



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## Superiority of the Kingdom (Luke 7:24-35)

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In John the Baptist we have found the last and greatest of the OT prophets, the one chosen by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ. He had the privilege of participating in the arrival of the most awaited figure in the history of Israel. The one, who in the minds of the people, would set things right and restore the nation back to its rightful place of prominence to the glory of God. John performed this duty with an uncompromising commitment in the face of opposition from both the religious establishment and King Herod. He discharged the duties of this ministry with bold preaching, not embracing the comforts of this world but lived solely for the purpose of the task given him by God. Even in his doubt and uncertainty while facing his impending death the only thing on his mind was the accomplishing of God's purposes. His skewed expectations had produced doubts, but at the core his heart beat for God and the desire to see the message spoken through the prophets brought to fulfillment. It is this man that Jesus can unashamedly announce as the greatest ever born of women, first because of the position he played in the ushering in of the messianic age, and then the manner in which he fulfilled this role.

With this understanding of John as the framework of who he was and what he represented, Jesus uses this as a springboard to teach about the kingdom of God. This John who epitomized a faithful adherent of the Old Covenant still lacked something in Jesus' estimation. When he measured John to those of the kingdom, Jesus declares the supremacy of this new order by stating that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. This is not a statement against John as an individual, but what he represents and the age that was being brought to its conclusion. John had previously articulated the superiority of Jesus and his kingdom by stating that he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. The kingdom that is being ushering in through the arrival of King Jesus is superior on the basis of the change that God will rend in the hearts of its citizens. The glory of this era as demonstrated by the greatest prophet ever born pales in comparison to the splendor of the kingdom of God and those who become its faithful subjects. In this we find not only a qualitative change in those who belong to the kingdom, but there is also a quantitative change where the common, ordinary, and disregarded now have value because of the work Jesus has accomplished in their hearts.

*Luke 7:24-35 - (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, (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."*

### THE LEAST BECOMES SUPERIOR

*Yet the one who is least* - In comparison with John, a man who not only held the position of forerunner to the Messiah but also descended from the priestly line of Aaron, the greatness of those in the kingdom would not be found in these terms. When Jesus speaks of those who are the least, they were those who existed on the fringe of society or the religious establishment. They are the disenfranchised who on the basis of their situation or sinful condition possessed no chance at ever being welcomed as an indispensable component of God's program. Nevertheless, these are the people who saw themselves as sinners and now possessed an experiential knowledge of the love and transformational power of Jesus as he touched their lives and established the value they held in his kingdom. They were the blind, lame and lepers whom Jesus healed and cleansed. They were the poor and oppressed who responded to the preaching of the good news, or the tax collector who when confronted with Jesus leaves everything and becomes one chosen as his apostles. In the manner Jesus approached his ministry, he declared his kingdom a place of all men, from all walks of life, regardless of the situations they find themselves currently entangled.

*In the kingdom of God* - What is the foundational element to the greatness of these whom the world would consider the dregs of society? Quite simply, it is their membership in the kingdom of God. We find the kingdom's arrival at the birth of Jesus, for the prophet Isaiah says, "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). The growth of Jesus' rule and reign on earth continues to expand from his birth until the

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kingdom comes with power at Pentacost when the Spirit is poured out on its citizens. The least of those who come into the kingdom are gifted with something of greater value than any treasure the world possesses. Jesus speaks of the advantage of his departure to the apostles, in that; if he does not go away the Helper will not come (John 16:7). He then tells them, when the Spirit of truth comes he will guide them into all truth and later prays that they would be sanctified by the truth of God's word (John 17:7). In Jesus' kingdom, God the Spirit indwells the hearts of his people; he interacts with the word of truth that they may be set apart for the purpose of being sent into the world. The prophet Jeremiah speaks in these terms when he says, no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31:34).

*Is greater than he* – If those who are least in the kingdom are greater than John the Baptist, then the quality of its citizens has increased drastically. This dramatic shift from the old covenant to the new is understood in light of the Spirit's influence in the hearts and minds of all God's people. In this case, we no longer wait for the next dynamic leader or believe we are called to the task of being a savior; we are simply called to be faithful to Jesus in the work he has given us. Jesus has come to the earth, accomplished his work, and imparted to his people the resources necessary to bring true and lasting change to their part of this world. The other aspect of the greatness and superiority of the kingdom is the distributed nature of its citizens. John the Baptist was the singular voice that eventually was snuffed out by the wickedness of King Herod; however, if the least is greater than John, then the kingdom is filled with those sent in to the world. We have not been sent into this battle alone, we stand not by ourselves but with others in the mission laid before us. The superiority of the kingdom is seen in the coming of the King who has infused his people with his Spirit, he then sends them into the world to be his instruments in accomplishing all God's purposes.

*They declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John,* – Again Luke contrasts those who accept the message of this new order instituted by Jesus with those who reject it. The people who declare God just are the outcasts, they include those who were healed of diseases and plagued with evil spirits; they were the blind who received their sight and tax collectors. In acknowledging the divine wisdom of the preparatory ministry of John, they saw how it led them to know Jesus as the Messiah. Whereas the Pharisees and teachers of the law, in refusing the ministry of John also saw no value in the design of God of presenting Jesus as their savior, this to their own destruction. So those who were least in the eyes of the world were able to

see their need and find salvation, while those of significance in that culture counted worthless the plan of God that could save them.

### CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S WISDOM

*We played the flute for you, . . . we sang a dirge* – As Jesus confronts the juvenile nature of the criticism to his ministry, he used this poetic parable to highlight the problem. It is not the manner in which the message is presented that is the determining factor in its acceptance. John preached the gospel while living an ascetic life-style (Luke 5:33). While Jesus preached the gospel in the joy of the kingdom's arrival, but both were rejected. Neither touched the stubborn hearts of the religious leaders because it was the message that offended them, not the manner in which it was delivered. The way these critics were behaving was childish; they thought John was too harsh and unsociable, while Jesus a glutton was considered too sociable.

*Yet wisdom is justified by all her children* – One is a child of wisdom on the basis of their response to the gospel message. As such, the message will never be palatable to all people, and this reality should not catch us off guard. Paul says, we are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, the fragrance of death (2 Corinthians 3:16). This is the reality of living on the basis of the truth claims about Jesus; there will be those who reject this message, and as a result, reject those who live on the basis of its truth. Moreover, it is to Jesus' final statement we must place our confidence, the wisdom of the gospel will be fully justified by what is accomplished in the hearts and lives of "all her children."

### APPLICATION

The superior nature of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus is seen in how the common and ordinary are elevated to become useful members in this new order. Having received the promised Spirit, the least in the kingdom is greater than the greatest of the OT prophets. In the new covenant there is not just one who is like John, but everyone in the kingdom becomes an important component in the ministry of Jesus to the world, as each one does his part. Jesus calls us to this confidence; the wisdom of God will be proved right through those who become his children, and his purposes will be accomplished through the lives of his people who serve him in the midst of life's circumstances.

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William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998). 401