

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 7: 24-35

Brothers and sisters, peace to you. This is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord that we have come again to our time of Bible reading. We continue with Luke chapter 7; today we read verses 24–35.

Verse 24a: “When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John:”

In front of John’s two disciples, Jesus spoke very directly, even to the point that it feels somewhat severe to us. After all, John had already been in prison for some time, suffering there, and Jesus encouraged him not to stumble because of Him. But after they left, the evaluation Jesus gave of John to the crowds was extremely high. Actually this is also a principle Christians should follow: be very real in front of people, but praise them behind their backs. Therefore Jesus spoke to the crowds about John.

Verse 24b: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”

Because John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness, and in the wilderness there is nothing but patches of reeds. Jesus said, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”

Verse 25: “But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings’ courts.”

When John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness, he attracted many people to come out from Jerusalem to the region near the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River, where he taught and baptized people. Therefore Jesus said, “Those who wear fine clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. What exactly did you go out into the wilderness to see?”

Verse 26: “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.”

Jesus gave very high affirmation to John’s ministry, and directly testified to the crowds that John held the office of a prophet, and greater than the prophets of the Old Testament—he is more than a prophet.

Verse 27: “This is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’”

This is quoted from Malachi 3:1 (NKJV). John is the one foretold by the Old Testament prophets. He was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, preparing the way for the Messiah and preparing people’s hearts to receive Jesus.

Verse 28: “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

In the history of Israel there have been many great prophets, including their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses who led two million Israelites out of

Egypt, David who established the kingdom of Israel, and the prophets Elijah and Elisha who turned the tide. These are all great prophets well known to the Israelites. Yet Jesus' evaluation of John is: "among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." Jesus gave John an extremely high evaluation.

Then Jesus added one more sentence: "but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." This sentence is not easy for people to understand. It turns out that the greatness and smallness Jesus speaks of are not quite the same as our usual concept of greatness and smallness. Our usual idea of greatness and smallness is based on what we possess, what we do, things that can be measured outwardly. But Jesus determines a person's greatness or smallness by something unrelated to these—it is a person's relationship with Christ. The closer and better your relationship with Christ, the greater you are; the more distant your relationship with Christ, the smaller you are.

Because the kingdom of God is the realm where God reigns, and in the kingdom of God those who have a good relationship with God are great, while those who have a poor relationship with God are small. John introduced Jesus; he presented Jesus to the people. His relationship with Jesus was still an external relationship, whereas everyone in the kingdom of God has Christ dwelling within them. In terms of relationship, even the least in the kingdom of God has Christ living inside him. Therefore he is greater than John.

Paul further tells us that the church is the Body of Christ. One day the church, adorned and prepared, will become the bride of Christ. John, however, is the friend of the bridegroom. Naturally the bride is greater than the friend of the bridegroom. The next verses 29 and 30—the small-print translation in the Chinese Union Version is actually more accurate.

Verse 29: “And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.”

Among the crowd listening to Jesus, many had already been baptized by John. These people and tax collectors, upon hearing John’s words, repented and received his baptism of repentance. Jesus said, You people have justified God; but on the contrary there were others.

Verse 30: “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

Because they were proud and self-righteous, unwilling to accept what John preached, unwilling to repent, and unwilling to receive John’s baptism. You people—for your own sakes—rejected the will of God. Following this teaching, Jesus, fearing the crowd might not understand, used a parable.

Verses 31–32: “And the Lord said, ‘To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not weep.’”

Jesus used a custom of that time: children playing in the marketplace, somewhat like children today playing house, imitating adults holding weddings or funerals. In the course of this game there are always some who do not participate, who are indifferent, just watching or enjoying the show. Like when the children play a wedding game—I played the flute for you, yet you did not dance; or when they play a funeral—I mourned to you, yet you did not weep. Jesus used this example they could all understand to explain the difference between His ministry and John’s.

Verse 33: “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’”

John’s ministry was a ministry of mourning, causing people to recognize how unworthy, unfit, filthy, and unclean they themselves were. Therefore he called people to repent. Because John’s ministry was one of mourning, he came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; he lived in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey, living a very simple life. And you people say he has a demon. Do you not know he was sent by God ahead of time to call you to repent and prepare your hearts to receive the Messiah?

Verse 34: “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”

John’s ministry caused people to mourn for themselves, so he neither ate nor drank. The Son of Man has come eating and drinking—the Son of Man is the coming Bridegroom; the Son of Man comes bringing the message of great joy, the gospel, so He both eats and drinks. To the one who neither eats nor drinks you say he has a demon; to the Son of Man who both eats and drinks you say He is a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Do you not know there is a time to mourn and a time to rejoice? When it is time to mourn we mourn; when it is time to rejoice we rejoice; when it is time to fast we fast; when it is time to enjoy a banquet or love feast we enjoy together in what God has prepared for us. But people who do not know God, who do not know God’s will, always use outward practices to bring various judgments. Therefore Jesus finally brings a conclusion.

Verse 35: “But wisdom is justified by all her children.”

Only Christ is God's true wisdom; the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The wisdom here is personified wisdom, referring to Christ. The children of wisdom are those who belong to Christ; they all justify wisdom—that is, they all justify Christ.

Are you one who belongs to Christ? Actually it is very simple—it depends solely on your attitude toward Christ. Whatever Christ says to you, you can accept it, you consider it right, rather than approaching Christ with suspicion, judgment, criticism, or unbelief. The same Bible: those who belong to Christ read out life, peace, and joy; those who do not belong to Christ read out suspicion, judgment, and criticism.

Through this passage Jesus gave John the Baptist an extremely high evaluation, and also told us that in the kingdom of God, those who have a good relationship with God are great. Those who belong to Christ, who have a good relationship with God, always justify Christ. A person who takes the mind of Christ as his mind, who can be in harmony with Christ in all things, who in life always magnifies the Lord—this kind of person is great in the kingdom of God.

Let us pray together: Lord, help us—there is still much in our life concepts that needs adjustment. Many times we do not know Your will and do not treasure Your word. Lord, forgive us; cover us with more of Your grace; let us in humility receive Your grace and let Your grace lead us through daily life. We do not think we understand Your will, but we are willing to empty ourselves and wait for You to speak to us personally. Help us know You, know Your word, know every leading You give us. When You play the flute for us, may we dance; when You mourn to us, may we weep; let us be completely in harmony with You. Bless my life today. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.