ultimately, the Pharisees didn't want to repent, so they resisted John. And they didn't want to love people, so they hated Jesus.

Craig Keener gives good insight into these verses:

“Neither Jesus nor John accumulated earthly resources for earthly pleasures; but Jesus accepted invitations to upscale banquets, while John was a wilderness prophet. Jesus came partly as God's ambassador to initiate relations with sinners, whereas John primarily took the role of biblical prophet in times of persecution; Jesus was a missionary within the culture, John a critic from outside it. Both models are Biblical but suit different situations. When we can influence a culture from within without compromise, we should do so; when the culture becomes so hostile to our Master that we must stand as witnesses outside, let us do so without regret.”<sup>3</sup>

That's an interesting idea, that sometimes we can be called to minister like John and call out sin and rebuke people. Ephesians 5:11 says, “*Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.*” We abstain from things in the world in order to show that we're called by God to lives of holiness. Other times, we are called to minister like Jesus, befriending and loving people in the context of sharing the truth of the Gospel with them. I'm not saying Jesus never rebuked anybody, He certainly did, but His ministry style was relational, friendship evangelism.

Sometimes watching football or playing golf with my neighbor disarms his fear of talking to the Christian down the street. Hopefully at some point in my relationship with him I can be strategic in speaking truth, love and the gospel. I got to know a guy named Anthony when our daughters played 3 seasons of softball together. His life was kind of a wreck- he walked out on his wife and kids starting an affair with a co-worker. He felt very bad about leaving his 3 daughters, so he moved across the street from them; it was very tense between he and his ex-wife, who also came to every single game. As I was thinking of ways that I could reach out to him, but before I could initiate anything, he was inviting my family over for dinner, asking if I wanted to play tennis, join his fantasy basketball league. We ended up sharing meals and spending time together. I invited him to church after awhile, which he declined, but also waited for “Gospel openings” to speak truth into his life. I hope you look for relationships like that, where you can model Christ's love to unbelievers.

## **Conclusion**

I want to examine this phenomenon of being criticized from both sides, like Jesus and John were:

-I remember being on a Missions Committee at a previous church where we had a meeting with people who were really passionate about missions and they were pushing for our church to spend more and more money on missions. At the same time, though, I also had people who were complaining about all this money that we're sending overseas and to ministries we weren't connected to, why can't we afford to buy a new sound system or build our own building?

-During my youth ministry days, I heard from time to time about how our meetings were too fun and we didn't have long enough time for Bible Study; it wasn't serious enough. Then another group of parents or students would complain about how we already have Sunday School and

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), p. 219.

church, why do we need to study the Bible in youth group too? When are we ever going to do something fun?

-Don't even get me started about music. Maybe you too have been in a church where the "hymns only" people and the "contemporary music only" people played tug-a-war with the music leader or the pastor as the rope, pulling for their preferences.

I'm sure if you have spent any amount of time in the church, you hear those criticisms and those tensions. And actually, as frustrating as they can get, I don't mind hearing those criticisms from people as long as one factor is there: as long as they are in the game. That changes everything for me! If someone is plugged in and part of the church, serving and using their gifts, then I appreciate their viewpoint. But if I've got an armchair QB who is just sitting on the sidelines taking potshots but unwilling to get in the game, I'm probably not giving that opinion much weight.

That's some of the things you hear inside the church, but you get these criticisms from both sides outside the church too. Maybe you've heard some variation of these:

- The church is old-fashioned, boring and irrelevant OR churches are too modern, too flashy and trying to fit into the culture too much,
- The Bible and Christianity is just for old ladies and little children because it's all about love, forgiveness and meekness OR the Bible is too violent, too exclusive, not enlightened enough about love and forgiveness for our modern mentality.
- Christians are too pious, too different from the rest of us OR Christians are just like the rest of us, they watch the same shows, listen to the same music; why are they any different, why should I be a Christian?

And I think that's what Jesus is getting at here: you criticize from both sides with no real intellectual integrity to your argument, because ultimately it's a smokescreen so that you don't have to believe. You don't have to get in the game. You actually have a pretty good case with any of those arguments. You can find ways that every church does things wrong. But eventually you're going to have to strip away all the excuses, stop finding reasons to blame others, and come face-to-face with questions like, "What do I believe?" "What is going to happen to me when I die?" "What is my response to God's offer of eternal life?" "Could Jesus really have died because He loved me?" Those are the real questions, not the peripheral issues of style and preferences.

You can try to Armchair Quarterback your spiritual life all you want, but eventually you're going to have to get off the couch and either get in the game or you are going to miss the kingdom of heaven. That's what happened to the Pharisees: they sat back with their intellectual criticisms and they missed what God was doing. Getting into the kingdom is not hard: you simply recognize that Jesus is fully God who came to earth and lived a perfect life as fully Man, but was eventually put to death by the design of God the Father through the hands of wicked men that opposed Him. That death, the Scriptures say, allowed Jesus to take on our record of sin and give us His record of righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:21 says, "*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Jesus died to take the punishment for your sins, and eternal life is free and there for the taking, if you'll stop sitting on the sidelines criticizing the rest of us. While Jesus was not a glutton or a drunkard, He most certainly was a friend of sinners. And He would even stoop down to the likes of you, because He stooped down for the likes of me. Amen.

Benediction - 2 Corinthians 13:11 - "*Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*"