



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 7:28-35**

To understand how Jesus and John took separate approaches to proclaiming the kingdom of God.

## We Want What We Want

There are times when my kids want something for dinner that my wife and I simply don't want to eat. "I don't think we will go there tonight, let's try something else," I might say. But nothing suffices. They had their little hearts set on McDonald's or Chick-fil-A or Peter Piper Pizza (dream destinations in every kid's heart). It really doesn't matter what I suggest from that point on; they don't want anything else. "I'm in the mood for burgers," one of them might say, but then every burger place I recommend is not good enough. Another one of my daughters might chime in, "I wanted pizza," but any credible pizza place I suggest is immediately dismissed. They simply don't want any of my solutions, regardless of how different and diverse my suggestions might be.

In Luke 7:28-35, Jesus talks about what makes John the Baptist unique. Beyond the fact that he's more than a prophet, but a forerunner of the Messiah, he also is the greatest humanity has to offer (Lk. 7:28). Beyond that, John took a very different approach to announcing the kingdom of God from Jesus. John fasted in anticipation of the kingdom; Jesus feasted in celebration of the kingdom - both were rejected. It didn't matter how the kingdom was presented; the people of Jesus' generation, like my disappointed children, had their hearts fixed on what they wanted, and no amount of diversity in propositions were enough. In this week's study, we examine those differences, and consider how we might fit into this as well.

## The Greatest Born of Women

Verse 28 begins with Jesus' statement regarding John: "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John." This is a phrase that is a bit of Hebraism, but its meaning is mostly clear: "John is the greatest thing humanity has to offer." The question is, why? Why does Jesus make this statement? It's because not only is he "more than a prophet" (Lk. 7:26), he is the very bridge between the old ways and the new ways. He serves as the transition between the old covenant and the new covenant. John's placement within human history is extraordinary, and the human tendency is to want to venerate him as above normal and worthy of attention and awe. Jesus responds to our human tendencies of such admiration: "Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk. 7:28b).

Jesus' statement unfolds something remarkable about the nature of the kingdom of God. Given John's stature, role as a prophet, and incredible office as the forerunner of the Messiah within human history, one would think (by worldly reasoning) that John's superiority in the world would mean superiority even in the kingdom of God. However, Jesus reasons that even the least, most insignificant people in the kingdom of God are greater than the greatest prophet (next to Jesus, of course). Jesus says something similar later in Luke's Gospel. A woman remarks to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed" (Lk. 11:27). She is commenting on the tremendous gift that Mary experienced as the mother of God! What a blessed and prosperous position to hold within humanity! On the contrary, Jesus answers her: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk. 11:28).

This means that, while there are various (and often ordained and necessary) hierarchies such as pastors, governors, leaders, etc., this hierarchy does not continue into the kingdom of God. Some people may have special roles that God uses them in, but it doesn't mean that they are more special than anyone else, spiritually speaking. John may be the greatest in stature in the world, but he is no different than anyone else in the kingdom, and when you compare even the least of those in the kingdom to the worldly position of John, John loses every time. This message is clearly understood to Jesus' audience: "When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Lk. 7:29-30). The lowly of the world rejoiced, and the great of the world scoffed. Jesus' statement regarding John turns out to accomplish what many of Jesus' teachings accomplish; a reversal of roles for what is expected in the world. The kingdom of God usually turns the kingdom of the world upside down; "whoever is least among you is greatest" (Lk. 9:48).

## Both Rejected

Jesus then begins to compare His generation to a bunch of kids playing in the marketplace. In order to understand this parable, we need to understand who is who.

### **THE CHILDREN**

The children in the marketplace are the contemporary generation of Jesus, but we can also include ourselves in this because our makeup as humanity hasn't really changed. The children, however, are not seen as one cohesive group, but two distinct groups who are "calling to one another" (Lk. 7:32). One group of children is calling to another group of children to play, but no matter what the one group of children proposes, the other group of children rejects. The one group of children plays the flute for celebration, and yet the other group of children "don't want to dance" (Lk. 7:32). The one group of children "sang a dirge," but the other group of

children “did not weep” (Lk. 7:32). They are indecisive, and do not want to participate regardless of what is proposed to them.

### **THE FLUTE**

The flute and the celebration in this parable likely refer to Jesus. Jesus comes proclaiming the kingdom with joy and feasting, inviting tax collectors and sinners to feast with Him (Lk. 5:29), but the religious leaders and the Pharisees disapproved of this (Lk. 5:30). They, like the kids who would not dance to the sound of the flute, have rejected the joyful news that Jesus brings concerning the kingdom of God.

### **THE DIRGE**

The dirge, by contrast, is solemn and serious much like John’s approach to announcing the kingdom: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come” (Lk. 3:7). John fasted, demonstrating a sign of mourning and repentance for sin in anticipation of the coming Messiah (Lk. 5:33). And the religious leaders and well-to-do of Jesus’ time, like the children who refused to weep at the dirge, rejected him just the same.

Jesus ends the parable by making the actual connection to both John and Himself. John, the strait-laced preacher who fasts regularly and abstains from alcohol is accused of having “a demon” because of his behavior by the religious elite (Lk. 7:33), and Jesus comes “eating and drinking” and is called “A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners” (Lk. 7:34). And yet, “wisdom is justified (declared right) by her children” (Lk. 7:35). Here, wisdom is synonymous with “God’s ways.” The children here are not John or Jesus, but the followers of Jesus. They have seen Him perform miracles and received His teachings and “do not take offense” at Him (Lk. 7:23). They see John for who he truly is, and therefore receive Jesus for who He truly is as well, and are blessed, though cursed by the world.

## **What About Now?**

One application is that regardless of how the message of God is proclaimed, it will be offensive to those who will reject it. It can be dressed up like John or it can celebrate like Jesus, and it will still be offensive because it calls its hearers to repent of their sin. This is a helpful application because it explains sometimes why people hate the Gospel so much. Sometimes, we could learn to share it with more grace and compassion, but still it will be “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23).

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Luke 7:28. What does Jesus say about John? And yet, how does he compare to those who are least in the kingdom of God?

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2. Read Luke 7:29. What did those who had been baptized by John do when they heard Jesus say what He said about John??

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 7:30. What did the Pharisees and lawyers do when they heard Jesus say what He said about John?

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2. Read Luke 7:31. What two questions does Jesus ask here?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 7:32. What is the point of this parable? (Hint: See above notes)

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2. Read Luke 7:33. What kind of behavior did John exhibit? How did people receive him?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 7:34. What kind of behavior did Jesus exhibit? How did people receive him?

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2. Read Luke 7:35. Who do “her children” represent in real life?

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## Week 28 Discussion: The Shape of the Gospel

In Luke 7:28-35, we come to understand that the same message of the Gospel can be presented in two very different manners (Jesus/John, flute/dirge, fasting/eating), and yet still be rejected by those who hear the message. Talk as a group about the importance of shaping the Gospel for the correct audience, and how important it is to anticipate rejection still.

1. Icebreaker: How was the Gospel presented to you when you believed? Compare answers as a group.
2. Do you share the Gospel? If not, why not? If so, how do you present it?
3. What group (social, class, age, etc.) do you find yourself most drawn to share Jesus with?
4. What aspects of the kingdom of God are you most interested in highlighting when you share the Gospel?
5. Why is a variation of method for sharing the Gospel a good thing?
6. Has anyone ever rejected the Gospel after you shared it with them? What happened?

### Takeaways:

1. Jesus declares John the greatest that humanity has to offer based on his role in human history.
2. Jesus reveals that though Jesus and John are different, they have both been rejected nonetheless.