



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

The Coming One ... and His Mission

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Following Jesus’ sermon at Nazareth, which, in Luke, “is programmatic for ... understanding ... the mission of Jesus” (Luke 4.16–30) (Green 1995, 76), the author recounts a series of episodes that showcase Jesus’ teaching, healings, exorcisms, nature miracles, calling of disciples, socializing with outsiders, Sabbath works, and responses to criticism (4.31–6.11). He then reports Jesus’ selection of the twelve apostles and the core principles of his teaching (6.12–49), followed by a return to Capernaum (7.1–10; cf. 4.23, 31), where he heals a centurion’s servant, and then a visit to Nain where he raises a widow’s only son (7.11–17).

It is at this point—just short of halfway through the Galilean ministry section that culminates with Peter’s confession and subsequent events including the Transfiguration (9.18–20, 21–50)—that Luke reports that John the Baptist sent two disciples to inquire about Jesus’ identity (7.18–23; par. Matt 11.2–6).¹ He explicitly asks what more and more Galileans had been wondering: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (7.19; cf. 4.32, 36–37; 5.9, 15, 21, 26, 30; 7.16–17). His question also sets the stage for the queries that follow (cf. 7.24–28, 39, 49; 8.25, 56; 9.7–9).

Matthew 11.2–3 says that John sent his emissaries from prison, something we can also infer from Luke 3.20, where he last appeared prior to 7.18. But, although it’s a question that has puzzled interpreters and prompted multiple proposals since the patristic period (Fitzmeyer 1981, 664–665), Luke doesn’t say why John, the forerunner, inquired about Jesus’ identity. He *does* say how Jesus responded. And that is what we most need to think about.

At that time Jesus healed many people of diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits, and he granted sight to many blind people. He replied to them, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn’t offended by me” (Luke 7.21–23).

Jesus didn’t answer John with a messianic declaration or explanation. Nor did he do anything “earth-rocking or heaven shaking enough for those who looked for special apocalyptic effects” (Danker 1988, 164). Instead, he did what had become routine in his ministry: healings, exorcisms, and granting sight to blind people (v. 21). (Notably, among the Gospels, the Greek verb *χαρίζομαι* [*charizomai*], “to give freely as a favor, *give graciously*” [Bauer 2000, 1078]—is unique to Luke [cf. 7.42–43]).

Jesus then told John’s disciples to tell the prophet what they had seen and heard. At first glance, the words of verse 22 seem to merely repeat verse 21. But, as most translations indicate

with a cross-reference note—and the Nestle-Aland 28 Greek text shows by printing the last phrases of the verse in poetic form—verse 22 is a quotation from Isaiah 35.5–6.

Isaiah 34–35 form a unit that anticipates “the larger assertion of [Isaiah] 40–55, wherein Babylon ... is eliminated as a threat so that God’s people may come home.” The chapters promise that “God will not leave the world as it is, in bondage, drought, and oppression, but will bring it right.” They also point to the defeat of evil and the coming of God’s new reign that is “pivotal for Christian hope” (Brueggemann 1998, 268). Chapter 35.8–10 declares that the reversal of circumstances for the outcasts named in verses 5–6 will see them included among the “redeemed” and enable them to join others who are “unclean” as they travel “a road” that “will be called the Holy Way.” As “the ransomed of the Lord,” their destination is “Zion.”

Multiple messianic texts in Isaiah refer to this joyful expectation for the world’s nobodies, including Isaiah 61, the passage Jesus cited in his Nazareth sermon (Luke 4.18–19; cf. Isa 26.19; 29.18–19; 42.18; 43.8). And the kind of ministry that would make the outsiders’ inclusion possible is how Jesus defined his kingdom mission, demonstrating a very different messianic identity from the varied expectations that were prevalent in intertestamental Judaism and the first century Jewish world (cf. Strauss 2007, 139–140).

Luke 7.18–23, which recapitulates the mission statement of chapter 4 and summarizes what it looked like in action, is therefore crucial for understanding Jesus’ mission as he saw it. But don’t miss its practical value, for it points to virtues and actions that we as his disciples are to emulate.

Take a moment today to think about that.

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Notes

¹ In the NA28 text, 2,357 words are used from 4.31–7.23; 2,521 words are used from 7.24–9.50 (Accordance electronic Bible, OakTree Software, © 1994–2025).

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