

May 26, 2024

Matthew 11: Doubting God

Matthew 11:1 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. 2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Noted shift of context seen here in Matthew's Gospel; the book is written to the Jewish Nation proclaiming Jesus as The Messiah. For the first 10 Chapters, essentially the first 3rd of this book, we have the case laid out for us:

1. Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah
2. Conceived of a virgin
3. Matthew shares how 'earthly king makers,' the Magi come and anoint Jesus as King. Then he positions prophecy to point out that prophets past have written about the Messiah and Jesus fulfilled those prophecies by going to Egypt then raised in Nazareth.
4. John the Baptist and God declares Jesus is His son.
5. Jesus Himself begins to make the case by overcoming the temptation of Satan then as He begins His ministry proclaiming the Good News and Healing the sick.
6. He continues to show Himself as Messiah with His Authoritative teaching with the Sermon on the Mount.
7. He continues to Heal the sick and deliver people from demonic possession showing His power and authority over the physical and spiritual world.
8. Jesus shows His Authority over the Ministry as He begins the process of delivering the Message to the masses by selecting and sending out the Apostles into the Mission field.

At some point, every one of us must come to a place where we can investigate the evidence and make a decision for ourselves WHO we choose to believe He is. Our eternity hangs in the balance on that decision. What decision have you made?

Here in Chapters 11 (and 12) we see the various reactions of the people. Up to this point in Jesus' ministry, at least here in Matthew, we haven't seen much more than the people accepting Jesus. That changes now. The first negative reaction we see is ***DOUBT*** and it comes from John the Baptist in verse 3. John the Baptist is Jesus' earthly cousin. He was filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb and knew Jesus when they were both still in the womb. And, yet he doubted. Just a few verses later Jesus says this "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist..." (Matthew 11:11). We are all human, and there's an enemy out there who likes to use this tactic to cause us to stumble.

Paul writes this in Philippians 2:12 **Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with**

fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

DOUBT is inevitable. You must come to terms with that because you too are human. DOUBT in and of itself is not sin, all of us at some point will face it. Jesus even said to his disciples: 'Oh you of little, faith...'. Doubt. It's what you do with it that can be dangerous.

Matthew 21:21 Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Matthew 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

WHAT can cause us to DOUBT in Jesus?

1. DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Matthew 11:2 When John, who was in prison...

John the Baptist was in a difficult circumstance. Tradition holds that at this point, John the Baptist was held captive by King Herod Antipas, who had him arrested for calling out his sin of taking his brother's wife as his own. The Jewish Historian Josephus tells us he was held at Machabris for about 2 years before he is ultimately executed. John lived his life outdoors and now he is imprisoned 24/7. Indeed, a difficult circumstance. So difficult it produced DOUBT in a man filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb.

DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES come in many shapes and sizes: sickness, loss of a job, accidents, wars, rumors of wars, and the list goes on. Some DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES are no fault of our own, some we bring on ourselves, but regardless, they can cause us to DOUBT.

What do we do? Where do we go? Where did John go? He went to Jesus.

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2. WORLDLY INFLUENCE

Matthew 11:2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah...

Don't count on 'the world' to confirm Jesus to you. John heard about the deeds of Jesus and it caused him to DOUBT. 'The world' doesn't understand the things of God. When Jesus was with them, they did not understand:

John 6:14 After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” 15 Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

26 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

If you are looking for confidence in God, and looking for confirmation that Jesus IS from ‘the world,’ expect to DOUBT.

I Corinthians 2:12 What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Where do we look? To Jesus. If we want confirmation of GOD’S PLAN, go to God, not His creation.

Romans 1:25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

3. LACK OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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YOU must make a decision for Christ. YOU! You cannot live out someone else’s belief. You cannot make it through life on someone else’s experience and you cannot make it to eternity that way. YOUR walk with God will be required to overcome DOUBT.

DOUBT is an attack from the enemy. Paul says in I Corinthians 15:1 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

Hebrews 6:4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age 6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

The importance of your daily walk with The Lord shown by being:

- In His Word
- In communication with Him
- In His Presence with His people is so that we have our own experiences with God so we can be anchored when difficult circumstances and worldly influences come against us.

We get to spend time with God, we don't have to. How will you get to fully understand God and your relationship with Him if you don't spend the time to know it? This is an old problem:

Exodus 33:7 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. 8 And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. 9 As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. 10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. 11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

God is no respecter of persons. He will meet with and speak with anyone and everyone who chooses to spend time with Him. When you DOUBT, go to the source.

4. UNMET EXPECTATIONS

Matthew 11:2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

When you EXPECT God is supposed to do things one way and that isn't the way He does it, that can cause you to DOUBT. Our first reaction in those times is not to rejoice. Yet, the Bible tells us when persecution comes because of the Ministry, James says 'consider it pure joy...' He doesn't tell us to doubt.

So what do you do? Go to the source! That's what John did and that's what we need to do.

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And he added, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me." (Verse 6, NLT)

And blessed is any person who does not take offense at Me." (Verse 6, NASB)

Jesus isn't afraid of your questions. He welcomes your questions. The answers may not be what you want to hear, and He is still ready to respond. When we accept His answer, there is BLESSING. John may not fully understand or agree with his personal situation, but that doesn't mean that people aren't getting set free, thousands are!

Mark 9: 23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

WE must make our own decision to move beyond our DOUBT and follow Jesus.

QUESTIONS

1. Play two truths and a lie. Each person must say two things about themselves and one lie (where you went to school, 3 favorite pizza toppings, jobs, animals you have had as pets, 3 things you have gotten tickets for, 3 favorite subjects in school, etc.)— write them down. Then share and the group must decide which one is a lie. Debrief after: what process did you go through in your mind to decide which statement to guess was the false one? In general, do you usually believe or doubt what people tell you? How could doubting someone be helpful to you? At what point might it move to unhealthy or even harmful?

2. Why do you think it's difficult for Christians to admit spiritual doubts? How could having doubts be a good thing for a Christian?

3. Look at these categories, where do you find yourself with doubts now, or in the past:

- Existence of God
- Creation and Evolution
- Does God really care about me?
- Am I living my life the "right way" to please God?
- Is there only one true God, one way to salvation?
- Is Jesus birth, death, resurrection real?
- God hasn't done what you have wanted Him to do?
- Your own category: _____

What causes us to have these doubts? Why do others struggle with them? Have you been expecting Him to do something for you, or be something to you, that He never promised in the Scriptures? Explain.

4. Do your doubts pull you closer to God or pull you away? Have you seen this dynamic played out in the life and faith of others? Give an example if you can. As a group, honestly evaluate how well you handle seasons of doubt. Do you think of church, especially life group, as an environment where doubts can be shared and discussed in a way that allows true growth to occur? What makes, or does not make, them a safe place?