

AM Luke 7:18-23

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 April 2020

Preacher: Rev Trevor Kane

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning again everyone. It's good to be gathered together. We're going to think this morning about Luke chapter 7. We're going to think about this very practical issue of doubt. As we think about Luke chapter 7, we see that John the Baptist begins to doubt.

Well, was Jesus really the Christ? Was he really the one sent from God? Was he really the one who was to come? But as we come, let's read together from Luke chapter 7, from Luke chapter 7. And we're going to read the verses that are marked 18 through 23, just this very short section. Luke chapter 7 and verses 18 through 23. The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord saying, Are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another? And when the men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another? In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits? And on many who were blind he bestowed sight, and he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. The dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn to the Lord in prayer. Now let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the truth that it contains.

We thank you for the way that it teaches us. We thank you, Father, for the fact that it shows us real life. Here as we see John doubting, here as we see John wondering, inquiring, Father, we see the full gamut of human emotions in Scripture. We see the full range of human emotions in Scripture. We see doubt. We see fear. We see worry. We see sin. We pray, Heavenly Father, for ourselves that as we come to your word now, that you would give us insight and understanding, that you would help us see the truths that are there. Remember our nation at this time and all of our political leaders praying for them as they take decisions that will affect many millions of people throughout our nation, that you would give them wisdom and guidance, that you would direct them in the way that they are to go. Remember our church leaders before, you know, asking again for wisdom and guidance for them. Remember, Father, before you all of the staff who work in our NHS, asking that you would bless them, asking that you would protect them, asking that you would keep them safe, even in the midst of difficult days, and that you would continue to go before us now, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's turn then, please, to Luke chapter 7. Luke chapter 7 and these verses 18 through 23, this very brief section in Luke chapter 7. I wonder if you ever doubt. Do you ever wonder, is it all real? Is Christianity true? In the reform circles that we move in, perhaps that's a tricky question for us to ask, because that centres on feelings, that centres on emotions, and it doesn't centre on cold, hard facts, but it centres on how we feel. We doubt. Because it rests on our feelings, because it rests on our emotions, we can be tempted to suppress it, we can be tempted to push it down, rather than deal with it. Yet doubt is real. Think about the questions that people are asking surrounding the coronavirus. Where is God in the coronavirus? Where is God in the pain and suffering?

Where is God in the countless thousands of people who have died? Where is God in the midst of that? We live in a world where many people, perhaps, doubt God's existence. We live in a world where even the Archbishop of Canterbury, during the Ebola outbreak a few years ago, said he wondered where God was. And doubt is where we find John the Baptist this morning. Doubting if Jesus was the Messiah, doubting if Jesus was God's chosen King, doubting if Jesus was truly the Christ, doubting if Jesus really was the one that all Israel had been waiting for. Thinking perhaps, well should we look for another? Are you the one who is to come? That's his central question. Are you the one who is to come?

[4 : 46] Or should we look for another? I want to think about this passage under three main headings this morning. See three things this morning. Firstly, we want to see how doubt creeps in. We want to understand the question that John asks and we want to perhaps understand why he might ask the question that he asks. Secondly, we want to see doubt dealt with. How does John respond to his doubt? He doesn't suppress it. He doesn't try and push it down. Rather, he goes to the source. He goes to Jesus and says, look, are you the one who is to come? And then thirdly, finally, we want to think about doubt defeated. How Jesus responds to John's question. How Jesus shows John that he is the Christ.

So firstly then, we think about doubt creeping in. Doubt creeping in. And we see that in verses 18 through 19. We need to understand a little bit of the background. We, of course, understand the context.

We've been studying Luke's gospel for quite some time on Sunday mornings together. But we need to understand what's happening here in this passage. So we remember the context. Remember what we've seen before. We've seen Jesus healing a centurion servant. We've seen Jesus raising the widow of knee and son.

And all of these things get back to John. All of these things get back to John. His disciples report to him everything that's been happening. His disciples tell him all that Jesus has been doing.

And John calls two of them to him and says, look, you go and see Jesus. Now why doesn't John go himself? Why doesn't John go and visit Jesus himself? Why doesn't John go and ask the question?

[6 : 27] Well, quite simply, because he's not at liberty to. John, at this point in the narrative, has been arrested. He is in prison. He has spoken out against Herod and taken his brother's wife.

John the Baptist isn't at liberty to go and ask Jesus these questions himself. Secondly then, we might want to ask, well, why does John send two of his disciples? And again, I think it's one of those little details that scripture records for us that helps us to understand its authenticity. It helps us to understand that it really is a true book.

Two men were required by a Jewish court in order for something to be considered valid legal testimony. Two witnesses were required in order for something to stand up under investigation at court.

Two men were required to corroborate any piece of evidence that was given. Then and only then would this evidence be accepted when two men had confirmed it.

Of course, we see that in other parts of the Bible, don't we? We see that in the trial of Jesus Christ. That was part of the central problem. That's why it took so long for things to come to a head, because they couldn't get two witnesses to agree.

[7 : 34] They couldn't get two people to agree on a charge against Jesus Christ that would stick. John sends these two disciples because their report would be considered legally binding.

It would be considered authoritative. It would be considered watertight in a court of law. So we've considered the background.

We've considered why John can't go himself. We've considered why John sends these two disciples rather than just one or three or four or whatever number we might care to choose. But now we need to consider what it is that John doubts.

What is this doubt that is creeping in? John doubts if Jesus is the Christ. John doubts if Jesus is the one who is to come.

We see that from his questions, don't we? Verse 19. Now this is astonishing when we think about it, isn't it?

[8 : 38] Because you think of all the privileges that John had. You think of all the things that John had seen. Remember, John was the one who leapt for joy in his mother's womb when Mary came to visit his mother Elizabeth.

Remember, John was the one who had baptized Jesus in the Jordan. John was the one who had seen the Spirit descend and remain on Christ. John had been the one who was the voice in the wilderness crying, make way for the Lord.

John had been the one who declared that he wasn't worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus' sandals. And yet despite all of this, despite all of the things he'd seen, despite all of the experiences that he'd had, he still doubts.

He still wonders. Well, is Jesus the Messiah? Is Jesus really God's chosen king? Is Jesus really the one who has been sent?

More than anyone, John perhaps should have understood who Jesus was. More than anyone, perhaps John should have appreciated who Jesus was. But when we consider John's situation, it's perhaps understandable, isn't it?

[9 : 50] Here he is in prison. I think he probably knows that the end of his life is coming. And he just wants to make sure. He wants to be 100% sure that he's got this right.

Is Jesus who he thinks he is? Is Jesus the Christ? Is Jesus the one who was to come? John, when he had all of this time to wonder, all of this time to question, says, well, is Jesus the Christ?

Am I sure? Am I convinced? I remember a good few years ago now when we were at college, we had Professor Donald MacLeod for systematic theology.

Systematic theology too, Donald MacLeod took. It was a module on the person and work of Christ. It was a simply fantastic module, a module that I can still remember to this day.

Our assignment from Professor MacLeod was to write a paper on the canonic theory of the incarnation. What did Paul mean in Philippians 2-7 when he said that Christ emptied himself?

[11 : 02] Did my research, did my thinking, wrote the essay, wrote the paper on what I understood to be the reformed position of Philippians 2-7, what the canonic theory of the incarnation really meant.

I thought I had it right. I was pretty sure that I had it right. But in order to check, I got one of the other professors to read over the paper for me. I got one of the other professors to scan it and make sure I was going along the right tracks.

John here thinks he has it right. John here is pretty sure that he has it right. But facing the end of his life, facing the spell in prison, he wants to make sure.

And so he sends these messengers to Christ saying, look, are you the one? Or should we look for another? One of the things this morning that we are tempted to doubt, I'm convinced that doubt is one of the greatest weapons that the devil has against believers.

Perhaps this morning you're tempted to doubt, well, was Jesus really the Messiah? Was Jesus really the Christ? Was Jesus really God's chosen king? Is Jesus really the only way for sinful man to come to God?

[12 : 16] Was Jesus Christ really the one who came into the world to save sinners? Perhaps for others of us this morning, assurance of salvation is that major stumbling block.

We know how sinful we are. We see the remaining sin that dwells in us. We see how far short of our own standards we fall. We see how far short of God's standards we fall.

When confronted with that, perhaps we're tempted to doubt, well, am I really saved? Am I really one of God's children? Am I really sure? Could be that perhaps when confronted with the issue of suffering, confronted with the terrible images that we're seeing coming out of the world, suffering from the coronavirus, perhaps we're tempted to doubt God's goodness.

Does God really care? Is God really all-powerful? Is God really all-knowing? And if he is, then why is this suffering allowed to happen? In our hearts we can all be prone to doubt.

In our hearts we can all question God. In our hearts we can all wonder, well, is this really true? We may not vocalize our doubts as John the Baptist does here.

[13 : 29] We may not say them out loud to other believers as John the Baptist does here. But in our heart of hearts we can question, we can doubt, we can wonder. It's part of our nature, I suppose.

We are finite fallen human beings who are seeking to look into the infinite things of God. We are finite fallen human beings seeking to inquire of the infinite God.

And of course we can never fully understand. Of course we can never fully grasp all of the truths and complexities of God. It's not sinful to doubt.

It's okay to doubt. But it's how we respond to that doubt that's the key thing. How do we react when those doubts creep in? How do we respond when we start to wonder if we're really saved?

How do we respond when we doubt to goodness and mercy and grace of God? And it's to that we want to turn now. We've seen the doubt creeping in with John. We've seen John beginning to wonder, well, is Jesus really the Christ?

[14 : 33] Secondly then, we want to see how John deals with his doubt. How to deal with doubt. And we read that in verse 20. John's disciples have been sent.

These two men have been sent to Jesus. And as they arrive at him in verse 20, they repeat John's question verbatim, don't they? John the Baptist has sent us to you saying, Are you the one who is to

come?

Or shall we look for another? John the Baptist takes his doubt and how does he deal with it? He takes it to the source. He takes it to the person who can overcome his doubt. He takes it to the person who can answer his question.

He takes it to the one who can tell him definitively. He goes to Christ and says, Are you the Messiah? Or should we look for another? John isn't concerned about looking foolish.

John isn't concerned that people will wonder about him. John isn't concerned that people may doubt him. He wants to get the answer. He wants to get the truth. He wants to know for sure, Jesus, are you the Christ?

[15 : 36] Should we be looking for another or not? Or should we look to you? And this often can be our greatest problem in times of doubt. We're worried about what other people might think about us.

We're worried about what other people might say about us. We're worried perhaps even what others in the reformed world might think about us. If we admit our doubts, it's admitting a weakness. If we admit our questions, it's admitting that we don't know the answers. And so, when doubt arises, when questions arise, we keep them internalized. We keep them to ourselves.

But yet, that's not what we're called to, is it? We're called to be a people of God together.

We're called to be a royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy people to God. We're called to live lives that spur one another on towards love and good deeds. The author of the book of Hebrews reminds us of that.

[16 : 39] We should feel comfortable admitting our doubts to one another. We should feel comfortable admitting our questions to one another. We should be comfortable opening ourselves up to one another with all of the vulnerability that that brings.

Because it's through this process that our faith is strengthened. It's through asking the right questions and admitting our doubt that our faith is strengthened or can be strengthened. It's through answering and listening to one another's questions and doubts that our love and our fellowship will grow together.

Too often we can try and live the Christian life like the superheroes in the movies. You know, we've all seen that. One man takes on an entire regiment.

One man takes on an entire town of villains and somehow emerges victorious. In our Christian lives we can be people who try to battle the enemy on our own. We can be people who try to pretend that everything's okay on our own.

But yet the New Testament holds out to us a vision of the Christian life that isn't like that. The New Testament holds out a vision to us of the Christian life that is lived in community, that is lived in the one another's of scripture that we've thought about on Wednesday evenings.

[17 : 55] Together facing our enemies. Together overcoming our doubts. Together answering our questions. Together facing our questions. The New Testament Christian life is fundamentally one of community, not of isolation.

The New Testament Christian life is one of togetherness, not separation. As we said, doubt in itself isn't a huge problem.

It's how we respond to that doubt. The problem with doubt arises when we keep doubt to ourselves. The problem with doubt arises when we keep it internalized.

We ignore the advice of John the Baptist. We ignore the example of John the Baptist here. He shares his doubt with his disciples, John. He shares his doubt with Jesus.

Jesus is the only one who can answer his question. Jesus is the only one who can offer him security. Jesus is the only one who can answer definitively the question that he has. As we face our doubts together, let's adopt the approach of John the Baptist.

[19 : 06] Talk with one another. Share them with one another. Tell people that this is what you're struggling with at the moment. And ultimately share them with the Lord. Because he is the one who can defeat your doubt.

He is the one who can answer your questions. The spirit ministering to our hearts is the one who can convince us of the truths and goodness and mercy and grace of God. So share them with God. So that's John the Baptist dealing with doubt.

We've seen his doubt arising. We've seen him dealing with doubt. Here he takes his problem to the Lord. And then thirdly, we see the defeat of doubt. The defeat of doubt.

And we see that in verses 21 through 23. The defeat of doubt. Now notice what Jesus does. John the Baptist's disciples come to him and they say, look, John wants to know, are you the Christ or should we look for another?

And what does Jesus do in verse 21? In a sense, he doesn't answer their question, does he? Rather, he keeps on doing what he's been doing. As John the Baptist's disciples arrive with their question, Jesus does what?

[20 : 13] Verse 21. In that hour, the hour they'd come to him, the hour they'd ask the question. In that hour, he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits. And on many who were blind, he bestowed sight.

Jesus keeps doing what he's been doing. He keeps opening the eyes of the blind. He keeps casting out demons. He keeps healing the sick. Without using any words, and this is why it's so wonderful, without using any words, Jesus is in fact answering their question.

Jesus is saying through his actions, I am he. I am the one who was to come. I am the one who was promised. Don't bother looking for another. I am the Lord's anointed.

Jesus is, of course, fulfilling that great prophecy of Isaiah 42. When Isaiah foresaw the work that the Lord's servant would do. When the Lord's anointed would do.

And Jesus here, in this section, is fulfilling all that Isaiah said the Lord's anointed would do. Jesus doesn't answer their question using any words at the moment.

[21 : 22] But he gives them a very real, very visual, very vivid demonstration of his power. And in effect says to them, look, I am the Christ.

I am the Messiah. I am God's chosen king. And it's a wonderful answer, isn't it? It's a wonderful way to show John's disciples who he is.

Because think about it. It would have been easy for Jesus to simply say to John's disciples, well, look, I am the Messiah. I am the Christ. Go and tell John, look, don't bother looking for another.

It would have been easy for him to say that. But instead he gives them this very visual demonstration. Instead he gives them something that their eyes can see. Instead he gives them something that their ears can hear.

So that they can testify to John, well, yes, this is the Christ. He in effect says to John the Baptist's disciples, look, go and tell John what you have seen.

[22 : 25] Go and tell John what you have heard. Go and tell John the objective fact that you've witnessed. That you have seen the blind healed. That you have seen the sick cured.

That you have seen the demon possessed set at liberty. The lame walk. All of these things have been happening, of course, throughout Luke's gospel.

We studied it together. Even last week we saw how these things were happening. We saw Luke 7, Jesus healing a centurion's servant. Luke 7, we saw Jesus raising the dead. Throughout the book of Luke we saw Jesus preaching the good news to the poor.

All of these things have been happening in Luke's gospel so far. And they're painting a picture. They're setting a stall out for us as Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction of God's coming messenger. But it's to these objective facts that Christ points.

[23 : 33] The things that they have seen and heard and witnessed. Go and say what you've seen with your own eyes. And it's through these objective facts that ultimately the doubt of John the Baptist will be defeated.

Notice here though. Just in passing we just draw it out very briefly. Notice in passing the part of what being the coming Messiah would involve.

That Isaiah's prediction involved what? Verse 22. The blind receive their sight. Yes. The lame walk. Yes. Lepers are cleansed. Yes.

The deaf hear. The dead are raised up. All miraculous things. But notice that final thing. That final part of it. The poor have good news preached to them.

It was by such works of mercy. It was by such works of ministry and preaching that Jesus would prove himself to be the Messiah.

[24 : 37] Not by military might. Not by throwing off the oppression of the Roman occupying force. But by works of ministry. Works of mercy. And by preaching the word.

I have a dear old friend sadly who is now in glory. He had three little wooden men that as young Christians he used to show us all the time.

He called them Mr. Faith, Mr. Facts and Mr. Feelings. And he would always insist that these men went in the right order. He argued that too many Christians live with Mr. Feelings as the driving force.

Mr. Feelings was the driving force in their Christian lives. But yet our feelings can let us down, can't they? We may wake up one morning and not be terribly assured of our salvation and our feelings let us down.

We may wake up one morning and feel particularly far away from God. And again our feelings let us down. John the Baptist here perhaps lives with Mr. Feelings as his source of assurance.

[25 : 50] And when he's in prison then things begin to doubt. Things begin to wane. He begins to question, well was Jesus the Messiah or not?

Was he really the one who was to come or not? But Jesus in response points to what? He points to Mr. Facts. Go and tell them what you hear.

Go and tell them the things that you've seen. The things that cannot change. The things that are objectively true. Unlike our feelings that can change almost daily if not hourly.

The lame walk. The deaf hear. The demon possessed or set at liberty. That's what John needed to know. Objective facts.

Objective truth. And if we're to stand any chance of defeating God in the Christian life, that's what we need. Objective facts.

[26 : 48] We need to know objectively for ourselves the truth of sins forgiven. We need to know objectively for ourselves the reality of Jesus Christ as God's son. We need to know the reality for ourselves of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We need to know the reality for ourselves of the life, death and resurrection of Christ. We need to know for ourselves the objective fact that in Christ we have been adopted as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Not based on our own good works. Not based on the things that we've done. But based on the works and righteousness of Christ. We need to look back on the objective truth of our lives being changed by these facts.

Of Christ making a difference to who we are. The problem is that that all sounds very easy, doesn't it? It all sounds that if we just have all our ducks in a row.

That if we have all of our facts lined up. If we have all of these things we objectively know to be true about Christ. Then doubt just disappears. But we all know it's not that easy, don't we?

[27 : 57] Notice here Jesus doesn't castigate John for his doubt. Jesus doesn't castigate John for asking the question. But rather he answers him with cold, hard, concrete facts.

Our doubt is best dealt with by remembering who we are in Christ. That we are blood bought children of the Most High God. That our sin has been dealt with.

No matter how we may feel. On any particular day. Our sin in Christ has been forgiven. These are objective facts.

Objective truths. That the Bible revealed to us. And it's in these that we must rest. It's in these that we must place our hope. It's in these that we must trust this evening.

If we're going to defeat our doubt. Not in our feelings. Not in those things that so easily change. But in the objective, cold, hard facts of Christ.

[29 : 02] So how do we respond to our doubt? What do we say to the Archbishop of Canterbury? Who perhaps doubts the goodness and mercy and grace of God? We say look at the facts.

Look at the facts of salvation. Look at the facts of all that God has done for us. Look at the facts of the God of mercy and grace that we know. Not at the situation. Not at the difficulties in our world. But at the objective facts of who God is. And what he has done for us. The answer to our doubt. Is never found by looking inward. It's never found by looking to ourselves.

But looking upward. To God. How will we respond this week when doubt creeps in? How will we respond this week when that little voice at the back of our head causes us to doubt?

With feelings? Or with cold, hard facts? With what we think? Or with who we are in Christ?

[30 : 02] By looking inward? Or by looking upward? Amen. Amen. ELISO so so So, let's go.

So, let's go.

So, let's go.

So, let's go.

So, let's go.

[33 : 11] So, let's go.