

## 18 - JOHN, JESUS AND THE COMING ONE Luke 7:18-35.

In some respects this passage is confusing. It puts John the Baptist in a different light than earlier parts of the gospel. He has heard of Jesus but appears to doubt his identity. Jesus' response to John's messengers repeated the basic elements of his ministry so far: teaching, healing, exorcism and challenge to all who saw and heard to believe.

The phrase "the coming one" and the raising of the widow's son also lend confusion to the passage. Did it refer to Elijah whose return was expected before the Messiah came to establish God's reign? Or did it refer to John himself?

In her discussion of the passage Sharon Ringe suggests two possibilities, then resolves the problem.

Either this incident, shared from a common source in Matthew 11:2-6, is an actual event in Jesus' ministry.

Or it is the product of the early church attempt to distinguish between John and Jesus.

It is known that there was some rivalry between the disciples of the two. The selected references to Isaiah's prophecies clearly describe the essentials of Jesus' ministry as Luke had previously defined it in 4:16-30 and 6:20-26. But this would imply that John was ignorant of Jesus' ministry, which seems very doubtful and his own role in preparing for him.

Ringe's solution is that there is no confusion or uncertainty if we regard the passage as a change in the theological understanding of the relationship between John and Jesus.

The subsequent rhetorical questions Jesus' put to the multitude describes John himself as "the coming" and not Jesus. In Jesus' time the Jewish people awaited more than any prophet's word but the word of one who would tell them that the events of the end-time had arrived. This is clarified by the quotation from Malachi 3:1 followed by Jesus' assurance that John was more than just another prophet. He was *the* prophet who would prepare the way for God's chosen Messiah who will bring that final time of salvation to Israel.

In other words, John was the last of the old order, but he was still not the one who came to establish God's reign on earth. He was not the Messiah. That is how vss. 28-30 describe John. Many people who came to be baptized by John believing that he represented the welcome justice and righteousness of God. Those who refused to be baptized by him, were actually rejecting God purpose for their lives.

It was as if Jesus and John stood on different sides of the dividing line marking the beginning of God's final reign. They had a common agenda from God, but they could both be rejected by *their own generation*. The parable about the children's games makes this point. Neither John's message of repentance nor the good news Jesus proclaimed

would be heard except by a relatively few.

The proverb about Wisdom's children reiterates the point of the whole passage. Those who

did believe welcome both the appeal for repentance and the joy of God's purpose and reign being fulfilled at last.