

Third Sunday in Advent

OLD TESTAMENT – Zephaniah 3:14-20

Israel's Joy and Restoration

14 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. 16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. 17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. 18 I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. 19 Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. 20 At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the LORD.

3:14–17 Joy in the restored city (in two parts: vv. 14–15 and vv. 16–17)—the prophet's reassurance (contrast 1:10–13). (CSB)

3:14 *Daughter of Zion ... of Jerusalem.* Personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

Citizens of God's Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church (Heb. 12:22) (TLSB)

This is the re-gathered remnant. There is to be a loud celebration because God has prepared them for rescue and this was a really big deal. The more magnificent the one being praised, the noisier and more enthusiastic will be the rejoicing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:15 *taken away the judgments* – The excitement within the faithful remnant feeds upon God's restoration of His grace-agreement with them. He has "taken away their punishment," "dropped the charges" against them, "commuted their sentence." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Ezekiel 18:4, "The soul who sins is the one who will die."

Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death."

If the punishment is gone, and if the great enemy, death, has been removed and what remains of it is simply a sleep of the body unto the resurrection, then sin and the guilt associated with it before God must be gone as well. (PBC)

The Lord has removed every legal accusation against His people (Romans 8:33) (TLSB)

These were the sentences of condemnation which had rightly been spoken upon her on account of her sins. (Kretzmann)

Notes from Romans 8:33 – *bring any charge* – Only God himself could bring charges against his elect, but he himself has justified us by the sacrifice of his Son. The judge is himself the Redeemer! Because of Christ, our record before God is clean. We are exonerated.

This is a legal technical term for bringing a charge against someone. A scene in the heavenly court is envisioned, where now the Accuser can no longer bring any accusations (Rev. 12:10). (CC)

The “elects” innocence and inviolability is grounded in the eternal and unchangeable designs of God. (Franzmann)

Christians do have enemies who accuse them. They are all hostile power, as Satan, the world and the flesh. (Stoeckhardt)

your enemies. All those arrayed against Israel. (CSB)

God had used the foreign nations to punish Israel and Judah. Now he had removed them and there was nothing to fear. When the Lord is once more again worshiped as King in their midst, His people will experience no more evil. Therefore, they can live without fear. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

Sweeping away the world-power which personified all the hostile forces of the world. (Kretzmann)

3:16 *on that day* – After the Lord has dropped the charges, no one needs to fear His condemnation. There is none. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

let not your hands grow weak. Do not be discouraged. (CSB)

This would have been a sign of despair. Since the charges were dropped they could now lift those same hands in praise to God for his great grace and mercy. They now are extended in service to others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:17 *a mighty one who will save* – He and only he has the power to save them. He is not only capable but also willing.

He will quiet you by his love – Jesus soothes the sinner’s guilty and troubled heart. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

The Lord lives among His people and guarantees their salvation. Luth: “It happens for the righteous that [the Lord] allows them to be attacked, to be molested in various ways, and to be troubled by many evils, so that they be conformed to their King. Yet He adds that feeling of joy, that security of heart, so that all things may become sweeter, so that nothing can separate them from the love of God, Rom 8:39” (AE 18:361). (TLSB)

The second consequence of the removal of sin is that God is present in the midst of His people with His protecting power. He is with them, protecting them from harm, delivering them from evil, quieting and comforting them in their fears and anxieties, and empowering their limp hands to move in service to Him. Believe it or not, He actually rejoices with songs on His lips because they are living in His presence. What a glorious revelation of our God! We are the one who should be filled with joy and singing, because we have the privilege in Christ of living with our God for eternity. (PBC)

he will exult over you – God, too, breaks out in celebration. He rejoices in the salvation of his people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

3:18–20 Summary announcement of restoration—the Lord’s final assurance. (CSB)

3:18 *the festival*. The fall of Jerusalem disrupted the celebration of annual festivals such as the Passover. (TLSB)

you will no longer suffer – When many Israelites were taken into exile foreigners were imported to fill up the cities. They would have been a constant problem for those Jews left behind. This phrase seems to indicate that these foreigners, too, were removed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 1)

The Lord will remove from His people anything that oppresses them. (PBC)

3:19 *all your oppressors* – Nations that afflict God’s people. (TLSB)

shame into praise – God will cause the lame and outcast believers to express praise rather than to wallow in shame. (TLSB)

3:20 *give you honor and praise*. See Ge 12:2–3. (CSB)

restore your fortunes – Yet another use of Hebrew shub. Literally, “return the things turned over (to someone). So, this is not a request for mere luck. The idea is closely related to the blessings of the new creation depicted as the new land of Israel (Ezek 47:3-12). In the NT, restoration describes what God effects through the coming of the messianic kingdom (cf. Mt. 17:11; Acts 1:6; 15:16; 1 Peter 5:10). (TLSB)

The fulfillment of this prophecy is clearly found in the gathering of the Christian Church, its members being called from the various nations of the earth, and the consummation and climax will be reached in the eventual complete deliverance from this present evil world as the Kingdom of Glory opens its portals. (Kretzmann)

3:14–20 Zephaniah urges God’s people to fear no evil but instead to rejoice over their coming salvation. Fear may hinder us from witnessing of God’s love and mercy; how wrong and foolish that would be! God has redeemed us in Christ. He will always be with us, and someday He will take us to the heavenly Jerusalem. • Lord God, make me a bold witness of Your saving power. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Philippians 4:4-7

Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord*. See 3:1. (CSB)

Troubled people ought not be alone, for this is why God created the fellowship of the Church. Also, “To be gloomy before God is not pleasing to Him, although He would permit us to be depressed before the world” (AE 54:16). (TLSB)

chairo – Full of cheer. To be well off which brings about a calmness. In Paul it is bound up with his work as an apostle. It results from faith in Christ and is a fruit of the Spirit. Joy comes when Christ is proclaimed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Paul would say “I will not tire of speaking to you about rejoicing. (Stoekhardt)

Habakkuk 3:17-18 “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

James 1:2 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,”

1 Peter 4:13 “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Joy is the basic temper and disposition of the Christian. Where this joy is found, there will follow what is stated in verse 5. (Stoekhardt)

always. Under all kinds of circumstances, including suffering (see Hab 3:17–18; Jas 1:2; 1Pe 4:13). (CSB)

Paul wrote this, you will remember, in prison. He knew that our outer circumstances do not need to affect our inner feelings. Paul’s joy came because he knew the Lord was with him no matter what happened. His repetition of the exhortation to rejoice suggested he knew conditions at Philippi might make his exhortation seem a little unrealistic. While believers often have situations in which we cannot be happy, we can always rejoice and delight in the Lord and His impact on our lives. Paul was not calling for smiles to be “painted on our faces,” but for a genuine joy possible only in the Lord. (LifeLight)

4:5 *reasonableness.* Christlike consideration for others (cf. 2Co 10:1). It is especially essential in church leaders (see 1Ti 3:3; Tit 3:2, “considerate”). (CSB)

epieikes – Appropriate moderation. To be mild or patient. It is not weak sentimentality. It is the earthly counterpart of the heavenly glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

The Apostle here does not speak of the Lord’s invisible or spiritual presence, but rather of His last visible return, which is close at hand. That Christians are to bear in mind all the time. When one is aware that he is on the way to the judge, he is more apt to exercise gentleness and forbearance towards others. (Stoekhardt)

In difficult times, our joy is not always visible to others; yet acts of gentleness to others can be seen. Paul encourages the Philippians to be fair and charitable to others. Trusting the Lord to care for our life, we are able to show consideration and gentleness to others. We know the Lord is near, not just by His presence in our hearts; but also in His Second Coming. There is no need to protect our turf when we realize all the earthly things will soon pass away. (LifeLight)

The Greek word here is one that cannot really be reproduced by a single word in English. Expressions that come close to reflecting its meaning are “bigheartedness” and sweet reasonableness.” What Paul is saying here is that Christians ought to be people who would much rather suffer wrong than inflict it. Gentleness or sweet reasonableness is another of those distinguishing characteristics that ought to mark Christians as different, special people in this world, people who with a self-sacrificing attitude that

imitates the humility of Christ. Where others loudly demand their rights, believers will gladly yield theirs. They will make the interests of the weak and helpless their concern and patiently yield to others, wherever such yielding does not violate their Christian principles. (PBC)

Titus 3:2 “to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.”

at hand. See Ro 13:11; cf. Jas 5:8–9; Rev 22:7, 12, 20. The next great event in God’s prophetic schedule is Christ’s return. The whole period from Christ’s first coming to the consummation of the kingdom is viewed in the NT as the last time (1Jn 2:18). From God’s vantage point, a thousand years are as a day. Thus there is a sense in which, for every generation, the Lord’s coming is near. (CSB)

The Lord is near to give you patience, wisdom, and help. The Lord is near in coming for you. This is life from a resurrection and eternal perspective. (TLSB)

Over 19 centuries have passed since Paul wrote, “The Lord is near.” By God’s way of reckoning, Christ is still near. For individual believers Christ’s summons from this life to eternity is near. It could come at any time. So could Christ’s return in glory. If we understand that, we shall want to live in the same eager, expectant spirit of rejoicing in which those early believers lived. How small a thing the sacrificing of some earthly rights becomes when we know that all wrongs will be righted when Christ appears. How meaningless the selfish lives of the unspiritual people around us appear. How significant lives of gentle joyfulness become. (PBC)

4:6 *anxious.* Self-centered, counterproductive worry, not legitimate cares and concerns for the spread of the gospel (see 2:28 and note; 2Co 11:28; see also Mt 6:25–31; 1Pe 5:7). (CSB)

merimnao – Full of care. Worry. This verse and 1 Peter 5:7 show that “to cast one’s care on God does not mean to think of Him as the One who guarantees one’s wishes, but to see in Him the One who knows what we need better than we do ourselves. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

Where there is joy, there is no anxious care. Joy expresses itself in confident prayer. All that a Christian desires and cares for, especially such things that cause him anxiety and uneasiness, he brings before God in prayer. So his joy cannot be crowded out and affects his whole life. Of course, a Christian is not capable of acquiring and maintaining such a happy mind and disposition of himself. How he comes to be so fortunate the next verse will show. (Stoeckhardt)

The stress of a hostile world gives rise to anxiety and fears about the future. Yet Paul challenges the Philippians and us to not be anxious “about anything!” We can take all our worries and bring them before the Lord in prayer. As St. Peter put it, “Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7). We can remember His loving care and let it supplant our worry. (LifeLight)

Matthew 6:25-34 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying,

‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

in everything, by prayer. Anxiety and prayer are two great opposing forces in Christian experience. (CSB)

The broad category of speaking to God at His invitation. (TLSB)

supplication. Specific request for help. (TLSB)

These exhortations to pray are thus designed to give absolute freedom from care as anxiety. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 1)

In childlike trust, leave everything in the Lord’s loving hands. The Lord does not forbid us to make plans or to think ahead. He does not want us to regard prayer as a substitute for planning and working. He wants us to use forethought and common sense to meet the various challenges and problems He sets before us in life, but in all our working and planning and thinking ahead, we Christians dare never forget that the outcome depends completely on the Lord’ will and on His blessing. With childlike trust, therefore, we should commend ourselves and our concerns to the Lord in prayer. The Lord knows our needs without our praying about them, but He lovingly invites and encourages us to bring them all to Him in prayer. (PBC)

thanksgiving. The antidote to worry (along with prayer and petition). (CSB)

Expressing before God all the things He has already done for you. (TLSB)

He’s given us that we’re thankful for. As we remember and recite all these blessings, this too, will vaporize our anxiety. (LifeLight)

requests. Made in the perspective of thanksgiving. (TLSB)

4:7 *peace of God.* Not merely a psychological state of mind, but an inner tranquility based on peace with God—the peaceful state of those whose sins are forgiven (cf. Jn 14:27; Ro 5:1). The opposite of anxiety, it is the tranquility that comes when the believer commits all his cares to God in prayer and worries about them no more. (CSB)

When life makes no sense, God’s peace sustains and directs us. Peace, not readiness or zeal, acts like a guardian angel for our mental health. (TLSB)

irahnay – A quietness that comes from being restored to oneness with others, especially God. (QV)

The Christian very well knows how unbecoming it is for him to fret and grieve over the current sorrows of life and that under all conditions he must cultivate a cheerful disposition, yet he cannot take hold of his bootstraps and lift himself over these obstacles. But the peace of God accomplishes what we are unable to do. The “peace of God” is the peace which He puts into our heart. This peace of God towers far above the reach of man’s understanding. When in the midst of the cares and casualties of life our rational thinking leads us to believe we are undone and so would pull down our soul the gloom of sorrow and

despair, come this peace of God and lends us an inner peace, contentment, hope, and joy. While tears may yet be streaming down our cheeks, we can smile with inner assurance that all things must work together for our good. This peace keeps our hearts steadfast, so that it clings to Christ and resigns itself to whatever God ordains. It is this about which the Christian always should be confident. God has promised it: “The peace of God ... will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” The future tense, “will keep,” expresses a divine assurance to Christians. (Stoeckhardt)

As the Philippians take Paul’s words to heart about worry, they will turn from worry to prayer and experience God’s peace. This is not a peace that comes from positive thinking, but from knowing that our sins are forgiven; that God is not our enemy, but our loving Father; that we have a Savior who loved us enough to die for us; that the Holy Spirit lives in our heart. With this peace guarding our hearts and minds we place our lives in God’s hands and accept God’s direction as being the best. Like a soldier on watch around our faith, God’s peace repels the attacks of the enemy and keeps us close to God and trusting in Him. As Christians, we can pray in the middle of a traffic jam, pray in the middle of personal crisis, and pray when the fear of the unknown hits us. In the midst of all circumstances, we can have God’s peace. (LifeLight)

When life makes no sense, God’s peace sustains and directs us. Peace, not readiness or zeal, acts like a guardian angel for our mental health. This peace resides in Jesus, our refuge. (TLSB)

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Romans 5:1 “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^a have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

surpasses all understanding. The full dimensions of God’s love and care are beyond human comprehension (see Eph 3:18–20). (CSB)

guard ... hearts ... minds. A military concept depicting a sentry standing guard. God’s “protective custody” of those who are in Christ Jesus extends to the core of their beings and to their deepest intentions (cf. 1Pe 1:5). (CSB)

The Philippians were used to the sight of Roman sentries standing guard. In that way, the apostle tells them, God’s peace stands guard at the door of the believers heart. God’s peace standing guard keeps believers steadfastly clinging to Christ. It prevents care from wearing on their hearts and keeps unworthy thoughts from disturbing them. By trust and prayer believers enter the impregnable fortress of God’s peace in the Lord Jesus Christ, a fortress from which nothing can dislodge them. (PBC)

4:8 *true ... honorable.* Paul understood the influence of one’s thoughts on one’s life. What a person allows to occupy his mind will sooner or later determine his speech and his action. Paul’s exhortation to “think about such things” is followed by a second exhortation, “put it into practice” (v. 9). The combination of virtues listed in vv. 8–9 is sure to produce a wholesome thought pattern, which in turn will result in a life of moral and spiritual excellence. (CSB)

whatever is true - dikaios – That which is equitable and innocent. This deals with social conduct. (QV)

The Christian progresses in sanctification as he practices what he knows to be good and right. (Stoekhardt)

whatever is honorable – *arête* – Something that has virtue or valor. (QV)

is commendable – *epainos* – Worthy of being lauded or to be commendable. This would refer to be true in the Christian community. (QV)

Stoekhardt summarizes it as follows: true – morally sound; honorable – of worthy character when men esteem with respect; just – agreeing with the law which tells us what we owe to another; pure – free from every fault, immaculate; lovely – what is valuable and dear in the heart of men; of good report – what is praised and esteemed among men; if there is anything that deserves praise – sums up the preceding. (Stoekhardt)

Paul commands that we continually keep these virtues, which are the fundamental ideals of life according to God’s design, in the forefront of our minds, in our very consciousness, so that they inspire and guide all we do. (TLSB)

think about these things - *logizomai* – Not just give some thought to, but to ponder on, take an inventory and then draw conclusions. (QV)

Christians should also be concerned about what is good and praiseworthy in the sight of the world and think about these things. (Stoekhardt)

“[The Word] always awaken new understanding, pleasure, devoutness and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts” (LC I 101). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 7:18-28

18 The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” 20 And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” 21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. 22 And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” 24 When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. 26 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ 28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

7:18 *John’s disciples.* Despite John the Baptist’s imprisonment, his disciples kept in contact with him and continued his ministry. (CSB)

Followers of John the Baptist. Cf Ac 19:1–7 regarding the persistence of John’s appeal, even after his death. (TLSB)

Many miles away from the event which took place in Nain a prisoner heard reports of what was happening in Galilee. The prisoner was John the Baptist. Herod Antipas had locked him up (3:20) in the fortress Machaerus, located on a solitary peak on the east side of the Dead Sea. Its ruins can still be seen today. (PBC)

John is in prison (3:20). John’s disciples tell him about “all these things” (περὶ πάντων τούτων; 7:18). The antecedent of this phrase is crucial. It could simply refer to the raising of the widow’s son at Nain and the healing of the centurion’s slave. But is this all that John’s disciples would have told him about what Jesus has said and done? More likely, it extends back to the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry in Nazareth and everything that has happened since (from 4:14 to 7:17). (CC pp. 313-314)

7:19 *shall we look for another* – John had announced the coming of the Christ, but now he himself had been languishing in prison for months, and the work of Jesus had not brought the results John apparently expected. His disappointment was natural. He wanted reassurance—and perhaps also wanted to urge Jesus to further action. (CSB)

Much debate has raged whether John doubts that Jesus is the Messiah or only his disciples doubt. A straightforward reading suggests that not only John’s disciples but also John himself questioned Jesus’ Messiahship and that he sent his disciples to Jesus with the question for the sake of his own understanding as well as for the sake of the understanding of his disciples. Indeed, in the gospel all human observers of the ministry of Jesus struggle with the way in which Jesus demonstrates that He is the “Anointed One.” In his first sermon, Jesus announced that he was present to set the captives free. Who is more captive than John the Baptist as he sits in prison (3:20) because of his ministry as the forerunner to Jesus? John was raised up to proclaim, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29). But the progress or manner of Jesus’ ministry has not been what John expected. (CC p. 314)

7:20 *John the Baptist* – Because his ministry included the administration of a religious washing (Baptism), John became known as the “Baptizer” or “Baptist.” Cf 3:1–22. (TLSB)

7:21 *healed many* – Jesus either immediately began to work the messianic miracles before their eyes, or He pointed to the result of healing that He had been doing. (CC p. 312)

By highlighting the miracles, Luke affirms that the OT is being fulfilled. Thus the teaching of Jesus is certified as messianic. When John’s disciples see the works of Jesus, they should interpret messianically both the OT prophecies *and* the teaching and preaching of Jesus since his sermon in Nazareth (4:16–30). (CC p. 314)

7:22 *report to John what you have seen and heard*. In answer, Jesus pointed to his healing and life-restoring miracles. He did not give promises but clearly observable evidence—evidence that reflected the predicted ministry of the Messiah. (CSB)

ἃ εἶδετε καὶ ἤκούσατε—The miracles and teaching reinforce each other, providing two witnesses, as it were. Here, Jesus points to the miracles first (ἃ εἶδετε) and then to his teaching (ἤκούσατε). Matthew, in contrast, reverses them (Mt 11:4; ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ βλέπετε). Cf. Lk 2:20. (CC p. 312)

These are the same miracles Jesus promised in his Nazareth sermon (4:18–19). Now, however, the miracles are more than promises because Jesus has actually been performing them for some time, as recorded in the gospel from 4:31 on. (CC p. 314)

dead are raised up – νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται—This statement would have had great impact because of the previous passage, where the widow’s son at Nain was raised from the dead. (CC p. 312)

the poor have good news preached to them. In Jesus’ review of his works, he used an ascending scale of impressive deeds, ending with the dead raised and the good news preached to the poor. In this way, Jesus reminded John that these were the things predicted of the Messiah in the Scriptures (see Isa 29:18–21; 35:5–6; 61:1; see also Lk 4:18). (CSB)

7:23 *who is not offended by me.* Jesus did not want discouragement and doubt to ensnare John. (CSB)

μακάριος— This beatitude is Christological; it speaks of blessedness for those who do not reject God’s saving work in Jesus. (CC p. 312)

Lk 7:23 anticipates the rest of this passage by introducing the theme of this section: the acceptance and rejection of Jesus and John. What is critical to Luke (and Matthew!) is Christology: What does one think of Jesus? This is the question Jesus will put to the disciples in 9:18, 20. At this point, responses must be on the basis of the first phase of Christology, Jesus messianic teaching and miracles. Blessed is he who is not scandalized at Jesus! The issue is Christology. (CC pp. 314-315)

There are, at this point, two possible stumbling blocks that could cause observers to be scandalized. First, the offense could come simply from identifying Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah prophesied in the OT. The miracles and teaching of Jesus identify Him as this prophet/Messiah. But not all are willing to acknowledge this. The people of His hometown, Nazareth, were offended because they thought they knew Him too well for Him to be the Messiah (4:22). (CC p. 315)

Second, the scandal could come because at His first advent Jesus reveals Himself primarily as a Messiah of mercy, compassion, and forgiveness (ἄφεσις – forgiveness, release – occurs twice in 4:18-19), and not one of vengeance. He has come to serve, to seek, and to save. His ministry now is not to execute judgment, but to absorb God’s eschatological wrath. This again goes back to Jesus’ citation of Isaiah in the Nazareth sermon. Curiously, He cut it off in mid-verse; he drew on Is. 29:18-19, He did not quote Is. 29:20, “For the ruthless shall come to nought and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off.” By not citing these phrases, Jesus was saying something profound about the chief emphasis of His own ministry. Perhaps Jesus omitted those very aspects that were foremost in the expectations of John and his disciples. Many expected the Messiah to come in wrath to execute vengeance upon those they considered to be the enemies of God and Israel. Instead, Jesus comes in solidarity with all human sinners and bears in Himself the vengeance and wrath of God against His enemies, including us and our sin. That is why Jesus’ ministry is filled with miracles of forgiveness and release for those who are in bondage. Blessed is he who sees that Jesus is the Coming One who brings mercy, compassion and forgiveness! (CC p. 315)

Lit, “scandalized,” refers to rejecting Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. (TLSB)

7:24-28 John is the hinge between the phases of salvation history. The period of OT Israel concludes with John’s ministry, and the new era of Jesus commences with the preaching of John. John was the last of the OT prophets, but he is the greatest prophet in that he announces the new era of salvation that comes in Christ. John’s announcement of the new era conforms to the parables of 5:27-39, but John as a historical figure (born of a woman) is not part of the new era, since “even the most insignificant member

of the kingdom ranks above the messenger who prepared the way for it.” Yet as a believer who, despite his doubts here, most likely died in the faith, he is part of the holy catholic church comprised of OT and NT believers alike. (CC pp 315-316)

7:24 *What did you go ... to see?* John was not a weak messenger, swayed by the pressures of human opinion. On the contrary, he was a true prophet. (CSB)

A “yes man,” one who changes position with every shift in public opinion, unlike John who as stable and strong. (TLSB)

7:25 *a man dressed in soft clothing* – John’s impact owed nothing to position or associations. Rather, his message drew people out the wilderness. (TLSB)

Had they gone out into the wilderness to find a man clothed in soft garments? There is a place for such people; they may be found among those that live in the houses of kings. There those living in luxury and clothed with splendid apparel properly belonged. But John was a poor preacher of repentance. The luxuries of life had no appeal for him; he spurned the delicate side of wealth. (Kretzmann)

7:26 *more than a prophet.* John was the unique prophet sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. (CSB)

But now came the main question: Had they gone out to see a prophet? Then indeed they had not been disappointed. For John was a prophet, and greater than the prophets of old. (Kretzmann)

John is in the same category as all the OT prophets. (CC p. 312)

7:27 *about whom it is written* – John prepares Jesus’ way, as Mal 3:1 predicted after the pattern of the exodus (Ex 23:20). In Luke’s geographical perspective, the way of Jesus is the way to Jerusalem and to the cross. Thus in this word of Jesus about John, Luke introduces and gives OT backing for the second phase of his Christology, the rejection of the Messiah, especially at the end of his journey. Just as Lk 7:18–23 reflected 4:14–21 as regards teaching and healing, now 7:24–28 parallels 4:24–30 in alluding to the rejection aspect of the prophet Christology. This sets the stage for 7:31–35, where the people of this generation reject Wisdom’s children, John and Jesus. John’s question as to whether Jesus is “the Coming One” receives a first-phase answer of wondrous deeds. But John (and everyone) is invited to recognize that since John prepared the way for the messianic new era, rejection is fundamental to both his ministry and that of the Messiah. His present imprisonment (3:20) and pending martyrdom testify to this. John probably realized that his imprisonment would end in death, and John was struggling to reconcile that with Jesus’ promise that he would release those in bondage (4:18–19). (CC p. 316)

my messenger – Jesus quotes Mal 3:1 to define John’s role as herald announcing the advent of the Messiah and getting the people ready to receive Him. (TLSB)

your way – ἦν ὁδόν—This draws on two OT passages. The first is a historical description of how God prepared the way for the Israelites to travel to the Promised Land (Ex 23:20; cf. 13:21–22). The second (Mal 3:1) is patterned after the first but is a promise that God will prepare the way of the Messiah to journey (to Jerusalem) to accomplish the world’s salvation. This complements Luke’s journey motif and places John in its context. (CC p. 312)

7:28 *born of a woman* – ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν—Namely, those of natural birth (cf. 1 Cor 11:8–12). This would include those from the OT era as well as the current one. (CC p. 312)

Reference to John's humanity, though this might also be taken as a subtle contrast with Jesus, who was not merely born of a woman, but of a virgin. (TLSB)

none is greater – John was the last prophet under the old covenant. His surpassing greatness was his close connection to Jesus. He announced Christ's advent, baptizing Him, and then preceded Him in a martyr's death. So closely related were John and Jesus, in fact, that Herod got the two confused (9:7-0). (TLSB)

one who is least in the kingdom of God. Some, including Luther, understand Jesus as referring to Himself as "greater." However, because the Spirit dwells in the heart of every Christian, making present the risen Jesus and imparting His resurrected life, even the Church's rank-and-file believers enjoy privileges that exceed any bestowed under the old covenant. (TLSB)

ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ—Namely, those born of God (cf. Jn 1:12–13; 3:6), or to use the language of the kingdom, those who see that in Jesus the kingdom of God is present. This also would include those from OT times and from the NT age. John would be one of the least in the kingdom. (CC p. 312)

Note from Matthew 11:11 – To be in the kingdom of God is to be a bride. John was only a friend of the bridegroom or best man at the very most.

7:29-30 Luke introduces a different perspective in verse 29-30, one that fits well into his Christology. Luke 7:29-30 is his editorial comment upon John the Baptist and the reaction of the people and religious authorities to the ministry of John. It expands on the prophet Christology of 7:11-17, showing that both John and Jesus follow in the train of rejected OT prophets like Elijah and Elisha (cf. 4:22-30). But the vital question at stake here is this: Who are the opponents of Jesus and who are his followers? Growing in the Pharisaic camp is an opinion of Jesus that will ultimately lead to charges resulting in his death. Luke's editorial comments in 7:29–30 demonstrate the polarization that now exists between the religious authorities and the people. The ministry of John the Baptist is the litmus test that distinguishes between those who are now accepting and those who are now rejecting God's plan of salvation in Jesus, whose way he prepared. (CC p. 316)