



## **Luke 7:24–27**

24 After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one

about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.”

## **Reflection**

One day soon, John the Baptist’s prison door will be unceremoniously flung open, late into the night. Bleary-eyed and afraid, his head will be severed from his shoulders and delivered to Herodias’ daughter on a platter; a gift from her step father, Herod Antipas – as reward for the lewd dance that she has just performed to the delight of his drunken dinner guests. This is the debauchery and violence of the first century. And the fate of the greatest

prophet the world has ever seen. But in his final moments it's very likely that John the Baptist would have taken comfort from the words that his disciples had brought from Jesus. In a moment of weakness he'd sent them to enquire if Jesus really was the one. John, like most devout Jews in his day, had expected a fire and brimstone Messiah, a warrior-king who would reclaim Israel's rightful territories on behalf of her God by force. And accordingly, his preaching was fire and brimstone, saying of Jesus,

The axe has been laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire ... His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the

wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

Luke 3:9, 17

And with words like these John is faithfully drawing on the Old Testament Scriptures with language not dissimilar to that of Elijah who called down the fire of heaven on his enemies. But the Old Testament also says that Jesus will be the Prince of Peace, and that God will,

put [his] Spirit on him,

and he will bring justice to the nations

2 He will not shout or cry out,

or raise his voice in the streets.

3 A bruised reed he will not break,

and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

4 he will not falter or be discouraged

till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope. Isa 42:1–4

And it is this side of Jesus' nature that no doubt brought comfort to John in the final moments of his life as he remembered the last words his Lord and Saviour said to him in yesterday's passage.

'Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed

to the poor. 23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

Jesus *will* come again with fire bringing judgment and condemnation on his enemies. The threshing-floor *will* be cleared, the wheat and chaff sorted one from the other, and those that have lived and died outside of faith in Jesus Christ *will* be burnt with unquenchable fire; but first Jesus came to extend his grace, mercy and forgiveness to all who would repent of their sins and place their trust in his name. And he has given us every opportunity. It is a matter of historical fact that blind received sight, the lame walked, those with leprosy have been cleansed, the deaf now hear, even the dead are raised and the good news has been proclaimed to the mass-

es, articulately, persuasively and with a wisdom and authority unmatched by any religious teacher to ever walk the earth before or since. The world has all the evidence it needs that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. And Jesus' final words to John no doubt brought him solace even as Jesus' words searched, sifted, and weighed him.

23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Blessed is anyone who can trust me, even when my plans for their life don't turn out to be their plans for their life. There is deep and satisfying blessing in trusting Jesus no matter your circumstances because he is thoroughly trustworthy and in the end, in everything, God works for the good of

those who have been called according to his purposes (Rom 8:28), and it was God's purpose for John to be martyred that evening and his life crowned in glory.

In today's passage, almost as if sensing what is to come, Jesus begins to pay tribute to John. Let me read it to you, Luke 7:24–27,

24 After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A



prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written:

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John the Baptist lived loosely to the kingdom of this world. He didn't live in a palace, or wear expensive clothes or indulge his life away in luxury or experiences. He lived loosely to the kingdom of this world. Because his vision was set on the kingdom of God and everything he did and said was influenced by this better vision. One of the highest callings in the Bible is that of a prophet, one who speaks God's words after him, one who reminds God's

people of the nature and character of God and his words in the past and calls them to account for the way they are living. The office of prophet is one of the highest in the Bible but listen to Jesus, according to Jesus, John was even more than that,

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written:

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John was a herald of the kingdom of God. He was a messenger of Jesus, sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus in the hearts and minds of the people of Israel.

His whole life was one of denial of self with the single-minded priority and focus of making Jesus known and his lifestyle matched his message. Stark, disciplined, passionate, urgent. Repent, for the kingdom of God is near – before it is too late.

## **Think & Pray**

And the example that John sets leads us to question the way we live. We too have been sent by God as missionaries to our culture. We too have been sent by him to prepare the hearts and minds of our friends, neighbours, family members and work colleagues for Jesus. We too are members of the kingdom of God charged by Jesus to live radically counter-cultural lives in the kingdom of this world. We may not be prophets, but it is every Christian's

duty to encourage, exhort and remind people of God's character and purposes as revealed in his word. And so to ponder this morning, is the extent to which you are living loosely to the world. How important to you are the luxuries, goals and aspirations of twenty-first century living? Is the vision you wake up with every morning one of the advancing kingdom of God and the urgency of repentance and faith in those around you, or a vision of your own ongoing prosperity and comfort? I know that's a tough question to end the week on. But in many ways it is *the* question for Christians in this comfortable, affluent age.

Pray today that God would fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Pray that God would set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. So

that when Christ, who is your life, finally appears he would have similar words to say about you as he did about John the Baptist.