

THE SAVIOUR WHO WON'T DANCE TO OUR MUSIC. LUKE 7: 18-35

Today we are confronted by one of the most challenging views of Jesus. This is a meeting primarily with John the Baptist. But it leads on to a reveal of people who doubt Jesus finding He makes no apology for not meeting their expectations.

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One of the most common defences I have heard from people who discover I'm a clergyman, or a church goer or a Christian is: I'm not interested in religion, or organised religion.

My natural instinct is to try and go gently, and be a bit apologetic for the sins of organised religion. But in more recent times I tried being contrarian in reply. For instance, to disinterest in organised religion – I might say try a church that's disorganised. But my most serious reply to disinterest in religion is – I agree. I'm no fan of religion either – but me being a Christian is not about religion, it's about a relationship I have with Jesus.

Because, when it's all said and done – Christians are who we are and believe what we believe because of who Jesus is, and what he has done.

It's all about Jesus. If Hobart rejects anything about us today, in the end it isn't that we meet here, or believe in God, or miracles, or fail to love our neighbours, or anything else – the greatest offence our world will find is Jesus himself.

Jesus was totally comfortable in his skin and being. In the face of expectations that a rabbi would be obsessed with religious trivia or a messiah with armed revolution, Jesus was loving, kind, gracious, competent, smart, and insightful.

Jesus just doesn't dance to the music his world played. He didn't bend to meet public expectations, and so it is today. We must take him as he is – the creator Lord of this world and us, and our Saviour who has rescued us from sin, death and Satan.

And we must take him especially as – The son of God who wishes to glorify The Father by all he says and does.

It is this single-minded focus of Jesus that confuses the people he meets because, like Satan in the desert, they expect **him** to meet **their** expectations.

And they usually reject him when he doesn't.

1. Jesus did not meet John the Baptist's expectations.

This whole passage today comes off the back of John the Baptist asking Jesus a question.

¹⁸ John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, ¹⁹ he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

²⁰ When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" ... ²² So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[a] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ²³ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me".

John the Baptist is in prison by now and can only hear of Jesus from his friends and followers.

And when John's disciples told him about all the things that Jesus was doing, it confused John because Jesus was not matching up with John had preached about the coming Messiah of Israel. He didn't doubt Jesus but was puzzled.

The general expectation among godly Jews like John, was that the Messiah would cleanse God's people from hypocrisy, corruption and evil. He would come like a thresher to sift the people and restore Israel to a holy people worshipping God alone.

Luke 3:7 "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? The axe is already laid at the root of the tree"

*¹⁵ The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. ¹⁶ John answered them all, "I baptize you with^[b] water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. **He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and fire.** ¹⁷ **His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."***

What John heard about Jesus was wonderful stuff, but there wasn't any chopping or winnowing, or threshing or burning happening. So, John sent two disciples of his to ask Jesus for clarification.

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... So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2).

John the Baptist would know that those words are from Isaiah. He would understand that Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment to Isaiah's prophecies. The context of Isaiah's words are of God's judgment and vengeance. Jesus may be assuring John that the time of God's judgment will come, even if it has not yet happened. For now, John should trust that Jesus is the one who was to come.

Jesus confused John the Baptist's expectations. And often ours as well.

I must say that like John the Baptist, it is very easy for us to have expectations that are disappointed in following Jesus.

In visiting church regularly while with CMS, I would preach in a small church one week and large church the next. Both ministers were nice guys. Both preached the gospel, taught the Bible, and the congregations were friendly. Both attributed the size of their church to those same things, and both admitted to disappointment in their ministry.

Pastors with big and growing churches, are deemed to be successful and so write books and speak at conferences, because there is a real demand among pastors and leaders to know what works in ministry.

To be clear there is much to be learnt from healthy churches, and sometimes things to be learnt from churches that fail.

But envy out of disappointment is an easy route to follow in ministry. And not just ministry. It's very easy for us to place expectations on Jesus that aren't met, or be disappointed by how our Christian lives play out.

We can be a bit like Elijah. We would rather a bit of earthquake, wind and fire to come down on people to shift them to believe in God.

And we can demand of God to be happy, successful, healthy and prosperous. We can demand of other Christians that they be kind, gentle, easy to get on with and agree with us.

And most of all, we can harbour disappointment with Jesus for how our life is going, or not going, or where it's going or not going. Perhaps the cost of following Jesus seems too high, too costly.

Maybe just sometimes Jesus disappoints us, or certainly puzzles us. That seemed true of the John the Baptist. But he wasn't alone.

2. Jesus marches to the beat of God the Father's drum.

Jesus' reply to John was essentially "look at the evidence from the right perspective", and John was asking from the right place.

After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see?"

John the Baptist was no pussy cat. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets, dressed in animal skins, living rough and eating bush tucker. Monday was not washing day, nor Tuesday spa and massage day.

People went to hear John the Baptist because he fearlessly called it how he saw it. He was in prison because he did just that.

And Jesus says – John the Baptist deserves honour for who he is and what he has done in obedience to God.

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

John's job was to prepare people for the expected long-awaited Messiah/Saviour to actually arrive.

But then Jesus goes on to say something very important – to us today.

I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

How can that be? Greater than John? Because we who have put our faith in Jesus – born again by His spirit, are witnesses and proclaimers of the Messiah who **has** come, **has** lived, **has** died to pay our penalty for our sins, and **has** risen, and **WILL** come again.

John dies in faith that the Messiah Jesus **would** set people free, **would** save them from the coming wrath, but didn't live long enough **to see** how Jesus would die on the cross or rise again and vow to come again. We have.

But from what Jesus says, many people are still not convinced or understanding. But not all.

All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.

3. THE SAVIOUR WHO WON'T DANCE TO OUR MUSIC

Henry Ford started out manufacturing and selling the Model T Ford in one model and one colour – Black. when asked why he didn't ask his customers what **they** wanted – He said "if I asked people what they wanted they would have said they wanted a faster horse."

The problem as Jesus sees it with humanity is that what we want is to be our own God in our own life. And it's not the right answer to our problems.

At the Bishop's training day yesterday the keynote speaker Stephen McAlpine highlighted the rise of expressive individualism. That's where my ID and your

ID has the highest priority and value to us in life. It takes precedence over any community or institution or morality. My individuality is my highest authority it's my truth.

You be you, be true to yourself. Follow your heart. Your greatest happiness and purpose in life is to find and express yourself authentically

The only useful deity that we will allow in our lives is the one that bows down and worships us, and like a genie in the bottle, gives us our greatest wish, again and again.

And that's why Jesus says next:

Jesus says, "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

*"We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not cry.'*

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

In the end, what Jesus is saying is whatever messenger or even the saviour God sends, our world will find an excuse to reject him, if you are being you.

Greg Morse from Desiring God ministries says "The children of this generation will not agree to disagree — you must dance (to their music); you must mourn (what they mourn). They check your face for tears and your feet for proper rhythm. If you cry during their cheerful song, you have a demon. If your feet dance to another tune, you are a drunkard, sinner, and glutton. Refuse to consent, and the new powers try to cancel you as a champion of hate. Nonconformity to the world is met with consequences."

It's the same today. How then do we approach our community and seek to attract them to us.

Contrast not condemnation ... Show Jesus ... affirm the longings for meaning etc.

Community not isolation ...

Piety not personalism

Guard amongst ourselves

“If the world hates you, *know* that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

4. Two key conclusions by Jesus

There are two little nuggets of powerful truth almost missed in what Jesus says.

V23 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

There are many caricatures of who Jesus is.

Meek and Mild Jesus.

Great Teacher Jesus.

Wise man Jesus.

Hippy Jesus.

Superstar Jesus.

Saviour, King, Lord Jesus – vs the Rich Young ruler ... Crucified Jesus – many disciples left him

Don't stumble ...

V35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

Psychology studies – sterile fruit fly ...

Let Jesus speak for himself.

Let his truth do so.

Let his life do so.

His death ...

His resurrection ...

His return ...

His good news ...