

PM Luke 7:18-35 Dealing with Doubt

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[0 : 0 0] doubts, doubts about God, about the Bible, about Jesus Christ, or some other aspect of the faith.

Doubts can be extremely disturbing, or sometimes doubts can be comfortable. They can be comfortable because they sort of enable us to sit on the fence and not commit.

And if we're commitment phobes, that can be sitting on the fence, can be a comfortable place to be. Doubts can sometimes have the appearance of being sophisticated.

It's like saying we're not naive people, we have doubts, we're sophisticated. But doubts can also be disturbing, they can be devastating, because they shatter the foundations you thought your life was built on.

And I think that's probably more closer to what the experience of John the Baptist was here. In verse 18 we read of John's disciples reporting to John just some of what was going on to do with Jesus.

[1 : 1 2] Jesus, the healings he was performing. Just immediately before there's an account of Jesus raising a dead young man and restoring him to his mother.

And other miracles of healing, healing the blind and the paralyzed, driving out demons and so on. And so we read that John called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord Jesus to ask, Are you the one who is to come or should we expect another?

Now John had previously, before being put in prison, he was the one who had introduced Jesus to the Israelites.

To read from John's gospel. We read there that this is from John chapter 1. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This is the one I meant when I said, A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.

[2 : 3 2] Then John gave this testimony. I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

I have seen and I testify that this is God's chosen one. So that is John revealing Jesus, introducing Jesus to the Jews, to the Israelites.

But John, as we saw, is now in King Herod's prison. Which I have no doubt was a pretty horrible place to be. And he hears reports, these reports about Jesus.

And yeah, it sounds in some ways spectacular, but maybe not exactly what he expected the Messiah to be like.

Maybe he seemed too humble, too powerless. When John had announced the imminent arrival of the Messiah, his announcement had included judgment.

- [3 : 49] This is from Luke chapter 3. John said that his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn.
- But he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. And so John, announcing the coming of the Messiah, had spoken of judgment of the Messiah, exercising that work of dividing the wicked away and burning them up.
- And we have to understand that at this time, the Jews were under Roman rule, under the rule of the Roman Empire. And in fact, for centuries, they had been under the rule of one foreign regime, one foreign empire after another.
- And the Romans were just the latest of a series of different empires who ruled over them. And that rule was oppressive.
- They didn't want these people ruling over them, but they had no choice in that. And it laid a heavy burden on them. A burden of taxation. A burden of just not being in charge of their own destiny, of their own lives.
- [5 : 02] And also there were puppet rulers, people like Herod, who was a kind of puppet king under the Roman Empire, who was cruel, who was brutal, who was a thug.
- And at this time, there was some expectation of a Messiah, who would come and liberate the Jews from their oppressors.
- Just to give you an example, this is from the first century BC, so sometime in the hundred years before this or so. So, this is from the Psalms of Solomon.
- This is not in the Old Testament. It's another Jewish writing. But it gives a taste of what the Jews were, or what some Jews at least, were expecting.
- This document says, See, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, which of course is the Messiah, at the time known only to you, O God, that he may reign over Israel, your servant.
- [6 : 06] Gird him with strength to shatter unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem of the nations that trample her down in destruction, to expel in wisdom and righteousness sinners from the inheritance, to smash the sinner's pride like a potter's vessel, breaking in pieces with a rod of iron all their substance, to destroy the lawless nations by the word of his mouth, so that at his mere threat nations flee before him, to condemn sinners by the thoughts of their own hearts.
- So that was the kind of thing that many people were expecting, and maybe to some degree John was also. And yet it didn't seem like that with Jesus.
- Why wasn't Jesus bringing injustice by doing away with Herod, and doing away with the Romans? Why was he himself, John, still in prison, suffering there in that dungeon?
- Jesus didn't look like a king. He didn't look like the king, the Messiah. And so John's thinking, questioning, doubting, maybe I got it wrong.
- Maybe Jesus is not the one who is to come, the one we're expecting and waiting for. And maybe we should look for someone else. So John suffers these questions and doubts.
- [7 : 34] Now, some commentators suggest that John wasn't himself having any doubts, but that he was sending his disciples for the disciples' benefit, so that they would realise that Jesus is the expected one, the one who is to come, the Messiah.
- But to me, the most natural reading of the text is that John is having doubts. And I don't think we need to sort of try and clear John's name.
- Because I think actually John gives us a great example here. It's not wrong, it's not a sin to have questions and to have doubts. We shouldn't have the attitude that, you know, we mustn't ask any questions.

You've just got to believe and just sort of ignore any questions or doubts. But the question is, what do you do with your doubts? How do we deal with our doubts?

See, many people feed their doubts. They nurse them. Some people celebrate doubt as if it's a sign of intellectual and spiritual maturity. And as we said earlier, some people find doubts comfortable because it means we can sit on the fence and not have to make any commitment.

[8 : 54] But that is not the answer. It's not the way to deal with doubts. And John is a great example here because what he does with his doubts is he goes to Jesus. Or at least, he can't go physically himself.

He sends his disciples to Jesus with his big question. And that is just such a great example for us that if we suffer from doubts, if we have doubts about whatever aspect of the faith, that what we do with that is we go to the Lord.

We go to God. We pray about it. We search the Scriptures. We maybe speak to someone who is qualified to answer that and to deal with that.

So John provides us with a great example of what to do with our doubts. We go to the Lord and take our doubts to him. Then we see Jesus' answer in verse 21.

We read that in that hour, Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits. And of many who were blind, he bestowed sight.

[10 : 08] 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. The deaf hear.

The dead are raised up. The poor have good news preached. To them. These were signs of the Messiah.

And of God's kingdom breaking in into history. In fact, the words that Jesus uses, they recall words from the prophet Isaiah.

In Isaiah chapter 35, a chapter which speaks about the return of the Israelites from exile. The original exile had been in Babylon about six centuries before this.

And although many Jews had returned after that initial exile, they were still under foreign domination. They were still slaves in their own land. That was how they felt. And they were looking forward to a real end of the exile.

[11 : 15] So Isaiah 35 verses 5 and 6 says, Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

Or Isaiah 61, which says, The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

And the word anointed is the word from which the word Messiah comes. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners.

So, Jesus replies in this way, making allusion to those passages from Isaiah. You may wonder, why does Jesus reply like this?

Well, if he just said outright, Yeah, I'm the Messiah. Then he would have been immediately arrested by Herod, and this wasn't the time for that yet. But instead, Jesus is saying in effect, let the signs speak for themselves.

[12 : 31] These healings, blind receiving their sight, the lame leaping, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and the poor hearing the good news.

These are the signs. The scriptures have foretold this. These are the signs of God's kingdom coming, of the Messiah coming. And he speaks of good news being preached to the poor.

That is the good news of the kingdom, of the reign of God, of salvation. And these healings, the dead being raised, are signs of God's kingdom, God's reign coming.

They are pointers, they are trailers, to the future reign of God, which will come in its fullness, at the end of this age. But which has now broken into this age, with the coming of the king, of the Messiah, Jesus.

It's like, you know, you see a trailer of a film, on television, or in the cinema, and a trailer just gives you maybe, you know, 30 seconds, or a minute, of the action of the film that's coming up.

[13 : 42] And it's to whet your appetite, it's to give you a taste of it, so that you want to watch the whole film. And, these miracles of Jesus, I like that, they're trailers of when God's kingdom, will come, in its completeness.

But, God's kingdom has also, in a sense, come with Jesus. It has broken in, to this present age, with the coming of, the king Jesus. But there's also a subtle claim, being made here, by Jesus, as to his own identity, in the way he uses, Isaiah 35.

Let me read, the passage again, with the, the preceding verses, the, in fact, the verses that we sung. So this is from verse 1, of Isaiah 35. The desert, and the parched land, will be glad.

The wilderness, will rejoice, and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst, into bloom. It will rejoice greatly, and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon, will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel, and Sharon.

They will see, the glory of the Lord, the splendor, of our God. Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees, that give way. Say to those, with fearful hearts, be strong, do not fear.

[15 : 00] Your God, will come. He will come, with vengeance, with divine retribution. He will come, to save you. Then, will the eyes, of the blind, be opened, and the ears, of the deaf, and stopped.

Then, will the lame, leap like a deer, and the mute tongue, shout for joy. John had asked, about the one, who was to come.

How much, he understood by that, we're not sure. But Jesus, referring, to Isaiah 35, claims that, when the things, when the things, that he is doing, take place, the healings, and so on, that it's a sign, that the one, who has come, is none other, than God himself.

As Isaiah says, your God will come. He will come, to save you. And then, these things, will happen. They are seeing, the glory of the Lord, in the, person, of Jesus Christ.

And that's, in keeping with, both what Jesus himself, claims elsewhere, and also in Luke's, presentation of Jesus, in his, gospel.

[16 : 15] Well, Jesus goes on, he says in verse 23, blessed, is, the one, who is not offended, by me. You see, there is a danger, of being offended, of taking, offense, or of stumbling, or falling away, because, of, Jesus not meeting, expectations.

And, it seems that, for John, and maybe for many Jews, of that time, that Jesus didn't look, like, the powerful thing, the powerful king, who would crush, their oppressors, their enemies.

He wasn't the, the Hollywood action hero, that, maybe they were, they envisaged, in their minds. And what about for us? What are our expectations, of, Jesus Christ?

Maybe someone, who will, we want him to, get me a job, or get me a marriage partner, or, get me out of the financial hole, I mean, or to, bring peace to my country, or get rid of, the bad leaders, or, or whatever it is, to sort out my problems, and to sort them out now.

And maybe, you feel you're, you're in a prison. John, of course, was in a literal prison. But you feel that, your situation in life, imprisons you. And you wish, and your prayer is, just, get me out of this, situation, now.

[17 : 49] Well, maybe, that will happen, maybe that prayer, will be answered, soon. Or maybe, it won't. But the important thing, is to trust, Jesus, who is, the Messiah, who is the Lord.

The Messiah's role, is to, bring healing, to give, new life, to the dead, to proclaim, good news, to the poor. And the prophets, also foretold, that, the Messiah, would bring justice, and righteousness.

He would be the one, who would put all wrongs, to right. And indeed, the gospel tells us, that when the Lord Jesus returns, at the end of this age, he will indeed, do that.

But also now, here and now, whenever, wherever his reign, extends, these things, begin to happen. Things begin, to be put right. Peace, justice, righteousness, wholeness, begin, to be restored.

It's not complete, here and now. It will be, when he returns. But these things, begin, to take place, even now, wherever, people come, under the reign, of King Jesus.

[19 : 06] And our hope, for the future, our certain, and sure hope, is the full, restoration, of all things, when his reign, comes in completeness, when he, returns.

Well, in verse 24, we read that, when John's messengers, are gone, Jesus began to speak, to the crowds, concerning John.

What did you go out, into the wilderness, to see? A reed, shaken by the wind? We have, you know, we sometimes use the expression, that, you know, just, whatever the, whatever direction, the wind goes, that's the way, you know, he goes.

Just goes along, with the flow. That was, certainly not, John's way. If he had, he wouldn't, be in prison now. Verse 25, If not, what then did you go out, to see?

A man dressed, in soft clothing. Behold, those who are dressed, in splendid clothing, and live in luxury, are in King's, King's courts. Those who attended royalty, had to keep them, royal masters happy, and, so that they could live, a life of luxury.

[20 : 15] That was completely, the opposite, of the way of life, that John, lived. Those kind of people, lived in palaces. John lived, in the wilderness.

So verse 26, What then, did you go out, to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, a more, than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger, before your face, who will prepare, your way, before you.

I tell you, among those, born of women, none is greater, than John. So John is, this great prophet, there is none, greater than him.

As Jesus says, quoting, he's quoting from, from Mike, Malachi, chapter 3, verse 1. That, passage says, I will send, I will send my messenger, who will prepare, the way before me.

Then suddenly, the Lord you are seeking, will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the Lord, Almighty. So, Jesus is saying, that John is that messenger, that Malachi, 400 and more, years ago, spoke about.

[21 : 35] So John is the, the messenger. He is the one, who prepares, the way, for the Lord Almighty. That is why he is so great. And, and the implication here, is that the Lord Almighty, is, Jesus.

Of course, that accords with, what we've already, seen. I'm sure you've, often heard, the blue lights, sorry, you've heard the siren, and you've seen, the blue lights flashing.

And of course, you know what that means. You mean, you know that it's a, an ambulance, or perhaps a fire engine, or a police car coming. And, what the blue lights, and the siren are doing, they are, they're preparing the way.

They're clearing the road, so that the ambulance, or whatever, has access, to get quickly, to where it needs, to be. It's on a, on a rescue mission, to do that.

Now, of course, the, the blue lights, and the siren, aren't, really the important thing. Of course, they have, serve a very important purpose. They prepare the way.

[22 : 37] But it's the ambulance, that is, on the rescue mission. It does the rescuing. It does the saving, of, a life. And John, John's ministry, was like that, of the blue lights, and the siren.

He is the one, who prepares the way, for, the rescuer, the saviour, Jesus. And that is his greatness. That is, why Jesus, describes him, as being so great.

But then, he says, something that seems, to counter that. He says, I tell you, this is in verse 28, yet the one, who is least, in the kingdom of God, is greater, than he.

What does he mean by that? Well, possibly, just that those, who have the privilege, of seeing, the kingdom, coming in the, light, in the death, and resurrection, of the Lord Jesus, that they are in a more, privileged position, than John.

John died, before that happened. He didn't live, to see that. That is maybe, what Jesus means, by this. Well then, in verse 29, this, may be Jesus' speech, or it may be, a kind of, editorial comment, by Luke, the writer of the gospel.

[23 : 57] He says, when all the people, heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared, God just, or perhaps God, to be in the right. Having been baptized, with the baptism, of John.

But the Pharisees, and the lawyers, rejected the purpose, of God, for themselves. Not having been, baptized, by John. So, John's, both John's message, and Jesus' message, divided people.

Some received it, others, rejected it. And of course, that is the same, today. John's baptism, was a baptism, of, repentance, for the forgiveness, of sins.

We told that, in chapter 3. But it seemed, that these Pharisees, these lawyers, didn't, feel the need, to repent. They didn't see, that they had, sins to be repented, of.

Well, Jesus goes on, in verse 31, he says, to what, then, shall I compare, the people, of this, generation? And what, they're like, they're like, children, sitting in the marketplace, and calling, to one another, we played the flute, for you, and you did not dance, we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.

[25 : 18] For John, the Baptist, has come eating, eating no bread, and drinking no wine, and you say, he has a demon, the son of man, has come, eating and drinking, and you say, look at him, a glutton, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors, and sinners.

So Jesus, he's, and he's speaking, particularly here, of the Pharisees, and the lawyers, when he's speaking, of the people, of this generation, but maybe others too, and he's likening, likening them, to kids, who just want, to be entertained, but who are never satisfied, and just always complain, you just can't, please them.

That's, says Jesus, is what this generation, is like. They complained at John, and now they complain at Jesus, for the opposite reasons. John is, an ascetic, he lives a very, harsh, kind of life, and they say, he's got a demon.

Jesus, just as a normal person, eats and drinks, and they say, he's a glutton, and a drunkard. That of course, is completely false, that was, he was not, and also that he's a friend, of tax collectors, and sinners, and they don't mean that, as a compliment, that's meant, as an insult.

Look at the kind of company, he keeps. What kind of person, is this? So they were making excuses, for rejecting, God's messengers. Too strict, not strict enough.

[26 : 51] And, of course, today, we can have, different excuses, for not, accepting the gospel. Some people say, you know, I can't accept, the Bible, I can't accept Christianity, because, Christianity and religion, are incompatible.

Sorry, sorry, sorry, Christianity and science, are incompatible. Science has proved it all, wrong. So, I'm not a Christian, because, I believe in science. And then, somebody else will come along, and say, and, and, people have said this, that, the reason the world's, in such an environmental, mess, is, because of Christianity.

Because, the modern, modern science, and technology, is based on a Christian worldview, and that's, the problem. That's, so, some are saying, you know, I'm not a Christian, because I'm a scientist, and others are saying, that, almost the opposite, that, Christianity, is at the root, of modern science, and technology, which is the problem of, has caused all these problems, with the environment.

And, many of, the doubts, that people have, many of the objections, that people have, actually, they're very, very culturally conditioned. Just to give you an example, people, I was talking this morning, about, my translation of Luke, and, Muslims have an objection, to Jesus being called, son of God.

Because they say, well, you know, how can God, have a child? That's impossible. And so, the term, son of God, causes great difficulty, and, I, go to some length, to try and explain, what that means.

[28 : 38] In western culture, for most westerners, if you say, Jesus is the son of God, most people, might just shrug their shoulders. It doesn't, maybe grab them, but it doesn't, sort of, cause offence.

On the other hand, in western culture, with many western people, if you talk about, God's judgment, and about hell, then, many people will say, that's offensive.

I can't accept that. But, in, many Islamic cultures, if you talk about, God's judgment in hell, that's, yeah, of course, of course God's going to judge people. Of course he's going to send, evil doers to hell.

That's not a problem. So, I hope that shows that, just, you know, the objections that we have, to the gospel, that people have, are so conditioned, by, by our cultures.

And, sometimes it's the opposite thing. You know, what, for one group, might be attractive, about the gospel, is to another group, it's just really, offensive, and vice, vice versa.

[29 : 39] So, that may teach us, to kind of relativise, the doubts, and the questions, that we have. But, for many people, whichever way, God's message comes, they reject it.

And, maybe, for you here this evening, maybe for someone here, that is, your situation. Whatever way, God's message comes to you, you won't accept it.

But, Jesus, finishes in verse 35, he says that, yet wisdom, is justified, by all her children.

So, the wisdom of God, God's wisdom, will be vindicated, in the end. You might object, to the gospel, you might, have some reason, why you think, it doesn't make sense, to you.

But, in the end, God's wisdom, and God's wisdom, is revealed in the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. It will be, vindicated in the end. And, Jesus, speaks here, of it being vindicated, by her children, by those who, who believe, the gospel, those who receive, the message, who accept it, and who believe.

[30 : 54] Back in verse 29, he spoke about, Jesus, it speaks about, all the people, who heard, and even the tax collectors, who acknowledged, that God is just, because they had been, baptized by John.

These were the, these are the children, of wisdom. These are the ones, who have repented, and believed, and borne fruit. And the challenge for us, are we, children of wisdom?

Are we those, whose lives, have been, so transformed, that they, become something, and are becoming something, that is attractive, and beautiful. So that, God's wisdom, is vindicated.

And so that people, praise, our Father, in heaven. May God bless, his word, to us. Let us, conclude, our worship this evening, by singing, song, to us.

Thank you for Popeye. Thank you for, watching us. Amen. For God, he is to, all of us, for you, congratulations and I thank you for, Tsai, all of us. Thank you for, bringing you.

[32 : 06] Thank you for,weise, many readings, with envie, and some of us, for we. In heaven, times, from you. Through us, for us, and some of us. And the gospel, as of us. And the things, and the need, and the wind, from us.