

The Gospel According to Luke

“The Brat Pack”

Chapter 7:18-35

Introduction

“I’m rubber, and you’re glue. Whatever you say bounces off me, and sticks to you!”

It is one of the great schoolyard sayings; one of those quick, catchy, cutting remarks that put you one-up on whoever was calling you names.

There’s a saying like that in our text. Jesus quoted it, in verse thirty-two, when He said, **“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.’”**

The saying described kids who refused to play with the other children because they couldn’t have their own way. We call them brats. When the other kids wanted to play the flute and dance, they refused to join in. Likewise, when the other kids wanted to play a more serious game, they refused to join in.

The ‘brat-pack’ Jesus was describing was not a group of children, however. It was a group of adults – the **“Pharisees and lawyers”** who criticized both Jesus and John the Baptist for their distinct styles of ministry, and who would join neither. Look again at verses thirty-three and thirty-four:

Luke 7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’

Luke 7:34 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!’

Before we go-off on the Pharisees and lawyers, we should notice that some disciples had problems, too. John the Baptist himself sent

disciples to ask Jesus if He were really the Messiah. It seems the Jesus-style of ministry troubled believers as well as unbelievers.

The Jesus-style still troubles us, believers and unbelievers. It troubles us differently; and that is what I want to talk about today.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Let Yourself Be Stumbled By The Jesus-Style, and #2 Don't Leave Yourself Stymied By The Jesus-Style.

#1 Don't Let Yourself Be Stumbled By The Jesus-Style (v18-23)

John the Baptist was in the dungeon of Machaerus, the desert fortress palace of Herod. He had criticized Herod's immoral marriage to Herodias, Herod's sister-in-law.

John's earthly prospects were a long imprisonment, followed by a cruel death... Or perhaps Jesus would set-up the kingdom on earth and free John to serve in it. After all, John was the messenger who preceded the King's arrival.

Some of John's disciples visited him to keep him up to speed with Jesus' progress in setting-up the kingdom:

Luke 7:18 Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things.
Luke 7:19 And John, calling two of his disciples to *him*, sent *them* to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

They gave John a report; it troubled him. There was no plan they could see to establish the kingdom on earth. No army was being drafted – just a group of itinerant ministers.

John wondered if Jesus were "[the Coming One](#)." It's a technical term, meaning *the One that should come* – the Messiah promised on the pages of the Old Testament. If Jesus was "[the Coming One](#)," then *where* and *when* was the kingdom?

John sent his trusted disciples to the Lord:

Luke 7:20 When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'"

Luke 7:21 And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

They asked the question that did not need to be asked. Jesus was performing the works that only "the Coming One" could perform. The healings and deliverances were credentials, identifying Him as *the One that should come*. The works He was doing were the uniform only the Messiah could wear.

Luke 7:22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that *the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

Jesus' answer was more than a review of His mighty works. It was a compilation of several quotes from the Book of the prophet Isaiah, listing the works of "the Coming One." Jesus was telling them to tell John that He was indeed fulfilling Scripture.

Why not just say, "Yes, I'm the guy!"?

1. For one thing, Scripture is always more reliable than miracles, signs, and wonders. Whatever anyone does – *even Jesus* - must be judged by the written Word of God.
2. For another thing, Jesus was intimating that their expectations of the kingdom on earth might not be completely Scriptural. It was commonly thought that "the Coming One" would lead a military overthrow of Rome. But that was an unScriptural conclusion based on expectations rather than the Word of God.

Then Jesus added a disclaimer:

Luke 7:23 And blessed is *he* who is not offended because of Me."

"Offended" could be translated *stumbled*. The idea is that you become troubled about what Jesus is doing, and you are then hindered in your spiritual progress. The Lord recognized that expectations that are not entirely Scriptural can stumble His followers.

If we fast-forward to ourselves, and if we are honest with ourselves, I think we must admit that we have this exact same problem. We ‘see’ the works Jesus has done throughout history; and we ‘see’ what He’s already done for us. Then we find ourselves in a new and unusual circumstance... And we wonder what Jesus is doing! We expect Jesus to work a certain way among us, or in our lives and circumstances. When He doesn’t, we are stumbled.

Jesus wants to do exceedingly above and beyond what we ask or think; He wants to exceed our expectations. But He often does it in a spiritual way, rather than the physical and material realm in which we’re asking or thinking about. You’ve got a problem and Jesus wants to give you His grace that is sufficient to see you through it; but if you are expecting to be delivered out of it, you’re going to be stumbled.

We can be just like John and his disciples. We can be right in the middle of Jesus doing a mighty work in our lives... But still be asking, “*Lord, are you the One?*” Then we look elsewhere for help.

Jesus is “**the... One.**” Make sure your expectations are Scriptural. Become familiar with His style, with the Jesus-style of ministry.

Believers can be stumbled by the Jesus-style. What about unbelievers?

#2 Don’t Let Yourself Be Stymied By The Jesus-Style (v24-35)

Jesus used the occasion of their visit as a teaching tool.

Luke 7:24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

Luke 7:25 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.

I would ask you to think like a first century Jew. You are expecting “**the Coming One**” to come and establish God’s kingdom on the earth.

But when His messenger came, to announce His coming, he did it in the desert, *not* in a palace.

The people had flocked to John in the wilderness. They didn't go there to check-out the seasonal "reeds" being "shaken by the wind." And, when they got there, there was no one "gorgeously appareled," no "kings' courts."

Through the ministry of John the Baptist, God **was** preparing them for the kingdom. But the physical kingdom on earth was not the essential feature. They must first themselves be prepared, through faith and repentance, by receiving their Savior, Jesus Christ. Everything that happened was perfectly consistent with God's promises in the Old Testament.

Luke 7:26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

Luke 7:27 This is *he* of whom it is written:

*'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'*

John was "more than a prophet" because he was the unique prophet sent to announce the actual, physical coming of the Messiah. He was the "messenger" who immediately preceded the King.

So... If the messenger was here; and the King was on-scene...
Where was the promised kingdom?

Luke 7:28 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."

The "kingdom of God" **was** at hand – just not in the way they expected it. We can look back, with spiritual hindsight and Scriptural insight, and see that the Jews rejected the offer of the physical kingdom on earth at Jesus' first coming. It resulted in a temporary suspension of God's prophetic plan. The kingdom of God on earth must wait until Jesus' Second Coming. Inbetween, the Lord would establish something new – His Church on the earth, comprised of Jews *and* Gentiles.

That explains how it is that “**he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater**” than John. The believers in the Church Age are greater in their privileges and position than the greatest Old Testament saint.

Luke 7:29 And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

Those who had been “**baptized**” by John were probably more stumbled than John himself! After all, if John was in prison, and there was no visible kingdom, what good was the baptism they’d submitted to?

The phrase, “**justified God,**” means that, after listening to Jesus, they acknowledged the wisdom of God’s plan. Instead of being stumbled by their expectations, even the worst sinners among them, “**even the tax collectors,**” were excited about the work of God.

Unbelievers, however, were stymied by this apparent change:

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

“**Lawyers**” refers to specialists in Jewish religious matters. These unbelievers had refused to be baptized by John. They thought themselves righteous by their own good works, by their keeping of the law. You know that they were happy when John was put in prison. It seemed to affirm that John was wrong, and they were right and righteous.

Then Jesus came along, and these unbelievers were challenged again. **Jesus was worse than John!** More people were following Him; and He was doing amazing miracles. All they could do was criticize.

Jesus summed-up their criticism of both He and John:

Luke 7:31 And the Lord said, “**To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like?**”

Luke 7:32 **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.'

As I said, this was a playground taunt. It described spoiled brats who would not join other children unless they could choose the game. Some call this the *Parable of the Brats*.

Jesus applied this to the brat-pack of Pharisees and lawyers:

Luke 7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

Luke 7:34 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!'

Unbelievers had criticized John's simple and admittedly weird lifestyle. They went so far as to suggest that he was demon-possessed. Then Jesus came along – quite the opposite of John. Instead of sinners going out to Him, as they had John, *Jesus went to them*. He went to their homes and ate with them. He was accused of drunkenness and gluttony and of having questionable relationships. After all, if you hung-out with sinners... Well, *you must be sinning!*

Unbelievers didn't like the Jesus-style of ministry. There's still plenty of that going around today. Unbelievers often hang-on tenaciously to one particular criticism of Jesus:

1. He let someone they love die is one of the ones I hear a lot.
2. Here's another one: "*Christians are a bunch of hypocrites.*"
3. Or, "*The Bible is full of errors and contradictions.*"

Jesus' answer to the unbelievers in His audience was to say,

Luke 7:35 But wisdom is justified by all her children."

The "**children**" of "**wisdom**" are believers, those who have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation. God's "**wisdom**" is acknowledged when you see the radical changes a relationship with Jesus brings in a person's life. The power of a changed life cannot be criticized with any real success. It only exposes the unbeliever as foolish.

Tucked away in here is an exhortation for believers to actually live-out the radical changes that the indwelling Holy Spirit makes in your life! But even when you fall short, even when you fail, “**wisdom is [still] justified**” as Jesus forgives you your sin and you begin again.

Jesus’ style among unbelievers is to expose their sin and self-righteousness, then immediately offer them His righteousness as a free gift of grace. People reject the Jesus-style because they want to believe they are inherently good; or that they can do enough good works to earn heaven. They are spoiled brats who refuse to join God’s children because they want to save themselves rather than admit they are hopelessly, eternally lost in sin.

Conclusion

If you are a **believer**: Are you disappointed with the way God has worked, or is working, in your life? *Don’t be stumbled!* He Who began a good work in you will complete it. You are daily being conformed into the image of Jesus. You are predestined to be like the Lord one day. You will awake in His likeness.

If you are an **unbeliever**: *Get in the game!* Quit standing on the spiritual sidelines, criticizing the Lord and His work with some lame excuse. Don’t “reject the will of God” for yourself, which is that you should come to repentance rather than perish eternally.