

Overcoming Doubt, part 2

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Preacher: Raymond Smith

[0 : 0 0] All right, Luke chapter 7, Luke chapter 7 this morning, as we continue looking here at the situation in the life of John the Baptist and just dealing with that reality of doubt and overcoming! and trusting God in the minus. When God takes something away, sometimes it often causes us to doubt.

It causes us to question why God is choosing or has allowed that into our lives. And so if you found Luke chapter 7, let's pick up here in verse 18 here this morning as we just set the stage for the lesson here today. And it tells us here in verse 18, the disciples of John showed him of all these things. And John calling unto him two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus saying, art thou he that should come or look we for another? And when the men were come unto him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us unto thee saying, art thou he that should come or look we for another? In the same hour, he cured many of their infirmities and plagues and of evil spirits.

And unto many that were blind, he gave sight. Then Jesus answered and said unto them, go your way and tell John what things you have seen and heard and how that the blind see and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised. To the poor the gospel is preached.

And blessed is he who shall not be offended in me. Let's pray. Heavenly Fathers, we come once again before you, Lord, we pray. Just have your hand upon our hearts and our lives and, Lord, our thinking. Lord, as we consider a very stern reality, a stark reality in our life, Lord, of doubt that comes sometimes because of situations or expectations that we have that, Lord, that don't come out the way that we thought or desire for them to come out. But, Lord, help us to learn to be resilient and to trust you even in the difficult seasons of life. And, Lord, we just pray you have your hand upon each one here today that we might not just be hearers but doers of your word. And, Lord, we just ask it all in your precious name. Amen. You know, we see here this morning, we began looking here last week about trusting God in the minus, trusting God when God takes things away.

You know, things or expectations that we have because sometimes God does subtract from our lives. You know, we like multiplication, we like addition, but most of the time we don't like subtraction or division because they take away. And we know there's many examples we talked about last time how God took away. You know, we talked about the example of Job. You know, in Job's life, Job had a lot taken away, you know. And Job could begin to question or to doubt, I mean, the challenges that they have with that, you know. I can't explain why God adds or subtracts, but we know that God does it or allows it for a reason. God allows seasons of subtraction in our lives and partly, I think, because we need to learn to trust Him through it. You know, trusting God through things that are difficult in our life. You know, we don't understand all those things and we've been looking at resiliency and we began looking about the ministry of John last week. You know, John the

[3 : 45] Baptist is one of the most unusual ministries in the Bible. You know, John we talked about, God blessed John. I mean, John was one. He had great crowds that would come out to meet him and to see him. And that he was there and they would come out and be baptized of him. And the multitudes, it tells us in Luke chapter 3, came out and they were there to see John. And because out where he was, there was nothing. They didn't go for the social aspect. They didn't go because it was a resort area.

They didn't go for anything except for the fact that John was there and they saw John and understood he was the one preaching in the wilderness. You know, that John was the one crying in the wilderness to make straight the path, the way of the Lord. And so we see that, that John's role was to prepare the way for Christ. And he knew that. I mean, that was, John was sent forth to do that. That was his mission.

That was his task in life that had been given him. And he invested his life into fulfilling that. But you know, there was a time when the crowds started to go away. You know, after Jesus came and was baptized, that many departed from John and began to follow Jesus. There was subtraction in his ministry, you might say.

Things were being taken away. But you know, John 3 tells us John's response. John chapter 3 and verse 30 says, he must increase and I must decrease. God brought blessing, but God also allowed a disruption in the life and the ministry of John. You know, John had many disciples that were there. And, but we know that Jesus even had the same situation. You know, there was people who began to follow Jesus and then they backed out. You know, John chapter 8 tells us from that time, many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. You know, there's sometimes people who start on a path with the Lord and turn around. They get sidetracked or distracted by the things of the world or something that makes them uncomfortable or something that moves them outside of their comfort zone.

You know, Paul faced the same disruptions in his ministry. You know, we talked about, you know, Paul dealing with those things. I mean, you think about all the things that Paul and his companions suffered and things didn't go as they always had planned. I mean, he talks about being beaten and shipwrecked and hungry and thirsty and cold and, and, you know, no place to sleep and weariness and painfulness and all the things. And, but God used and uses setbacks for his glory. You know, when we understand that as with John, because remember we talked about John here, where was John when he sent messengers to Jesus? He was where? In jail.

[6 : 51] For doing what? Speaking the truth. You know, sometimes people don't like truth. Truth makes people uncomfortable sometimes because truth has the same effect that light does.

Light dispels darkness. Truth dispels spiritual darkness. Truth reveals what's truly there.

But John was shut up in prison and, and he preached about the sins that were going on. Even the sins of the ruler. Remember Herod was upset because he confronted him about his sin with sleeping with his brother's wife. You know, he didn't step back from it and, and he didn't just cower back from the reality of what could happen. But, you know, we see the doubt of John. We began talking about this a little bit last week, his doubts. You know, sometimes when life doesn't go how we expect or things don't come out, we begin to get doubtful. Is this what God wanted? Is this how God intended? Is there something going on? And, and, you know, the reality of John was in prison and he began to have these things roll through his mind because he's watching Jesus and he's beginning to question because he's not seeing what he thinks he wants to see. He knows that Jesus is the one. Matter of fact, he declared Jesus, behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Intellectually, he knew who Jesus is, but you know, he began to struggle because what he saw Jesus doing didn't match up with what his expectation was. Because doubts can expose our misplaced expectations. Because sometimes

God allows things for his glory and his purpose that aren't the way we would do it. You know, I think that's one of the struggles that we have because aren't we by nature people? We like to have things the way we want it done or how we envision it. You know, I have a picture of how it's going to go and then it doesn't match up. And sometimes we get discouraged or, you know, you can do an activity or you can do other things that you say, well, you know, God's going to use this.

And then it just goes, you say, why? You know, we have an expectation and expectations can be good, but we need to always keep those things in mind of how is God using those things. You know, look over to Philippians chapter one for a moment. Philippians chapter one, and we find here in verse 12, the word of God tells us this. It says, but I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happen unto me have fallen out rather under the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord waxing confident in my bonds are much more bold to speak the word without fear. In other words, Paul says, hey, I come to understand that sometimes God allows these things to happen for the furtherance of his purpose and not my purpose. Think about Paul's writing that to the church at Philippi. Remember what happened at Philippi? Paul was beaten and put in prison.

[10:19] Think about it. Do you think that was on his memo list of things to do while he was doing it at Philippi? I don't think that was on his schedule. Okay, at 2 p.m. this afternoon, they're going to come arrest us and beat us. I don't think that was his expectation of what was going to take place.

But yet he understood as he walked through it that, yeah, God allowed that. And we know, how did God allow it for the furtherance of the gospel? We see a jailer whose life was changed and whose family's life was transformed. Why? Because Paul and Silas ended up in a prison cell. It wasn't what Paul and Silas might have desired. I imagine Paul would have said, Lord, couldn't you just pump me into him on the street and I could share the gospel with him? That'd be much better. But you know what God said? No, this is where and what needs to take place for the furtherance of the gospel.

This expectation and sometimes disruptions open new opportunities. At other times, disruptions expose our misplaced expectations. Because notice here in our text, look at verse 18. What's John's expectation? You know, the disciples of John give John a report and John calling unto him, two of his disciples, verse 19, sent them unto Jesus saying, what's John asking? Art thou he that should come or look we for another? What's he saying? Jesus, what my disciples told me isn't matching up with what I'm expecting to happen. What I'm expecting to take place and John's doubt or at least his expression of it ought to be in a sense reassuring to us because sometimes the same thing happens.

You know, our expectations don't line up with what God has planned. And sometimes that causes us to doubt because I think it'd be, somebody'd have to be lying if you don't ever have doubts. I'm not talking about doubting God in the sense of God, but I'm talking about doubts about, hey, Lord, why'd you allow this to happen or why is this happening? What's the purpose behind this? Our Lord, this isn't going the way I pictured it. We have doubts and during those times we need to recognize that there's a difference between doubt and unbelief because doubt is normal. Doubt is something that actually helps us sometimes because doubt is a form of evaluation. It helps us evaluate the circumstances. It helps us to actually think about and consider those experiences that we wrestle through. But unbelief is the hardening of our heart towards God.

Unbelief and a hard heart go hand in hand. And we see that John isn't unbelieving. He's just saying, Jesus, are you the one that was prophesied or do we look for another? Because things weren't going and we understand, look what happens here because doubt can bring us back to the word of God.

[13 : 32] John's disciples repeated the question exactly as John had given it to him. When you think about it, now notice what Jesus did because Jesus here didn't start jumping all over him for bringing the question. We got to keep in mind that Jesus didn't respond harshly to him. What did Jesus do? Because notice what he asked. He says, do we look, are you the one or do we look for another? Now notice what happened. Verse 21 of our text there in Luke, it says, in that same hour, he cured many of their infirmities and plagues and evil spirits and unto many that were blind gave he sight. And notice what he says, verse 20, go your way and tell John what things you have seen and heard. Why did he tell John to tell him to go back and tell John that? The answer is in Isaiah 35 because Isaiah 35 foretold what Christ was going to do. He said, go back to the word of God. What's been foretold? Isaiah 35 says, in the eyes of the blind shall be open and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. And then shall the lame man leap as a heart and the tongue of the dumb sing. For in the wilderness shall waters break out in streams in the desert. You know, what did Jesus say? He says, go back to the word of God, tell John that look at what's happening, then compare it to the word of God and see if it's so.

Because I want you to understand, Jesus didn't tell John anything he didn't already know. What did Jesus do? He helped him reestablish the word of God as the point of reference instead of his own experience. You know, oftentimes instead of using the word of God, we use experience as our reference point. John's settled point of reference was the word of God. We left off last week talking about the compass, you know, and we talked about how the magnetic north, if you try to trust a magnetic compass, it will deviate because it moves. It's not set, it's not fixed. In life, sometimes we chase things that aren't fixed, but we need a true setting. We need something true. You know, I want you to understand why the earth's magnetic fields have shifted. Geographic north hasn't ever moved after they said it. We need something that's steadfast and sure. And what's he pointing back to instead of experience that changes to something that's steadfast and sure? Because experience, you know, let me ask you this, is experience always accurate? Are your feelings accurate? You know, how many times have you had a feeling about something and then you find out your feelings had totally off base? Sometimes feelings might be accurate, but you know what? To about a 50-50 shot, they're not. Because feelings are put, are adjustable to all sorts of different things. And we see here that doubt can reacquaint us also with the gentleness of God. Because John here, even his position and place that God sent him, I want you to understand that Jesus didn't harshly rebuke him. What did Jesus do? He says, hey, look back and see if it's so. Look back to see if it's true. Look back to those things. And we see here he didn't send John's messengers back with words of disappointment or rebuke. In other words, he reassured him and reminded him of the truth of Scripture.

You know, when we bring our doubts to the Lord, he doesn't rebuke us for what we're thinking or feeling in that moment. Think about Psalm, turn to Psalm 103 for a moment. Psalm 103, the Bible tells us this, God in verse 13, says this, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame, and he remembereth that we are dust. In other words, God understands you're going to have doubt sometimes because you're not going to, you need that encouragement, you need redirected back to the truth. John's doubt, and we find in Matthew's account of this, he came back with a theme of gentleness. You know, right after this, Matthew chapter 11 records after this event, he says, Jesus says this, he says, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take your yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest under your souls. You know, none of us like a doubt. None of us like seasons of things going away.

You know, that's a reality, but we can take those to the Lord to understand the dynamic and reacquaint us with who God is, his gentleness, his love towards us. He says, come unto me. You know, in those moments is when we ought to come, but you know what? Oftentimes our fear and our doubt keep us from coming.

To say, Lord, I'm just going to trust you in the moment. And we see the faithfulness of John. Not only did Jesus not condemn John for his expressing doubt, but after John's messengers left, Jesus praised John. Look at the rest of this. When John's messengers leave, look down at verse 24, back in our text in Luke chapter 7. It says, and when the messengers of John were departed, began to speak unto the people concerning John. It says, what went ye out into the wilderness for to see a reed shaken with the wind? For what went ye out for to see a man clothed in soft raiment?

[19 : 15] Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled and live delicately are in king's court. But when you went out for to see a prophet, yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet, for this is he of whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

For I say unto you, among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist, but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. You know, think about that for a moment. Here John comes with questions and doubts, and Jesus sends him back, pointing him to the word of God. And after his disciples do, what does John do? Or what does Jesus do? He doesn't say, don't doubt like John. What's he say? He says, hey, John is a prophet sent by God. Matter of fact, John fulfills scripture. You know, John was no weak individual. He wasn't delicate or effeminate. I mean, you think about it. He lived in the wilderness and the clothes he wore, the things he ate. I mean, John would have been a rugged individual. You know, he didn't have soft skin and just lived a soft life.

It was a hard life that he lived. And he was a great prophet whose biblical and strong message attracted people out to where he was. Now, I want you to see here, even in his moment of doubt, that he understood the truth of scripture. And Jesus even states that there's no greater prophet than John. You know, if John could doubt because of misplaced expectations, you know what?

That tells us something about us. Because if John could have those issues in life, you know what? There's nothing exempting us from it. That there's going to be moments when God takes away or things don't go the way we think. That doubt will come, but it's what we do with that doubt.

Right? Because notice, John didn't go to somebody else to get their opinion. What did John do? He went to Jesus. He went to Jesus. He went to, and Jesus responded, he says, directed him back to the word of God. Because John wasn't there just for the fruitfulness.

[21 : 27] John was there for the faithfulness. Because faithfulness, I want you to understand, is greater than fruitfulness. Sometimes we put fruitfulness above faithfulness.

But there can't be true fruitfulness if there's not faithfulness. John is not great because people came out to hear him. He wasn't great because he preached to tens of thousands of people. He wasn't great because he spoke against the sins of the day. The reason for John's gratefulness, what being great, and what is meant there when he shut up in prison and no longer preaching, he was still there.

What would it mean when the Pharisees thought that he was going to be put out of the way? And we see here that we should praise the Lord. And at times, he allows us to serve him and enjoy those fruitful seasons. But we ought to be also thankful when we see things diminish, when it's in God's hand, because John was not great because of the outward fruits of his ministry. You know, one of the false narratives today is crowds mean blessing. You know, think about how many people measure by crowd.

I want you to understand there's nothing wrong with crowds. Crowds are good, but that's not the measurement. The measurement that God measures is faithfulness. Because if you're faithful, there'll be fruit. You see, our assignment, God never expresses the importance of fruitfulness.

He says that we ought to bear fruit, but that fruit comes from faithfulness because faithfulness is where the root is. It's what we're bound in. Think about what does Christ tell us? He doesn't say, well done, thou good and fruitful servant. What does he say? Well done, thy good and what?

[23 : 17] What's that word? Faithful servant. You know, we understand that we want to be fruitful. There's a sense which bearing fruit glorifies God. I mean, think about John chapter 15.

John chapter 15 in verse 8, it says, Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit, so shall you be my disciples. I want you to understand, fruitfulness is what glorifies God.

Fruitfulness is in the hand of God. We're not able, nor does God expect us, to produce fruit by the sheer power of ourselves. You cannot produce fruit of yourself. That's not God's expectation. You know, think about there. Look earlier in John chapter 15, look up at verse 5.

He says this, Faithfulness is different from fruitfulness.

Because true fruitfulness cannot come until there's faithfulness. The faithfulness has to be there. And we understand that sometimes fruit from things is going to be evident.

[24 : 40] You know, things pop out and things are kind of well seen or easy. You know, other times, I want you to understand, sometimes the fruit that's happening isn't always seen on the surface.

It isn't seen in the moment because sometimes fruit will be immediately evident. I mean, when somebody, when you share the gospel and somebody gets saved, that's like immediate fruit.

You see that dynamic, but other times, I want you to hear, it's going to be hidden. Because sometimes it's in seasons of loss, wondering what God is doing in your life.

I mean, think about all the Old Testament examples that you have. Joseph. Joseph had a lot of things taken away. But you know what? God was bearing fruit in Joseph's life that whole time.

God was working where other people weren't seeing what was happening. Even when our fruit is not evident, if we are being faithful where God has called us, we can be sure he's producing fruit.

[25 : 41] Because faithfulness is tied to abiding, and abiding produces fruit. And when we understand that we need to anchor ourselves to truth of Scripture during times of minus, times of doubt, and why times of addition and multiplication are exciting, you know, oftentimes we grow most in subtraction.

Why? Because we draw closer to the Lord. We draw closer to Him. We rely more upon Him.

We're brought back to the truth that we are in Christ, and what we are in Christ matters more than what we do for Christ. It reminds us that what we do for Christ must flow out of who we are in Christ.

When we understand that dynamic, our service for Christ matters. But we can't say we love Him and not serve Him.

But service is not where we derive our worth. Our worth is in Christ, and in Him we have all that we need. Faithfulness is greater than fruitfulness.

[26 : 57] Faithfulness. Because without faithfulness, there won't be true fruitfulness. Faithfulness. Secondly here, what I have in Christ is greater than anything I don't have in this life.

You know? What I have in Christ is greater than anything I don't have in this life. You know, we mentioned earlier another season in John's ministry, which he encountered a minus.

You know, after John's publicly identified Jesus as the Messiah, people had been listening to John, now turned their attention and attendance to Jesus. Naturally, there are those looking for controversy always try to stir something up.

You know, look back over to John chapter 3 for a moment. Look at verse 26. And they came unto John and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizes.

And all men come to him. What's going on there? After some went away from John and went to Jesus, who showed up?

[27 : 59] Somebody trying to stir something up, didn't they? Trying to stir up jealousy with John, saying, John, look at Jesus. Look what he took away from you. Trying to stir up controversy. How did John respond to that?

Look down in verse 30 of John chapter 3. He says simply this, He must increase, but I must decrease. John didn't mind the subtraction when it didn't add up to a focus on Jesus.

Now, I want you to understand that as John doubted, it's the same doubt that the apostles had. Think about what was the apostles' struggle that they had with Jesus, especially at the end of his ministry. Jesus, when he went for the last time to Jerusalem, said what?

I'm going to go. They're going to accuse me. They're going to abuse me. They're going to kill me. And on the third day, I'm going to rise again.

The disciples struggled with that. Do you know why? Because their expectation of the Messiah was that he was going to come and immediately establish his kingdom. And when it didn't happen, what's John asking?

[29 : 08] Are we looking for another? Because what I'm seeing happening isn't what I have perceived in my mind what's going to happen. But what did Jesus say? He says, point you back to the word of God, back to Isaiah.

He says, what's happening is exactly what God said was going to happen. And in seasons of doubt, we need to look, what does God have to say about what's going to happen? How is it going to transpire? What's going to take place?

You know, we can learn from John the Baptist in his seasons of minus when God subtracts from our life, no matter what it is, whether it's ministry opportunities, relationships, possessions, or anything else, we can express our trust in God the same way that John did.

Because notice, John didn't start a complaint group when he was in prison. You know, he didn't go protest Jesus. He sent two of his disciples because he couldn't go himself.

He says, go ask Jesus, are you the one or do we look for another? John was questioning because he says, things aren't going the way I thought they were going to go.

[30 : 14] Not only did I lose people, now I've lost my ministry. Because remember, where's John at? He's in prison. But his focus was on Christ. And he brought his doubts to the Lord.

He didn't try to grab a hold of them and try to solve them himself. He said, Lord, what do we need to see? What do we need to do? We need to be redirected back to the truth of God's word.

You know, for John the Baptist, resilience didn't mean physical deliverance. His faith in God didn't mean that he was going to get out of jail. Matter of fact, he never made it out of jail. Because if you recall, he made Herod's lover so mad, she did what?

Called for his head. And his head brought to her. He was beheaded because he was faithful. God used him in a mighty way. You know, when we understand that sometimes when we stand for the Lord, there's not going to be the outcome that we expect.

When we understand that sometimes God takes away for a reason. You know, we talked last week and mentioned about Hugh Latimer there in England in the 1500s.

[31 : 24] You know, the guy who preached the same sermon after he got out of jail. A little later on, he was martyred for Christ. Queen Mary took the throne in 1553. She was determined to reinstate Roman Catholicism as the official religion and sent hundreds to their death because they would not give up the truth for the doctrine of Rome.

And one of those burned at the stake was Hugh Latimer. He was burned with Nicholas Ridley for the same public spectacle. As the flames rose around their bodies, it's reported that Latimer called out, Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man.

And we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust never shall be put out. It's interesting, from that moment, he stirred a great many other people to take a stand for Christ.

It tells us, history tells us that throughout England, the gospel spread because of their stand. Because of what was looked at as a negative or subtraction, God used to make fruitful.

Why was it fruitful? Because of their faithfulness. Faithfulness is greater than fruitfulness.

[32 : 45] Because there'll never be fruitfulness without faithfulness. You know, when you question the losses and disappointments, the minuses of life, and of your service to the Lord, don't despair.

Don't assume God has abandoned or forsaken you. Don't remain stuck in doubt, but instead do as John did. Bring it to the Lord. Lord, what am I to do? How am I to respond to this?

Because when we understand his promises above all, when Christ is the most valuable thing we can win, it's in the minuses that we learn the greatness of what we have in Christ.

Because it clings us to Christ and not to what we possess. Or what's happening. Because as a believer, the greatest thing we have is Christ. In him are hid all the treasures are in Christ.

Let's pray. Let's pray.