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## **THE DISAPPOINTED PROPHET'S WISE COURSE.**

– *LUKE 7:18-28.* – *APRIL 29.* –

**"He hath done all things well." – Mark 7:37.**

WHILE Jesus was performing many miracles, making numerous disciples, and meeting with comparatively little opposition, things were going very differently with his cousin, John the Baptist. Yet this was only in accordance with what John himself had prophesied, saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease." John was in prison, about 120 miles [R2621 : page 125] from where Jesus was laboring so successfully. To be shut up in a dark dungeon of the kind usual at that time, and to have our Lord proceeding with his work, and raising no voice of protest on his behalf, and exercising none of his mighty power for his deliverance, probably seemed very strange to John – especially in view of his expectations respecting the work of the Messiah – that he would be a great earthly general and king, in harmony with the general Jewish expectations.

We see how readily John might have permitted doubts and fears to enter his mind. He might have said, This whole matter is a fraud, and Jesus and I have been deceiving ourselves. He might have lost all faith in God's providential dealings in the past and all heart and hope for the present and for the future; but notwithstanding the great disappointment he felt, his faith continued its firm hold on the Lord. This is indicated in his sending of his disciples to Jesus, to make inquiry, and also in the character of the inquiry. He does not say, Is this whole matter a farce, and are we deluded? but on the contrary his question was a sound one, and expresses the conviction that thus far the Lord has been leading, and that the only doubt in the prophet's mind was whether or not, as he was the forerunner of Jesus, Jesus in turn, greater than he, might be the forerunner of some one else still greater and yet to come. And strictly speaking this was exactly the case; for Jesus in the flesh was indeed the forerunner and preparer of the way

before the still greater glorified Christ of the second advent, who will accomplish the great and wonderful things foretold by all the holy prophets since the world began. – Acts 3:21-23.

Our Lord, it will be noticed, did not answer John's question directly – he did not say that there was not another coming and still greater work than that which he was performing, but he did give John to understand distinctly that the work he was then doing was the very work which had been foretold in the prophets, and the proper thing to be done at that time. While John's messengers were with Jesus a number of miracles were performed in their sight, and Jesus sent them back to John with instructions that they bear witness to him of the work of the Lord progressing in his hands, and to say to John that while the opportunities to stumble at Jesus, his work and his words, were many, and while many would stumble at these, as the prophet had declared (Isa. 8:14), yet a special blessing would rest upon all who would not stumble, but whose **[R2621 : page 126]** faith in the Lord would continue, despite various disappointments of expectation respecting his work and their fulfillments – through misapprehension of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine plan, which, as the heavens are higher than the earth, were higher than human conception could have foreseen. For instance, what Jew could have thought for a moment of the still higher than Jewish expectations of the Kingdom – of the spiritual Kingdom-class to be selected first before the establishment of the earthly kingdom, and to be sharers with Messiah in his glory, honor and immortality?

All of the Lord's faithful servants need to remember the same lessons which were thus forcefully impressed upon John: they need to remember that when sometimes matters turn out very differently with themselves than what they had expected, when they receive injuries, reproaches and oppression, as the rewards of faithfulness to duty and to truth, it does not mean that God has forgotten them, nor that they were misled in their previous service to the Lord; nor does it mean that the Lord has changed his plan; nor that he is careless or indifferent

respecting their condition. True, their first thought should be whether or not present unfavorable conditions are in the nature of chastisements or the results of any misdoings on their part, or failures to serve the Lord in his own way, but if they find their course to be harmonious with the divine will and Word they should at once rest their faith upon the Lord, and conclude that God knows better than they how to manage his own work. Then while thankful to be used in that work for a time they should nevertheless be pleased, if it were the Lord's will, to be set aside for a time – perhaps for the good of others, or perhaps for their own training in the school of experience, and in the learning of lessons of patience and of faith.

But such a resting in the Lord, such a centering of life in him, can be enjoyed only by those who have made considerable progress, who have run a considerable distance in the way of the Lord, and who have already been exercised under the Lord's providences, and have learned many lessons in his school. This, however, is the condition which all of the Lord's true followers are to strive to attain, as the only one thoroughly pleasing to the Lord. The proper course of all God's servants when perplexed is the one followed by John, namely, to go to the Lord with the perplexity – not doubtingly, but inquiringly – and be set at rest by his Word. We may not be able to hear the Lord's words with our own ears, but we can receive it second hand as did John, – through the testimonies of the Apostles and prophets, by whose writings God has provided in advance replies to all proper queries.

The question arises, was John imprisoned on account of officiousness – on account of trying to mind Herod's business? Or was he imprisoned because of his faithfulness in the discharge of that duty? Was it right or was it wrong for him to reprove the king, and to say to him that it was not lawful for him to take as his wife his brother Philip's wife? There is no question that Herod was in the wrong, and that John's expression on the subject was a correct one, and that Herod was living in adultery, but the question is, Was this any of John's business? Did he need to meddle with the king's affairs, and thus get himself into

trouble? And if it was John's duty to reprove Herod on this subject, was it not the duty of our Lord Jesus to have done the same, and in addition to have uttered a protest against the imprisonment of John, and in general to have raised a great hubbub over the injustice being done by the wicked ruler? And if John was right in this matter was our Lord Jesus wrong in not following the same course? Or if Jesus was right in not following John's course in reproving Herod, does it prove that John erred in giving the reproof?

We answer that our Lord's conduct is certainly to be considered as above reproach, since "in him was no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" but this does not prove guile and sin on John's part in following a different course. We are to remember that in many respects John and his ministry differed widely from our Lord and his ministry. For instance, the uncouth skin-girdle which John wore was very different from the seamless robe which the Lord wore; and the Scriptures call attention to the fact that John lived a very abstemious life, "neither eating nor drinking" ordinary food, but practicing a continual fasting or self-denial as respects these comforts, while our Lord Jesus came "both eating and drinking," attended wedding feasts, and banquets made in his honor. The lesson is that these grand characters each fulfilled his own mission, according to the divine arrangement, but that they had different missions. John's mission was pre-eminently that of a reprovor and reformer, and we are to understand that as a prophet he was supernaturally guided in respect to the various features of the course which he took. Our Lord's mission, on the contrary, was a different one; he was gathering to himself those whom John's ministry served to arouse to righteousness and to zeal to know and do the Lord's will.

We who are called to be the "body" of Christ and to follow him, may learn a lesson in this as respects our proper course: we are not sent forth as John was, to dwell in the wilderness, living and dressing uncouthly, and to criticise and denounce everything and everybody. Some of the Lord's dear people fail to notice that such commissions are

special and very rare and sometimes in following the wrong copy, undesignedly bring reproach upon the Lord's cause. We are to be copies of God's dear Son, our Lord, and not to be copies of John the Baptist. We are not to stir up strife by trying to mind other people's business, nor to seek to govern all the affairs of this world, reproofing emperors, kings, governors, etc., but to the contrary of this are exhorted by the Apostle to remember that what God sees fit to permit we can see fit to endure.

Even tho we find many things which we cannot commend or indorse, we may equally find ourselves able to avoid any special denunciation of them – especially of things which have no bearing whatever upon the proper understanding and fulfilling of the Lord's Word. The Apostle points out our proper position saying, "As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men." And our Lord emphasized the same thought, saying "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called the children of God."

Some of the holiest of the Lord's people err on this subject in their own families, and needlessly arouse prejudice and opposition, and make their homes unhappy, **[R2621 : page 127]** by continually finding fault with things which tho not up to the standard of saintliness and cross-bearing, are nevertheless not immoral or wicked even in tendency. Parents and guardians are surely to guard against all tendencies toward immorality, etc., but to find fault with those they love merely because they are only nominal Christians and have the spirit of worldliness, is certainly unwise. Their general life of peace and joy in the holy spirit is the very best reproof of worldliness they can give and the best recommendation of the glorious gospel they profess. This is the epistle that will be read, the light that will reprove darkness. In other words, we must not expect from nor try to force upon the unconsecrated the details of our own self-denials. We must wait until they shall see full consecration to be their "reasonable service" **[R2622 : page 127]** and present their bodies living sacrifices to God. Pastors and teachers, however, should seek to keep continually

before the Lord's consecrated flock the high Scripture standard, realizing that many influences are continually at work to lower the standard of holiness and devotion.

### **JOHN MORE THAN A PROPHET.**

The multitude who stood about must have heard the message which John's disciples brought to Jesus, and no doubt queried within themselves, if not audibly, Is John losing faith in Jesus as the Messiah? If John is a prophet himself, should he not be informed by God on this subject, without sending to inquire of Jesus? Does not this, in connection with the fact that John did no miracles, prove that John was not a prophet, but merely some sort of a reformer, possibly self-appointed? Our Lord seems to have detected such a questioning, and hence, after John's disciples were gone, so that his words could not be construed as a sop of flattery to hold John's confidence, he delivered quite a eulogy upon his faithful forerunner, which we paraphrase thus: – What did you expect in John – a weak, pliable character, easily swayed by every wind of doctrine and fancy, as a reed is easily swayed by the wind? Those who get such an impression respecting his character are deceiving themselves. On the contrary, he is a prophet, yea, more than a prophet – he is a special ambassador and messenger of God at this present time, to do an introductory work related to the Kingdom which I am now preaching. He is referred to by Malachi the prophet (3:1). Indeed, I declare to you that there has never arisen a greater prophet than John, and yet I say to you that the least one in the Kingdom-class is greater than he; for he does not belong to the Kingdom-class at all, but to the previous dispensation – "the house of servants." "The law and the prophets were until John" (and he is the last of the prophets), and since then the Kingdom of heaven is preached, that now whosoever will of this divinely favored nation may press his way and gain an entrance into it and become a son of God. – John 12:1.

Note in the text the clearness of our Lord's words respecting the distinction between the new institution which he was founding and the old institution founded by Moses, and which was then coming to an end, giving place to the new. The Apostle shows that the call of us Gentiles during this Gospel age to a joint heirship in the Kingdom as members of the Kingdom-class is because those of the Jews ready to receive the Kingdom favor upon the Lord's terms were fewer than the pre-determined number. Our call is to fill the places of those "natural branches" of the Abrahamic stock, by being grafted into and made partakers of the original root of divine favor – the Abrahamic promise – to be members of the seed of Abraham, in which as a Kingdom-class all the families of earth shall be blessed with certain favors of knowledge and opportunity. – Compare Rom. 11:1-33; Gal. 3:16,29.

How highly we who belong to the new dispensation should value its privileges and opportunities, and seek to "make our calling and our election sure." (2 Pet. 1:4-11.) If those who were called with an earthly calling to be a "house of servants" rendered but a reasonable service when they engaged in the Lord's work zealously, as did John the Baptist, and have been faithful, how much more zeal and energy ought we to put forth who have been favored so much more highly! "What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" Let us remember that this "high calling," this "heavenly calling," to joint-heirship with our Lord in the Kingdom, is a very special and a very limited call, that it will soon end, and that so far as the divine revelation shows, it will never be repeated. In view of these things let us lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race set before us in the gospel, looking unto Jesus, the author, until he shall have become the finisher, of our faith. – Heb. 12:1.

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