

AUTHENTICITY

LUKE 7:18-35

M.I. GOD AUTHENTICATES THE GENUINENESS OF OUR FAITH.

I. WE ALL NEED GOD'S REASSURANCE (VS 18-23)

THERE WILL COME A TIME IN ALL OF OUR LIVES THAT WE WILL NEED GOD'S REASSURANCE OF HIS LOVE AND PROMISES TO US.

- A. JOHN'S NEED FOR REASSURANCE (18-20)
- B. JESUS' REASSURANCE (21-23)

II. GOD'S CHILDREN ARE SPECIAL TO HIM (VS 24-30)

GOD ENJOYS BRAGGING ABOUT HIS CHILDREN.

- A. WHAT WE ARE NOT (24-25)
- B. WHAT WE ARE (26-28)
- C. HOW WE RESPOND (29-30)

III. GOD AUTHENTICATES HIS CHILDREN (VS 31-35)

GOD MAKES SURE THAT HIS CHILDREN ARE PROVED TO BE GENUINE.

- A. GENUINE PHONIES (31-34)
- B. ONE HUNDRED PERCENT GENUINE (34)

Authenticity

Luke 7:18-35

I guess I've always known this, but it seems to me that as I study through the Gospel of Luke after about 30 years in the ministry, I'm struck by Jesus' demeanor. Some of the topics that I have often avoided or downplayed in my preaching have been hell, judgment, punishment, money, and the difficulty of being an authentic Christian. Oh to be sure, I have touched on these subjects, but not to the point Jesus did. Jesus talks a lot about money. He talks a lot about judgment and hell. He talks a lot about holy living. He almost never makes it easy to follow Him. And His greatest condemnations are reserved for religious people.

Oftentimes we think doubt is a weakness when in actuality it could demonstrate an intense faith in what we believe. Doubt demonstrates that we have actually been thinking intellectually about our faith. We have just come through the Christmas season. Do we really understand what we are placing our faith in? We are saying that God created the entire universe and everything and everyone in it. He inhabits the entire universe, every single nook and cranny of it at all times. And then this God decides to come to live with us, so He allows Himself to be born as a human baby via a virgin teen-aged girl. The God Who created everything that exists is now a helpless little baby. Who can just accept all of this without doubt? Only if we don't think it through can we just accept this. But even more unbelievable than this is God's idea of justice. How can we accept this? You and I because of our sin deserve to spend eternity in hell. We deserve to be humiliated, punished, tortured, and killed because of our sin. And yet, this God-child Jesus grows up perfectly righteous and perfectly sinless. But because of His incredible love for us, He personally takes on the punishment we deserve. He was publicly humiliated, tortured and punished mercilessly, and publicly executed on a cross for your sins and mine. He suffered our destiny ... and we go free. How believable is that?

I think we need to ponder two questions about our God and His plan of salvation. First, how could God love rebellious creatures so much that He would go through with this plan of salvation? And secondly, how could I be so lucky that He would demonstrate this love personally to me?

The Apostle Paul told the Philippian church that they ought to work out their salvation in fear and trembling. In other words, how could such a holy and righteous God love a sinner like me? And how could He give His life so that I could go free? Yes indeed, the salvation story is an incredible story. It is an unbelievable story. And yet it's true.

In this morning's passage, Jesus' cousin John will seem to express some doubt as to Who Jesus is. And many scholars seem to chide John for this. But really doubt is part of a well thought out faith.

On the other hand, cynics seem to have already made up their minds. When I did my chaplaincy training, I had to serve at a Catholic hospital. I got to work with some great nuns. They put up with a lot of abuse from cynics. Let me give you an example. A man had been rushed to the hospital with chest pains. The hospital ended up doing a double bypass surgery. When the man was getting ready to be discharged a nun came in to follow up with the paper work. She said, "Do you have insurance?" to which he answered, "No." The nun then asked, "Can you pay cash?" to which the guy responded, "No, I don't have any money." Then the nun asked him, "Do you have any relatives that may be able to help you out?" Now a little peeved the man said, "I have only one spinster sister, she's a nun." Now the nun became a little indignant and said, "Nuns are not spinsters. We are married to God!" to which the man said, "Then send the bill to my brother-in-law."

This guy seems to have a cynical view of God and those who choose to follow Him. But doubt is much different than cynicism. Doubt seems to stem from taking our beliefs seriously. And further, the more of our lives we risk in faith and the more that is at stake, the more we seem to have to face doubt. But we should take heart because we see some of the heroes of the Bible doubt as they try and reconcile their situations with their faith in God. It all seems to be part of the process. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **GOD AUTHENTICATES THE GENUINENESS OF OUR FAITH.** You see, Jesus was well aware that all the people that followed Him were not believers. He has already singled out a group of people who called Him Lord but in no way were true believers because they did not do what He commanded. In his next chapter Luke will talk about how different people receive the Word of God and in chapter 9 he will talk about the sacrifice of discipleship. Not everyone who goes to church, repeats religious phrases, participates in the ceremonies, and does religious stuff is an authentic Christian. God is the One Who authenticates our faith. Some people that we may think are authentic may not indeed be authentic and others that we may think are not believers may in reality be true believers. God is the judge.

WE ALL NEED GOD'S REASSURANCE (VS 18-23)

Doubt does not signify unbelief. In verses 18-23 we can see that we all need God's reassurance. In other words **THERE WILL COME A TIME IN ALL OF OUR LIVES THAT WE WILL NEED GOD'S REASSURANCE OF HIS LOVE AND PROMISES TO US.** In other words, if we are truly living out our faith as Jesus laid it out in Chapter 6, then we will have doubts. When you have been betrayed or deeply wounded by someone, and you forgive and love that person out of your devotion to Christ, you have absorbed an incredible emotional loss. Oftentimes this loss you willingly choose to endure may be

financial. If we have been living sacrificially loving lives, there will come a time when we ask if what we are doing is truly worth it?

In verses 18-20 we see John's need for reassurance. John is a great example of a man who gave his entire life to serving God the Father and Jesus the Messiah. From birth he was set apart to be the man who would prepare the people to receive Jesus as the Christ. John sacrificed everything. He didn't get married and have a family. He lived an ascetic life in the wilderness. He was a prophet of God who preached repentance and revival. He was hated by the religious and political leaders. In fact this passage we are studying this morning takes place while John is locked up in prison for publicly denouncing King Herod's illegitimate and perverted marriage to Herodias. Sometime between the passage we are studying this morning and the next two chapters of Luke, we learn that John was beheaded by Herod at the instigation of his wife Herodias. So John has given up all the comforts of life to prepare the way for Jesus' ministry. John was the one who said that his ministry and influence must decrease as Jesus' ministry and influence increased. John was now in jail and soon to be executed. As we face death, we all want to be sure our lives counted for something. We want to make sure we have fulfilled God's purposes. John laid it all on the line. Based on his choice to follow Jesus, he would now be able to face eternity with confidence and anticipation if Jesus really is the Promised Messiah.

Verse 18 starts out with the statement, "John's disciples told him about all these things." They told John about Jesus' teachings, about how he confronted the religious leaders, how Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, and raised the dead. No doubt they told John about Jesus' sermon on the Plain where he laid down rules for living in God's kingdom. We are to love our enemies, do good to our enemies, and pray for our enemies. We are to be humble, poor, repentant, and willing to follow Jesus at all cost. After the sermon, they must have reported to John about the Roman Centurion's remarkable public demonstration of faith in Jesus and how Jesus healed the Centurion's servant telepathically. And then to top it all off, on their way into a town, Jesus encountered a funeral. Jesus interrupted the funeral and raised the dead man to life and gave him back to his widowed mother. John must have heard this with excitement.

And yet, wasn't the Messiah supposed to set the captives free? Why was John in prison? Why was he being held captive by an immoral king? Where was the great judgment of the unrighteous and why wasn't Herod being eaten by worms? You see, John is thinking through his faith. His circumstance doesn't quite match all of his beliefs.

So for some reassurance, John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah or is there another who is to follow. Sending two witnesses for the Jews was rooted in their theological history. It always took two or more to validate a testimony. If two people go, they are more likely to come back with a full and accurate report. And so, John's faithful disciples

seek out Jesus and inquire as to whether Jesus is the promised Messiah or if they should look for another. So in verse 20 they ask Jesus if He is the Messiah. By the way, let me just back up and show you how Jesus' teaching at the Sermon on the Plain applies here. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus said that if a blind man leads another blind man, they will both fall into a pit. These two disciples of John had been following John faithfully. If John had misidentified the Messiah, then these two disciples would be the blind following the blind.

But that is not the case. John made a wise decision in following Christ and these two disciples were about to see how wise that choice was, because in verses 21-23 we encounter Jesus' reassurance to John. I love the way Jesus teaches and deals with us. He says and does something and then invites us to evaluate it. Here is a great example of free will interacting with predestination. Perhaps John's two disciples were predestined by God to come and ask Jesus this question for John. But now Jesus invites them to evaluate what they see and hear. They will have to make a free will choice to either receive Jesus' testimony or reject it. Let me make it a little more personal. Perhaps you are sitting here this morning for one of a multitude of reasons. Maybe your spouse dragged you here, maybe you're here because of your children, or maybe a friend brought you here, or maybe you just wandered in. However you got here, God predestined you to be here. If you are not yet a believer, then God is inviting you to evaluate His message to you. You too have the free will to either receive Him as your Lord and Savior or to reject Him. I'll be preaching through the Gospel of Luke for most of 2010. Please bring your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors, especially if they are not saved. Let God invite them to make a personal free will choice.

Well look at verse 21. Jesus hears their question and goes on doing what He has been doing all along. He continued to set people free from diseases, sicknesses, demons, and blindness. Take a moment to look at the last phrase in verse 21. Jesus gave sight to the blind. The word used for gave is actually excharisato. The root word is charis which means grace. Jesus freely gave sight to the blind. Jesus graciously gave sight to the blind. Jesus graced the blind with sight. It didn't matter if people were poor, uneducated, or slaves. Jesus' offer to the people was whosoever will, may come. Jesus' offer today is that whoever wants to come and be saved can come and receive salvation for free. Jesus wants to grace us with salvation. Please don't miss that.

In verse 22 Jesus then turns to the two witnesses and tells them to go back and tell John what they had just witnessed. But to make sure, Jesus sums up what they just saw and what they had seen before: People had been set free from their captivities of blindness, lameness, leprosy, deafness, and even death. The Gospel is freely preached to all, including the poor. Access to the Messiah and His ministry are open and available to all who will come in faith. These are all Messianic descriptions predicted by the Prophet Isaiah

about 700 years earlier. In other words, Jesus was claiming in word and deed that He was the Promised Messiah. The problem was that there were also political and military promises of Messiah as well. Jesus intended to and will fulfill these roles of Messiah at His Second Coming. But for now He is asking the people to recognize His Messianic ministry and to trust Him for the rest.

Hence the strange statement in verse 23, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." This is part of Jesus' message of reassurance to John. That sounds strange to us, but in Greek, it's even more strange. The word fall away in Greek is scandalizo. It is the word from which we get the English word scandalize. Literally the word means to trip over, to offend, to fall away, or to scandalize. So what does Jesus mean that the person that does not trip over Him will be blessed? Jesus is saying this to John (my paraphrase), "Take heart cousin. You have baptized and anointed the right Man. I am the Messiah. Hold on to that as you pass through death. Your reward is waiting for you. I will soon be joining you." I know that I have preached this one hundred yes even one hundred and one times. We are encouraged to hold on to our faith no matter what circumstances we face because Jesus our Lord will be with us through the end of this life and in all eternity. Paul put it like this:

"35Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? ... 37No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

38And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away" (Romans 8:35-38 / NLT).

We need to keep repeating these promises to ourselves daily. We need to practice living them in the good times so we will be ready to put them into practice during the difficult and trying times. John lived his life totally for Jesus and now Jesus has reassured Him that his life was not lived in vain but for the glory of God. Jesus wants to encourage us. So let's live out Jesus' commands and allow Him to reassure us that any sacrifice we make in this life for Him will be rewarded beyond our wildest imaginations. What could be sweeter than to be personally encouraged by Jesus; the One Who loves us and gave His life for us? If we live for Christ, THERE WILL COME A TIME IN ALL OF OUR LIVES THAT WE WILL NEED GOD'S REASSURANCE OF HIS LOVE AND PROMISES TO US.

GOD'S CHILDREN ARE SPECIAL TO HIM (VS 24-30)

I really love this next section. In verses 24-30 we can easily see that God's children are special to Him. Did you ever stop to think about this? GOD

ENJOYS BRAGGING ABOUT HIS CHILDREN. I don't know about you, but I was always a little embarrassed when my mom and dad used to brag about me. First of all, I don't really like that kind of attention. But secondly, it meant that I now had to live up to those claims.

Look how Luke starts out verse 24, "After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John." In verses 24-25 Jesus makes it clear what God's children are not. We are not people who are blown about the winds of this world. We are not shaken in our belief about Who God is and who we are. We stand firmly on the truths of God and oftentimes we will find ourselves out of step with the world and its values. We are not confused by the flash and glitter of this world. Instead we see people who are perishing and need to hear the Gospel message. John the Baptist was no pampered, spineless pretty boy. He was not swayed by the winds of popular opinion of false theology. He was not a wealthy politician or philosopher. He was in jail for bravely and uncompromisingly calling King Herod and Queen Herodias out for their sexual immorality. He called out the religious leaders of the day and he demanded that sinners from all walks of life repent and start living out faith in the One True and Living God, Jehovah. He called all people to turn their eyes towards Jesus, the long awaited Messiah. And he would soon be beheaded for his faith and his ministry.

We are not people of this world. Jesus, the Apostle Paul and other New Testament writers made it clear that out of necessity and out of God's plan to save people, we are in the world, but we, like Jesus are not of this world. We belong to another kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

I am begging us that we not be conformed to the patterns, values, thoughts, and behaviors of this world. But let us continually allow God to mold us into His righteous vision of us as Jesus describes what we are in verses 26-28. Now look how Jesus describes John. John was a prophet but not just any prophet. John was selected to be the one prophet who would announce the coming of Messiah. John baptized and anointed Jesus. The Jews believed that Elijah the prophet would appear on the scene once again to announce the coming of Messiah. In fact, even to this day Jews leave an empty chair at the Passover celebration. The empty chair is a hope for Elijah to come and announce the coming of Messiah. John fulfilled this role. And then Jesus sums up John's ministry like this, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." John's ministry is bigger than the greats: bigger than Abraham, bigger than Moses, and bigger than King David, and even bigger than the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. John was greater because his mission was greater. John's ministry bridged the gap between the Hebrew promises of the Old Testament to the Messianic fulfillment in the New Testament.

And then again, Jesus throws in this little twist at the end of verse 28, "Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." That sounds strange but we need to think in terms of John's own words. John said that

he baptized with only water but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Of the old order, John is the greatest because he provides the bridge ministry between Judaism and Christianity. But being baptized and born again through Jesus, is greater than anything in this world. Therefore, anyone born again through faith in Jesus belongs to the new order. Jesus is the Promised Messiah of Israel and now offers up salvation for all; first to the Jew and secondly to the rest of us.

We have already touched on this interaction between free will and predestination. In verses 29-30 we are reminded that how we respond makes all the difference in the world. There were many different kinds of people in the crowds where Jesus taught and healed. They were there by destiny. They heard Jesus speak and witnessed His miracles. And now they had the freedom to respond. We have been predestined to come face to face with the teachings and miracles of Jesus. How will we respond? There were tax collectors and sinners from all walks of life who had gone to be ministered to by John. The message made sense to them. They repented of their sins and they were baptized. They had prepared themselves for Jesus' ministry and now as they watched and listened to Jesus teach, they were convinced He was the Messiah. They gave their lives to Jesus in faith. They were prepared through repentance, humility, and faith.

Again, we find a strange phrase in verse 29. Do you see the phrase, "acknowledged that God's way was right."? Literally that reads, "justified God." Isn't our theology that God justifies us? Here the tax collectors and other sinners are justifying God. What could that mean? The word for justify is *dikaióo*. It means to declare right or righteous. By turning their lives around through repentance, baptism, and lifestyle change, these sinners are proving God to be right. God keeps His promises. God does what He says. When we live out our faith in Christ, then we prove God's way to be right and God to be righteous. That's why we need to define faith like Jesus defined faith. For Jesus, faith is always defined as actions we take based on what we believe. As James put it, "Faith without works is dead."

But how could one not respond to Jesus in faith, in repentance, baptism, and a lifestyle change? What could keep people from receiving Jesus? In verse 30 it seems that pride is what keeps most people from surrendering to Jesus. The Pharisees and experts in the law thought they were already good. Certainly they were several cuts above these tax collectors and other sinners. They felt there was no need for them to repent and so they refused John's message of faith, humility, and repentance. And further, they rejected Jesus' teachings. They refused to prepare themselves to receive John's message and they failed to prepare themselves for Jesus' message. Look the Bible is clear that ALL have sinned and fallen short of the God's standards for living. If we were to look at God's commands for life as laid down in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, we can see that we fall way short. But it takes humility to admit that I am just as much in need of God's grace as a thief, a murderer, a prostitute, a drunk, or a drug addict. The

Pharisees did not want to be lumped in with these evil tax collectors. But that is the very attitude that caused them to reject John and Jesus. I hope we use our free will to humble ourselves, repent, and place our faith in Jesus because GOD ENJOYS BRAGGING ABOUT HIS CHILDREN. He embarrasses us by bragging because we know we don't deserve any credit but He also gives us a lot to live up to.

GOD AUTHENTICATES HIS CHILDREN (VS 31-35)

In verses 31-35 we learn that God authenticates His children. In other words, GOD MAKES SURE THAT HIS CHILDREN ARE PROVED TO BE GENUINE. Again, we are reminded that we are either preparing ourselves to receive Jesus or preparing ourselves to reject Jesus. Verses 31-34 show that Jesus has a way of exposing genuine phonies. People find all sorts of reasons for not giving their lives to Christ. They cite philosophical problems with Christianity, intellectual problems, theological problems. If you listen to them long enough, you will hear them making contradicting arguments to reject Christianity. I direct you to the trials of Jesus. The witnesses gave contradicting testimony of the charges against Jesus. The witnesses couldn't agree yet they crucified Jesus. The reason people don't want to recognize the truth of Christianity is because they don't want to change the way they are living. They enjoy living immorally by having sex outside of marriage, getting drunk, getting high, cheating, lying, and basically living for themselves. They are consumed by their own passions and desires.

Jesus laid it out clearly for them. Jesus said, you rejected God's truth because you couldn't accept God's message from John because his life was too ascetic for you. In fact you said he was demon possessed.

And so here I am, giving you the same message, God's message, and you reject it because you call me a glutton and a drunkard because I eat and drink like a normal man. Therefore if you reject God's message because it came from either John or Me, then you are really not rejecting John or Me, you are rejecting God's message. And if you reject God's message, you are rejecting God.

Jesus said they were like little spoiled brats playing games with people trying to please them. He says, people came to you rejoicing and playing happy music but you refused to celebrate. So they played you the blues and funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry. There is no pleasing spoiled, whiney brats. The point is this. Self-centered, self-indulgent, self-absorbed people will never receive Christ because they are too involved satisfying their own lusts. Since Christ tells us to die to all of that, they reject Christianity, the Christian message, and Christ.

On the other hand there will always be those whose hearts Jesus' message penetrates deeply. Jesus calls these people children of wisdom. Please do me a favor and look back at verse 29. Do you remember what I said about

the wording there? It said that the tax collectors justified God. We came to the understanding that what that phrase ultimately meant was that by turning their lives around through repentance, baptism, and lifestyle change, these sinners are proving God to be right. When we give our lives to Christ, He forgives us of our sins, comes into our hearts, and lives in us through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. God keeps His promises.

In this last verse, verse 35, we come in contact with that same phraseology again. Literally it says, "Wisdom is justified by her children." It is the same phrasing. When we live out our faith in Christ, we prove the wisdom of the Gospel message is truth. Those who receive Christ in humility prove that God keeps His promises. Those who live out their faith in Christ prove that God's ways are wisdom and truth. When we justify God and His wisdom through faith and the pursuit of holy living, God justifies us. God gives all of us the free will to either reject Him or receive Him. I pray that all of us here make the choice to be wise children and not whiney spoiled brats. God will prove who we are. GOD MAKES SURE THAT HIS CHILDREN ARE PROVED TO BE GENUINE.

It's relatively easy to fool others into thinking we are pretty good people. It's even easy for us to fool ourselves. But it doesn't really matter what we think of each other or what we think of ourselves. God is the One Who judges. GOD AUTHENTICATES THE GENUINENESS OF OUR FAITH. Look, this is about a power struggle. Will we surrender our lives to Jesus in faith or will we continue to proudly live life on our own terms. I like the way Bruce Larson sums up this passage in his commentary on Luke:

"The ultimate power game is the game we play with God Himself. And hell is that place where God finally says to us, 'Have it your way. You've won.' But we can have it His way. The King welcomes us into the Kingdom and as we move out to strangers, friends and family, He gives us the power to live as He would have us, to defer to our enemies, and not to have to win."

It truly is a strange life Jesus calls us to live. And because we are called to lay it all on the line, we often find ourselves in need of reassurance that Jesus is indeed Who He says He is; The King of kings and Lord of lords. We will not be disappointed if we continue to follow Him.