

Solving the Problem of Doubt

Scripture: Matthew 11:1-6

Code: 2285

Matthew 11 is our text this morning, as we have the high and sacred privilege of examining the first 6 verses of God's Holy Scripture in this marvelous chapter. Before we look specifically at the text, however, let me see if I can't give you a little bit of a feeling for why this text is here and what it has set about to do.

Matthew's gospel answers the essential question facing men; that question is, "Who is Jesus Christ?" That is the focus of Matthew's gospel. For ten chapters, Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has told us who Jesus Christ is. He has presented Him as the Son of God, God incarnate, the King, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior of Israel, and the Savior of the world. Over and over again, he has reiterated that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the living Lord, the Son of God.

In the effort that Matthew has made to do this, he has tapped every effective witness to the claims of Christ. It's as if he is an attorney, drawing witnesses into a courtroom who can give testimony to the claims that Christ made. If you look at the ten chapters in that way, you can see that they are really a series of testimonies to the deity of Jesus Christ.

For example, in chapter 1, we begin with the testimony of history as we see the genealogy and ancestry that points to Christ as Messiah. Then, we see the testimony of the virgin birth, as the text tells us He was uniquely conceived by the Holy Spirit without a human father. Then there is the testimony of fulfilled prophecy in chapter 2, as Christ fulfills the Old Testament predictions in detail. In chapter 3 is the testimony of the forerunner: John the Baptist, a prophet of God, a man filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, says, "This is the Messiah." In chapter 3 is the testimony of God the Father, who at the baptism of Christ said, "This is My beloved Son."

In chapter 4, we have the testimony of power as Jesus Himself defeats the arch-enemy of God, Satan. Then in chapters 5-7, we have the testimony of His words - the truthfulness, the power, and the authority of what He said verifying His claim. Then, in chapters 8-9, we see the testimony of His works: healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, forgiving sin. All of these testify to His deity.

Finally, in chapter 10, as we have been learning in the past few weeks, we see the testimony of His disciples. They were so convinced that He was the Christ that they were willing to pay the dearest price of loyalty to Him - death itself. So Matthew has laid out all of this tremendous evidence; all of

these have been called, as it were, into the courtroom to testify that Jesus is the Christ.

As he approaches chapters 11-12, he has a new purpose in mind. Based upon all of this testimony, what is the reaction of those who have heard and seen? Matthew deals with that in chapters 11-12. In fact, he lists for us the various kinds of reactions to the claims of Christ. Through giving us brief narrative events in these chapters, he gives us categories of response to Jesus Christ. These chapters are filled with very common reactions to the claims of Christ, which were true then and are true today as much as they were then.

For example, in Matthew 11:1-15 is the response of doubt. From verses 16-19, we see the response of criticism. From verses 20-24, there is the response of indifference. Going to chapter 12, the first 21 verses deal with the response of rejection. Verses 22-23 are the response of amazement, and verses 24-37, the response of blasphemy. Verses 38-45 show the response of fascination.

Those are all the negative responses: doubt, criticism, indifference, amazement, rejection, blasphemy, and fascination. Each of them, in a sense, is kind of a unique response all its own, although there is some overlapping as well. But you'll notice that I said nothing about the last section of chapter 11 and the last section of chapter 12, because both of those deal with positive responses; the response of faith, the right response.

So by the time you have covered these two chapters, you have run the gamut of possible reactions to the claims of Christ and crystallized the categories. That is very helpful, because you'll find out as we move through these two chapters, we'll be able to see the varying responses that are just as true today as they were then, and understand, perhaps a little better, where people are coming from when they react to Jesus Christ.

The first response that he deals with is the response of doubt, and that's what we're going to look at in the first 6 verses. You might even call it perplexity or confusion, but doubt says it better than those terms, I think. Let me give you a footnote as we go in so that you'll understand something. When the New Testament talks about doubt, whether you're talking about the gospels or the epistles, it primarily focuses on believers. That's very important. It's as if you have to believe something before you can doubt it; you have to be committed to it before you begin to question it. So doubt is held up as the unique problem of the believer.

There is only one time in the gospels when it refers to unbelievers in reference to doubt, and when it does, it uses a word that means 'to keep in suspense.' It is a term that is used nowhere else in the New Testament. The normal terms that are used of the concept of doubt are used of believers.

I say that to encourage you, in a sense, that doubt is something that occurs in the life of a believer. In fact, the illustration in Matthew 11 happens to be John the Baptist. Unless you might think that John

the Baptist was a weak believer, verse 11 will help you. It says, "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist." If the greatest man that ever lived up until his time had doubts, then we can be a little comforted when we doubt, can we not?

So doubt is basically a problem encountered by believers. Over and over, for example, in Matthew, Jesus said to His disciples, "Oh you of little faith," and on some occasions, "How long will you doubt?" They had committed themselves to Him, and believed, but their belief, from time to time, hit some snags that made them doubt. Jesus said to them in Matthew 21:21, "If you have faith and doubt not, you will not only do this to the fig tree, but also," and He goes on to talk about moving mountains. He had to continually remind them not to doubt. It is amazing, but in Matthew 28, at the end, after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to them. Verse 17 says, "When they saw Him, they worshiped Him, but some doubted." Incredible!

We're not skipping Mark because there is nothing there; in fact, there are several passages in which the doubt of the disciples is discussed, but in Luke 12:29, He says, "Seek not what you will eat or drink, neither be of doubtful mind." Again, He tells them not to doubt, and He uses an interesting Greek word, *meteorizo*, from which we get the word 'meteor.' The word means 'to be suspended in mid-air.' It is used in Obadiah 4, in the Septuagint, of eagles flying in the air. He's saying, "Don't be hung in mid-air; get your feet firmly planted."

You'll remember that God said to Peter in Acts 20, in reference to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, "Don't doubt. Trust Me; believe." In I Timothy 2:8, he said, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands, praying and not doubting." James said, "If you doubt, you're like a divided man, unstable in all his ways." So doubt is a matter that belongs in the life of a believer. That's the place it fits, not that it ought to be there, but it is. So we're not so shocked when we see the one who is the illustration of doubt being none other than John the Baptist. Let's read these six verses. Matthew 11:1-6.

"Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.'"

First of all, we'll examine the passage, and then we'll talk about the problem of doubt. Verse 1, "Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples." That is what went on in chapter 10: He had taught them, trained them, prepared them to go out into the world and represent Him. He knew that ultimately, they would be sent out, empowered by the Holy Spirit, after His ascension, and the whole building of the church would depend on their availability and ministry; they

were critical. He had invested time in them, and now they were ready for their first training mission, their first short-term training exercise. After chapter 10, He sent them out, to go and carry on the things that He had stated to them in that chapter.

They did that, and it says, "He departed from there," that is, the place where they were sent, "And went on to teach and preach in their cities," and that means the cities of the disciples, which were the cities of Galilee. Eleven of the twelve of them, with the exception of Judas, were from Galilee. So He continued His Galilean ministry.

Remember, at the end of chapter 9, He had said, "Pray with Me that the Lord would send forth laborers." They prayed, they became the laborers, and now they are sent on their first mission. But as a true leader, having sent them, He doesn't just kick back; He does His ministry too. It reveals His leadership and His great heart for the work.

Notice it says He went, "To teach and to preach." We've already looked at that in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35; that was the twofold ministry of Christ: teaching and preaching, and they are different. The synagogue was a place where the Scripture was read and expounded. Philo, the historian, says the synagogue's main feature was to read and give a detailed exposition of Scripture. So the Lord would go into the synagogue, and since any resident expert who happened to be there could speak, He would take the occasion to speak, and He would take the Old Testament and give them the meaning of the Old Testament and apply it to Himself. He was an expository teacher.

He was also a preacher. The word means 'to proclaim,' and He would go from the synagogue to the streets and the hillsides, and the highways and byways, and the corners, and anywhere. He would preach and proclaim His Kingdom. So He continued doing this. We may also assume, based on verse 5, that He continued the miracles of healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and forgiving sin. So the Lord goes on about His work.

He is alone now; the Twelve are gone. They are out on their first mission. As Christ is ministering, He is approached by two disciples of John the Baptist in verse 2. John had heard in his prison about the works of Christ, so he sends these disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is coming, or should we look for another?"

Remember, John was the forerunner of Christ, the one who announced His coming, the one who said, "Behold the Lamb of God," the one who said, "He must increase and I must decrease." John had already known Christ, already pointed to Christ, already baptized Christ. He had affirmed that he believed in Christ, but there were certain things that caused him to doubt. So he sends these two to say, "Is this the Messiah, or are we looking for someone else?" It reflects his perplexity and his doubt, even though he had affirmed his belief and had known about Christ.

For example, back in Matthew 9:14, Jesus is at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, and has called Matthew to follow him. Matthew has gathered together a lot of sinners for a feast, and it is in that setting that we see the disciples of John come to Him and ask Him a question. The point that I want you to see is that the disciples of John were sort of tracking Jesus. You see, John was in prison and he needed a report on how things were going, so some of his disciples would follow Jesus around. At this particular point, they got involved in the conversation.

Look at Luke 7:11-17, another utterly essential text. Here, Jesus raises from the dead the son of the widow of Nain. He touches the casket, and says, "Arise," and the dead son sat up and began to speak, so He turned him over to his mother. Then fear came upon them all, and they glorified God, and so forth. So He raised the dead, and the rumor went, "Throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region." Then there is this little note in verse 18, "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things."

Let's go back to Matthew. The disciples of John were poking around the crowds and hanging around the edges, watching what Jesus was doing, because it was utterly important to John to fulfill his task as the one who announced the Messiah. He wanted to be sure that the one whom he had announced was indeed the Messiah. So his disciples stayed close to Jesus, as well as to John. It also indicates that although he was a prisoner, they had some kind of access and could come and see him.

It is also true, as another footnote, that he had some disciples who apparently didn't stay very close to him, because in Acts 19, we meet some of his disciples who never even knew about Jesus. He had a lot of followers. In fact, earlier in John, it says the whole city and the whole country was coming out to John the Baptist, so he had many followers. The ones who stayed very close to him and worked very closely with him, he dispatched to follow this Jesus around to be sure that he was right.

Now there were some reasons for him to doubt, so he asks this question. "Are you the one who is coming?" That sounds like such a vague question. Who was he talking about? That's only because the English text doesn't really say what the Greek text says. The Greek text says, "Are you erchomai," it's basically a participle, 'the coming one.' And it should be that way: "Are you the coming one?"

You should write that in your margin and capitalize it. The Coming One is a title for the Messiah. It is a Messianic title, like The Branch, The Seed of David, the King of kings, the Prince of Peace, the Coming One. In fact, it is one of the most common titles for the Messiah. In one form or another, it is used in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the epistles. It was first introduced in Psalm 40:7 and 118:26. The Messiah is called 'The Coming One.'

If we go back to Matthew 3:11, when John first speaks in the New Testament, he says, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I," in other words, 'The Coming One' is the term John used to refer to the Messiah. In Mark 1, Mark says, "Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I.'" The Coming One again. That becomes a constant title for the Messiah; He is the Coming One.

In Luke 3:16, where Luke writes regarding John, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming." In the epistles, in Hebrews 10:37, the Messiah is called The Coming One. By the way, the Jews clearly understood this as a Messianic title, so what John is asking is very simple; he is saying, "Are you the Messiah, the One promised?" That's the first question. The second one is this, "Or do we look for another? Are we still looking for someone else?" This phrase indicates the element of Messianic expectation, but it indicates that he was perplexed. "Are you the One, or are we looking for someone else?"

John had doubt, and that's OK, in a sense. There are reasons why he had doubt, and we'll see those in a minute. The thing that was so good about John is that, when he had doubt, he went to the right source to have his doubt dealt with. Where did he go? To the Lord. Some people might want to say, "Well, John didn't believe," but that's not true. The form of the question implies that he believed but was having some perplexity. He's saying, in effect, "Should I continue to believe what I believe, or should I believe something else?" It's as if he's saying, "I believe that You're the Messiah; am I wrong in believing that?"

In a sense, the very fact that he would ask Jesus to answer this indicates that he hadn't lost his faith in Jesus, or he never would have gone to Him for assurance. If he is saying, "Please assure me that You are the Messiah," then he must have believed that to start with. He didn't just deal with his doubt in himself, and he didn't just talk about other people; that would have dragged everybody down in doubt. He went to the Lord. His faith had found a difficulty, a perplexity. You have had that, and so have I.

John believed, he preached, he expected the Messiah to fulfill the promises, he had baptized Him, he had pointed to Him and pronounced that He was the Messiah, and yet, he was confused. We shouldn't be too surprised, because he didn't really know everything, even though some of the things he predicted from his own mouth were from God. There were so many things that he didn't know that sometimes, he had a difficulty interpreting what he did know.

What do I mean by that? It's like I Peter 1:10-11 says regarding the prophets, that they inquired and searched diligently what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, and what person. In other words, they prophets studied their own writings to figure out what they were saying

because they couldn't figure out the exact person, or the exact time. That was John's problem. He wanted to be sure it was the right person at the right time, so he sent two disciples.

Jesus answered them in verse 4, and said, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see." He knew they had been around for a while, and seen a lot, and reported a lot, so He says, "Go and tell him more. Go back again and tell him that the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Go back and give him all the credentials."

Look again at Luke 7. This is absolutely thrilling. Luke records the same incident. He says they came and asked the question, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Then look what happens in verse 21, immediately after they asked the question. "And in the same hour." Instantaneously, momentarily, immediately, "He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, 'Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard.'"

You know what He did? He did a whole plethora of personal miracles and said, "Here, these are for John. Now go tell him." It wasn't second-hand; He just let the power fly, and then said, "You've seen it all, heard it all, go tell him." Clearly, those are the credentials of the Messiah. Then He gave a closing Beatitude in verse 6.

"And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." What does He mean by that? Well, it's a gentle rebuke, a gentle warning. "If you want to be blessed," He says, "Then don't stumble over me. Don't doubt." The word 'offended' is skandalizo; it means 'a trap.' "Blessed is the man who is not trapped." A trap was a crooked stick, and the bait was on the crooked stick, and when the animal grabbed the bait, the crooked stick fell, and the trap got him and he was dead. It became a word that meant 'offended.' So the Lord is saying this, "If you want to be blessed, don't allow anything I do or anything I say to lure you into the trap of doubt and make you stumble." Don't doubt, because if you doubt, you won't be blessed. It's a Beatitude: blessed is the man who doesn't doubt, but trusts.

It's a tender rebuke, and I need to add that it didn't eclipse the Master's love for this prophet, because in verses 7-15, He gives the greatest testimonial to anyone He ever gave in His whole life, written in Scripture. He tells us that this was the greatest man who had ever lived up until his time. That's comforting, isn't it? To know a man as great as this can doubt, and even when he doubts, his greatness is instantly reaffirmed.

The phrase which follows shows that his doubt did not lessen our Lord's esteem for him. Now we understand the basics of the passage, so let's talk about that. Why did John doubt, and why was he perplexed? As I looked at the text, I found four reasons why he doubted, and I believe they are the same four reasons why we doubt, why we have times in our lives when we doubt God.

Reason number one: difficult circumstances. Difficult circumstances tend to make us doubt. Humanly speaking, the career of John the Baptist had ended in disaster. John was this fiery, dramatic, dynamic, confrontive, bold, courageous man who preached exactly what needed to be preached to whom it needed to be said when it needed to be said and never had any fear. He was bold, powerful, aggressive. When he saw sin, he rebuked it, and rebuked it in the person in whom he saw it. That resulted in his being imprisoned. I mean, you have to be careful who you rebuke!

Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, had paid a visit to his brother in Rome. When Herod went to see his brother, he took a liking to his brother's wife, so he seduced her. When he returned home, he proceeded to divorce his own wife and then steal his brother's wife, whom he had seduced, and take her as his new wife. John the Baptist heard about that, and do you know what he did? He did not write an anonymous article; he went in the public view, in the face of Herod Antipas, and told him he was a rotten, vile sinner who was an adulterer and gave him the whole line right to his face. This didn't go over really big with Herod, who proceeded immediately to throw him in prison, and would have killed him, except he was afraid of the people, because the people thought he was a prophet.

Not just any prison, either. Five miles east of the northern tip of the Dead Sea, and fifteen miles south was an old, Herodian palace that had been turned into a fortress. Its name was Machaerus. In the bottom of it was a pit; a dark, stifling, stuffy, hot dungeon in the middle of that bleak desert. That's where he put John. For 18 months, John had been in the limelight - a free spirit in the wilderness, preaching, teaching, and proclaiming. The whole country was coming to him, and he was in the middle of the action. The crowds and the excitement were there, but now, for over one year, he had been in the blackness of a stifling pit without any fresh air. In modern times, the place is called Mukawir.

William Barclay may have captured some of the significance when he wrote, "John was the child of the desert. All his life, he had lived in the wide open spaces, with the clean wind on his face and the spacious vault of the sky for his roof. Now, he was confined within the four narrow walls of an underground dungeon. For a man like John, who had probably never lived in a house, this must have been an agony.

"In Carlisle Castle there is a little cell. Once long ago, they put a border chieftain in that cell and left him there for years. In that cell there is one little window, which is placed too high for a man to look out of when he is standing on the floor. On the ledge of the window there are two depressions worn away in the stone. They are the marks of the hands of that border chieftain, the places where, day after day, he lifted himself up by his hands to look out on the green dales across which he would never ride again. John must have been just like that, and there is nothing to wonder at and still less to criticize in the fact that questions began to form themselves in John's mind."

He was a true saint, a prophet of God, a great, holy, faithful, selfless, loyal prophet. He had done exactly what God told him to do, and he had done it well. He had announced the glorious coming of the Messiah, who would make all things right and set up His Kingdom. He was even a close relative to the Lord. He had been filled with the Spirit since the time he was in his mother's womb; he had taken the Nazarite vow - the highest level of spiritual commitment possible. Was this his reward? Was this it?

You see, doubt comes from our inability to deal with negative circumstances; trials. "If You're the God of all comfort, and the Christ that cares, why am I going through this? It doesn't square; I've been faithful." John must have thought, "Didn't Isaiah promise in chapter 61, verses 1-2, that when the Messiah came, He would free the prisoners and set loose the captives? What's going on here? This isn't the way it's supposed to be. Isn't there a place of blessedness for such a faithful man as I have been?"

Our doubts come like John's doubts. We convince ourselves that we belong to the Lord, and the Lord is going to care for us, and when something goes wrong, we really begin to doubt. We lose a child to death or unbelief, or lose a husband or wife, or mother or father, or a dear friend, or someone gets cancer or has a heart attack, or a child is struck by a car and crippled for life, and we begin to say, "God, is this what it's supposed to be like when You care and love us?"

If everything doesn't go the way it should go, we wonder if God loves us and fall easily into doubt. Once we start thinking that way, Satan gets behind it and just starts shoving. In our selfishness, ignorance, and failure to see the whole plan of God, and in our constant problem of getting tied down to this passing world, we doubt God. We doubt that He cares and loves us; we lose our job or something like that, and we just start questioning God.

John doubted because of difficult circumstances, and I understand that. But he did the right thing with his doubt - he went immediately to the Lord. That's the place to go if you have doubt over those kinds of things; go to the Lord. Yes, he had begun to stumble; verse 6 makes that clear. He was offended, and he had stumbled. But he asked the Lord to help him deal with his doubt, and he sent these two, and said, in effect, "Lord, would you help me?" The Lord was glad to respond, and even said, "Blessedness can come if you'll just trust me, even in the midst of mystifying circumstances."

Paul was in prison in Philippians 4, but he didn't doubt. He said, "I rejoice. Rejoice always, and again I say, rejoice. Be anxious for nothing, but by prayer and supplication," he got tuned in to the Lord. He said, "I know how to be abased and how to abound; I know how to have everything and nothing. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me and have the confidence that my God will supply all my needs." He went to the source.

Negative circumstances are tough, but all they need to do is drive us to the Lord, who will respond to those struggles by replacing our doubt with faith. What does verse 5 say? He said, "You tell John that the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." What is that list? That's all the hurting, broken, crippled, crumbling people. And He's saying, "John, if you think I don't care about the people who are hurting, take a look at the kind of people I touch. I care. This, John, is only a preview of coming attractions in the Kingdom." That's what He's saying, "I do care. Can't you see that by the people I touch and reach out to?"

By the way, John's circumstances never got any better; they got worse - he got his head chopped off. Doubt comes from difficult circumstances, but that only gives us an opportunity to exercise faith. Faith, when it is exercised, gets stronger.

So He sends that little rebuke in verse 6 and says, "John, if you want to be blessed, don't doubt. Don't let anything lure you into the trap of doubt, not even difficult circumstances. I do care; can't you see that by the people I've touched? Some day, you'll be delivered. Maybe not in this world, but in the next."

The second thing that causes doubt is worldly influences. Notice that it says in verse 2 that John had heard about the works of Christ, and this confused him. It confused him because the works of Christ, the things Christ was doing, did not parallel what the people thought the Messiah should do. The people all thought that when the Messiah came, He would first knock off the Romans, wipe them out, and give Israel back her land. Secondly, they were thinking, "Free food!" an instant welfare state.

That's why, in John 6, when He fed the multitude on the hillside, they tried to make Him a king in the same chapter. They wanted health, wealth, and instant happiness. They thought all the wrongs would be made right, everything would be as it ought to be immediately; that was the existing expectation, and doubt is caused by worldly influence.

John had become a victim of the thinking of his day, saying, "Isn't it supposed to be this way?" Was Jesus supposed to be walking around, meek and lowly, with not much going on that changed the environment? The wrongs were still wrong, the injustices were still there, the sin was everywhere. It just wasn't the way it was supposed to be, and he had become victimized by the thinking of the people around him.

By the way, this is very clearly the problem of the disciples. They were forever fighting doubts about Jesus because they had these current expectations of the Messiah, and Jesus didn't live up to them. That's why, even in Acts 1, they're saying to Him, "Is this the time You're going to bring the Kingdom?" And He says to them for the umpteenth time, "You're still asking the same dumb

question; it's not for you to know." That's why, even after all those years of being with them, He says in John 14, "Have I been so long with you and you still do not know who I am?" They had these confused concepts that came from the world around them.

One of the interesting things the Jews believe, and it comes up in Matthew 16, is that when the Messiah came, before He arrived, there would be a long succession of other guys who would come. A whole bunch of guys would come, and the Messiah would be the final one. That's why, in Matthew 16, Jesus said to the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" They said, "Well, some say You're Elijah, some say You're Jeremiah, some say You're one of the prophets." He asked, "Who do you say that I am?" and they replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What did that reflect? It reflected the current Jewish thinking that there would be a long string of people coming; first would be Elijah, then Jeremiah, then a bunch of prophets, then that prophet of Deuteronomy 18, and finally, the Messiah would come. When Jesus did not do what John thought He should be doing, John began thinking, "Maybe He's back up a few guys, and someone else." So he says, "Are you him, or do we look for someone else? Where are you in the line?" So he was even affected by that misinformation. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a certain thing, and it wasn't turning out that way, so there was confusion.

Jesus even said in Matthew 16, "I'm going to go and die," and what did Peter say? "Lord, let it not be so. You're not going to die; that's not in the plan!" And Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You don't even know the plan." You see, they never understood it.

On the night Jesus was going to be betrayed and taken to be executed, they were sitting around, arguing about who was going to get to sit on the thrones in the highest point of the Kingdom. And Jesus was talking about dying. They looked right by it. When the Lord was taken prisoner, Peter was so totally disillusioned that he went out immediately and denied Jesus three times. It didn't make any sense to him at all, and it didn't make any sense to Thomas, or to those on the road to Emmaus, who were moping, saying, "We thought He was the Christ."

They had all become victimized by what the people around them thought He should be. In fact, in John 10:24, the Jews said to Him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? Tell us who You are." You know what He said to them? "I told you who I was," but it flew over their heads. They weren't even on His frequency. He was saying it over and over, but their expectation was so different that they couldn't hear what He was saying.

We face the same causes for doubt today; we doubt because we're perplexed by the plan of God. I think the world imposes that on us. Have you ever heard this question? "If God is a God of love, why is the world so messed up? If Christ loves everyone so much, why do children die and people starve, or get diseases, and there is war and death? If your God is so loving, why doesn't He make things

right in this world; why is there so much injustice? If your God is so loving, why is He sending people to Hell?" They say, "We'll tell you what kind of Christ we want, and if yours fits, we'll believe."

We cannot become victimized by that or we'll begin to doubt. We'll say, "I don't know. Why doesn't God do something? If there is a God, why are there so many false religions? If He wants everyone to love Him, and He's so powerful, why doesn't He wipe out the false religions so we'll all believe?" When you start letting the world dictate to you what God is to be and to do, and what Christ is to be and do, you'll look at the Bible and wonder, and be perplexed.

The world does not know God or His plan; they don't know Christ or understand who He is. The natural man does not understand the things of God, and if you begin to let the world force you to think that Christ must be who they say He must be, then you'll start doubting. Again, the solution is to go to Him.

What will you find when you go? He says, "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." What does that mean? He says, "Look! Can't you see I'm the one who will make things right? I am reaching out to the poor, reversing disease and death. Can't you see it?"

It is limited, however, by the unbelief and sin of the world. Can't you see He is the one who is going to make it right, who has the power to make it right and reverse the curse? Someday He will, in his Kingdom. These are previews of coming attractions, a taste of what He will do in the future.

In Luke 7, the Jews said to Him, "Where is the Kingdom of God? You're the King and You talk about a Kingdom, but what are you doing about it?" He says, "The Kingdom of God is in your midst, but you just can't see it." He says to John, "See, I can do all that. I can stop disease and give resurrection life to the dead. I can touch the poor and preach good news to hurting people. It is going to be right, just trust Me for the right timing." Then He adds the Beatitude, "Be blessed by not doubting." Negative circumstances make us doubt, but we don't have to doubt. We don't have to doubt because of worldly influences either.

Thirdly, there is incomplete revelation. It says in verse 2 that John had heard. John had heard about Jesus and what was going on. His disciples had come back and said they had seen this and that, but he really doubted because he didn't have the opportunity for a firsthand look. I think there is a sense of legitimate doubt here. He didn't have the opportunity, like Peter said, to be an eyewitness of His majesty. He didn't have the opportunity, as John did, to handle Him with his hands, as he said in I John 1:1. He didn't even have a more sure word of Scripture, as we have. He didn't have a complete revelation; there was a lot missing and he was getting some stuff secondhand.

So he says, "I need some firsthand information," and the Lord said, "OK. If you need some firsthand information, I'll give you some." Remember Luke 7; right there, on the spot, Jesus did massive miracles and said, "These are for John! These are John's miracles, now take them to him and tell him." The Lord filled in that space where he needed a more complete revelation.

How does this relate to you? Do you know why a lot of people doubt? Not only because of negative circumstances and worldly influences, but a lot of people doubt because they just don't understand God's revelation. You have to know the facts. He says, "Go tell John the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." In other words, "Give him the revelation, give him the manifestation; tell him what I've done."

I would promise you that your doubt is erased as you daily expose yourself to the revelation of God. Let God speak through His Word; that spells the end of doubt. The two on the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24, were walking along. They were in the middle of doubt, confusion, and perplexity, and the Lord came along and opened to them the Scripture. He began to speak out of the Scripture the things concerning Himself, and their eyes were opened, and they saw Him. They said, "Did not our hearts burn within us as He spoke with us along the way and opened to us the Scripture?"

What dispelled their doubt was the revelation of Himself in the Scripture. We all need a firsthand manifestation of the living Christ to dispel doubt, and it comes through the pages of Holy Scripture. That's why the Bereans were more noble, because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. He gave them the evidence.

Fourthly, people doubt because of unfulfilled expectations. John says in verse 3, "Ask Him if we're looking for someone else. Do we look for another?" Why would he say that? Only because He hadn't fulfilled his expectations. What does that mean? When John preached about Christ, he said, "There comes one after me that is mightier than I, who comes with unquenchable fire, with a winnowing fan in His hand, by which He will separate the wheat from the chaff," which is judgment.

In other words, he says, "The Messiah is coming in holy judgment." That was his message; that's why he was always preaching, "Repent, repent, repent." In other words, "You'd better get your life right because the Messiah is coming." The implication was that if you're life wasn't right, you'd be judged. He was preaching that the Messiah was coming to judge. He expected the Messiah to land with brass feet blazing in fire, to come blasting evil things with divine thunderbolts. And here came Jesus, with a little group of twelve totally inept characters, meekly wandering around Galilee.

John just couldn't figure it out. Jesus was on a mission of mercy, and John's was a message of judgment, waiting for the fury and fire and flame and wrath. He was saying, "When are You going to blast Your enemies?" He sounds like David in Psalm 9, 10, 35, 52, 58, and all those psalms where

David asked God to do in His enemies. He sounds like the people under the altar in Revelation 6, "How long, Oh Lord, how long will you tolerate this?" He's thinking, "If you're the Messiah, what's going on?" He has unfulfilled expectations.

Really, impatience can lead to doubt, when we expect divine intervention and it doesn't happen. You expect God to do something. If there is someone in your life who is a wretched, evil, vile person, and they seem to prosper all the time, you say, "How long will you let this happen, God? This doesn't seem to fit." Or maybe you've been looking for the Second Coming for so long, you just sort of gave up.

I think some people have been looking for the Rapture for so long, they just figure it will never come and have decided to be post-tribulationists. They've just thrown away imminence; they're so tired of thinking He could come at any minute that they've decided it would be much more comfortable to be post-trib and go right through the Tribulation, mark off the events as they happen, and know when He will come. I think it's more emotional than biblical.

Have you ever noticed how there are waves of prophetic interest? I'll preach a series on prophecy, and everyone will get really excited and start asking questions. "Do you think the Lord will come any minute?" And everyone will be really turned on about how the Lord could come, then six months later, He hasn't come, and everyone is back down to just the basic principles of living the Christians life. Three or four years later, I come back and can jack them back up on the Second Coming, and they get their pajamas on and go sit on a roof somewhere, and are really excited about it, but He doesn't come. Then they're right back down again.

I've also discovered in my life that it's new Christians that get the most excited about Christ's imminent return. The ones who have lived for 40 or 50 years as Christians just figure they've been waiting a long time with nothing happening, so they just don't care anymore. John had all these expectations, and maybe you're like him, saying to yourself, "I wonder if He ever will come. Is this whole thing true?" I think people say, "Everyone has always believed that, but He hasn't come yet." II Peter 3:3 says, "Scoffers will mock His coming, saying, 'Where is the sign of His coming? All things continue as they were from the beginning.'"

Watch Jesus' answer. If you're worried about if He's going to come and set up the Kingdom, listen to this: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Why does He say that? Those are all signs of the Kingdom, for in the Kingdom, all disease is eliminated, there will be a lessening of the power of death, the world will hear the Gospel. These were all signs of the Kingdom.

Isaiah 35 says that in the Kingdom, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the lame (and Isaiah 61 adds the poor) will all be healed and have the Gospel preached to them; those are Kingdom promises. He

is saying, "John, if it's your Kingdom expectation that is causing you doubt, look again at these things. They are all the marks of the Kingdom; you're seeing them in a preview. It will come, so don't let anyone catch you in the trap of doubt, or you'll lose your blessing."

Mark this, the words of our Lord answer the problems of doubt. If you doubt because of difficult circumstances, look at His works; they prove He cares for a people in difficulty. If you doubt because of worldly influence, look at His works; He is in control, and will show it fully one day. If you doubt because of incomplete revelation, then look at His works, study them, read them, and see who He is. If you doubt because of unfulfilled expectation, look again, for these are the previews of what He will do in the Kingdom. If He could do them then, He proves Himself to be the one who can do them in the Kingdom.

The best part of this story is the part that Matthew doesn't put in, and it is this: John had his doubt removed by the Lord's answer. How do we know that? Look at Matthew 14:12; one verse tells us. It talks about John being beheaded and his head is brought on a platter. "Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus." Why did they tell Jesus? Because Jesus was the most important person, and they believed in Him. Why did they believe? Because John believed in Jesus, and had made them to believe in Jesus. The fact that they went immediately to Jesus is indicative of the fact that John was satisfied with the answer that he got. Jesus fit into their lives and their plan because He fit into John's plan.

We all doubt, know this. II Timothy 2:13 says, "If we believe not, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." When you doubt, God will be faithful; you won't lose your relationship to the Lord. He will be faithful because He can't deny Himself. He has affirmed that you are His child and He will hold on. Knowing that, you can have the confidence to go to God with your doubt, and He'll give you the answer you need. As Luke 12:29 says, "Neither be of a doubtful mind."

Father, we know that everyone's faith has weak moments, and no single chapter is the full story of a man's life. We all have struggles. Thank You for what You've taught us through John, that you cared that he understood and that his doubt was removed. You didn't think any less of him, because you extolled him as the greatest man even though he had doubts. Father, the sign of his greatness was that he knew where to go with his doubts, so help us to know that as well. May we, as Paul instructed Timothy, pray without doubting, that You may be glorified through our faith. In Christ's name, Amen.

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