

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Why the Believer Doubts, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 7:18-20

Code: 42-95

As we worship the Lord, of course, we are instructed in Scripture to worship in truth. We have worshiped in spirit, as our hearts have been lifted up and we have sung and now it's time to hear the truth. Our text this morning in our continuing study of the gospel of Luke is in chapter 7. So open your Bible, if you will, to Luke chapter 7. Let us hear what God has written for us.

Through the inspired writer, Luke, we are returning to a passage this morning that we looked at last Sunday, but I want us to dig a little more deeply into what is a very, very important and helpful portion of Scripture. Luke 7 verses 18 to 23. This is the first of three passages that deal with Jesus and John the Baptist. They are very important, crucial passages as we shall see in the weeks to come.

Let me read you the first of the three starting in verse 18. "And the disciples of John reported to him about all these things and summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord saying, 'Are You the expected One? Or do we look for someone else?' And when the men had come to Him, they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to You saying, Are you the expected one or do we look for someone else?' At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits and He granted sight to many who were blind. And He answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear. The dead are raised up. The poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.'"

The gospel writer Mark records an incident where Jesus confronted a father with a demon-possessed boy, a serious case of demon possession, one of the most serious recorded in the New Testament. This demon had somehow made this boy mute so that he could not speak. The demon had affected this boy in such a way as to have seizures. He foamed at the mouth. Scripture says he ground his teeth. He stiffened himself, convulsing and falling over and smashing into whatever was in his way before he hit the ground. And the father dealing with his pitiful son came to Jesus and told Jesus that it had been this way with the boy since childhood...which would lead us to believe that perhaps he was a teenager.

The horror of this, not only the physical difficulties but the embarrassment had created such a pitiful scene that the father hearing of the power of Jesus brought the boy. And then he asked Jesus if He could help his son. Jesus responded with this statement, "All things are possible to him who

believes." And the father's response is famous, Mark 9:24 says the father said this, "I do believe, help my unbelief."

What a strange statement. You do believe, help your unbelief? But we all understand that. We understand believing doubt, or doubting belief. And that father's testimony is the testimony of most of us. I do believe, help my unbelief. That is to say I believe but my faith is incomplete, my faith is assaulted and fraught with doubts. Astonishingly that is exactly the situation in the text I read, not with just a passing stranger such as the father, but with the greatest man who had ever lived up until his time, John the Baptist, the greatest prophet of all. Jesus had so designated him as the greatest man who ever lived, according to Matthew 11:11. Here is a saint of God, a prophet of God, the forerunner of the Messiah, the last of the Old Testament prophets and the greatest who is struggling with doubt.

You can read the New Testament. You could have been there during the events of the life of Jesus. In either case you would have plenty of reason to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, the Immanuel, God with us, the Redeemer. If you had any association, let's say, with the family of Jesus, or with the family of John the Baptist, his aged mother and father, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were also related to Jesus' family, Elizabeth being related to Mary. If you knew those people you would know of the affirming evidences that Jesus was the Messiah. You, if you were hanging around the Apostles, would have ample evidence to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh, truly the Christ the One who is coming, the expected one, as John calls Him here. And even reading the New Testament the proof is replete. There is the testimony of angels. The angel who came to Zacharias while he was doing his priestly duty in Jerusalem and told him he was going to have a son...and he was probably in his eighties and he and his wife were barren. And truly they did have a son who was none other than this great prophet John the Baptist. The testimony of the angel Gabriel who came to Joseph and Mary and testified to the fact that the Spirit of God was going to plant a child in the womb of Mary who would be a virgin when the child was born. The testimony of the angels who spoke in vast numbers to the shepherds in the fields. Plenty of angelic testimony. It must have circulated around the family of Jesus and the family of John the Baptist. It must have been just part of normal family talk, even though John's family lived in the Judean hillside and Jesus' family lived up in Nazareth and they were spread apart by about sixty miles. They must have come together at Passover and other events. And whenever they did, the stories must have been the stories of the great angelic appearances, the virgin birth, all of that. That was all part of the family history.

They were well aware of the fact that Jesus came down through the Davidic messianic line. His descent through His earthly father Joseph, His descent through His mother Mary, both coming from David. They were all aware of the fact that John the Baptist himself had given testimony that this is the coming one. This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They were aware that

at that time when John baptized Jesus the Spirit of God came down, descending upon Him in divine affirmation, the Father's voice came out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." There were all kinds of sort of events all the way through that indicated divine intervention from angels and from God Himself and the Holy Spirit.

And then there was no other explanation for the teaching of Jesus, His power over disease, His power over demons and His power over death except that He was God exercising divine power. And that was all a constant public display, all those healings and all those casting out of demons going on all the time day after day after day. Plenty of evidence, plenty of reason to believe. Even people who didn't know the Old Testament very well, even Gentiles could get the message such as the Centurion whose story begins in verse 2 of this chapter. The Centurion, a Gentile, an outcast, a part of the Roman occupying army, despised and hated, probably having responsibility over the collection of taxes which the Jews despised, a tax collector being the most despicable person of all, this outcast, this outsider, this Centurion had come to faith in Christ and a faith that was so great that in verse 9 Jesus said, "I have not even seen faith like this in Israel."

There was plenty of reason to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, God in human flesh, the Savior, the Redeemer, the Promised One, the Coming One. And some did believe. The Centurion believed and some of Jesus' disciples believed. Certainly the Apostles believed. But most people came short of believing. So as you study the story of Jesus, you see all of this proof, all of this unanswerable evidence that Jesus is God's Son, met with attitudes that are short of faith. What you see is criticism, questioning, indifference, rejection, curiosity, fascination, hostility, hatred and conspiracy to execute. So you have the great model of pure faith in the Centurion, and then you have this massive people in the middle who are somewhere in that spectrum that I just recited for you, something short of faith. And then you have those who believe but their faith was mingled with doubt and that tended to be the more common characteristic of the believers. And you know that because how many times do you hear Jesus address His Apostles this way, "O you of little faith. Why do you doubt?" I mean, that's the story of the Apostles. We would like to think that they had a faith equal to the Centurion's, but they didn't. It's amazing.

You know, one of the things that saved the Centurion from doubt was that he didn't have the same expectations that the Jews had. Let me say that again with punctuation. One of the reasons the Centurion's faith was so pure and not mingled with doubt was because he didn't have the same expectations the Jews had. It was the Jews' expectations that tended to create their doubt. They had a certain expectation for what Jesus should do, would do and when He didn't do it they were fraught with doubt. A Gentile wouldn't have those kinds of expectations, not knowing the Old Testament the same way and not being a part of the Jewish tradition and culture. And when you come to the Apostles themselves, Matthew 8:26...27 I should say, Jesus finds two blind men and He heals

them...I'm sorry, chapter 8, I'm looking at chapter 9, chapter 8 verse 26, that's later. He says to them, "Why are you timid, you men of little faith? Why are you timid, you men of little faith?" This was at the time when they were out on the boat in the sea. I thought I was in the wrong place. The fourteenth chapter, verse 31 again, "Why are you timid and of little faith?" Verse 31 more direct, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt? Why did you doubt?" And who is He talking to here? Peter...Peter the leader who fancied himself the strongest of the strong is designated as a doubter. We think of Thomas as the doubter, but Thomas wasn't the only doubter, they were all doubters. Jesus said in Matthew 21:21, "If you have faith and don't doubt, you can do this and this... Your problem is you have too much doubt mixed with your faith." Amazingly at the end of Matthew, 28:17, this is after the resurrection. The eleven disciples go to Galilee, Judas is obviously dead committing suicide. They go to the mountain where Jesus designated and He shows up. They saw Him, they worshiped Him and it says, "Some were doubtful." They doubted from the beginning to the end. They're still doubting after the resurrection. That's why they're characterized so often as "the little faith association." You could call...you could write a book, "The Apostles, subtitled the little faith association." You find that again in Mark and a couple of other places, in Mark, in one place in Luke chapter 12.

So doubt was not an uncommon thing. In fact, it was characteristic of those who were the most devout, the Apostles, those who had been chosen to be the first generation of preachers the Lord would train. And here then we find doubt on the part of John the Baptist, the greatest man who ever lived. Doubt is very real for people who believe. It is reality but it is not an acceptable reality and it needs to be addressed. Moses doubted God. Gideon doubted God. Elijah doubted God. Jeremiah even expressed doubt. The Apostles doubt and here John the Baptist doubts. We understand that. Coming face-to-face with doubt is coming face-to-face with ourselves. And that's why this is an important passage because it's going to help us to be able to deal with doubt.

Now what do we mean by doubt? Well, some people say it means confusion or perplexity. But let me just give you a simple definition. Doubt is a struggle to believe...it is a struggle to believe. It is something that prevents me from fully believing. It can be momentary, it can be prolonged. It can be permanent.

But I want you to understand how that the gospels deal with doubt. Whenever Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the gospels, deal with a doubting person, listen to this, it's always a believer. It's always a believer. There is one occasion in John 10:24 where it says the Jews were saying to Jesus, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." But that wasn't honest doubt. That wasn't a struggling to believe. They were fixed in their hatred and unbelief. That was just their unbelief trying to put Jesus on the spot. Every true expression of doubt in the four gospels relates to believers. Doubt is something that is part of being a believer. So we again go back to what the man said. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." And you can identify with that and so can I. There have been times in all of our lives when in the midst of our believing we struggled with doubts. Some

of you are going through that even now. Doubt is presented as a believer's problem.

So we shouldn't be surprised to find the Apostles having little faith and doubting. We shouldn't even be surprised to find a believer, John the Baptist, a godly prophet, struggling with doubt. If the greatest man who ever lived had some doubts, if the twelve Apostles who were with Jesus had some doubts, then maybe it's understandable that we have some doubts as well.

Now to give you the picture, we don't want to think less of John than we should. John believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He asks the question here, "Are you the *har erchmainos* [??], Are You the Coming One?" That is a messianic title that appears in the fortieth Psalm and the 118 Psalm. Are you the Coming One? Well he knew He was. Chapter 3 verse 16 of Luke, "John answered and said to the people, 'As for me, I baptize you with water. But the Coming One...there he uses that messianic title...the Coming One who is mightier than I and I'm not fit to untie the thong of His sandals, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'"

So John was talking about the Coming One. He was pointing to the Coming One. And, of course, the day came when Jesus appeared and John says he pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And then he baptized Jesus and then the Father said, "This is the One who is My beloved Son." And so there was no mistake, the Holy Spirit came down and just settled on Him. John knew He was the Coming One.

So we affirm that John is a believer. He's a believer. At that time he was so convinced that Jesus was the Coming One, the promised Messiah and Redeemer, that he said, "My basic work is done." And then John 3:30 he said to the people, "He must increase and I must decrease." Time for me to fade away, I'm done. I was to be the forerunner. I was to announce the Messiah, to point to Him, to present Him. I've done it, I fade away. In every sense that we can look at John's encounter with Jesus we'd have to conclude that John believed Jesus was the Coming One. The Father affirmed it. The Spirit affirmed it. Jesus Himself affirmed it. And then in verse 18 of Luke 3, "John went on with many other exhortations preaching the gospel to the people." He didn't stop his ministry, he went on preaching...preaching Jesus Christ and the gospel, the good news. Messiah is here. The Kingdom of God has come. Messiah has arrived. And his message was always this, "Repent, repent, repent because unless you repent you can't participate in the Kingdom of God." You have to repent of your sin.

Well, he was a strong preacher. He was a hell, fire and damnation preacher. In fact, there's not a lot of compassion in his preaching. It was very strong judgment that he preached and he called for repentance and he didn't mince any words. Verse 19, Luke 3, and this sets the stage, "When Herod the Tetrarch was reproved by him..." Whoa...when Herod the Tetrarch was reproved by him? Do you

remember when we went through this passage I told you Herod the Tetrarch, tetrarch meaning a ruler of a fourth of an area, which came to mean metaphorically a small-time king. He was king over Galilee/Peraea, those adjoining areas where Jesus was ministering, where John had ministered. And he was a petty king. He was of the family of Herod the Great, he was one of Herod's sons. And this is the ultimate New Testament soap opera.

One of his sons by one of his wives was this man named Herod who had become the ruler of this section called Galilee and Peraea. And John the Baptist had occasion to confront him and when he did, he reproved him on account of Herodias, his brother's wife. He was real specific.

Now you've got to know this. Herodias was a woman married to Herod's brother. This is Herod Antipas. Now Herod Antipas, as he was called, the tetrarch, had lots of half brothers. He had one half brother named Philip who had this wife named Herodias. When this wife was married to Philip, Herod Antipas, the one here, seduced her and stole her and married her. Now what makes it even more bizarre is that she was the niece of Philip, so he married his niece and she was also Herod's niece. So they're just passing around incestuous relationships. No matter how you look at this, it was wicked. Multiple marriages, seduction, divorce, incest...and when John had the occasion to meet Herod, he pointed it all out. And that wasn't all, it says in verse 20, he also talked to him about all the wicked things which Herod had done. He just hit him right between the eyes with all the wickedness he had done.

At the time we were going through that passage of Scripture, Bill Clinton was still President. And I wondered if John the Baptist had an audience with the President what he might say. Very different than several evangelicals who did.

Well, as a result of that, he did more wicked things. Added this also, here's the most wicked, he locked John up in prison. He locked him in prison. He wasn't going to stand for somebody rebuking him in public. So he slammed him in a dungeon down underneath Fort Machaerus some miles east of the Dead Sea, the northern end of the Dead Sea out in the wilderness, barren, rugged place. It was a summer palace. The Herodians had a lot of summer palaces, including Masada[?], this is one. They took John out, threw him in prison. The reason they didn't kill him was he was very popular at the time, he wanted the popularity to kind of die if he took him out of circulation for awhile. And he did, he kept him in prison at least a year before he executed him.

And you remember the story of how he died, don't you? There was a party. And Salome came and danced and Herod said, "What do you want?" And prompted by her mother, "Get rid of that prophet, I want his head on a platter." And that's what happened. Out they came in the middle of the party with his head on a platter. So, John's faithfulness cost him his freedom and it cost him ultimately his head.

The story of his death is found in Matthew 14, beginning of the chapter; Mark 6 toward the end of the chapter.

So when we pick up our story, let's go back to chapter 7, when we pick up our story, John is in prison. He's been in prison for many, many months. And his disciples, verse 18, the disciples of John reported to him about all these things. He has no firsthand information, he can't hear Jesus, he can't see Jesus. And he has some privileges, some people can under some circumstances visit him and occasionally that must have happened because there are going to be at least two occasions here...once when they first go, and then when they report back. So he had some opportunity for contact with his disciples. And here the disciples of John report to him the things that have occurred around Jesus.

What do they mean? Well first of all, they may well have been there when Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain, that's in the prior passage. You remember, Jesus broke up the funeral, raised the son from the dead. Prior to that Jesus had healed the Centurion's very sick servant. So it may have been that they were there because the disciples of John...watch this now...the disciples of John are following Jesus. They're following Jesus because they're still sort of caught...they know John said, "You know, He must increase, I must decrease." They know John said He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, you need to follow Him. But they're loyal to John. And some of these disciples of John the Baptist are so loyal that we still find some of them who don't even understand the gospel in all of its fullness in the nineteenth chapter of Acts many years later. You remember that? They run into some disciples of John who haven't even heard of the Holy Spirit, don't even know what's going on. So John had some very loyal followers. You remember, tens of thousands of people had experienced his preaching and even his baptism, so He had people who were followers of his. Some of them were loyal enough to follow Jesus around to try to figure out if He really was the Messiah and occasionally go back and report to John. Matthew 11:2 and 3 says, "Now when John was in prison, he heard of the works of Christ." So he heard from these disciples. That's a parallel to this text. The way he heard, these disciples went back and reported to him. They're talking about specific things like the two incidents prior. They're also talking about the general things that Jesus was doing, all of His miracles and mighty word and mighty works. And so, they go back and they give a report to John.

Now we know they're following Jesus...go back to chapter 5 verse 33. In chapter 5 Matthew is converted and Matthew is a tax collector. And so Matthew is so excited about his conversion that he wants to have a party and invite all his friends and give them the gospel. He wants Jesus and the Apostles to come and be the guests at the party. Well the only people who associate with a tax collector are the scum, the riff-raff, the trash and so he's got this...this party of all of the outcasts of society. And he holds the party.

Interestingly enough the Pharisees show up outside because they always follow Jesus looking for a way that they can indict Him and then execute Him. But also verse 33 of Luke 5 says, "The disciples of John are there." Now Luke doesn't specifically say they're there, but Mark 9:14...I'm sorry, Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18 says they were there. And so the disciples are having this big party. They're celebrating the conversion of Matthew and they're excited about their own conversion. And the question then is posed, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but you have a party. How is it that You've broken with this...this traditional approach to religion?" This...this fasting and praying which implies that, you know, God needs to intervene and the Messiah needs to come and we have to fast and pray. The disciples are having a party because He's already arrived.

But what's interesting here is that the disciples of John are doing the same things the Pharisees are doing. That's what he says. It doesn't mean that they had that same animosity, that same hatred, that same bitterness the Pharisees had, but it does mean they had never moved out of that paradigm of religion. They were still functioning in the old traditional Jewish way. They were still going through the ceremonies and the fasts that the Pharisees had prescribed. They were just doing their religious duty so they were still in the truest sense followers of John the Baptist, stuck in the old patterns who had not yet come to the full understanding of the Messiah. So they weren't likely to be much help to John since they hadn't seemingly come to real faith in Christ themselves.

They then are following Jesus around. They're honest. I think they're trying to come to a true understanding. The Pharisees were dishonest, they're trying to indict Him in order that they might kill Him which eventually they did.

So some of these disciples, back to chapter 7, show up at the prison and they report to John what Jesus is doing to give him this update. Now remember, John has been in prison for months and months. He hasn't seen anything or heard anything. And he's beginning to doubt. Does he believe Jesus is the Coming One? Sure. Does he have ample evidence? Of course, I told you what he personally would have had, the whole family history of everything from the angelic annunciation to his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, the whole connection with Joseph and Mary, the testimony of Anna and Simeon which must have come down through the family stories every year. And all of the things that Jesus...that had affirmed Jesus at the baptism, and all the rest. Sure he believed, he believed. No question. But doubt was growing on the edges of his faith. Just wasn't going the way it probably should go. So some of his loyal disciples who were up in Capernaum, sixty miles at least, or more, maybe even eighty miles from where John was in prison, took the whole trek all the way down there, walked all the way down to the Jordan Valley, all the way over the tip of the Dead Sea down to the east to wherever this place was. And they told John what they had seen and heard.

And so, John 1 verse 19...summons two of them, two because they could help each other, they could support each other, they could fellowship with each other. And Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "All testimony should be confirmed in the mouth of two or three witnesses." So he sends two, Jesus sent the disciples even two by two, He went the 72 by two, this was a common thing. And so he summons two of his disciples and John sends them to the Lord saying, here's the question, "Are you the expected One, or do we look for someone else?"

Just a little note. Luke is now starting to identify Jesus as Lord. There's no question in his mind. Back in verse 13 he called Him Lord. Here again he calls Him Lord and that is a settled issue now. Jesus is Lord. And that's what Luke calls Him.

So John sends them back 80 miles to where Jesus is ministering in Galilee and says, "You ask, are You the expected One, or do we look for someone else?" Are You the *har erchmainos* [?], are You the Coming One, are You the expected One? That's a technical term for Messiah. And that's used in the New Testament many places...Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Mark 11:9; Luke 3:16; 13:35; 19:38; John 1:27. That's a common New Testament expression based, as I said, on Psalm 40 and Psalm 118. It's like saying, "Are You the Messiah? Are You the One promised in the Old Testament?"

And at that point we are now coming face-to-face with John's doubts. What created those doubts? What caused him to doubt what he believed? Why is he saying, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief?" Why would he ever say, "Or do we look for someone else?" Why would he ever say that? I mean, with the Father speaking out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son." With the Spirit descending, with Jesus affirming. Why would he even ask that?

Well doubt had crept in. And that hadn't destroyed his faith. I think it's a tremendously interesting point, you need to understand this, that his faith is proven by the way he reacts to his doubt. If he had no trust in Jesus, he wouldn't go to Jesus to ask Jesus to dispel his doubt. That to me is so interesting. He is asking Jesus whom he believes in and doubts at the same time to resolve his doubt. And he knows that Jesus is the only one who can resolve that doubt. So he's really struggling against a weakness in the flesh, he's struggling against a temptation. And you do what you always need to do with doubt, you go directly to the Lord, not to somebody else, or to nobody. The worst thing you could do with your doubt is keep it to yourself. He's saying I've got some doubts and I need to get an answer, and the way to get the answer is to go directly to the Lord. And in that sense he proves his faith. If he had no faith in Jesus, he would never ask Jesus to be the one who resolve his doubts. Still that way. If you want to get your doubt resolved, go to the Word of God, not to any other place.

And remember, in John's case the picture wasn't clear. Jesus hadn't died. He hadn't done His saving work. He hadn't risen from the dead. He hadn't established His Kingdom. He hadn't assaulted the Jewish apostate leaders. He hadn't knocked off the Romans and established a welfare state, etc., the Kingdom. And John doesn't know there's a big gap between the first coming in which Jesus demonstrates compassion and mercy and kindness, and the Second Coming in which He demonstrates fury and wrath and judgment and fire. He's like the prophets that Peter wrote about in 1 Peter 1:10 and 11. He said, "The prophets of old...speaking about Christ...wrote and after they wrote they looked at what they wrote to try to figure out what it meant." Because until you see the fulfillment, something that is a prediction is not clear. That's why we struggle with prophetic passages that deal with the end of the age, the book of Revelation, the book of Daniel, the Olivet Discourse because we can't...we can't understand all of the realities of a future time that hasn't happened. And so here John is a prophet who predicted the Messiah, who said He's here, but he hasn't seen all the unfolding of everything the prophet said about Messiah, so he has questions.

Now at this point I want to stop and I want to talk about doubt. I'm just going to talk about it partially and then I'm going to wrap this up next time. John doubted. And the reason he doubted was because some things weren't clear to him, some things didn't seem complete to him. And as I think about that, I think it's important to understand that we have doubts as well and there are reasons why we have doubts. Let me just give you...I'm going to give you four, but I'll give you two this morning.

Number one reason...personal tragedy...personal tragedy. Doubt can sort of be broken out into these factors. I mean, think about John. He is in a stinking dungeon, been there months, probably going on a year. Humanly speaking now, this is his reward for a life of faithfulness. He is a thread width from death and that's what he gets for being the forerunner of the Messiah, the most exalted prophet of all prophets. He had been bold, bold before the most powerful sinner in his world, Herod Antipas. And as a result of his faithfulness and his courage and his boldness, he's sitting in this dungeon in the desert. His personal tragedy didn't seem consistent with his faithfulness. Where was the blessing that's supposed to come to faithfulness? And his personal tragedy didn't seem consistent with the Messiah's power. Couldn't the Messiah do something about it? In fact, Jesus had never even been to visit him. And it didn't seem consistent with the purpose of God. Messiah's going to come, and this is going to happen to the bad people, not the prophet. The bad people are going to receive the fire, not saints and it was bad enough that John...he was a man of the desert, was clothed in camel's hair and ate locust and wild honey and lived outside. He had a life that was completely open. I mean, he breathed the clean air, felt the wind in his face, the vault of heaven was the roof over his head. Maybe never lived in a house, now he's confined in four narrow walls. I mean, just that part of it, but to determine this horrible physical situation is somehow the result of my faithfulness just didn't seem to make sense. Couldn't connect the dots.

And after up to eighteen months of public ministry, freedom to preach, tremendous response, massive crowds, people repenting, being baptized, now all of a sudden he's slammed in this deep, dark, wretched dungeon. So this is what loyalty to Christ gets you?

He was, after all, the truest of saints. He was the great, holy, faithful, selfless, loyal, bold prophet of God who did exactly what God called him to do...told him to do. I mean, there's nothing in the record of John the Baptist that indicates he ever did anything but exactly what he was told to do. There's no moment of faithlessness or disobedience. This is a virtuous man. This...this is a model man, the model preacher. He had been filled with the Holy Spirit since his mother's womb. He had taken a Nazirite vow and that is the vow of abstinence that is the supreme vow of dedication that a Jew could ever take to show his singular devotion to God. He had committed himself at the highest level of spiritual commitment. Is this his reward?

You see, doubt comes from our inability to deal with negative circumstances when we perceive ourselves as being faithful people. Now that doesn't happen to people who are not faithful. If you're a Christian and you're living in the shallows and you're playing around with sin and you're dishonoring God and you're disobedient, when things go bad you know why they go bad. Right? You say, "Oh that's exactly what I should be getting."

You know, there's one believer in the New Testament that illustrates that profoundly. He had only been a believer for a few seconds, a few minutes maybe. He was hanging on the cross, remember? He says to Jesus, "Remember me when You go to Your Kingdom." Jesus said, "Today you'll be with Me in paradise." You remember what that thief said when the other thief was taunting Jesus? He said this, "We are getting exactly what we deserve." You see, he wasn't saying, "Lord, Lord, I'm a believer, why is this happening?" Hey, he had no expectations. He had no life of faithfulness to parade before God. People who are very much aware of their sin and weakness and life goes bad, that doesn't usually create doubt. They see that as pretty consistent. The people who may struggle with this are the people who live these very sacrificial and devout lives and all of a sudden they can't see how the circumstances connect with what they've been doing in terms of their faithfulness.

That was John the Baptist, he didn't get it. Why am I here? Why doesn't the Messiah come and set me free? I mean, doesn't it say in Isaiah 61 that when He comes He will set the prisoners free? Isn't the saints who come out of prison and the ungodly who go in? What's wrong with this picture?

Our doubts come when we've convinced ourselves that we belong to the Lord, we're loyal, we're faithful, we've lived and served Him and He ought to take special care of us and this is not special care. And if everything doesn't go the way it should, we begin to wonder if He cares or if He's really

our Savior. But we fail in our selfishness and our ignorance to see the whole picture, the whole plan. And we have to understand that all of our circumstances, no matter how negative they might be, are subject to the ultimate divine purpose of God and His Kingdom. So difficult circumstances, personal tragedy causes people to doubt...the death of a child to faithful Christian parents, a loss of a life partner through death, through desertion, immorality, loss of a job, loss of a treasured friend, cancer, heart attack, you name it, car accident. But I've been faithful...I've been faithful. And the flesh then takes those kinds of things and uses it as a wedge to drive doubt between us and Christ.

John was struggling with that but he did the right thing, he went directly to the Lord. He had begun to stumble and he's saying to the Lord what the man in Mark said, "Help me, Lord, I believe but help my unbelief, I don't want this. Help me...help me."

There's a second thing that causes doubt. Not only personal tragedy but popular influences...popular influences. John was in part a victim of the current misconceptions about the Messiah. I mean, it's a clear picture of the Messiah in the Old Testament, very clear. But the suffering of Messiah, such as in Isaiah 53, the sin-bearing work of Messiah, those things were sort of pushed aside and the Jewish community had created an image of Messiah...what He would be, what He would do. And John had been just as the disciples were, influenced by that. In fact, it's true that one of the reasons why the Centurion had such great faith is because his understanding of Jesus Christ was not the Jewish understanding. He was not in that society. He was not in that culture. So he wasn't victimized by this popular image of what the Messiah should be. And so he had a faith that was superior to the faith of those who were Jews, even the Apostles who struggled with doubt and the doubt was not related to the Scriptures, but it was related to the popular tradition.

Messiah wasn't doing what everybody thought He would do, which was knock off the Romans, right? First there would be a military movement on Messiah's part in which He would massacre the Romans, it would set Israel free from Roman occupation. Then there would be the great society would come. Abrahamic blessing would flood the land. There would be a welfare state, free food for everybody...health, wealth, prosperity, the whole business. All the wicked people will be thrown out. All of the apostate people would be judged by God in a day of the Lord kind of holocaust. And the glory of the Kingdom would fill the earth and everybody would come to Israel and the desert would blossom like a rose and there would be a river opened from Jerusalem flowing east, and the lion would lie down with the lamb and everything the prophet said about the glories of the Kingdom would come to pass. And David's greater Son would sit on the throne and He would reign and rule and all nations would be subject to them and Israel would be the glory of God on earth.

They had it all figured out. But it was because of these popular conceptions that they had so much doubt and Jesus didn't do that. They couldn't figure out...why doesn't He knock off the Romans? Why is He being constantly victimized by these Jewish leaders?

But there was another interesting theory going on at that time. There had developed an idea that before Messiah there would be a string of prophets who would come. First would come Elijah and that is the way the Old Testament ends, you remember, that Elijah's going to come. And then would come Jeremiah and he would be vindicated so there would be Elijah, Jeremiah. And then Prophet A and Prophet B and Prophet C and Prophet D and Prophet E and then the Messiah would come. That was kind of the idea. And that's why in Matthew 16 Jesus said to the disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Remember that? And they said, "Some say You are Elijah, some say You are Jeremiah, or one of the prophets...A, B, C, D, E."

In other words, they didn't believe He was the Messiah, but they believed He was somewhere along the line of those preliminary to Messiah. And then Jesus said, "But who do you say I am?" And Peter says, "You are the Messiah." Now that is reflective of that popular concept. So John is saying...look at his question..."Are You the expected One or do we look for someone else? Obviously You're from God, obviously You have the power of God, obviously You teach the Word of God. But are You just one in the line prior to the Messiah?"

Now where did that come from? That didn't come from the Old Testament. That was a traditional popular idea that had developed. Where are You in this line? This sequence here? And what about knocking off the Romans? And what about the health, wealth, and happiness instantly for everybody, solve all problems, right the world, establish the throne and rule? What about that?

I mean, even in Acts 1 just before Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection, the disciples were saying, "Are You at this time going to bring the Kingdom?" They still couldn't figure out why there wasn't a Kingdom. Even after the resurrection, I read earlier, when Jesus appeared to them in Galilee, some of them doubted. Well the reason they doubted is because they had this popular idea of what Jesus would do. And it was even more confusing to them when Jesus said, "I'm going to die and go away," and they just were absolutely blown apart. What do You mean You're going to go away? Where are You going to go? John 14, "I'm going to My Father's house and prepare a place for You." Well we don't know where You're going to be, how we going to ever find You? How we going to find You? "Oh, you'll find Me, I'm the way, the truth and the life. You'll find Me."

Thomas doubted. Philip doubted. They doubted. They all doubted. Scattered and fled, they're walking down the road to Emmaus after the death of Jesus Christ, mumbling and muttering that all is lost, all is lost, all is lost. See, their expectation for what the Messiah would do was just not right. If you believe the lies that are being told today about the health, wealth, prosperity and success gospel, you're in trouble. People who preach that literally sentence the hearers to a life of doubt...crippling doubt that dishonors God. There is no promise that you're going to be healthy. There is no promise

that you're going to get well, that you're going to be healed. There's no promise that you're going to be rich. There's no promise that your career is going to be successful. There is no such promise in the gospel until you get translated into the next life. Then all your diseases will be over. And when you tell people that over and over and over and over, you are programming them to reject the God of the Bible and the gospel of the Bible and to live in a life of confusion, perplexity and doubt. It is a terrible thing to do to people.

Jesus tells His disciples about His death, Peter says, "No, no, no, You're not going to die. You know, the plan is You're going to live. The plan is You're going to conquer. The plan is You're going to be the leader and the ruler and the King of the world." And Jesus said, "Get you behind Me, Satan." That's Satan's plan, not Mine. Satan tempted Jesus in His temptation, Matthew 4, Luke 4, to do what the people wanted. Do a spectacular swan dive off the temple tower and be the big great one, let them make you king. Make, create food, turn the stones to bread and show them you can bring a permanent welfare state. I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. Why? That's what they wanted. They wanted a great one, someone who could fly, literally, Thudas[??] a false messiah tried it, short career, great flight, bad landing.

But Satan was tempting Jesus to do what the people expected a Messiah to do. And He wouldn't do it. If you make all those ridiculous promises, you're going to program people for doubt. They buy into that expectation and it doesn't happen. Let me tell you, evangelical churches are strewn with the wreckage of people who believed that and shattered whatever faith they may have had.

When you have illegitimate expectations, when you've bought into a false system and God doesn't deliver on those promises, you have a problem with faith. Better not sit under that kind of teaching. It will sentence you to a life of serious debilitating, discouraging doubt that will rob you of your joy and your usefulness.

You know, we face this all the time today. "Well, if there's really a Christ and He cares, why is the world so messed up?" "Well, if the Lord really loves people, why do children die and people starve and disease happens and war and death, and why do planes crash into buildings?" "Why doesn't Jesus stop all of this and why doesn't He stop the people who are teaching error if He doesn't like it? Why doesn't He stop all the false religion and shut them down?"

Well, Scripture doesn't tell us He's going to do that. That might be your idea of what He ought to do, but that's not what Scripture says. It says evil men are going to get worse and worse. Lies and deceptions are going to fill the earth. People are going to say, "Here's Christ, There's Christ," false religion is going to be rampant all over the world until the end of time. God has a purpose. The prophet Habakkuk, you know, saw Israel in such terrible spiritual disarray and he said, "How long, O

Lord, how long? You've got to bring revival. You've got to bring revival. Lord, how long You going to wait? How long You going to wait? I've been praying this prayer for so long." And the Lord answered his prayer by saying, "I'm not going to bring revival, I'm going to bring destruction and I'm going to send the Chaldeans who are a bitter and hasty nation, a wicked, evil, pagan nation to destroy Israel." Well they had a bigger problem. Not only why doesn't God, you know, bless His people, that's one big problem. The second problem which is even worse is how can God use a wretched pagan Gentile nation to punish His people? And he's struggling, Habakkuk, until he backs up and gets on a firm foundation, not on circumstances but on the character of his God and finally in the last chapter of his prophecy he said, "If everything in the world goes haywire, if everything you can count on is in reverse, if all the things that are normal collapse, I'll still trust my God." But doubts arise because people have wrong expectations, they have a view of a plan that isn't God's plan at all. And John had been victimized by popular viewpoint.

There are two other things that make people doubt. If you want to know what they are, come next week. Okay? And then we're going to find out how the doubt got resolved. Let's pray.

We can honestly pray, Lord, we believe, help our unbelief. Help us where our faith is frayed on the edges. Help us where we struggle to believe because of personal tragedy, or because of popular misconceptions. Help us, Lord, to trust You. Help us to be honest enough to go You and that means not sending some servants to where You are on earth but going to Your Word and finding clear understanding of Your nature and Your plan. Deliver us from doubt. It so debilitates us. It so steals our joy and our happiness. It robs us of the passion of service to You. And it cripples our worship. Deliver us from doubt. May we not be double-minded, unstable, wavering, tossed like the sea, as James says, doubting people are who then receive no good thing from You. And we pray that we might learn from this marvelous account of the greatest of men who struggled with the most human of problems. And help us, Lord, to see doubt as a temptation, as an illegitimate invasion into our lives and to deal with it by going directly to You and asking You to give us the truth that dispels the doubt. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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