

prophecy of one with a 'winnowing-fork in his hand' (3:17). John therefore sends two of his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the one who fulfils the OT hopes and whether in him the final action of God is being realized. In v. 21 Luke points out the wonders that Jesus 'at that time' had been doing. The basis for his response to John is secure. So Jesus appeals to his actions in a list that freely quotes from Isa 35:5-6 and 61:1. For those who have eyes to see, they make his case. v. 23 contains a challenge to, and perhaps a criticism of John. The presence of Jesus demands a willingness to have established beliefs questioned.

Jesus now talks to the crowds about John and his relationship to himself. He begins with a compliment. When they went to hear John, they knew he was not one who would bend with the wind or be ensnared by the power or luxuries of the court. Luke has already told his readers that John had been wrongly put in prison by Herod because he had rebuked him for the evil he was doing (3:18-20). Had they gone out to see a prophet? Jesus gives John a higher status in God's plans than that. He applies to him a mixed OT quotation from Ex 23:20 and Mal 3:1 which, by a slight adaptation of pronouns, makes John the immediate forerunner of himself. He brings this to a climax with a further compliment which is, nevertheless, something of a backhanded one. No one in the world has arisen greater than John, 'yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he'. As it stands, this says that John is as yet outside the Kingdom. He still works from within the old expectations. He has not yet come to appreciate the radical challenge Jesus brings to these and the new perspectives from which they have to be viewed. However, this interpretation has been challenged ever since the time of Tertullian. Because the Greek in v. 28 uses comparatives ('lesser', 'greater'), the saying has been taken to refer only to Jesus and John and to their places in the Kingdom. Jesus is younger than John, perhaps originally a disciple of John, perhaps even a servant figure unlike John. He is nevertheless the greater in the Kingdom, though this interpretation would not suggest that John himself was not yet in the Kingdom. This, however, is not the most likely interpretation of the usual NT usage. John has not embraced the outlook of the Kingdom and as yet remains outside it. Those who have acknowledged it are already living within its embrace, out of its grace. They await its future revelation. For John, that embrace awaits the future (13:28).

The part of John in God's redemptive act, however, is emphasized in Luke's comment (vv. 29-30). 'All the people', that is those true Jews who had come to respond to Jesus and so be included within God's redeeming action, 'acknowledged the justice of God', his work of redemption that began through John's baptism that prepared them for their acceptance of Jesus. Those who were to reject Jesus were also the ones who rejected John.

Jesus acknowledges John's part by comparing his contemporaries to children at play. They are like those who fail to respond to all efforts to entice them to take part, whether it be a call to mourn or dance. John challenged them with the demands of God and they accused him of misanthropy. Jesus, on the other hand, presented them with the freeing grace of God and they cast him as a libertine. They will not respond to the challenge found in either proclamation. The section finishes with v. 35 which acts as a counterbalance to the rejection of which vv. 31-4 speak. 'Wisdom' in the OT came (alongside Spirit and Word) to be personified as the expression of God's outreach to humankind in which he made himself known and united them to himself (Prov 8; Wis 7). This verse takes up this thought. God's way is 'vindicated' (the same Gk. verb is used in v. 29), that is acknowledged and praised by all those who through the ministries of John and Jesus have experienced God's embrace and so have recognized his work both in them and in themselves.

(7:36-50) Jesus and the Woman Who Was a Sinner All four gospels tell of Jesus' anointing by a woman (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:1-8) though all three others link the anointing to Jesus' passion and record a complaint about the waste of money. Whereas Matthew and Mark have an anointing of Jesus' head, Luke, like John, tells of the anointing of his feet. Only Luke speaks of the woman as a 'sinner'. The significance Luke sees in the story depends on the actual meaning of a number of verses which are not easily interpreted. Simon, a Pharisee, invites Jesus to a meal; a woman comes into the room, as was possible on semi-public occasions, bathes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair. She publicly kisses his feet and anoints them with ointment in an extravagant display of affection. Simon feels that Jesus' acceptance of such affection from one who was a sinner was not consistent with a prophet come from God. Jesus replies by telling a parable of two debtors which makes the point that

one who is forgiven much is likely to respond more warmly than one who is forgiven little. So much is clear. The difficulty is in determining how it applies to the two characters. The woman is demonstrating her love. Is this because she has already been forgiven which is what the parable would imply? 'The woman's actions can only be accounted for by reference to something the story does not itself contain' (Evans 1990). On the other hand, v. 47, on a first reading at any rate, does not appear to support this but rather suggests that she has been forgiven because of her love. This is how RSV translates the verse. More recent translations, assuming a consistency in the story as a whole, take the Greek *hoti* to mean, not 'because' but 'with the result that'. So, REB translates, 'Her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven.' v. 48 then proclaims her forgiveness which such a translation assumes has already been pronounced to her.

Perhaps however we are trying to force into a time sequence something that cannot be so easily ordered. The woman hears of Jesus and of his proclamation of the outreaching redemption of God. God's recreating acknowledgement of the outsiders is being enacted in him, the one who accepts the title of 'the friend of tax-collectors and sinners'. She responds with love and a warmth which is accepted. The story says nothing about her penitence in any formal sense and to assume this is to assume too much. What she brings is rather a response to a lack of condemnation, to an outreach, to a recognition. It is that response of love that Jesus acknowledges, accepts, and meets with a declaration that God has forgiven her. 'The woman does not love because she has been forgiven, but vice versa' (Lampe 1962). She loves, because in Jesus she meets with acceptance. In turn, her love receives the forgiveness for which he stands.

The parable is addressed to Simon and is looking at them both from Jesus' own point of view whilst engaging with Simon's own stance. It is a condemnation of his judgemental attitude and of his lack of openness. Is it suggesting more and saying that he was discourteous to Jesus? On the whole, this is unlikely. Though the lack of provision for the washing of feet is 'surprising' (Evans 1990) the other omissions would seem to be additional courtesies rather than requirements of the host. The story does not suggest that Jesus was singled out from the other guests; that would have meant a hostility that Simon's address to Jesus (v. 40) does not

imply. The contrasts are caused by the woman's actions rather than by Simon's discourtesies. What the contrast emphasizes is Simon's lack of response to Jesus and his message of the gracious approach of God. Simon feels no great need but is rather, if not content, then at least comfortable with the position at which he has arrived. Comparatively, he does need to be forgiven little, but it is that little need that has made him miss out on Jesus' message. He actually needs to learn from the incident.

(8:1-21) Proclaiming the Good News After a fairly static period, Jesus now resumes his itinerant role of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God (cf. 4:43; 9:6). The Twelve are with him and some women 'who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities'. They had been psychologically or physically distressed. Mk 15:41 mentions a group of women who had come to Jerusalem from Galilee with Jesus. Luke brings the mention forward to this point so as to link them with the Twelve in their accompanying Jesus. Mary Magdalene is mentioned first, probably because of her role at the tomb which is noticed in all four gospels. Jesus had cast out 'seven demons' from her—a witness to the severe nature of her illness, though not a pointer to any immorality; she is not to be brought into connection with the woman of the previous episode. Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, a woman of some social standing, is also mentioned at the tomb. Susanna is not found elsewhere. With other women, they provided for Jesus and the Twelve out of their resources. Women of means are found frequently in Acts. The most significant instance is the mention of Lydia who in Acts 16:15 acted as host for Paul and his companions at Philippi in the first of the 'we' passages in Acts. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Luke himself lodged there and perhaps even stayed there after the rest of the party had left (Acts 20:6). Luke may have been looking at the part women played in the ministry of Jesus in terms of his own later experience. He is anxious to point to their presence at the cross (23:49), the burial (23:55), the empty tomb (24:10), and when the community waits for the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:14). He has no appearance of the risen Jesus to them as does Mt 27:9 and Jn 20:18, but this would seem to be because of his concern to have Peter be the first witness of the risen Lord (24:34).

It is in this setting of Jesus' preaching ministry that Luke places the parable of the sower which