

Why the Believer Doubts, Part 2

Luke 7:21-23

42-96

We return to the study of the Word of God this morning. As our little motto at Grace To You says, "We unleash God's truth one verse at a time." And we find ourselves in the 7th chapter of the gospel of Luke and verses 18 to 23. Including Christmas Sunday, this will be the third and final message on this very wonderful text of Scripture. Luke chapter 7 verses 18 to 23; let me read the text for you so that I can set it in your mind, starting in verse 18. "The disciples of John," that is John the Baptist," 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 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.'"

Now I've entitled this particular portion, "Believing Doubt," "Believing Doubt." I know that's paradoxical, that's kind of an oxymoron but it's reality, believing doubt. And interestingly enough the doubt here we find in the believer named John the Baptist, of all people, the greatest man who had ever lived up until his time by the statement of Jesus Himself, the greatest of all Old Testament prophets, the one who was the forerunner to the Messiah, the one miraculously born late in life to Zacharias and Elizabeth to be the Messiah's herald, this great man who had seen Jesus come down to the Jordan River and had baptized Him there and heard God affirm Him as His Son and seen the Holy Spirit descend upon Him and who himself had identified Jesus as the Coming One, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, this John who had said, "I must decrease and He must increase," this John who had known Jesus all his life because they were related, this John has some doubts about whether Jesus is the Expected One, or not. And that is the key question in verse 19, repeated in verse 20. "Are You the Expected One?" Expected One being a technical term for the Messiah, the Coming One. Are You the One?

After all that John had been told by God Himself, after all that had been revealed to John directly; certainly we wonder why he would ask the question. Well we're learning a little bit about that as we go. Well we're introduced to the fact that even the best of men, the greatest of men, the noblest of men, the greatest of men who had ever lived can experience doubt. And so we're talking about doubt, believing doubt.

As I told you last time, in the gospels, in the four gospels, whenever you run into somebody with doubt, they are believers. Doubt is an issue with people who believe. It's a matter of completing their faith. Doubt is something that occurs among immature believers. It can also occur among very mature believers, but in that case it's... It's really sinful, whereas doubt in the case of a young

believer or immature believer may not necessarily be sinful.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. Doubt, honest doubt, is not a bad starting point. It's just a bad finishing point because as a starting point doubt serves us very well. In fact, I think doubt...the capacity to doubt is connected to rationality. It's connected to being created in the image of God. God is a rational being and when He created man, He created man a rational being. And part of rationality is to be able to discern what is true and what is not. That is absolutely critical to God's plan, isn't it? If God creates people to whom He's going to reveal truth, then it's absolutely essential that He give those people the apparatus to sort out information to come to a correct conclusion. One of the features of that sorting process, one of the components of rationality is doubt, or, if you will, skepticism, a healthy kind of skepticism.

I know from a personal standpoint doubt has served me well through my life, particularly when I was very young. I tended to be skeptical about what people said. And so I tried to follow a pattern that I learned about fairly young as a Christian, in the 17th chapter of Acts and verse 11, a pattern that was established by a group of Jewish believers in a town called Berea. And when they heard the gospel, it says they received it with eagerness, but then they searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so. That's a healthy skepticism. So if you come to my door and you're trying to sell me snake oil, you're going to be met with doubt. I'm not very gullible, I hope. Doubt will serve you well the next time you go to the used car lot, healthy skepticism. You understand what I mean. There's a certain amount of doubt that serves you well even when you go to the doctor and somebody says, "If you're smart you'll get a second (what?) opinion," because you don't want to be sucked up into something that may not be quite right. That is part of being made in the image of God. Doubt in that sense is a very, very good gift. And when somebody is gullible, that's not a compliment. When we say about someone they'll believe anything, that is not a compliment.

So we're not talking now about having all the evidence and not coming to a reasonable faith, we're talking about an honest kind of doubt that serves you very well. Doubt is a very good starting point. It's just not a good ending point. And for many of the people who heard Jesus and saw His mighty works, doubt was the beginning and the end. And they treated Jesus with criticism and indifference and rejection and hatred and hostility and even a conspiracy to execute Him. And the best some of them ever offered Him was curiosity or fascination and they retained a certain measure of doubt. Doubt's a good starting point, I say again, but not a good place to finish. And I really do believe that God has wired us with a certain measure of skepticism for the sake of self-protection. You just know not to trust everybody and everything. And people who do are seriously wounded by it, spiritually and even physically.

Now some of the great heroes of the faith were really pretty monumental doubters to start with. Abraham was filled with doubt when God told him that he was going to have a son. He doubted that seriously, since he was 100 years old and had never been able to have children. He had a healthy case of doubt. But Abraham is now known to us as the father of faith. And what started out as doubt, having been resolved by God, then had transformed itself by God's power into faith.

Sarah, along with him at the age of ninety, when she was told she was going to have a child, laughed with a serious case of doubt. Sarah, of course, eventually did bear that son of promise that God had pledged she would bear and her doubt became faith and she too is included among the heroes of faith in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

When it comes to listing all the great people of faith, you have Abraham and Sarah. You have another one by the name of Moses. And Moses had a very formidable case of doubt. When God told him to lead the people Israel out he said, "I can't do it, I'm not a very good speaker," etc., etc. You remember the story. And Moses became the greatest leader in Israel's history, led them in the great exodus from Egypt, led them through forty years in the wilderness to the edge of the Promised Land where his leadership ended and Joshua took over. Moses too is listed among the heroes of faith. To Abraham, Sarah and Moses are given the greatest portion of the 11th chapter in describing those people whose lives are marked by the most monumental faith.

And then in the 11th chapter of Hebrews you have a whole lot of other names of people who could give testimony to periods of doubt in their lives but whose lives ended up as great monuments to faith, including a man named Gideon who seriously doubted that he was some kind of mighty warrior from God, when God identified him as such. Didn't believe that he could carry off a great victory but did. And his doubt was resolved into faith. In Judges, chapter 6 we learn the story of Gideon whom God used in such a mighty way that he too is included in the 11th chapter of Hebrews as a hero of faith.

Well, you get into the New Testament, Zacharias the father of John the Baptist certainly doubted his capacity to give birth to a son late in his life, probably in his 80s. When he was told that he would be a father in old age, in Luke 1:18; this was something beyond his capability to believe. It was very unreasonable, said, "I'm an old man, my wife is advanced in years. This is impossible." But he began a doubter and ended up a man of great faith who gave magnificent tribute to the Messiah at the end of the first chapter in that powerful, powerful statement of Zacharias that ends Luke chapter 1 in which he shows how the Messiah fills all the Old Testament...fulfills all the Old Testament covenant promises.

And then you have among the apostles the most famous doubter, the Apostle by the name of Thomas. We all know about doubting Thomas. Thomas, unfortunately, is saddled with that label of being a doubter but the fact of the matter is Thomas is the one apostle who made the most unequivocal clear statement about who Jesus was of any of the apostles. It was Thomas, you remember, who said concerning Jesus, "My Lord and my God." There can be no greater statement made. One who was labeled a doubter became the man who made as great a confession as is made in the gospel accounts. And even the twelve who were little-faith kind of characters eventually had their faith strengthened to the point where Luke says in Acts 17:6 that they actually turned the world upside down.

So doubters, whether Old Testament or New Testament, and those are just a few of many, can become heroes of the faith listed with the great. Doubt then is a good place to start. It's just not a good place to finish. And so we all understand the man in Mark 9:24 who said, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." I believe as far as I can believe but if I'm going to believe anymore than this, You're going to have to help me by giving me what I need to believe it. And there again is that...that rationality, I want to believe if You'll give me reason for faith. Doubt is very real and it's most real in immature believers who don't yet have enough understanding to continue to believe to a greater and greater degree. And amazingly the greatest man who ever lived, John the Baptist, struggled with doubt at the beginning of his exposure to the gospel. He was very little different than the disciples, the apostles who had little faith.

And so, we began to look last time at John's situation. Let's pick it up in verse 18 where we left off.

"And the disciples of John reported to him about all these things." Jesus was going everywhere teaching and healing. He was demonstrating power over disease, over demons, over death. John the Baptist was in prison at the time, according to Matthew 11:2 and 3, he was in prison, a place called Fort Machairus. He had been put there by Herod Antipas who was the ruler of Galilee and Perea. John had confronted him about his wicked life, particularly about the fact that Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, had seduced his brother's wife and then taken her and married her. It was a soap-opera kind of situation. So it was a...He was a gross and immoral man. John the Baptist in his normal fiery form confronted Herod Antipas. He didn't like what he said to him so he took him prisoner and slapped him in a dungeon in Fort Machairus which is out in the wilderness north and east...on the northeast portion of the Dead Sea in a barren place where the Herodians had built one of the summer palaces. John has been in a dungeon for months and months, nearly a year perhaps. Soon he will have his head chopped off. He will be decapitated because of the sexual desire and the perversion of Herod Antipas who will do that when he is seduced by a dance by the daughter of his wife. That whole sordid story is recorded in Matthew 14 and Mark 6. So, John is at the end and he is now isolated. He's a prisoner and he's going to be beheaded not long after this incident happens.

The only information that John has then about Jesus is secondhand. Somebody has to come and tell him. He's not circulating anymore. He has no firsthand opportunity to hear Jesus or to see Him. So he has some disciples, as we noted last time, who perhaps occasionally came to visit him and to tell him because he was very interested in what was happening. I mean, his whole life had been preparation to present the Messiah. His ministry then was preparing the people through the message of repentance to get ready for the Messiah. And then when the Messiah came he proclaimed the Messiah, pointed to the Messiah and said, "Okay, I fade away at this point." He continued to preach. He continued to proclaim until he was slammed in prison. And now he's out of the picture. Occasionally perhaps, obviously, this imprisonment was...was relieved to some degree so that he could at least meet with some of his followers. And on this occasion they came to tell him about what Jesus was doing, both in general, the miracles of Jesus, and maybe even about the raising of the widow's son in the prior passage and the centurion's slave being healed in the passage before that.

John's response in verse 19 is that he identifies two of these disciples — we don't know how many there were at this time — and he sent them to the Lord saying, "Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?" This is the instruction he gives them. You go back and ask Jesus if He is really the Messiah. John knew, and it says in Luke 3:16 that John said, "The Coming One will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." So he had identified the Coming One. He knew it was Jesus because the Father had said so, the Spirit had come, John had baptized Him. But now he's having doubts. And so he says to two of these men, "You go back and you find out for sure if He is the Expected One, the Coming One," a term for Messiah, "or do we look for someone else?" And I told you last time and I think it needs to be repeated, to get his doubt resolved he went to the Lord, which showed that he believed. He was a believer or he never would have asked the Lord to resolve his doubt. He knew that the Lord Himself was the one who could help him with the doubt.

And remember, the picture wasn't clear to John. He wasn't there for firsthand testimony. He was getting things by hearsay. And Jesus hadn't yet died, He hadn't risen, He hadn't ascended. He certainly hadn't confronted the apostate religious leaders. He hadn't confronted the corrupt people in Israel. He hadn't established the kingdom of God on earth. He hadn't defeated the Romans and all the enemies of Israel and set Himself upon the throne of David. He hadn't brought Abrahamic blessing. Everything that John sort of expected to happen hadn't happened. And I think John had a pretty clear picture of what should happen. John knew well the Old Testament. His father was

Zacharias a high priest...not a high priest, but a priest. And because he was a priest he was a student of the Old Testament who two weeks of the year would do priestly duties in Jerusalem. The rest of the year he would live in the hill country of Judea where his home was and he would be teaching the Old Testament. That was his duty. And so John would have been raised on the Old Testament. He would have known messianic prophecies, he would have known what the Messiah was going to do when He came and He had certain expectations.

Just to give you a little better insight into that, turn back to the first chapter of Luke, the end of the chapter, verses 67 and following. Now John the Baptist has been born. And he's just a little baby. And just at the time of the birth of this baby, the father, Zacharias, knows that this child is to be the forerunner of the Messiah. That has been made very, very clear. He is to proclaim the arrival of Messiah. Now Zacharias in response to this knows the Messiah is coming and so verse 67, "He, filled with the Holy Spirit, preaches." Here is an Old Testament preach...preacher, an Old Testament priest filled with the Holy Spirit giving a sermon, a messianic sermon. It is a magnificent one, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but also from all of the learning of Zacharias. And this is what he says. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant." Verse 71, "Salvation from our enemies, from the hand of all who hate us, to show mercy toward our fathers, remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, grant us that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child," he says to this little infant, John, "you'll be the prophet of the most High and you will go before the Lord to prepare His way; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God with which the Sunrise," the Messiah, "from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace." This is a great, great, great sermon, testimony to what Messiah will do. It incorporates elements of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant. If you didn't hear the series I preached on that, you ought to get the tapes. It's the best bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament I know of to help you understand how Jesus fulfills all the Old Testament promises in the covenants.

And so Zacharias preaches this great sermon. But notice the components of it. In fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant and the New Covenant, when Messiah comes, a number of things will happen. Redemption will happen. Salvation will happen. In particular, deliverance from our enemies and the hand of all who hate us will happen. And again in verse 74, deliverance from the hand of our enemies and then we will serve Him without fear. And there will be holiness and righteousness. And then further down into verse 79, there will be the Sunrise coming, verse 78, and light will fill the darkness and the shadow of death will disappear and we will be led into the way of peace.

Now, surely this is the best sermon Zacharias ever preached, the only inspired one. And I can imagine that when John was growing up, Zacharias, like any father, had said to him, "Did you ever hear that sermon I preached, you know, the one when you were...?"

"Yes, I hear it all the time, Dad. Of course I've heard it. I've got it memorized. I know it was your greatest sermon." If they had it on tape he would be distributing the tapes his whole life. "Yes, Dad, I know the sermon." So you can be sure that John grew up understanding when the Messiah comes redemption comes, when Messiah comes salvation comes, salvation from enemies, from all who hate the Jews, mercy comes, the Abrahamic Covenant is unfolded, the Davidic Covenant is

unfolded, the New Covenant is unfolded, holiness, righteousness comes, the Sun rises and light floods the land and darkness disappears and death disappears and peace arrives. That was John's messianic view. And when the Messiah came, it didn't happen. It didn't happen. And he had been raised on that great sermon by his father. And he comes to this point and he's down in a dungeon in Fort Machairus east of the Dead Sea, completely out of circulation and all he hears about Jesus is that He's traveling around healing people, and raising dead people, casting out demons. And these are people that aren't believers. These are sinful people, people who are part of the apostate system of Judaism. It's all confusing to him. So he struggles with doubt.

Sorting through that, just kind of pulling it apart a little bit to look at some of the components, I suggested to you there are four things that contribute to this kind of doubt for us as for John. First: personal tragedy. Remember that last time? John's circumstances didn't seem to fit with his faithfulness. How is it that he being faithful to his calling, preaching what he was told to preach, no indication that John was anything other than faithful to the very max in his ministry, why is he languishing in a stinking dungeon, months and months in prison, headed for a rendezvous with death? How can this come? This is the doubt that comes because the circumstances don't seem to match our devotion, or our faithfulness, or what we think we deserve, or what we think has been promised. Doesn't this look like the triumph of evil and not the triumph of God? Isn't this the triumph of a wretched, wicked Herod and not the triumph of Messiah?

So John began to stumble into doubt. It just didn't seem to make sense. So he's questioning, "Are You really the Messiah, or are You just one in the line?" And that takes us to the second reason for his doubt, popular influences. There was a view existing that there would come Elijah and then Jeremiah and then Prophet A, Prophet B, Prophet C, however many, and finally Messiah. That's why in Matthew 16 when Jesus said to the disciples, "Who do men say that I am? Some say You're Elijah, some say You're Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." So there was this popular idea that there was a sequence. And John is saying, "Well, are You Prophet B, or A, or C, or D? And the Messiah's not here yet? Is that the idea?" So popular influences, popular ideas, popular concepts can create doubt. And they still do that. There are those people who develop a popular image of Jesus and when the preacher who preaches the true Word of God doesn't preach what fits with the popular idea of Jesus, people doubt and wonder because they've accepted unbiblical notions of the Savior. And we talked about that last time.

But let's come to the third and the fourth one this morning. And this really is the crux of it. These things aren't necessarily separate from each other. They're kind of intertwined a bit. The third reason, and this is the compelling matter, doubt arises out of personal tragedy when we can't square our circumstances with our faithfulness, out of popular influences when we start to believe the popular image of someone, including Jesus. They also come because of incomplete revelation. This is really the crux of the matter.

John's doubts came because he didn't have full information. And what John couldn't understand was, why doesn't the kingdom come, because John didn't have the information that Jesus would come, He would be rejected, the Lord would then turn from Israel to the Gentiles, establish the church, the church age would go on at least 2,000 years, which it has, and Jesus would then come back, return and then set up His kingdom. That's mystery in the Old Testament. The Old Testament does talk about the kingdom, that's right. And Zacharias had it exactly accurate in his sermon, that the Messiah will come, fulfill Abrahamic promise of blessing in a land, prosperity and all of that, Davidic promise that Israel would have a king, a great king, a son of David, and he would reign over Israel

and Israel would literally rule the whole world, the New Covenant promise, the forgiveness of sin, mercy and grace and salvation, all of that was there. But the Old Testament didn't show this mystery period, this 2,000-year at least, period in which God turns from Israel and carves out a new channel of witness to the world, namely the church made up of Jew and Gentile. And not until that period ends and Israel is saved does Jesus return to establish the glorious promised kingdom and bring to pass the fulfillment of everything He pledged to Abraham and to David.

John didn't have that information. So he's functioning with some incomplete information. He needs what Peter said, "A more sure word than his own experience." He needs to see the truth of God or to hear the truth of God. And some of the apostles, of course, were in the same situation. Even after the resurrection, they didn't know Jesus was raised. Jesus had been killed, they were on the road to Emmaus, they were moaning and groaning that everything was over with, it was all done, that the whole thing was pointless and useless. Jesus was dead and Jesus showed up. And you remember Luke 24 says, "He opened the Scripture and spoke out of the Scripture of things concerning Himself," and helped them to understand that this was all part of the plan from Scripture.

Now this was pretty typical. Even after the cross and the resurrection the disciples struggled. Acts chapter 1, they said to Jesus, "Are You at this time going to bring the kingdom?" Are You going to bring the kingdom? Is this the time for the Kingdom to come? Jesus said, "It's not for you to know that." God has that in His own purpose and He'll bring the kingdom when it's time to bring the kingdom, it's not for you to know the times and the seasons of the kingdom.

So their whole expectation was about the Messiah arriving to bring the kingdom. When He came and didn't bring the kingdom, and it looked like things were getting worse and worse and it turned out that they were and He was executed, it was like the whole plan dissolved. So they had an incomplete revelation. They could have understood more had they better interpreted the Old Testament. Matthew 22:29 Jesus said, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures." You are mistaken not understanding the Scriptures. The Scriptures do speak about a suffering Messiah, don't they? Isaiah 53, Psalm 22? The Scriptures do speak about a final and ultimate lamb depicted in all the imagery of the sacrificial system.

But...but John was really suffering from incomplete revelation. The New Testament hadn't been written...been written. You couldn't say, "John, you need to read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, it's all there." You need to read 2 Peter 3, "a day to the Lord is like a thousand years, a thousand years a day." You've got to realize there's some big time gaps here. But that wasn't written. The book of Revelation wasn't written. It wouldn't be written for over half a century. And so, John was just without the full information to see the timetable.

Well, you and I don't have that problem, do we? If you say to me you have doubts, then what I'm going to say to you is go to the Scripture, because the revelation of God is clear. Read the Word, learn the Word, know the Word, trust the Word. Blessed is the man who delights in the law of God day and night, who meditates on it day and night, because it's in the knowledge of the truth that you understand the purposes and plan of God and doubt is dissipated. For me as a young person, those early doubts sent me into the search for the truth. And once I determined the truth, the doubt disappeared. Doubt is a...almost a foreign matter to me and to many of you, at this point, because the truth has so taken over your mind and your heart. You may be tempted to doubt what you know, but you don't doubt because you don't know. You have the evidence there. You have the mind of Christ in the Scripture. You can bring every thought captive to Christ, as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says.

You have an anointing from God, you don't need to be taught by men because the anointing from God teaches you all things, 1 John 2.

John just didn't have enough information to be certain. And that's okay. If you don't have enough information to be certain, then go to the one who has the information. Who's that? The Lord. And where does He reveal His mind? Where is the mind of Christ? It's right here. First Corinthians 2:16: "You have the mind of Christ," right here, you don't need to have doubt. That's why I say doubt is a good place to start. It's a bad place to finish. If you have some doubts, go to the Word of God and get your doubt turned into faith.

And then lastly, there was one other component in the case of John that contributed to his doubt: wrong expectation. And it was tied to the information issue, wrong expectation. Now John was a fiery prophet. There doesn't seem to be much grace in John's message. John preached repentance. John preached this furious message of God's judgment, Day of the Lord kind of stuff. And, you know, John knew how the Old Testament ended. The Old Testament ended in Malachi. The last warning of the Old Testament is that the Day of the Lord is coming, the great and terrible Day of the Lord. It's going to come burning like a furnace, all arrogant and evildoers will be chaff. The day is coming to set them ablaze so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. In other words, they'll be burned to the very ashes. This is the day when the wicked are going to be trodden down, ashes under the soles of your feet. That's...That's the last statement of the Old Testament. The Messiah is going to come. The Day of the Lord is going to come. It's going to be judgment. It's going to be a holocaust. This was John and John thundered out that message about fire and brimstone and judgment.

In the 3rd chapter of Luke we meet John, the voice crying in the wilderness, verse 3, preaching baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It's a strong message. When the religious leaders show up along with the multitudes, he says, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" I mean, he called them snakes. They were like snakes scrambling in front of a prairie fire to get to a river before they got incinerated, scrambling down here to the water to get baptized like snakes running to the water from a fire. And then he preached to them about an axe that was going to chop them down, about a fire that was going to burn them, incinerating them to ashes. That was the kind of preaching he did. So it was connected to the idea that when Messiah comes, there's going to be a holocaust of judgment, furious judgment. He's going to baptize you with fire. He's going to take out a winnowing fork in his hand and he's going...he's going to thresh you like wheat is threshed and separated from chaff, and then he's going to take the chaff and He's going to burn it with unquenchable fire. That was John. He was the...he was the original hell-fire, damnation preacher. And that's what he expected Messiah to do.

Well here comes Jesus and what does He do? What does He do? He heals everybody. That's not judgment. He makes everything better. It's all compassion and tenderness and love and mercy and He's doing all these wonderful things that express the compassion of God. And He's doing them to unbelievers. And where is the confrontation of the faithless and wicked people? And where is the confrontation of the wretched, wicked, not only Jewish people, but Idumaeans like Herod Antipas, who lived such a gross and evil life. Where's the axe in the hand of Messiah? Where is the fire in His hand? Where is the winnowing fork? Why doesn't He blast His enemies, burn up the wicked, bring the fury of the Day of the Lord? It just doesn't seem to be going the way he assumed it had to go because John was getting people to repent so that when the Messiah comes they didn't get burned up. And now the Messiah came and they...they were getting healed and dead people were getting raised, demons were being cast out.

And so these are the things that caused his doubt. Expectations, lack of information, those are things that are reasonable. His doubt was a reasonable... It was a rational doubt. It was a starting point. And it was a good starting point because it drove him to the Lord to get the rest of the information that he needed.

How did the Lord respond to him? Let's go back to the text. This becomes very clear to us. Verse 21, here's how He responded. At that very time, immediately, right on the spot in front of these two disciples of John who asked the question... They said to Him, "Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?" And you can see they...verse 19 John tells them what to say, verse 20, they say exactly what he told them to say. So they're faithful to their commission. Verse 21: "At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits and He granted sight to many who were blind." On the spot, at that instant, wherever He was and we don't know exactly where He was, somewhere in Galilee, maybe near to the town of Nain, where He had raised the widow's son from the dead, immediately, instantaneously He just does this massive display of supernatural miracles, curing people of physical diseases as well as casting demons out in just an explosion of spiritual power, sweeping, miraculous, power display. Something He had been doing regularly, but this was a personal, private explosion for the two disciples of John.

By the way, when the Pharisees asked Him to do those kinds of things for them, He didn't do them. Theirs was unbelief. John's was faith looking to be completed. And so this explosion of healings and deliverances occurs and many blind people receive their sight. Blindness was a very, very big problem. Many people were blind and much of Jesus' healing was of the blind. Here many blind were healed in this instant.

Now Jesus was usually surrounded by people with these kinds of physical problems and spiritual problems because they knew He was a healer and a deliverer and so that tended to make up a large amount of the crowd. And so many miracles would be easily done by Him in that environment because there would be many with needs.

And then in verse 22, after the display, "He answered and said to them," here's the key, "Go report to John what you've seen and heard." Tell him this: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them." You go tell them that.

Now, Jesus didn't say anything about judgment. Didn't say anything... Didn't say, "Go tell John that the wrath comes later. Go tell John to go find a book on dispensationalism." He doesn't say anything about that. He says, "Just go tell him this, tell him what you've seen and heard firsthand and what you've seen and heard is a display of supernatural power." But more than that, I want you to understand something that's going on here. This was evidence that the kingdom had been inaugurated. You need to mark that down in your mental file. This was evidence that the kingdom had come and therefore the King was present.

Really, how is that so? Turn back in your Bible for a moment to Isaiah 26. Now believe me, John knew the Old Testament. His father knew it and had taught it to him. And particularly did he know those messianic passages, and connected with Messiah's return and the establishment of the messianic kingdom were some very specific things. Isaiah 26 is looking at these glorious times.

Verse 18, "We were pregnant, we writhed in labor, we gave birth, as it were, only to wind. We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth, nor were inhabitants in the world born." Looking at trials and the difficulties of Israel, but then in verse 19, here comes the hope of the future, the promise. "Your dead will live, their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits."

One of the elements of the coming messianic kingdom would be the resurrection of the just. Daniel writes about this, doesn't he, as well, that when the Messiah comes there will be a resurrection. That's part of messianic promise, the promise of resurrection. And that is in Isaiah 26:19. And you can be certain that John the Baptist knew that very well. Daniel 12:2, "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake those...these to everlasting life, others to everlasting contempt and disgrace." So, one of the promises in the future was resurrection.

Now turn to the 35th chapter of Isaiah and here we look at the kingdom again when Messiah comes. Some wonderful things are going to happen when Messiah comes. "The wilderness in the desert," Isaiah 35:1, "will be glad. The Arabah," another word for desert, "will rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon."

First of all, during the time of the Messiah's kingdom, when He comes and establishes His kingdom, there will be changes in the environment. There will be changes in the land. The desert will blossom. There will be changes in the plant life. This is a kind of return to paradise lost, you know. We're now in the paradise lost, this is paradise regained. This is back to an Edenic kind of environment. And one of the things that happens is that a river is created in the kingdom, the prophet says, that will flow from Jerusalem out into the desert and it will water the desert and the desert will be glad and it will blossom. And that's part of it. There will be those physical changes.

At the end of verse 2, there will be a display of the glory of the Lord, the majesty of God. There will be displays of glory when the kingdom comes. Literally, glory will fill the earth as the prophets indicate. But notice starting in verse 3 what also is going to be happening in the kingdom. "Encourage the exhausted, strengthen the feeble," literally the shaky legs. "Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance,'" there will be vengeance. "But the recompense of God will come but He will save you." And what will happen in the kingdom? "The eyes of the blind will be opened. The ears of the deaf will be unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy." What about that? That's what's going to happen when Messiah comes. The dead are going to rise. The desert's going to blossom like a rose. Flowers are going to grow everywhere. Glory will be manifest all over the earth, the glory of God. And healing will take place. Those that are weary, those that are shaking, those that have deep anxieties no longer will have to fear. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk. The mute will speak. That's kingdom conditions. And what Jesus did in His life was give them previews of the coming kingdom. When He does that in His kingdom, that kind of healing will sweep the world.

And so, what Jesus is saying is tell John that what you're seeing is what the prophet said would happen when the King came. And then remember 61 of Isaiah? Isaiah 61, we commented on it at length in the 4th chapter of Luke, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me," this is the Messiah speaking, "the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor," or the afflicted, the humble, "bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to prisoners." When the Messiah

comes the dead will be raised, those with physical illnesses will be healed and the gospel, the good news, will be preached to the humble, the poor and the afflicted. That's all in Isaiah.

Now go back to Luke 7. And so, Jesus knows that John knows Isaiah and says, "You just go tell John that the blind are receiving their sight, the lame are walking, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are raised up, and the poor are having the gospel preached to them. Just go tell him the kingdom has been inaugurated, the King is here." Even though the earthly fulfillment of that kingdom is yet future, inauguration of the kingdom had already occurred. The kingdom was inaugurated when the King came, that's why Jesus could say though the kingdom didn't come to earth in the millennial sense that it will in the future, Jesus could say the kingdom of God is among you. He inaugurated the kingdom with a display of power that was a preview of the power that He will display all across the face of the earth in His glorious kingdom. Yes, God will come with vengeance, but also with healing and with resurrection power. So the whole...Jesus' whole statement there is really drawn off of Isaiah's prophecy. And you tell John, verse 23 says, "blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." John, you're going to be blessed if you believe this. Don't be offended by it, don't let your personal tragedy, don't let popular views and influences, don't let the lack of revelation, don't let your wrong expectations cause you to stumble over Me, cause you to be offended by Me, cause you, that is, to think that I'm not One. Know this, the kingdom has been inaugurated and I am the King because what was promised is now being displayed.

Well the population for the most part of Israel were offended by Jesus. And they rejected Him and executed Him. But what about John? What happened to John? Well the story really for us can be brought to a conclusion if you turn to Matthew 14, Matthew 14. John never asked Jesus another question, never sought more information. Once Jesus gave him through his disciples, firsthand eyewitnesses to what He did, and tied it all into Isaiah's prophecies, John didn't have any more questions. And here's... Here's really the postscript. Herod, in verse 10 of Matthew 14, Herod had John beheaded in the prison and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, the girl who had danced for Herod on his birth...at his birthday, and she brought it to her mother who had initiated the decapitation of John because she so hated John because he had confronted her iniquity. They brought John's head in, gave it to the woman. Verse 12, "His disciples came, took away the body, buried it, and they went and reported to Jesus."

That's a very important final note. John was beheaded before Jesus died. He was beheaded before Jesus, therefore, rose from the dead. He never heard much of what the Lord taught because he was a prisoner. He never saw the power displays. And when he died, his disciples came to tell Jesus. Why Jesus? That says it all for me because Jesus was John's Messiah else they wouldn't have come to tell Him. Not all his questions were answered before he was murdered. The kingdom, however, had been previewed and John had gotten the message that all of this indicated that the kingdom was inaugurated. Even though it's not yet in its final form, the kingdom was inaugurated. And, beloved, let me tell you something about it. The kingdom is still in place and you and I are in it. And we are kingdom children and Jesus is our King, is that not true? And He has given us mercy and grace and the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Yes there is an earthly 1,000-year reign of Christ that will take place in the future but in the meantime this is the kingdom and we are in it. And He inaugurated it when He came. And He continues to give mercy and forgiveness and New Covenant salvation day after day. And the full fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and the Davidic promise is yet future, waiting for Israel to believe. And when Israel finally does believe, then they will receive their King and His promised kingdom. But in the meantime, the kingdom is within, among us. John said, "I need to know if You're the one." He was satisfied. And when he died, his disciples reported to

his Messiah that he was gone.

Verse 13, "When Jesus heard it, He withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place by Himself." The greatest man that ever lived was gone. But it was really his time. His task was done. And he died believing that Jesus, indeed, had inaugurated the kingdom. He left what he didn't know, couldn't know, to his Lord, but he didn't have to wonder very long because his theology was made perfect just the split second his head was chopped off. He didn't have to ask any questions of Jesus anymore after this one in Luke 7 because that was all the evidence he needed.

Beloved, we have so much more than he had. Don't we? We have the whole unfolding of all of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, intercession, the whole explanation of all the epistles, the wonderful book of Revelation to explain the future. If you're a doubting believer, you don't need to be. You can erase that doubt and be a believing believer if you'll go to the Word and get the full information. So Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who doesn't stumble over Me." Most of the Jews did and they still do because of their own lack of revelation and wrong expectation. But blessed is the one who doesn't stumble but who embraces Christ in faith and that blessing is for time and eternity.

Lord, we come to the conclusion of this worship service, but the beginning of our service on behalf of the truth we've heard. Give us opportunity to proclaim even as we began in Psalm 40 with the psalmist saying that he would proclaim in the great assembly righteousness and holiness. Now may we do the same. May we be used by You to erase the doubt that may be in the minds of the people around us and in the case of some here. As we've said, doubt is a place to start but not a place to end. May all of us be faithful to learn Your Word, to dig deeply into it, to search it so that we may find that doubt turned into faith and that faith taking us from fear in not knowing to exhilaration and joy in knowing. Give us the confident joy that comes to those who know the truth concerning Jesus Christ and may You by Your grace awaken dead hearts to embrace the Savior and strengthen faith and eliminate doubt that we may give to You the faith that You deserve, a true and complete faith, for You are worthy of that. We thank You for the testimony of John, faithful to the very end, even though he knew far less than we. May we take the Word of God, which is such a treasure given to us, which men like him and many others, all those heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, didn't know. They died before it came. May we who have it understand the richness that it brings to our lives so that we have no real excuse for doubt. Make us faithful people of the Word with the complete revelation and therefore correct expectations, being able to grasp the great reality that truly the kingdom has been inaugurated, the King has come, and He is none other than Jesus Christ, the Lord we love and serve. We pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).