Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 7:24-27
Code: 42-97

Luke chapter 7 is our text for this morning, Luke chapter 7. And I have all the good intentions to be able to work our way through these paragraphs in a single message, but find that the depth of richness makes that nearly impossible. I don't know why it is or how it is that history has confined us to preaching the Word only for up to an hour, I could have wished that I lived in a place in time when two hours was acceptable. Then these wouldn't be series, they would be sermons. But perhaps I would not be able to be confined by that either, if the truth were known.

As you study the Word of God, the longer you study the Word of God I suppose some people would say there's only so much information and when you've absorbed it, what's left? The Word of God doesn't work like that. The longer you study it, the more you see the depth of it and the harder it is to get through because you see things more deeply and broadly than one who perhaps has a more superficial understanding. And so as we look at these paragraphs, my goal is not to somehow give you a sermon but to rather take you through an understanding of these great passages because they are the Word of the living God and particularly these in the gospels which introduced to us the majesty of Jesus Christ. We just cannot hurry our way through.

We're looking then at chapter 7 verses 24 to 30 and we'll be looking at that this morning and then again next Sunday as well. And this is about John the Baptist. I suppose we could title it, if we were forced to title it and we always are just for a title on a tape or in a Sunday bulletin, but we could title it, "Real greatness." It is really a look at John the Baptist and it is a passage that forces the people who were following Jesus into a very, very difficult place. The goal of all of Jesus' ministry was to cause people to recognize that He was the promised Messiah, the promised King, the Christ, the Redeemer, the Savior who would bring about salvation for His people and for the world, who would fulfill all of the promises made to Abraham and David, who would ratify the pledge of forgiveness found in the New Covenant given to Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Jesus was endeavoring to demonstrate in every way possible that He in fact is the Messiah, the promised Savior, the Coming One, the Redeemer.

And in this passage He discusses John the Baptist not for the purpose of having us honor John the Baptist, although it would be well to give him honor, but for the purpose of us understanding how John the Baptist's ministry connects with Jesus as Messiah. Everybody in Israel essentially perceived that John was a prophet. The whole of Judea had gone out to him. Matthew tells us that, and Mark tells us that. When he was ministering down at the Jordan River in the wilderness, all of Judea was going out to him, all of Jerusalem was going out to him because everyone perceived that

he was a prophet. And when they got there what they heard was a message of repentance for sin and then a baptism of repentance was held. And these people were actually being baptized by John with what essentially was a proselyte baptism.

In other words, a baptism that was usually given only to Gentiles. When a Gentile wanted to embrace Judaism, there was a ceremonial baptism that they went through which was a confession that they were unclean and outside the covenant and outside the promises and uncircumcised and outside of Israel...in a word, a Gentile, a pagan. But John was baptizing Jews which was tantamount to them confessing "I am no better than a pagan...I am no better than a Gentile," which was a very hard pill for Jewish people to swallow. They prided themselves on their Judaism. They prided themselves on their Jewish heritage like the Apostle Paul who was circumcised the eighth day was of the tribe of Benjamin, an Israelite to the max. That was part of their pride. And to get them to say "I am no better than a pagan, I am no better than an uncircumcised Gentile and I need to be washed, I'm outside the covenant, I'm outside the promise, I'm outside what it means to be a true Jew," that was an immense act on their part.

And that's precisely what they were doing, they were going out, they were listening to John. He was preaching this fiery message of repentance and judgment and that God was coming in flaming vengeance and He was coming to winnow, you know, to throw souls in the air, as it were, to blow the chaff away which would then be burned in the fires of hell. This was John's preaching. And he demanded they repent. He called them snakes and vipers who were scrambling to escape the furious wrath to come. He even gave that message directly face-to-face to the Jewish leaders, the most religious people in the nation, the religious elite. He condemned the ungodly, wretched, wicked life of the ruler of the region, Herod Antipas. It was all fire and damnation that he preached. Consequently, you know, he was thrown in prison and ultimately beheaded.

But in spite of the fury of his message, in spite of the power of his message, in spite of the straightforward call for repentance, in spite of redefining all of them as no better than Gentiles, they came, they listened, they repented and they were baptized with that essentially proselyte baptism. Which was an amazing admission, why did they do that? Because they believed this man was the prophet declaring Messiah. He said, "There's one coming after me who is mightier than I, the sandals of which I'm not worthy to unloose." He said, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." And then Jesus came one day and John 1:29 and John pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." There is the final sacrifice for sin. There's the Messiah, the Redeemer. There He is. And he pointed to Jesus. And, of course, Jesus came and said, "You have to baptize Me, John. I want to identify with the righteous." And John baptized Him and God's voice came out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," affirming that this was the Messiah. The Holy Spirit descended on Him and literally came down in a visible form on Him. So you have the Father and the Spirit affirming that this is the Messiah. This was John's ministry and the people believed John was that prophet.

But the dilemma was they all accepted John but they weren't accepting Jesus. This was the problem. Here was Jesus going all over Galilee healing, casting out demons, showing power over disease, power over demons, even power over death, raising the dead...as we saw in chapter 6 [7] with the son of the widow in the town of Nain. Here was Jesus doing everything to demonstrate that He was God in human flesh, doing everything to demonstrate that He was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth, all of those elements that He was engaged in having been prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, as we saw in the last passage. Jesus making it very clear who He was. Very clear that He was the Messiah, that He was the One who had come to preach the gospel to the poor, as Isaiah 61 said Messiah would do. He had come to heal those that were deaf and blind and lame as Isaiah also had said He would do. He had come to raise the dead, as Isaiah also said He would. And He was doing it all, thus He was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He was inaugurating the kingdom. He had come for that purpose. He had demonstrated that to some of the followers of John who then went back and reported to John that indeed this is the Messiah, in spite of the fact that He's not unleashing fury and fire and consuming the wicked, in spite of the fact that He hasn't overthrown the Romans, that He hasn't judged the apostate Jewish religious establishment, in spite of the fact that He hasn't set up His kingdom and established His throne, in spite of the fact that He hasn't delivered them from all their enemies and brought salvation to the whole nation, in spite of the fact that all of the promises of the glories of the kingdom haven't come to pass. This is the Messiah and He is beginning to inaugurate the kingdom. All of this information Jesus demonstrated to the followers of John who then went back and settled any doubts that John had in his mind.

At this point then Jesus sees an opportunity to confirm His messiahship by connecting with John. And that's what you have in this passage before us. And I want you to see the power of this passage. It literally backs these people into an impossible corner. Because they universally accepted John, they then therefore must accept the One to whom John points. You can't accept John and reject Jesus. And that's their dilemma. Jesus forces it on them.

Now He makes here an unambiguous statement that we'll use as a starting point, go down to verse 28. 'I say to you, among those born of women," and that would be all of us, "there is no one greater than John." Now he's not going to get an argument about this from the people. This is about greatness...this is about greatness. Back in Luke 1 when the angel had come to Zacharias, John's father, who had never been able to have children, the Lord came to Zacharias and told him in 1:13, "Don't be afraid, you and your wife, Elizabeth, are going to have a son." And they were in their seventies, maybe in their eighties, never having children. "You'll give your son's name John, gift of God." And then verse 15, "He'll be great in the sight of the Lord." He's going to be great. He's going to be great. That was the prophecy.

How great? Jesus here answers how great. "Among them that are born of women, no one greater, no one." This then is to say he's the greatest man who ever lived. The greatest man who ever lived.

That phrase "among them that are born of women" was simply a colloquial way of saying "among human beings" because there was one who was saying this that was greater than John, right? Jesus Christ. He too was born of a woman but that was a colloquialism for being human. He makes it very clear in Luke 1:32 that Jesus was the Son of the Most High. But among those that are human, this is the greatest man who ever lived.

And you want to know something? That...that unambiguous statement, that crystal-clear statement really wouldn't get any argument...at least on the surface because the people had made very clear their belief that John was the prophet of God heralding the coming of Messiah, which would be the greatest prophetic assignment everybody...anybody ever received. And we could talk about greatness from a worldly viewpoint. You know, we have all that stuff in our culture that somehow is identified with greatness, like Pulitzer prizes and Nobel prizes and all these other prizes and lifetime achievement awards, and Oscars and Emmys and MVPs and All-Star honors and an endless litany of educational degrees, honorary degrees, corporate honors, military honors, medical honors, literary honors, on and on and on and on. We're really deep into giving people honor. We like that. There's a world championship with everything, absolutely everything, conceivable and inconceivable. And the illusion of greatness can be bought by money. It can be gained by political position. It can be garnered by media exposure. And greatness matters a lot in a culture of self-esteem where the primary dominant, social veneration in our society is ego. If nobody gives you greatness, you can just claim it for yourself. And that shows how psychologically healthy you are.

But God's standards for greatness had just the absolute antithesis of any of this silliness in the world and you certainly find that out when you look at John. The greatest man that ever lived had none of the normal criteria for which the world would give him any awards. Our world would say he's an absolutely an outcast, he's anti-social, he's unconventional, he's politically incorrect, he's insensitive, he's bothersome, he's irritating, he ought to be shut up. That's exactly what Herod said who represented the world. And he did it, put him in prison and whacked off his head and served it on a platter at a party. He had no wealth. Came from a very humble family of a priest in the Judean hill country. He had absolutely no social prominence, no worldly status, no education, no success, no achievement by any measure of the world. He held no position, built no organization, headed no institution. He wrote no books, left no sermons except a few excerpts from his preaching. Possessed no social position, owned nothing, had no particular charm. In fact he was very uncharming. As far as we could tell he had no physical bearing, wouldn't have won a fashion award, for sure. Yet Jesus said he was the greatest man that ever lived. Greater than Adam, greater than Noah, greater than Abraham, greater than Moses, greater than Joshua, greater than David, greater than Elijah, greater than Elisha, greater than Isaiah, greater than Jeremiah and you can fill in the blanks. In fact if you'd like to fill in the blanks, just read all the names in Hebrews chapter 11, all of those heroes of faith and remember this, John was greater than all of them. Pretty remarkable. In fact, it's a staggering statement. The only person who was greater than John was Jesus who was not just human but the God/Man, the Son of the Most High God...as well as the Son of Mary.

Now this passage in front of us really tells us why he was great. You could look at his life and you can see things about him that would be great spiritually. He was humble. He was honest enough to demonstrate when he didn't know something, that's a mark of greatness. We saw that in the last passage. He had some questions. He had some doubts because he didn't have all the information that he needed. He was operating on some, you know, some popular viewpoints about what the Messiah would do. He had some unfulfilled expectations. He had some incomplete revelation. And so he had some questions and so he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You really the one, the coming one, the expected one? Or should we look for someone else?" He was honest enough. I like that, he had a real humility about him. He didn't know something. He admitted he didn't know it. He had some doubts and he sought to get them resolved. That's a part of greatness. Pride stifles greatness, know-it-alls are never great, it's the humble people who know what they don't know and seek to learn it that become great, if in fact they do. But we don't want to talk about that because there's a lot of people like that.

What made John great was something that was just really remarkable and absolutely unique to John. And Jesus brings it out as we look at the passage. So let's go back to verse 24 and watch it unfold. "And when the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the multitudes about John."

Now John has been in prison for months now so he has had no opportunity to see or hear Jesus. Anything he knows about what Jesus is doing is hearsay. John has followers. He had many followers. The whole nation, as we told you, was going out and being baptized by John and many of these followers were still loyal to John and some of them from time to time apparently would come and visit him in prison. He was out in Fort Machaerus out in the desert in a summer palace that belonged to the Herods, northeast of the Dead Sea, southern part. And so on occasion, on one occasion anyway some disciples came and John said, "Could you go back and ask Jesus if He's really the coming One? Because I don't know, I have some doubts. He's not...He's not confronting the apostate Jewish leadership. He's not overpowering the pagan Romans. He's not establishing the kingdom. Is He really the one? Can you just kind of fill in the blanks?"

They had gone, Jesus had done miracles, connected them to prophecies in Isaiah. And the messengers of John then went back to affirm to John, "Yes indeed He is the one, all the prophetic signs are being fulfilled that He is inaugurating the kingdom." John never again had to ask the question.

Well that made John the topic of conversation among the crowd that day. No doubt the disciples of John had verbalized their question publicly. People heard it. Jesus did this tremendous explosion of miracles, as we learned in the passage prior. Then says, "Go tell John these are all things prophesied by Isaiah," as we pointed out. "The kingdom is being inaugurated. You're seeing divine power belonging only to the Messiah who has come to inaugurate the kingdom."

Now that made John the topic of conversation. And this provided Jesus an opportunity to back these people into a corner with regard to His messiahship. Because they had all embraced John, they were therefore stuck with the fact that if they believed John was the prophet, then the one to whom John pointed had to be the Messiah. You can't believe John and not Jesus. And that's what happens as Jesus then turns to the multitudes, this massive crowd of thousands of people who follow Jesus everywhere He went, made up of some who had truly affirmed their faith in Him, including the apostles. Some who were on the way to doing that, on all points these people were...some of them were curious, some of them were just fascinated miracle seekers, others of them were listening to the teaching beginning to believe. Some had come to faith. It's a mixed group. And so He turns and this is what He speaks to them, and He's going to capitalize on John because John has become the topic of conversation because of his followers. And He says this to them, verse 24, fascinating. "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?"

Now that John is the topic and they're buzzing about John, Jesus says, "When you went out to hear John preach, what were you going out there for? What did you go out to look at? A reed shaken in the wind? You went miles, 40 miles, 50 miles, 60 miles, out into the wilderness. You trekked out there, a long walk. All Judea went, including Galilee. Why did you go out into the wilderness? Why did you go out in the barren desert?" Wilderness brings back into their minds, as it does into mine, Isaiah 40 verse 3, "That John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." That's Isaiah 40 verse 3, that was a prophecy of John which Luke 3 says John fulfilled. It's right there in Luke 3. You went out into the wilderness because you believed that there was a prophet in the wilderness who was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. You didn't go out there to see a reed blown around. Some people have suggested that Jesus was saying...You didn't just go out there to watch the reeds along the river blow. No, it's not a physical thing, cause it's a singular reed. It's metaphoric. You didn't go out there to see somebody with no conviction. Jesus is building His case. You didn't go out there to see just another guy blowing around in the breeze.

Reeds grow along the Jordan River, still do in some places. And they're thin sort of flexible stalks, just blowing in the wind. Whenever the wind blows, they just kind of blow. Jesus said, "Look, you didn't...you didn't walk 50 miles to see another guy blown around in the wind, did you? You didn't go out there to see another spineless coward, did you? You didn't go all the way out there to hear somebody give you the same dribble you hear from the leaders. You didn't go out there to see somebody with no particular opinion and no conviction and no courage and no boldness. You didn't go out there to listen to somebody who was unstable, vacillating and fluctuating. Why did you go out there?"

Well John was anything but that. John was politically incorrect. John was confrontive more than you can imagine. The religious leaders show up and he greets them, "You brood of vipers. What made

you flee from the wrath to come?" Oh, how about, "Hi, fellows, how can I help you?" This is no coward, this is no...this is no vacillating guy blowing in the breeze. If you wanted to see a coward, you could stay home, they're everywhere. If you wanted to see someone who wants to make sure they do exactly what the system expects them to do, they're all around. John preached hell, fire and damnation, furious judgment, sifting. If you wanted to see some swaying reeds, they're growing around the Sea of Galilee, too. Lots of them, plenty of vacillating people who just fall into line with the powers that be. They'll do whatever Herod says to do cause they don't want to ruffle his feathers. They'll do whatever the Jewish leaders say to do, they don't want to ruffle their feathers. Whatever the pressure is, they'll comply with the pressure. They'll go the way the wind blows. It's safer to do that.

John wasn't like that. John not only confronted the Jewish leaders and called them snakes and said if you're going to be true repenters then bring forth fruit that is fit for repentance. John went eyeball to eyeball with Herod Antipas, condemned Herod Antipas for seducing his brother's wife and then taking her as his own wife for the rest of the wicked immoral things he did. John was so bold that before the Jews could get rid of John, Herod threw him in prison, eventually chopped his head off. So He's saying, "Look, what drew you to John? First of all, you were drawn to the man because of his uncompromising conviction and boldness. That's what attracted you to him." I think that's still pretty attractive in a day of cowards and vacillating people who will not speak the truth.

Jesus builds His case a little further in verse 25. "What did you go out to see?" Another rhetorical question. "A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces." Now this is an interesting statement.

Where was the attraction of John? Was it that he was a coward? You went out to hear a coward? No, you went out to hear a compro...an uncompromising, courageous, bold preacher of repentance and you know that's a message from God. That's why you went because God calls for repentance. You know that so you went because John was a man of conviction. And then He asks a rhetorical question again on a negative side. "What did you go, to see a man dressed in soft clothing?" Soft is the Greek word malakos...malakos. It's translated in 1 Corinthians 6:9 effeminate...effeminate. It's used for male prostitutes. Did you just go out there to see some soft effeminate guy? If you want to see soft, effeminate guys, go to the palace, that's where the people cow-tow to royalty so they could live a life of luxury.

I mean, there's lots of ways to illustrate that but have you ever seen anything more disgusting than the royal garb of English and French kings? Sickening, isn't it? All of them dressed in foo-foo with little skirts and frilly things and curly hair. The foo-foo guys. That's the way it was then too, effeminate, soft, wanting luxury. You didn't go out there to see a guy like that. You didn't see John in foo-foo trying to make points with Herod Antipas so he could live in the palace and eat pickled hummingbird tongue and whatever else. They actually did eat that.

John is no effeminate flatterer of royalty. John is no softie trying to gain entrance and favor with people in power. That's pretty repulsive stuff, isn't it? I personally am not attracted to people with no convictions and I'm not attracted to people who just fawn on people in power so they can gain some access to luxury. And neither were those people. They went out there because this man was a man who was strong, had tremendous convictions, was bold and courageous. He certainly didn't try to gain favor with those who were in the royal palace. He didn't seek an indulgent life of ease and luxury. By the way, there were some scribes, historians tell us, who...who decided that the best way to live their life was to change their scribal...humble scribal robes for the robes of Herod the Great's palace and they literally did that. And a group of scribes went into Herod's palace kowtowing to Herod in order that they might enjoy the luxury of the palace.

Well, John wasn't like those scribes. He was rough. Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6 says he wore clothes made out of...what?...camel's hair. And by the time a camel's-hair coat gets to you, it's fairly refined. But throwing the hide of a camel over you was pretty rough stuff, and he pulled the camel's-hair thing together with a belt and that was it, that was his garb and some sandals. And his diet was locusts and wild honey...sweet protein, a lot of protein in those bugs, I hear. I get mine elsewhere but... John was out in the wilderness, he didn't have a life of ease, he didn't own anything, he lived out in the wilderness, the vault above his head, stars was his ceiling. This is a man of self-denial. This is a man who lives the way a prophet lived. You know, you can tell a prophet because a prophet was an uncompromiser who gave a message from God and the message from God was repentance. They knew that. You went because you knew his message rang like the message of a prophet and you went because you knew his life was lived like the life of a prophet. There was an austerity in his life. There was a self-deprivation in his life. There was a self-denial in his life. He didn't drink wine or strong drink. He took a Nazarite vow. He abstained. This was consecration by separation. Numbers 6 talks about a Nazarite vow, probably indicates he didn't cut his hair because that was part of the Nazarite vow. He wasn't concerned about making a fashion statement of any kind...live a life of abstinence, self-denial. Only three men were lifelong Nazarites in the sense of the Nazarite vow, not talking about Nazareth, that's different. One was Samson, one was Samuel and the other was John.

Why did you go to him? You went to him because he was so different, because he spoke like a prophet and he lived like a prophet. He had this uncompromising proclamation of divine truth and it had the ring of prophetic truth because it confronted the establishment and the sins of the people no matter who they were, lowly or at the top. And you went because you could see there was nothing self-aggrandizing. He didn't show up every day in a new suit. He didn't seek to live the life of ease. He went because he had the demeanor and he had the message of a prophet. And therein lies the greatness of John.

It wasn't his character, although he was humble and humbleness is great, although he was a man of conviction and that's great, although he was a man of self-denial. There have been other humble

men and women. There have been other people who had conviction. There have been other people who were self-denying. But all of this led to this next statement, verse 26, "What did you go out to see? A prophet?" There have been other prophets, well there hadn't been one in 400 years, they've been waiting a long time. You went out because you saw all that was characteristic of a prophet, tremendous conviction concerning divine truth, prophets called people to repentance. They called people to turn from their sin. They called people to be cleansed in their heart. They called people to be ready for God to appear, for Messiah to come. And prophets lived a life of self-denial. You can go back to the Old Testament, you will see that. Prophets even like Samuel, taking a vow of separation and the other prophets as well, sometimes even being fed by God because they had no way to feed themselves. Jeremiah being thrown in a pit. Self-denial went with being a prophet, boldness with the truth of God and self-denial. So you went out to see a prophet.

But, not just a prophet...look at verse 26, "I say to you, you went out to see someone who is more than a prophet." My, how could you be more than a prophet? How could they say he's more than a prophet? He gave the message that prophets give, strong message. You can go back to Luke chapter 3 and read it, a message of judgment, a message of sin, a message of repentance, a message of if you don't repent you're going to perish in the fire of God's judgment, a strong, strong message. He had the demeanor of a prophet; self-denial, separation from the society around him so he's not corrupted by it. He is a prophet but the people knew he was more than a prophet.

In what sense is that true? Verse 27, "This is the one about whom it is written," listen to this, he is not only the prophet, but he is a prophet who was prophesied to come. That's unique. Other prophets came and went, came and went. Other prophets weren't prophesied to come. This one was because God said before Messiah comes there will come a prophet. And Jesus reminds them of that prophecy, verse 27, "This is the one about whom it is written," and He then paraphrases so as to correctly interpret Malachi 3:1, the last book in your Old Testament. The Old Testament ends with a prophecy that Messiah will come but before Messiah will come the messenger. "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face who will prepare Your way before You." This is not just a prophet, this is the prophesied prophet who will prepare the way for Messiah. John's greatness was within his calling. There are many people who are humble, many people who have convictions. There have been many prophets. The unique greatness of John was connected to this unusual privilege, this amazing privilege of being the forerunner to the Messiah. Four hundred years there had been no prophet. Four hundred years no prophet had spoken for God, so there was immense excitement. But John was not just a prophet, he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. I am the fulfillment of Isaiah 40 and I am pointing to Messiah and there He is." People acknowledged it.

So, Jesus is saying, "What did you say about John? You were drawn to the conviction that he had as a prophet. You were drawn to the persona that he had, the self-denial that was characteristic of a prophet. You knew him as a prophet, but not just a prophet the prophesied prophet who was the messenger announcing the arrival of Messiah." That's who you knew him to be. That's why you went

out there. That's why you were willing to say, in effect...I am no better than the Gentile. His preaching was so powerful, his presence was so supportive of that preaching, so affirming of that preaching the man, this man, this...this self-denying man, this man dressed in camel's hair, this rough hewn man living in utter disconnect from all societal influences, this man spoke a message so powerfully that people literally were crushed under the weight of its conviction and Jews who really saw themselves as the elite and looked down on the Gentiles openly confessed I'm no better than a pagan, I'm no better than an uncircumcised Gentile. I need to start all over again and I need to be cleansed and washed like a proselyte. Powerful man and you saw him not just as a prophet but as the messenger who would come before Messiah. Malachi 3:1, the Old Testament ended with that promise, "Behold, I'm going to send My messenger and he'll clear the way before Me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple. And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He's coming, the coming one, the expected one. But before that there will be a messenger." Malachi ends the fourth chapter, "I'm going to send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord and he will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children." When it says "I will send you Elijah," it means "one like Elijah...one like Elijah." John was that Elijah-like prophet. In fact, in Luke 1:17, "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children." That's a direct quote out of and an interpretation of Malachi 4:5.

The people accepted it. He's the one prophesied in Isaiah 40 verse 3, that's what he claimed when he preached. He's the one prophesied in Malachi 3:1, that's what it says right here and the lips of Jesus said it. He is the one prophesied in Malachi 4:5, that is precisely what was said by the angel who announced his birth. He is that messenger before Messiah. Believe me, the word was out that this is the...this is the prophet fulfilling all those scriptures. That's why you went out there. That's why you went through what you went through. How then can you having accepted John reject Me? That's the dilemma. And the sad reality is because they didn't want to accept Jesus, they were beginning to change their view about John. That's how wicked the heart of man is. It will undo what it has already confessed to avoid what it does not want to believe. Amazing.

There are people who have come to church, heard the truth, gone through a baptism, but never committed their lives truly to Christ. And when Christ lays claim to their life in a stronger way than John did, when Christ comes and calls to be Lord in their life, they're not willing. They don't like His diagnosis. They don't like His demands. In rejecting Christ they will then undo past confessions and turn against the very thing they once said they believed.

So Jesus says you can't have John and not Me. To reject John, reject Me. If you accept John, you have to accept Me. If he was a prophet and he said "I'm the Messiah," then I'm the Messiah. So if you're going to reject Me, you're going to have to reject him.

Well that just gets us into this passage. Believe me, what happens in verses 28 to 30 is an amazing result and a surprise ending for next week. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this powerful scene and ask that You would confirm its truth and application to us. So sad to see that sometimes under the emotion of powerful preaching can do things that appear to be genuine, even extreme and yet some can walk away from it demonstrating its superficiality. How many people under strong people, conviction have perhaps even gone through baptism but when the claims of Jesus were laid against their life they were unwilling? And in refusal to really submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ, they therefore must undo the prior confession. Lord, may it not be so. And we grieve over the multitude of people who eagerly embraced John even though it was a great thing to do, but couldn't receive Jesus. We know, Lord, that if we are going to receive the testimony about Christ, we must receive him, be it John's testimony or any other testimony in Scripture. We pray, O God, that You would be gracious and grant a true and saving faith to all who have heard the gospel. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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