

A truly righteous spirit

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Let us turn to **John 7: 43-49**.

John 7: 43-49

- 43 So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.
44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.
45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?"
46 The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."
47 The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you?"
48 "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?"
49 "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."

As we seek to appreciate who the Lord Jesus is, at times the Lord Jesus is seen more clearly when we contrast with people who are not like Him or who may be opposite to Him in their character. So today we look at the response of the chief priests and the Pharisees, and we compare that with the responses of the Lord Jesus.

We notice that the chief priests and the Pharisees sent the officers to arrest the Lord Jesus, to bring Him back. But when they came back, they did not bring the Lord Jesus with them. So the chief priests and the Pharisees, they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

We have seen that the response of these officers was something meaningful, something positive. They went with the intention of arresting the Lord Jesus but when they heard Him, they were so impressed, they were affected, they were influenced positively; they decided not to arrest Him. So they were open to listen, to consider, to hear, what the Lord Jesus had to say.

However, we see the Pharisees answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."

We see the response of the Pharisees manifests the wrong spirit within them. They seemed very confident that they were right. They seemed to think that their knowledge was accurate and anyone who followed the Lord Jesus would be someone led astray.

In the first instance, we know that they were totally wrong. They were deceived and they were moving in the wrong direction, and the Scriptures describe the Pharisees in various areas of their lives which predisposed them to being deceived: they were lovers of money; they wanted honour amongst men; they wanted to be called Rabbi; they wanted chief seats. They were people who had wrong desires, as a result of which it would be very easy for them to be led astray. They were also affected by jealousy in knowing that the Lord Jesus was popular, effective, and people were listening to Him.

So they said, "You have not also been led astray, have you?" If they were to listen to the Lord Jesus, it would mean they were led astray. So the Pharisees seemed to think that they were righteous: In fact, that was generally their attitude; they thought they were right and they were righteous.

Then they made this remark: "...this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed": a very strong remark and one that comes forth from a very negative spirit.

Even if they were right, even if their understanding was correct, this was not the way to respond to the people who did not know the Law. If the crowd did not know the Law as a result of which they did not recognize what was the right path, then it was their responsibility to help them understand unless the crowd was rebellious and unwilling to listen.

But this was not their attitude: "...this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." So we see that spirit of impatience: they were not concerned towards the crowd, seeking their welfare, their well-being.

The Lord Jesus knew the characteristics of many of the Pharisees. Not all of them were like that, but many of them showed characteristics that were quite negative. And so the Lord Jesus told this parable in order to help the people understand the wrong attitude and spirit.

Luke 18: 9-12

- 9 And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:
- 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
- 11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.
- 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

The Lord Jesus told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt. This is precisely what the Pharisees were doing in this incident that we have just seen in **John 7**. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they viewed others with contempt.

So one significant area is that if we want to help other people, in the first instance we must make sure that what we know is correct.

If what we know is wrong and we try to help other people then we can bring disaster to ourselves as well as to others. So this is one major aspect: we must be sure that the path we are taking is right.

The Pharisees thought they were righteous but in reality they were unrighteous. But can we be righteous? The answer is: Certainly. We can be righteous and we must make sure that we are righteous if we are going to help others.

The second aspect was that they were preoccupied with themselves. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous. When we are preoccupied with ourselves, we easily become subjective and inaccurate. We think highly of ourselves and we think lowly of others; there is a tendency towards that.

The third area is that they compared themselves with others and as a result, they viewed others with contempt. They felt they were leaders, they were knowledgeable of the Scriptures, they knew God, they could teach others – so those who did not know the Law were accursed.

These were some of the aspects that were very negative in the lives of the Pharisees.

Then let us look at how the Lord Jesus responded.

Matthew 23: 13

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in..."

The words of the Lord Jesus here may sound a little bit like the way that the Pharisees spoke: "...this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed." The Pharisees viewed the crowd negatively and the consequences for the crowd would not be positive.

Here the Lord Jesus used very strong words. He said, "...**woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites**".

So was the Lord Jesus wrong in speaking in this way? Obviously we know He was totally right.

Why is it in one instance it is wrong to speak so strongly, while in the other instance it is right to speak so strongly?

That is because in the first place the Lord Jesus was truly righteous; He was accurate in His knowledge; He understood what was in the heart of the Pharisees. He knew that they were hypocrites and so He could pronounce judgment on them correctly.

So it may seem as if the Lord Jesus was very impatient. Why did He not speak gently with the Pharisees, give them more opportunity to change, to become better people?

The Lord Jesus pronounced judgment on the Pharisees because He saw in them something very serious.

It does not mean that there will be totally no hope for the Pharisees but they required that rebuke from the Lord Jesus and if they were prepared to humble themselves, to correct themselves, it is possible for them still to find forgiveness.

But to speak to them in this context gently would not be helpful for them. And so the Lord Jesus in His wisdom, He spoke very strongly because the kind of danger that they posed to society was very great.

So while it is true that patience is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit and all of us must develop patience, we also need to recognize that patience as a quality of our being does not mean that every one will benefit from our patience.

God in the final Day of Judgment will sentence many people to condemnation. Would God be exercising patience toward them? On that occasion they will suffer the wrath and the judgment of God; they would not benefit from God's patience anymore.

But does it mean that God is no longer patient? No, God is still patient. In the character and being of God, God will always be patient; God will always be righteous; God will always be kind.

But God responds to us in relation to how we live. To those who are kind, yes God manifests His kindness. But to those who are crooked, God shows Himself astute: He will know how to deal with them accordingly.

So it is very important for us in learning to appreciate the Lord Jesus, to look at the total picture of His life. There are many different attributes of His being.

While God is a God of love, patience and kindness, God is also a God of wrath and judgment and holiness. And very often amongst Christians, if we do not sufficiently appreciate the holiness and majesty of God, we may not treat life so seriously; we may not deal with sin so thoroughly: We think that God will always be patient with us; He will always forgive us when we fail...

There may come a day when that is no longer available to us. We cannot take these things lightly.

Yes, God is a God of patience, He is very kind to us and we must learn to be like Him. And it is true that when others hurt us, fail us, we should be patient, kind and understanding but we must be careful, prayerful, to seek the Lord to understand what is a wise response. In different situations, the response is different.

Let us look at another passage to see how the Lord Jesus responded.

Luke 22: 31-34

- 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat;
32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
33 But he said to Him, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!"
34 And He said, "I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me."

We see a very different picture. The Lord Jesus is the same: holy, righteous, patient and kind. On the one hand He denounced the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, pronounced woes on them. Here, we see He was very gentle with Peter. Peter failed the Lord three times – denied Him – and the Lord Jesus knew that Peter was going to deny Him. And yet we see the Lord Jesus told him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail..."

He knew Peter's weakness but He was very kind and patient towards him: "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail..." But did Peter fail? Yes, certainly he failed. He did deny the Lord Jesus. But the Lord Jesus said, "I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail..." The meaning here I see is that although he failed, he faltered, but he continued to come back to the Lord. His faith did not fail totally. He faltered, he failed in that occasion but he repented: he came back to the Lord.

So He said, "...when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." The Lord told Peter, "You have a lesson to learn. You are self-confident; you think you will not deny Me, you are prepared to go to death with Me. But the reality is: your faith is not strong enough; you will deny Me. But I have prayed for you, to help you so that you can recover from your failure, you can go on and develop."

And that is what happened to Peter. He recovered from his failures; he went on to love the Lord, to serve Him to the end. And that is why he could write **1 and 2 Peter** with such meaning, after all that he went through in suffering.

God is very patient. He does not want anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance.

But the Scriptures also tell us that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven: God is a patient God but He is also a God of wrath; He is very angry with sin and unrighteousness.

In **Romans 1: 24** we are told, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their heart to impurity".

God gave them over: God did not continue to seek to persuade them. He gave them over.

Verse 26: For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions...

Verse 28: And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind...

In one chapter, we are told three times: God gave them over. The picture is: God gave them up – whether absolutely or not we are not told but basically, God was very angry with them and they were not really benefiting from His patience.

The apostle Paul likewise understood how serious it is for us to be loyal to the Lord. He told the Galatians, "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion *did* not *come* from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*."

And then he goes on to say, "I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves."

He does not sound very positive, very patient, but it was an expression of his righteous anger at those who were leading people astray. Paul was very angry with the false teachers who were drawing people away from the true gospel.

When we look at the life of the Lord Jesus, we are often impressed by His kindness, gentleness and love and that is correct, we should be. He has gone to such a great extent in His love for us to help us.

But it is also very important for us never to treat it lightly. The Lord Jesus can also be very angry and very fierce when it comes to hardening of the heart, hypocrisy, going against God's ways, deceiving others, influencing others in a negative direction.

So as we think of who the Lord Jesus is and what He has done on the cross, it is important for us to deepen in our worship of God, in our appreciation of His holiness, and it is important for us to learn to submit to Him that He may teach us His ways, however difficult the path may be.

Sometimes, Christians complain, "Why must life be so difficult?" It is because they do not understand and appreciate that some of the most beautiful things come forth from some of the most difficult situations of life. Think of the cross. What great riches have come forth as a result of the cross! If the cross had not taken place, who would have been saved? How would we have understood the love of God, the grace of God? How would we have appreciated true sacrifice and what it means?

So in our walk with God, it is good for us to concentrate on the meaning within the heart of God. God is a God of moral perfection in all aspects of His being. We must not concentrate on some areas to the exclusion of others.

And if we understand God correctly then we can rejoice in Him always, whatever situation we may go through, knowing that He is always good. Even in the midst of the most difficult of situations, He remains good.

So then as we come before the Lord, let us ask Him to help us to appreciate Him wholesomely, not to develop the wrong spirit, a self-righteous spirit, but to learn to be like Him: to develop a truly righteous spirit, where our focus is not on ourselves but on God, on what is good, on what is right, and we give ourselves for that.

And in that context, we develop the character of God in our love for people, in our love for God and His ways and in our preparedness to take our stand against evil, to stand together with God and to live for Him.

So let us ask Him to help us to evaluate our lives and respond well to Him, that we may truly benefit from His grace, His mercy, His kindness, His love and His patience.