

# In The Dungeon Of Doubt

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today we talk about John the Baptist in the Dungeon of Doubt. But by the time we see John the Baptist here in Luke chapter 7, he is really kind of a messed up guy.

He is, as you may remember, the cousin of Jesus. John born just a few months before Jesus was born. And he had some peculiarities.

He had a peculiar calling in his life. One of them was to live kind of as a Nazarite, a Nazarite vow that he took. That meant that he wouldn't touch anything having to do with the fruit of the vine, no grapes, no grape juice, no wine, no nothing.

He didn't eat a regular diet. He ate locusts and honey. And maybe eating all that locusts and honey, that's what got to him. We don't know.

But wore camel skin outfits and just kind of a different ministry than Jesus.

[ 1 : 04 ] Everything that we've seen about Jesus up until this point. And John the Baptist was quite a bit different. And so on the one hand, you have the moment where he is absolutely certain that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one God had sent to save Israel and save the world from its sin.

And that moment when Jesus asked to be baptized, even though he had no sin to repent of, and that's what John's baptism was all about, he wanted to identify with the people that John had baptized.

And so John agreed to baptize him. And in that moment, the voice of God, the clouds parting, the light streaming down, the voice of God saying, this is my Son in whom I am well pleased, the Spirit like a dove descending upon Jesus.

And I mean, who in that moment wouldn't recognize that Jesus is the one after hearing all and seeing all of that. And he is absolutely certain in that moment.

But ever since that moment, things began to change for John. John's ministry was certainly, you might use the word a bit harsher in terms of its tone.

[ 2 : 28 ] And certainly not long after that, he was put into prison by Herod the Tetrarch because he had some hard things to say about Herod's morality and the people around him.

And he wouldn't back down whether the comments were public or whether they were to his face. He was going to say what God had instructed him to say, which was that he was living in a way that was immoral and it wasn't right and that Herod needed to repent of his sin.

And so Herod basically just kept him locked up. Somehow out of curiosity, he wouldn't let him go, but kept him locked up in that prison, liked to have conversations with him, liked the peculiarity of John.

John, his wife, on the other hand, couldn't stand him. And eventually he lost his head because of her. And but up until this point where we meet him today is basically his last words that we get to hear from John the Baptist.

Now, John, while he was in prison, it was not unusual for them to be allowed to have visitors.

Often times, if they were going to eat anything of substance, it was because visitors were allowed to bring that to him.

[ 3 : 55 ] And he was allowed to meet with people who wanted to visit with him and to teach even and to do those things. And certainly he heard reports of Jesus.

Reports of what Jesus was doing out in the world and the ministry that he was carrying on, the words that he was preaching, the miracles that he was performing.

And yet there was something about what he was hearing about Jesus that he didn't like. Because Jesus was not like John. And his ministry was not like John's ministry.

And so now that leaves him here toward the end of his life in prison and having some questions. And so that's where we get the text. Luke chapter 7, beginning in verse 18.

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. So what are they reporting to Jesus? To John, it's Jesus healing the centurion's servant.

[ 4 : 57 ] It's Jesus raising young man from the dead in this nowhere town called Nain. And all these things, the teaching that he had taught just before that up on the mountainside as he taught what we know as the Sermon on the Mount.

And John wasn't liking what he was hearing. And so he says this. John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord saying, Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another? Now this is John who earlier was absolutely certain he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. I mean, he's like, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He's telling his disciples, Hey, maybe you should go follow Jesus instead of me. He is the one that we've been looking for. And now, this is probably more than a year later.

He's been in prison for much of that time. And he's asking this question, Are you the one? Because I'm not so sure anymore. Or should we be looking for someone else?

[ 6 : 15 ] Now, it's interesting. There are some people who would look at some of the other records of this in the other Gospels and say, Well, did John really ask this question? And Luke is careful to repeat the question for us.

Verse 20, When the men had come to him, to Jesus, 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? I mean, it's basically verbatim, word for word here, that they're asking the same question that Jesus asked.

And interesting response. You'll see here that when Jesus answers the question, he doesn't answer the question.

Well, what's up with that? Why would he do that? Look at what it says. In that same hour, so right when they're asking this question, and apparently there's people all around.

This is kind of a public setting. There's people there. And Jesus, even without addressing their question, just sets about to do more ministry.

[ 7 : 19 ] And look what it says. In that hour, he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits. And on many who were blind, he bestowed sight. Did I skip?

Here we go. He bestowed sight, verse 22. 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. And that last little part is especially for John.

So he doesn't say to the disciples of John, he doesn't answer their question by saying, Will you go assure John I'm the one?

He doesn't do that. He goes about and he performs other miracles. And then finally he turns to the two men and he says to them, You go and report back to John the things that you've seen and heard from my ministry.

[ 8 : 35 ] The blind are made to see again. The deaf are made to hear again. Those who have evil spirits and demons, they are cast out and they are healed. The people who are lame are walking again.

Even dead are raised to life. You go back and you report to John also this sentence. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

Now it's interesting here that Jesus is basically quoting from a number of Old Testament passages that are meant to point us to what the Messiah was going to be about.

In other words, when you're looking for the Messiah, this is what you're looking for. Blind people are seeing again. Deaf people can hear again. People are healed from their diseases.

The lame are walking. The mute are speaking. The dead are being raised to life. The gospel is being preached. The good news of the kingdom of God is being proclaimed.

[ 9 : 36 ] This is what you are to look for when you're looking for the Messiah. Now go and report to John the things that you've seen and heard. And that was to be enough of a message for John.

Even so, this last phrase, blessed is the one who is not literally here translated trapped, set a trap for, offended.

In other words, John, don't let what you're hearing about my ministry, which is admittedly, Jesus is saying in this passage, we'll see it in just a little bit, that my ministry is different from yours, John. That what you have been called to do, God has given you that task. You have been faithful to complete that task. But now as you listen to the reports about my ministry, my ministry has been different, the things that I have been saying.

I have been saying them in a different way than you have been saying. I have been doing different things than what you have been tasked or assigned to do. But don't let that alarm you.

[10:47] Remember, the deaf are able to hear again. The blind are having their sight restored. The lame are walking. Those who are sick are being healed.

Demons rejected. The gospel being... All of this is going on. That is your confirmation, John. Don't let this other stuff trap you.

Into thinking, I am not who you think I am. I am not the person that you so openly declared that I am the one.

Remember what God has said about the coming Messiah. Now, it's interesting that you have all of this. And on your notes, we're going to talk a bit about why it is that John the Baptist, who at one point was so assured, who was so absolutely certain, that this one called Jesus, his cousin, whom his mother and father would have taught him about, and all of that, is now struggling mightily with who Jesus is.

Well, first of all, John had very little contact with Jesus. They didn't hang around as kids, as youngsters. John would go off early on and begin his ministry, living in the wilderness, not being in the city.

[12:13] He wouldn't go back into town to buy food. I mean, trapping locusts. I don't know. What do you do with that? And gathering honey and making his own clothes.

And that was his ministry. People had to go to John out in the wilderness to hear him preach. And so it was a very different ministry.

And then when Jesus went public with his ministry, it was in his later 20s or even 30 years old when he began his public ministry. So not a lot of time spent together.

And now John had been in prison for the last year. And so he wouldn't have had opportunities to have conversations with him. Secondly, John's question was ultimately the result of his dissatisfaction with what Jesus was saying and doing, what he wasn't saying and doing.

This is starting to get at the crux of the issue here. John wasn't happy with Jesus. John's ministry was spoken and done in a certain way, and he didn't like what Jesus was doing.

[13:27] I mean, John the Baptist would have been plain spoken right into your face. You're doing it wrong. You're sinning against God. You need to get right. You need to repent. You need to be prepared for the one who is to come.

And the one who is to come is coming along and telling them parables that they don't understand. And it's like, Jesus, what are you doing?

Tell it to us plainly. And even in his question, John's question, Jesus' reply is not direct. He answers his question with another question.

And Jesus is famous for that. That's what he does. And so that's frustrating to John. The third thing here, Jesus had not publicly identified himself as Messiah, which frustrated John.

Why don't you just come out and tell it? Why don't you just come out and say it? And Jesus' purpose is different. And you see this here.

[14:36] John was more trying to force Jesus to fit his own agenda than he was simply following Jesus.

Even in this question, he's trying to force Jesus' agenda to come out and reveal who you are.

Come on, let's get on with the agenda. No more games. No more parables. No more, you know, stories that nobody can understand. Just come right out and declare who you are and let's get about.

The business of setting up the kingdom. Because that's what John the Baptist would have expected. It's what all the prophets, all the Old Testament prophets would have expected that. That when Jesus came, he was coming to set up his kingdom.

And that would have meant doing away with Roman rule. And getting rid of the conquerors over Israel. John would have meant that. And all of that. John wouldn't have had any extra insight into the idea that Jesus would come not as a conquering king, but as a suffering servant.

[ 15 : 48 ] And that he would go to the cross and die for our sins. John wasn't prepared for that. Just the Old Testament prophets weren't prepared for that.

They didn't see that. They didn't understand that. There were hints in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53. The lamb that was sacrificed. But they didn't see how that all fit together.

And so John was challenging Jesus here. To do what Jesus had purposed not to do. Do you remember throughout the early portion of Jesus' ministry, Jesus would heal someone. And would they get excited when they got healed? I mean, wouldn't you? Right? If you had leprosy. And you know, you got limbs falling off. And ears that are deteriorating. And all of that kind of stuff. Would you be excited if you were healed? If you couldn't see and now you're able to... Would you be excited? Of course. Of course. But Jesus would say what to them? Don't tell anybody.

[ 16 : 57 ] Well, what are you talking about? I can imagine even the disciples are like, Well, wait a minute. Isn't that what we're supposed to be doing? Aren't we supposed to be saying that this is Jesus and he's our Messiah?

And Jesus is like, Don't tell anybody. Jesus had purposed in his heart to not make it known that he was the Messiah by human flesh.

In other words, by telling people. By saying, I'm the one. I'm the one. He was allowing his actions and his teaching to be the things that people would look to to say, Yes, Jesus is the Messiah. Look at what he's just done. Look at how he just healed that man. Look at how that man's sight has been restored. Look at how that man's leprosy, he's been cleansed. Look at that young man who's been raised from the dead.

Who else could this be but the Messiah? Must be the Messiah. But Jesus wasn't about announcing it.

[ 18 : 07 ] So John's question was not really a question as much as it was a public challenge. Jesus, come on, make it known.

Who are you? Are you the one? And maybe in the back of his mind, John was like, Come on, I know you're the one. Why don't you just say it?

Come on. And if you're not willing to say it, well, maybe, maybe. I mean, I've been in prison here for a year and I've got some doubts. Maybe you would have some doubts after sitting in prison for a year thinking that God had called you to this ministry and you've been shut up in this prison for a year.

And I'd have some questions. I'd have some doubts. So come on, Jesus.

After all, there were some pretty big differences between John's ministry and message and the ministry and message of Jesus.

[ 19 : 19 ] And Jesus begins to highlight them. So the two guys from John the Baptist are sent away. And immediately in their absence, Jesus begins to tell the crowd about John the Baptist.

Okay? Now, understand, when Jesus said, Blessed are those who aren't offended by me, he's not kind of looking down on John.

He's not, you know, questioning John. He's not upset with John. He's trying to encourage John. And look at how he speaks about his cousin, John.

So when John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

All these people would have been familiar with John the Baptist and his ministry. He became famous in all of Israel. Okay? John the Baptist's ministry, everyone would have heard about this.

[ 20 : 23 ] Heard about his ministry. Heard about his preaching. Heard about his message of repentance. What did you go out in the wilderness to see? Did you go out to see a reed shaken by the wind?

Is that what you went out in the wilderness to see? Now, you could take that a couple of ways. One would be, well, of course not. I didn't go out to see a reed get blown in the wind. That's not what he... Or is he saying, did you go out to hear some man who would just be, whose ministry, whose message would just be blown about by every wind of aristocrat or other influence?

Yes, sir. No, you went to hear someone who was a stalwart, who was going to stand for and who was going to declare the message of God openly. Well, what then did you go out to see?

Why did you go out to see John? Did you go out to see a man dressed in fine clothing? That's the idea here. Fine linen and...

No, behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing, they live in luxury and are kings in courts. That's not what you went out to hear. You knew the reputation of John. He dressed in camel's hair. [ 21 : 37 ] Leather belts that he probably made by hand and chomping on a locust. Probably had a few locust legs stuck in his beard. He had a long... He didn't cut his hair.

Didn't have... You can picture it. Little clumps of honey. Little legs still... Well, what then did you go out into the wilderness to see?

A prophet. Someone who speaks for God. A prophet. Yes, I tell you. And more than a prophet. John was more than what the Old Testament prophet, the other Old Testament prophets, their message. His message was, it's coming. He's coming. And you better be prepared. Prepare your hearts. Because God in the flesh will be here.

You need to be ready. You need to be ready. That's what you went to go see. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.

[ 22 : 52 ] That was what John's ministry was about. To prepare the way of Christ. The way of the Messiah. His way to come. I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John.

Now, was Jesus looking down on John? Was he upset with John? I don't think you're upset with somebody and then say, well, among those born among women, how many of...

Let's see a show of hands. How many of you have been born among women? It's kind of a silly question, isn't it? I mean, we all have a mama. Yet the one who is least... Now, get a hold of this because you have to understand what Jesus is saying here.

Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Now, you know who this includes? Me and you.

Because Jesus came declaring the kingdom of God and he introduced the kingdom of God. And we are kind of living in the precursor of that.

[ 24 : 00 ] Jesus is going to come to complete that when he comes again. But until then, you and I, through faith in what Christ has accomplished at the cross, when Jesus died, when he willingly, sacrificially went to the cross, shed his blood, he wasn't doing that as a travesty of justice or, you know, some terrible circumstance that put him in that.

No, he did it willingly. He walked into that scenario to pay the price, your price, my price, for the sin that we've committed, for the sin of all the world.

He went to the cross, shed his blood like a lamb to the slaughter and died so that we could be forgiven.

Heaven could be our home. The kingdom of God, we would belong. We would belong to the family of God, that we would become sons and daughters of the king. You and I as New Testament believers, I don't care how small you are in the kingdom of God.

You have it better than any Old Testament saint could ever dream. They did not have the Holy Spirit living within.

[ 25 : 26 ] They did not have the completion of the cross and all of that to look back toward. They were looking ahead to a sacrifice. They weren't quite sure what that would even look like.

Or if it was necessary, they were even just looking for a Messiah who was going to come and conquer. But you and I is greater.

We are greater than John the Baptist. Not because you're, you know, all that. You know, you're just wonderful. It's just because of where you land in history.

You land on this side of the cross that makes you, in that sense, a bigger beneficiary of what Jesus has accomplished at the cross.

So, a little parenthetical statement. Now, understand that the parentheses are put in there by the translators here, the English Standard Version.

[ 26 : 32 ] But that's not part of the original text. So, just follow along with me with what the translators are saying is a kind of a side thought that explains it.

When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, remember the tax collectors were like one step below the sinners. You had the tax, you know, you had the sinners and the prostitutes and all these other people.

And then you had the tax collectors. They were like, if any of you work for the IRS, I'm sorry. So, when all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

So, they're listening to Jesus preaching to them about who John the Baptist is, and they're like, well, yeah, we liked John the Baptist's ministry.

When John preached, we went out into the wilderness to listen. And when we heard his message of repentance and forgiveness, we responded. And we recognized our sinfulness.

[ 27 : 49 ] We recognized our wicked ways, and we repented of that. And as a demonstration of that repentance, we walked down into the river with John, and were subsequently dunked into that water and brought back into new life.

And that's why we're here. So, when they're listening to Jesus go on about John and how wonderful he is, they're like, absolutely.

That's what the phrase they declared God just means. Well, yeah. Absolutely. But, the part now in the blue. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves.

And what was the evidence of that? Because when they heard John preach, they didn't go out and be baptized by him. They went out and criticized him.

Well, this guy's not from God. Look at him. Look at what he's eating. Look at how he's dressed.

Listen to his message. You guys, we are the children of Abraham.

[ 29 : 02 ] Of course we belong to God. We don't need to repent. It's all those Gentiles out there. It's all these wicked people. The sinners and the prostitutes and the tax collectors and all these Gentiles.

We're fine. Thank you very much. Because we're the sons of Abraham. And Jesus, of course, rejects that thinking. We've heard that before.

John, of course, rejected that thinking. And so they're saying, nope, we reject the purpose of God. It doesn't fit our agenda.

So that's what Jesus is saying at this point. Verse 31. To what then shall I compare the people of this generation?

The people that he's talking to right now. Okay? What are they like? And don't you know Jesus is going to tell us a little parable here?

[ 30 : 01 ] Sort of. It's not a parable in the traditional sense of a parable, but it's a riddle. It is a question that we have to wrestle with. And so let's take a look at this question.

They are like, the people of this generation, they're like children. And when he's talking about the people of this generation, he's talking about the people who are rejecting him. People who rejected John the Baptist's ministry and now they're rejecting the ministry of Jesus.

Let me tell you what they're like. They're like children sitting in the marketplace calling to one another. There's a game going on between the kids that are playing in the streets. We played the flute for you and you did not dance.

Now, apparently, the flute back in the day was a party instrument. I don't know too many people going to parties like, oh man, that guy with the flute. If you're a flute player, I'm sorry.

I'm offending people today. But basically, the description is like of a wedding procession. It's meant to be a party. It's meant to be fun. It's meant to be dancing.

[ 31 : 15 ] We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge. You did not weep. Now, what kind of a song does a dirge remind you of? Or what kind of an event?

It's a funeral. So you got weddings and funerals and we did them both. We've got a wedding thing going on and it's a party atmosphere and it's dancing and it's fun.

You didn't want to play along. We did a dirge. A funeral dirge. We sang that sad song. You're not willing to play that game either.

What's wrong with you? So he goes on. And he compares himself to John. The two ministries.

Look at this. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread, drinking no wine, and you say he has a demon.

[ 32 : 19 ] John was the funeral dirge. John was the hard preaching. John was the repent, repent, repent. You didn't care about that.

You said he had a demon. The son of man, this is how Jesus often referred to himself, has come eating and drinking and you say, look at him.

He's a glutton. He's a drunkard. A friend of tax collectors and sinners. common complaint that was made against Jesus by these religious Pharisees and teachers of the law and the scribes and they looked at Jesus wanting to go to the dining room tables of Matthew, the tax collector.

Why do you eat with them? Well, it's because the sick who need the doctor. Right? And that wasn't Jesus saying, you guys aren't sick, you don't need a doctor.

It was Jesus saying, you don't recognize you're sick. You don't recognize your need of a doctor. And then he says, yet wisdom is justified in all of her children.

[ 33 : 45 ] what? He's saying, listen, whether you follow John the Baptist or you follow Jesus of Nazareth, the wisdom, the discernment that you used in following and accepting their messages, the result of that is proven out by those who followed.

those who chose not to follow, those who rejected John, those who rejected Jesus, their wisdom did not prove well, did not prove well.

So when you look at this difference between John and Jesus, and let's fast forward a couple thousand years to where we're at today and some of the struggles that we have today and I'm going to say that it's struggles with religion that we have.

Okay? Let's take a look at what John perhaps missed when he's in that dungeon and he's questioning, all right, is this, is he the one?

Are we supposed to look for another? I don't really think that, but I'm going to ask that question, I'm going to push this agenda, you know, I'm a hard driver, I'm going to push it.

[ 35 : 21 ] Let's take a look on your notes now. What John didn't seem to understand, and I think sometimes we miss this too. Okay?

So number one, we all have unique giftings and passions and assignments. A lot of times what happens in churches, ministries, is someone has the gifting of the Holy Spirit for one type of ministry, one style of ministry, and their passion is for a particular area of ministry.

You might have someone who is gifted in evangelism, gifted in sharing the message of the gospel, and they're just fired up about homeless people and people who are down and out, making sure that they hear the gospel and that they respond.

And that's their passion, that's their gifting, and maybe that's even their assignment, that's their calling. But that person starts to think that everyone else in the church who doesn't have that same gifting and that same passion is somehow not doing it right.

Not right with God. Because if they were right with God, they would have a passion for these people that are broken and need Jesus. And why don't they?

[ 37 : 07 ] You might have another person who's gifted in the area of teaching, particularly with children. You know, put them in a room full of adults, and it's like, ah.

But put them in a group of children, children, and now it's fun. Now it's exciting. These are not just the next generation of Christ followers.

These young children are Christ followers now and need to be taught, and that's my passion. And how come some of you don't want to get involved in children's ministry?

What's wrong with you? Right? Or someone has the gift of faith, or the gift of giving, and they have the passion, the desire, and the means.

Why doesn't everyone give like I do? Why doesn't everyone have the faith that I do to believe that God can make this happen in our local ministry? What is wrong with you?

[ 38 : 14 ] Do you see where I'm going with this? we have to believe and accept that people are different. People have different giftings, people have different callings, people have different assignments, and different passions.

Now, let me say, if you would say, well, I don't know what my gift is, and you would say, I don't know that I have any passion for ministry, or impacting someone else's life, and I don't know what my assignment is, so I'm not really doing anything, I would say, that's a problem.

Because if you're plugged into the local church, and maybe you're a brand new Christian, and so you're still trying to figure some of this out, but the best way for you to figure some of this out is not to go online and take some spiritual gift test, or just wait for something to fall into your lap, and oh, that's what I'm supposed to be doing.

No. The responsibility that we have as believers in Christ is to jump in. Start getting plugged in. Start asking, what can I do?

How can I get plugged in? And my guess is, you're going to probably get plugged into something that maybe doesn't fit you so well. And that's okay. Not everything fits everybody.

[ 39 : 32 ] If I got plugged into ministry with five and six year olds, they would have a revolt and kick me out. okay?

Doesn't mean that I can't love them. Doesn't mean I can't play with them. Doesn't mean that I can't. But my guess is, I'm not going to speak at their level, and they're not going to understand me, and all those kinds of things.

My calling might not be to a broken person who needs Jesus. but now I'm going to say it differently. I'm not. My calling is still to that broken person who needs Jesus. Might not be my passion, might not be my gifting, but we're all called to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We're all called to give. We're all called to teach. We're all, some of us are gifted, some of us have a passion for it, but it's all part of the body of Christ working together for the good of the body.

[ 40 : 40 ] But we need to recognize that there's uniqueness. There's difference there. People are wired differently. Paul wrote, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

Well, I have a passion for the lost. You don't. What do I sound like? I sound like I'm better than. Okay? Be careful with that.

But to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. You're going to have a different assignment. That's okay. That's good.

It goes on. For as in one body we have many members, the members do not all have the same function, so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members of one.

We need each other. It's basically what Paul is saying here. We need each other. Only let this 1 Corinthians 7, only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him.

[ 41 : 44 ] So the life that you're assigned to is going to be different than the life that I'm assigned to. We're all going to have a different assignment, and that's okay. That's a good thing. Second thing here is, our different assignments call for different strategies.

Our different assignments call for different strategies. We're going to do things differently. The way that I may witness to someone might be different than the way that you witness to someone. The words that I say, the track that I take, the content is going to be the same.

The gospel doesn't change, but the way that we share it may change. 1 Corinthians 9, 19, For though I am free from all, Paul says this, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

So he said to those who were of Israel, I became myself of Israel. For those who were Gentiles, I became like a Gentile. For those who were servants, I became like a servant. I became like the people I was trying to reach.

It's a different strategy for each category of people. And that's fine. And then he says this, Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize?

[ 43 : 05 ] So run that you may obtain it. Let me tell you what this is not saying. We're all running a race, which means we're all pitted against each other.

Right? So we're all starting line, and we're all running a race, and we're running against each other, and we understand that it's a marathon, and it's not a sprint, and we're running, and we're running, and pretty soon I'm going to recognize, you know what, I'm not as fast, and I'm not as good, and I'm not as strong, and I'm losing.

That picture in our minds is not a good picture. The only person that you're running against is yourself. You're calling. Every one of us has the opportunity to win the prize, and I know some people are like, well, wait a minute, does this mean that everyone gets a trophy like in Little League, and they don't even keep in score?

That's not the same kind of illustration here. It's the idea that God has called you to this. God has assigned you this.

He has given you a passion for this. He has given you gifts of the Spirit for this. Are you running that race faithfully? And it's just you.

[ 44 : 25 ] Are you going to complete the race? Are you going to complete the course? Because that's where the prize is. Number three.

Again, this might seem a little bit odd for the pastor of a church to say this, but we're going to say it. if we're going to judge other people and ministries, and some people are like, no, we don't do that.

We're not supposed to do that. And I'm going to tell you, yeah, you're supposed to do that. You are supposed to do that. And then, oh, what about that passage in, where is it at?

Matthew chapter seven? Yeah, it's there. Matthew chapter seven, verse one. Do not judge. There it is. What are you doing telling us to judge? Well, let's finish it.

Lest you be judged by the same standard or the same measure. Yes, we are called to judge. It just means to have discernment, to decide whether something is right or wrong, and the fallout of that, whether someone is right or wrong in their actions or what they are teaching.

[ 45 : 44 ] How do you know that, Rich? Because in that same chapter, Jesus goes on and tells us to look at false prophets and make a judgment about them.

Now, the same standard is going to be used for you, and you better make sure that you don't have a log sticking out of your eye while you're trying to confront someone else, the speck in their eye. The instruction there is to get rid of the log, and then you'll be able to inspect the eye of another. Judge them, if you're going to judge them, judge them by their fruit, right? Their actions and their doctrine.

What they teach. Because you're judging a false prophet. What is the fruit of a prophet? It's what they teach. Now, their actions ought to match up with what they teach, but it's still what they teach. So, are we called to follow false prophets? Are we called to follow false teaching? How do we know it unless we are discerning enough to know, well, this, what this man is teaching, and that's your responsibility every Sunday when you come to church.

[ 47 : 05 ] You're to look at the preacher, and you're going to say, okay, how does what he's saying right now match up with the word of God? We don't judge based on our own personal preferences or what my calling might be.

So, here's that passage in Matthew chapter 7. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will know them by their fruit. By their fruits. How are we going to know whether we're looking at, whether we're clicking through the channels and seeing some religious broadcasting or whether it's we go to a church or listen on the radio or a podcast.

How do we know if what we're listening to, if what we're watching is not from a ravenous wolf? a false prophet? It's because we're students of the word and we know what the word of God says so that we're able to discern, so that we're able to judge.

Not because I'm judging and saying, well, that person's condemned to hell because I said so. It's not what that, it's judging in the sense of, I don't want to follow that person.

[ 48 : 36 ] I don't want to pay attention to their teaching. I certainly don't want to apply it. I certainly don't want to call attention to it so that others would be, come and listen. I would, on the other hand, call attention to it and say, warning, red flag, this person is a false prophet.

Here's how, here's why. That's appropriate. And what we've been called to do, you will recognize them by their fruits.

Finally, God doesn't want our religion. We see this Old Testament and New Testament.

Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 1, God is saying, listen, I don't want your sacrifices, even though God called for sacrifices. I don't want a blood of your goats and your bulls. Listen, I don't want all of this stuff if all it is is just a religious exercise.

If all this is is a way for you to, well, I can be religious on one hand and then live like the devil on the other hand. Right?

[ 49 : 54 ] This is, this is, you might be familiar with this, Godfather Christianity. Some of you may be familiar with the Godfather movies or mafia movies in general.

Or sometimes the mafia is just well known for, well, I'm going, I'm going to mass or I'm going to church and here I am at a baptism and oh, I'm so worse.

And then I'm going to go over here and rat-a-tat-tat and kill some people and be justified because I went to church. And yet how popular it's, it's, it's the way we don't, we're not as gross as that.

Right? I don't think any of you are going out with a Tommy gun and shooting people up. But I do think crowd like this, there's some people that are like, well, yeah, I'm going to go live how I want to live.

Ignore God the rest of the week, but I'm showing up on Sunday morning. So I'm good with God. It's just religion. It has nothing to do with Christianity.

[ 51 : 04 ] Christianity. It's just religion. God wants a relationship with you. Where you learn and you grow and you grow in your relationship with him and there's a given, the take.

And it's, it's that kind of thing that, that you grow into as you make your way through life. Again, Jesus talked about this Mark chapter seven.

Well, did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites? So Jesus was at sometimes wasn't very nice, was he? Right? Because at times he's like calling these, these Pharisees hypocrites and whitewashed tombs and snakes and vipers.

It's not very nice. Well, it was true. Well, did Isaiah, Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written, this people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

That's hypocrisy. That's that. And what that means is, well, I'm showing up to church, but I'm just punching a time clock. I've got my religious check mark. Now I'm not living like that the rest of the week.

[ 52 : 16 ] No way. Read my Bible. Spend time with the Lord. You're not fooling anybody.

In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, your traditions. And listen, we've got our religious traditions just like the Pharisees do.

It's natural for us to always gravitate back into religious duty, religious function, keeping our relationship with the Lord fresh and where it needs to be, where I'm daily repenting of sin, daily crying out to God that I need him because I can't do this on my own.

Well, that sounds like you're getting saved every day. Well, there's a sense where not in my position before the Lord, but on this day, I can't make this day without him.

I can't do it on my own. So this day, Lord, that's what he's after. Not this vain worship.

[ 53 : 26 ] This is what he's after. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. You know what? Religion is fear. Right?

Religion is, I got to go to church because we don't say it out loud, but I'm afraid of the outcome if I don't go to church. Right? If my good doesn't outweigh my bad over time, that's a place of fear. That's a place of, have I done enough good to make it to heaven? That's religion. It's dead. It doesn't get you anywhere. But you have instead, when you've trusted Christ as your Savior, you have received the spirit of adoption as sons.

Adoption as sons is just the one word in Greek, and there's no good English word, word for word, that translates it. Even adoption as sons doesn't quite cut it because it's the idea of God has brought you into his family.

He has gone out of his way to pick you out of the crowd, as it were, and to bring you in and say, you're mine. You're mine. You're mine.

[ 54 : 41 ] And you place your trust, your faith in him to save you, and now he becomes Abba or daddy. Abba is just the Aramaic word transliterated, not translated, transliterated into English.

And if we translated the word, it would be like papa or daddy. It's a term of endearment. He wants a relationship with you where you can day by day cling to him, love on him as he loves you, and live for him in the way that you live out your day.

Lord, this day is for you. This day is for you. And when we do that, we begin to live in a way that is according to his will. And it fits you perfectly.

Romans 12, 2. It fits like a glove. Matthew 11. It just works. If you just stop bucking against doing it his way.

Lord, we thank you so much. Thank you for your word. We thank you for this moment in time where we get to have a glimpse into what's going on in John's heart and to see the doubt, the questions, the maybe a different agenda than what you had.

[ 56 : 23 ] Because, Lord, we never have a different agenda from you. Of course, we do. Of course, we want you to answer the prayers that we have according to the way that we think they ought to be answered and the timing they ought to be answered instead of just fully surrendering to your will and your timing.

It's hard to do. It's hard for us to follow. Just to follow. Just to surrender and follow. Lord, I pray that that's what we would do.

That, Lord, that we would each day surrender to you and trust the day to you. Lord, may you be honored.

And all the things that we do. And, Lord, may we come to the point where we understand you don't expect perfection from us.

You know that we are nothing but dust. That we are frail. That we fall into temptation. That we make poor choices.

[ 57 : 57 ] But every day is a new day. Every hour is a new hour. And you call us back. We thank you for that.

Thank you for your grace. Your mercy and your love. We know that from this point forward, Lord, John, the Baptist would lose his head quite literally. But he never lost you through all of this. Lord, we thank you for the example that he set for us. that when we have doubts that we can go to you and ask. So, Lord, we trust you. We love you. Even in times of doubt, Lord, we keep coming to you. And you keep answering. You keep calling us forward.

[ 59 : 18 ] We thank you, Lord. That the work that you began in us, you will bring it to completion. And that is your promise to each one of us.

We thank you for that. We love you. And we praise you. And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.