

Title: The Purposes of God  
Text: Luke 7.24-35  
Theme: The patient plan of God  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: While God does not reveal everything at once, what he does reveal is enough to remove our excuses and calls us to faith.

In order to understand life, you need to understand God and in order to understand God, you need to know and understand the Bible. When you begin to grasp the big idea of the Bible, you are struck with the fact that God is Creator and we are creation. There is an infinite chasm of knowledge between us and God. God does not tell us everything that there is to know, but he tells us everything that we need to know. But God is careful to give us that a little bit at a time. In the first chapter of Luke, we read that the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to be with child without benefit of a husband. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called – holy – the Son of God.”* (1.36) Jesus is God in human flesh. Jesus, as he became known, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead. He took on flesh and was born into this world as part of his own creation. There is mystery to that. We do not understand everything about that, but God revealed this to us so that we would know it and believe it, even if we do not fully grasp it.

God did not tell us everything there is to know about how Mary conceived Christ, but he told us enough. Now, as we are studying the gospel of Luke we are witnessing how little by little Jesus is revealing his deity to his disciples. They believed in his humanity. That was obvious. He ate, drank, slept, talked, walked and did everything that humans do. He looked like a fully functioning human, which he was. But he was more. He was God. How do you inform those around you that you are God? That’s a bit of a challenge. What plays into this drama is the way that Jesus reveals himself is so that his disciples and others will know that he is God and what kind of a God, he is. There is so much that goes into this. Jesus gives us evidences of supernatural power and amazing grace. At the same time, he is carrying out his plan for this universe with complete oversight. Put it together and we see that God wants us to know him that we may love him and trust him.

Often God does not tell us everything up front. He lets us learn on the job. Part of that is because we will learn it better, and part of it is that we need time to be able to grasp the truth. We are finite and he is infinite. There are things that we think that we know and we really don’t. This is why genuine believers are marked by humility. We are the creation and we know it. We are finite and we know it. We are limited in knowledge, strength, wisdom, abilities and life and we know it. We are prone to sickness, stress, weakness, disasters and tragedies. But our humanness is all that we know. Therefore, we are tempted to think of God through the lens of ourselves. *“If I were God I would...”* That is really a crazy statement! We really have no idea!

So God gives us his Word so that we can learn by reading. The more we read, the more we understand, knowing that we will never fully understand. That’s okay. God sent Christ. The more you listen to him and see him, the more you understand, but even then you will never

understand everything. This is called faith. Faith is not a blind leap into the dark. It is trusting in what God has revealed all the while knowing that he has not revealed everything. But because what he has revealed is so good and so convincing, you are willing to believe that whatever else there is that he has not yet revealed is worth believing in as well. Luke 7 is a pivotal chapter in the life of Christ in the sense that there are several things that happen in this chapter that are astonishing. Each account is here by design so that we will stop and think about them so that we will come to the proper conclusions about who Jesus is.

7.1-10 – Jesus heals the servant of a Roman Centurion who was at the point of death. Jesus did this at the request of the Roman Centurion (Gentile) who made a bold confession of faith in the authority and power of Christ. Wow! A Gentile appears to believe that Jesus has power over sickness and appeals to him and Jesus comes through. He heals the servant from a distance.

7.11-17 – Jesus raises a young man from the dead and gives him back to his mother who was already a widow.

7.18-23 – Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah and yet, he does not make any effort to release John the Baptist from prison. John the Baptist did not understand why and Jesus did not explain it to him or us. He simply assured John that he was the Messiah and that there is a blessing to those who are not offended by Jesus. There is a blessing (eternal life) on those who trust Christ and what he says no matter what he does, or doesn’t do because everything that he does or doesn’t do is in harmony with what he says.

John’s disciples head back to John to deliver this message to him. Then Jesus uses this occasion to reset some expectations even as he exposes some hearts. Christ does multiple things at the same time. There are many different strands of the purposes of God that weave together the tapestry of his glory and this text is another example. My aim in this sermon is simple. I want to you understand this text so that you can see how Christ did so many things that all contributed to his plan, even though in the moment it was not fully appreciated. God is still doing that. He is doing so many different things all that the same time that are working together to carry out his plan. Our response is to be amazement, worship, love and trust.

Read Text:

The structure of this sermon is very straightforward. There are two main points. In the first one, I want to explain the text and in the second one, apply it. Aside from the opening statement in v.24 and the parenthetical comment in verses 29-30, the rest of this text are the words of Christ. They are summarized by...

### 1. **Four Insightful Statements by Christ:**

The opening phrase of v.24 sets the scene. Jesus has been regularly putting on a display of his power and yet John the Baptist remains in prison. A couple of John’s disciples came to Jesus with two related questions from John. “Are you the one who is to come (the Messiah), or shall

we look for another?" It is not clear if this was publicly or privately asked. We looked at how Jesus answered them last week, but when they had gone, Jesus spoke to the crowds about John the Baptist. How does Jesus engage the crowd? He asked questions. Jesus does this a lot in his teaching because he wants us to think. He wants us to engage with him at the heart level. So he asks a series (6 actually) of questions that are designed to lead his audience to a specific point. 1<sup>st</sup> question: What did you go out into the wilderness to see? In other words, it took a lot of effort to go out into the wilderness to hear John the Baptist preach. He was not doing a series of weekend meetings at the local synagogue. So, what drew you to him? 2<sup>nd</sup> question: Did you see a reed shaken by the wind? The assumed answer is no. You wouldn't go through all of the inconvenience to see that. That's nothing. The implication with is supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> question is that you went into the wilderness because something significant was going on. But what was it? What exactly did you see? Question 4: "A man dressed in soft clothing?" Again, no. People like that don't generally go camping and live off the land. You expect to find them in places of luxury like palaces. Notice that question 5 (beginning of v.26) is the same as questions 1 and 3. "What then did you go out to see?" The 6<sup>th</sup> question is actually the answer that Jesus was leading them to. "A prophet?" Then the affirmation. Yes. You went to see a prophet. But look at what Jesus said at the end of v.26. "Yes, I tell you, (which means, pay attention to this) and more than a prophet." The first insightful statement is:

**A. John is more than a prophet. (27)**

What does Jesus mean by this? Jesus is reaffirming his admiration of John and his confidence in him. But he wants his audience to connect some dots. John is not only a prophet, but he himself is the fulfillment of a prophecy from Malachi. Malachi was the last book in the OT. Malachi was the last prophet with a word from the Lord for 400 years. Then came John. By saying this, Jesus was doing several things all at once. 1) He was quoting Scripture which once again demonstrated his belief in the Bible. He quoted it as being authoritative and true. He pointed out how this promise from 400 years before had been fulfilled right before their eyes. (27a) God keeps his word. God promised that a messenger would come to prepare the way for the Messiah and look! God sent that messenger. That messenger was John the Baptist. You heard him. You were drawn to him. His words and messages drew you clear out into the wilderness because he spoke to your hearts. You resonated with him. You did that because he was sent by God with the Word even as he was the fulfillment of a prophecy. If the messenger before the Messiah was John, then you must believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is implying this. He wants them to connect the dots. He then makes a second insightful statement.

**B. None born of women is greater than John. (28)**

*"I tell you"* (26b, 28a) There is nothing wrong with John. The fact that he is in prison and has not been released does not mean there is something wrong with John. In fact, none born of women is greater than John. You cannot find anyone who is better. He has done exactly what he was called to do. He has fulfilled his mission in God's plan. This is the definition of success. This is what your best life now, looks like, doing exactly what God called you to do and doing it by faith. Then comes the third insightful statement.

### **C. The least in the kingdom of God is greater than John.**

This is stunning and obviously it is intended to be stunning. As great as John is (and there was at that time no one greater), the least in the kingdom is going to be greater. John was in a sense like Moses. Moses was the end of slavery and the beginning of life in freedom. He brought his people all the way to the edge of the Promised Land, but did not go in. John was the last prophet of the Old Covenant. He set the table for Jesus who would establish the New Covenant. The New Covenant people of God have it so much better than the Old Covenant people of God. The Old Covenant was laws, sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies that pointed to fulfillment. The Old Covenant was designed to make people aware of their need for a Savior. The New Covenant is built upon the reality that the Savior has come. The promises have been fulfilled in Christ.

The Passover is Christ. The Day of Atonement is Christ. The Sabbath is Christ. The year of jubilee is Christ. The sacrificial system with all of the morning and evening sacrifices, burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship and peace offerings, purification offerings, reparation and guilt offerings have all been fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. John preached that, but he did not live long enough to see Christ accomplish that. But Christ did when he died on the cross. The night before he told his disciples as they celebrated the Passover that the cup of wine they were sharing was a symbol of his blood that he would shed and through his death the new covenant would be established. Every person who comes to faith in Christ would be forgiven, declared righteous, and placed into the body of Christ by the baptism of the Spirit who would indwell each believer and gift each believer. The new covenant people of God would not be centered on people in Israel trying to keep the law at the Temple, but would be made up of people from every tribe, language and nation and it would be centered on Christ who fulfilled the law in our place. The least in the kingdom of God now, has it so much better than John. We know that our sins are forgiven in Christ. We know that the Savior has come, the King has come, the Sacrifice has been offered, the price has been paid and our King who rose again will return again. We see now, so many promises that have been fulfilled in Christ that all those that remain to be fulfilled await with such a greater certainty. If you are a genuine follower of Christ and have truly understood and embraced the gospel, you are so much better off than John ever was, and he was a great one.

### **D. Wisdom is justified by all her children. (35) (disciples of John and Jesus)**

The high praise that Jesus has for John is well received by the common people and tax collectors who believed the message of John and were baptized. Like our country, 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel was polarized. There was a significant gap between those who embraced John and those (Pharisees and lawyers) who rejected him. Jesus then exposed the rejectors of John for what they were. He uses spoiled children as an illustration. The Pharisees found fault with John because he was “too extreme” for them. They used his diet and habits as an excuse to reject his message. His diet and habits had nothing to do with their rejection of John. They rejected John because his sermons exposed their hypocrisy. He refused to play by their man-made rules and they hated him for it and here is further evidence of it. John was “too pious.” He didn’t eat bread and drink

wine, and they accused him of having a demon. Jesus, on the other hand, eats and drinks and they accuse him of being a glutton and a drunkard and hanging around tax collectors and sinners. In both cases they find fault with silly surface stuff. In truth they hate Jesus because he doesn't play by their rules either and he also exposes their hypocrisy, but even more so.

These guys are impossible to please! Like the children who played a happy song but other kids wouldn't dance because they claimed to be sad. So, they played a dirge and the kids wouldn't weep. It did not matter what John did or Jesus did, they were not going to believe. The Pharisees found fault with both John and Jesus. What further proof do you need of the authenticity of Christ? He raised people from the dead. Later on, when he was on the cross, they jeered and said that if he came down off the cross, they would then believe him. No, they wouldn't! If you don't want to believe and you are too stubborn and prideful to acknowledge the obvious, you will never believe. That is why in order to be a genuine believer you have to be humble. Jesus summarizes all of this by saying, "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." In other words, just wait and you will see what true wisdom produces. The guys who are all large and in charge now, who mock John and Jesus, will be exposed for what they are.

## 2. **Three Necessary Conclusions:**

### A. **Doubt and Faith can co-exist, but only for a time.**

Jesus called John the greatest of his era and yet the greatest had doubts. How did Jesus respond to the doubts? He patiently and beautifully answered them and was not offended at John. But notice this. John had doubts that were looking for reasons to believe. We have a reasonable faith. We have a faith that stands together and makes sense. There is a clear logic to it and yet at the same time, it is faith. It is reasonable to believe the promises of God because of what God has already done. It is also understandable to struggle because we live between promise and fulfillment. John the Baptist lived there too. Doubts will arise, but doubt and faith cannot co-exist for too long. Either your doubts will be temporary or your faith will be temporary. This is a call for self-reflection. If you have doubts, do not deny them, address them. John addressed his doubts. There are answers to your questions but we can't help one another if we are not humble and honest with one another.

### B. **The Elite tend to struggle with genuine faith.**

There is a clear distinction in this text between the elite and powerful who appear to be large and in charge and John who was poor, outcast, and now in prison. On a surface level, the elite had no reason to believe in John nor Jesus. They had what they wanted. They had what everyone else wanted. That is why it is so hard for the elite and powerful to be humble followers of Christ. They have attained the status that the world dreams of. They are it. Along comes Jesus who says, "it's not all that." "You're really not that impressive. In fact, you are just a sinner like everyone else. You just happen to drive a nicer car." God could care less that you went to the college you did, got the title you got, have the career, the status that you have achieved. In fact, all of what you have accomplished gives you a false sense of salvation because

you think that those things justify you and they don't. Happy is the 1<sup>st</sup> round draft choice, the occupant of the corner office, the CEO of the fortune 500 company who sees it all for what it is and is not impressed by it. But who knows what really matters and that is this:

**C. Following Christ will prove to be worth it.**

Every single thing that Christ promises, he does. Every single thing, every single time. This means that no matter what your circumstance, following Christ is worth it. Christ knows that there are days when you wonder if it is worth it, when you wonder what he is up to, when you wonder if he has forgotten about you, when you wonder why others seem to catch all the breaks, but it will be worth it and it will be worth it, on a level that we cannot begin to grasp.

Is your life going well? Following Christ will prove to be worth it. Is your life facing intense difficulty? Following Christ will prove to be worth it. Are you the only one in your family who takes the gospel seriously? Following Christ will prove to be worth it. Are you surrounded by faithful believers? Following Christ will prove to be worth it.

If you could interview Herod today, what would he say?

If you could interview John the Baptist today, what would he say?

If someone could interview you, 60 seconds after you died, what would you say?

Wisdom is justified by her children. Jesus said that. Take that check to the bank and cash it.