

*Are You the One, Pt. 4*  
***Confronting the Crowds***  
*Luke 7: 24-35*

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In a classic story, Act 4 is where it all goes wrong for the main character. So Act 4 is often just called “the worst point.” For example, Jack climbs the beanstalk and enters the castle of the giant. He finds the goose that lays golden eggs and steals her. Then, Act 4 starts when the giant wakes up. Jack is in jeopardy. This is when I always tried to scare my kids, “Fee. Fi. Fo. Fum. I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I’ll grind his bones to make me bread.” All seems lost. The giant is awake and he’s going to catch Jack. The worst point.

Now most main characters don’t choose this bad point. It just comes to them as a result of the choices they made earlier. They have roused the opposition. Villains seeks to do them harm. But in the story of Luke 7, Jesus actually wades right into the worst point. He demands it. Jesus himself creates the crisis that could lead to his undoing.

This is the 4<sup>th</sup> week we’ve been discussing Luke 7 as a complete story in itself. In Act 1, Jesus engaged the powers that thwart human flourishing. He healed a servant who was ill unto death. In Act 2, Jesus went deeper into his encounter with hostile powers as he took on death itself. He raised the only son of a widow right in the middle of his funeral procession. Last week was Act 3. It’s the midpoint where something essential is revealed about the main character. After this reveal, there is no turning back for the hero. We saw that Jesus sent a message to his cousin John the Baptist. In this message, Jesus quoted a string of Scriptural passages about the coming Messiah and he claimed that these were about himself. Jesus declared that all of God’s Word pointed to him. Now, in today’s section of the story, we read that Jesus did not wait for opposition to build against him. He incited it.

Jesus’ tone seems to change as he turns from a message meant just for John to a speech given to the crowds. He gets combative. Jesus uses a rhetorical strategy of asking the same question three times. Concerning John the Baptist, Jesus asked, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see?” It’s an in-your-face question because they all knew about John. A year or so earlier, great throngs had gone out into the desert to hear John preach his fiery sermons. They had gone to confess

their sins and to get baptized in the Jordan River. They repented and got clean in order to be ready for the Messiah to come. Jesus asked it again. “Did you go out to see a little reed shaken back and forth by the wind?” They all knew John the Baptist was no bending reed. He was a mighty oak. A powerful man with black and white convictions. “So what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes?” John wore rough burlap and ate wild locusts. He was no palace fancy man. He was one serious dude. “So what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet.” Jesus declared that John was the messenger declared in Malachi to be the advance man for the arrival of the LORD I Am himself. And Jesus declared, “I tell you, among those born of women, no one is greater than John.” In other words, no naturally born person has ever been more faithful than John. He’s the top. He told and he lived the truth.

But then Jesus dropped the surprise. “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Bang. John was but the forerunner. Fulfillment is here. John got as far as anyone could with following the Law to get right with God. But something more was needed and it has come. Now you can be born from above. You can be spiritually remade. You can become a new creation. The least person who has been made new in me has gone way past where John could go.

For many in the crowd this was welcome news. They had confessed sins. Repented. Gotten washed. But they knew they were still law breakers at heart. They knew they were still waiting for the new heart God would give them through his Christ. And here he was. The one who changes not just behavior but hearts. Who remakes us from the inside out. Our confession and repentance and baptism by John got us to see that we actually cannot save ourselves. Meticulous law keeping does not change the inner man. Only the new birth by the Spirit can do that. And now we believe that God has come to do in us what we cannot do on our own. This is truly amazing grace.

Luke then adds a commentary that chills me. He says “But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by John.” The religious leaders, the theologians and experts in the Scriptures, the scrupulous law keepers—they did not go down in the waters of Jordan. They did not admit that they were common sinners. They were willing to stand on their own record. To say, “We trust that we have done enough. We do not need this confession and baptism.” Brave pride. They believed they were better than others. And good enough for God. They were fine in themselves. And so, Luke tells us, they rejected the purpose of God for themselves.

*They rejected the purpose of God for themselves.* Can you imagine having *that* be the description of the final evaluation of your life? Here's Dawson. He rejected the purpose of God by declaring that in himself he was enough. He thought he had this. But by insisting on himself, he shoved aside God's purpose for him. He has drawn himself outside of God's will and plan.

Jesus confronted people with the reality of God. He boldly declared that he was God himself in the flesh, the fulfillment of the Scriptures. He healed the sick, raised the dead, forgave sinners, and freed the possessed. No power that thwarts human flourishing could stand against him. Save one. *The human will.* Sure, he could free you from a demon, but if you would not bow the knee to him, he would not force you. He could wash away a lifetime of sin, but if you insisted on staying in unforgiveness toward your brother, he would not pronounce pardon. He could gather the lost lamb with the greatest tenderness, but if you wanted to stay in control of your life, his face was set hard against you. Jesus did not use his power as the Son of God to force those who refused him. The cornerstone of true life thus became the stumbling stone to those who did not like the way he chose to save us.

Then Jesus made a sweeping accusation against the spirit of the age. He stopped speaking to individuals and spoke to mankind in general. He compared the present age to children. In essence he said, people today are like unpleasable children complaining amongst themselves. Hey, we agreed to play hide and seek, but you wouldn't hide. You said you wanted to play Red Light, Green Light, but you wouldn't stop on Red. You wanted a clear speaker to tell you exactly what to do. God sent you John. And you said he's crazy. You wanted a savior who would forgive sinners. God sent you me. And you said I hang out with the wrong people. You are not please-able. You don't like the way your Father has planned to save you. You want it your way alone.

This was not just a Jewish problem. In his second letter to the Greek church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote more about the spirit of his age. He spoke of the deception into which the world at large keeps falling. He wrote that people are "perishing because they refused to love the truth, and so be saved. Therefore, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they may believe what is false" (2 Thes. 2: 10-11). They refused to love the truth. That sounds a lot like "they rejected the purpose of God for themselves." Human willfulness triggers a powerful delusion. We go stupid. We start to believe what is false. We take pleasure in unrighteousness. We start to crave what destroys. We call good evil and evil good.

I want us now to think for a moment about strong delusions we may be under. The recent change in abortion law in New York state has brought issues of life back to public discussion. In no area is strong delusion more evident than when we name a bill Reproductive Health in order to have greater freedom to extract and discard living creatures from their mother's womb. Mostly, this reality is so terrible that I choose not to think about it. That's what most of Christ's church does most of the time. We cannot face the horror of what we have done, personally and as a nation. We have to shout the guilt away with shrill angry voices. Or drug it away or sleep it away. The delusion stays strong when no one bursts the bubble with the truth.

Rhonda and I support Students for Life, now on over 1200 college campuses. They find great hope in the millennial generation's rising pro-life views. They watch young people change instantly when the delusion is burst with truth. All it takes is for someone to watch a two-minute video with illustrations, not photos, of how an abortion actually works. Most people do not really know what happens. The reality has been papered over with words like "health, rights, your body," and calling the fetus a "pregnancy" rather than the life it is. People just think it's sort of a mouthwash. You swish away the pregnancy. But science tells a different story. *All you have to do is risk a half hour to see truth.* Google an illustrated video of what happens in an abortion at 10-12 weeks. Then take 3 more minutes to look at the development from conception that has occurred by 12 weeks. See what it is that is being removed. Then look at the illustration of what happens during an abortion at 24 weeks, now legal in New York. Take three more minutes to look at what's inside a mother's womb 24 weeks after conception. That's all I'm asking you to do. Look at the reality. Then you will know what you need to do next. It may involve weeping. It may involve confession. It may involve anger. It may well involve never, ever believing the lie again.

Then, when you have recovered a bit, I'd just ask you to Google again. This time look up "What happens in gender reassignment surgery?" Read the medical descriptions: mastectomy, labiaplasty, penectomy, clitoroplasty, hysterectomy. Note the amounts of testosterone or estrogen required for the rest of one's life, without any data yet on what effects this has long term. Remember high school biology. Males have one Y and one X chromosome, females have two X's. Our gender is at a cellular level. Burst the bubble of the madness that says gender is a psychological construct. Think how we are letting children be permanently mutilated while pumping their bodies full of hormones to fool their natural genetics. Read about Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria and how this disorder spreads like a vicious fad. Weep for the ones caught in this delusion, feeling displaced in

their own bodies. Take thirty minutes to look at the reality. Then you will know what to do. You will know we cannot let the cruelty of this lie be seen as a hero's path any longer.

In Luke 7, Act 4, Jesus addressed the crowds and he condemned the spirit of the age. Not individuals. He always addressed every individual he encountered with personalized compassion, with unique insight. He spoke truth, but always in love that offers redemption. We too have to be aware that the strong delusion of our age wants to stay masked. So what happens is that as soon as someone says, "This is not right!" an individual is brought forward. An individual in great pain who evokes deep compassion in us. And then we are told, "The only way to care for this suffering individual is to affirm what we say." In other words, "If you care, you must let us have our delusion." Don't fall for it. We fight on two fronts: the spirit of the age, and each broken individual. We are called to a public witness to the truth in general. And we are called to personal, loving care of individuals. In one area, the church has done fairly well over time. The Pro-life community has been sacrificially caring for the needs of families even as we encourage bringing our babies into the world. The church still needs to catch up with its personal, come-alongside care of those in psychological conflict with their biological gender—we need to be truth-telling, loving, long term friends to those in need.

Now let me bring this to a close by going ahead and turning this bright light of Christ's truth away from two key issues and onto each heart in this room. Scripture spoke of the devotedly religious, "They rejected the purposes of God for themselves." Paul wrote of the resolutely pagan, "They refused to love the truth and so believed what is false." What do Pharisees and pagans have in common? *They both think they are ok in themselves.* They have both relied on their own rightness, their own decisions, their own path as being a sufficient way to live. Refusing the purposes of God occurs whenever I will not submit my will to the Father's will. Whenever I decide that *I own my life, not God.* Whenever I determine that I know better than God what makes for flourishing. And I stubbornly choose *my will and my way.* Down that path lies perishing.

Luke tells us that it was the people who had gone out to get baptized by John who found Jesus' words to be so joyfully true. These are the ones who said, "I can't, only God can. I have changed my mind about doing life my way. I want God's way. I see the truth now. The delusion bubble is burst. Only God's way leads to life and health and peace." Those are the ones who when they saw Jesus saw a Savior. They were reborn in him. Washed clean and made new. Beloved, walk in the truth. Walk in the light. And so walk in the purposes of God.

Resources:

Abortion at 10-12 Weeks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boz--Xqnf8I>

Abortion At 23 Weeks:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WiQNPk\\_2G8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WiQNPk_2G8)

Gender Reassignment Surgery:

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/sex-reassignment-surgery-srs-3157235>

Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/08/180822150809.htm>