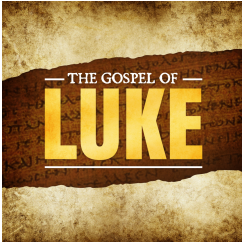


“Dispelling Doubts”

Luke 7:18-23



Theme: Skepticism about Jesus as the Christ is alleviated through acceptance of God’s Word.

Introduction: The issue of doubt is a contest inherent in faith. When you consider the issue of doubt, you recognize that in order to doubt, you must first believe! What you don’t believe, you cannot doubt ... you simply deny. Doubt is the exercise of the mind whereby you desire confirmation of what you believe. Hence, it is a means to the end of greater belief and is helpful when the energy associated with doubt leads one toward confirmation and not outright denial. This is the very sentiment communicated by the father of the demoniac In *Mark 9:23-24* who came to Jesus and in response to Jesus’ statement: *“All things are possible to him who believes,” the man “cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”*

Doubt can result from the presence of sinful conduct – whereby one’s indulgence in sinful activity conflicts with what we know we ought to do and be. Our rebellion creates a disparity with our identity in Christ and we doubt what we have believed – thinking that we have “believed in vain.” Such doubt is designed to check the progress of our indulgence and call us back to faithfulness to the grace of the Lord in being an overcomer and victor through that grace. Yet, doubt creeps into our minds at unexpected, intermittent times when we cannot explain why. Our text today provide us great insight into not only the *arousal of doubt*, but our *anchor in the midst of doubt*. Finally, we are given the *allegiance* that we must maintain in the midst of our struggles with doubt.

I. The Arousal of Doubt is Certain – 7:18-19

A. PERSONAL TRAGEDY¹ – v. 18

1. The context of our text is Luke’s desire to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah – and has been developing this through his careful examination of the life of Christ.
2. He has been intensifying the awareness of the credentials of Christ throughout his presentation – culminating in the previous section with His ability to overcome death through the power as the Lord of Life.

¹ See MacArthur, pp. 145-148

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3. Immediately, Luke decides to address the issue of doubt head-on – reporting the struggle with doubt that a man identified as “the greatest person who had ever been born” – cp. [Matthew 11:11](#)
4. Luke shares: *“The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?’”*
5. John had every privilege and provision of truth that was available at the time –
 - a. John had leapt in the womb of his mother when Jesus was in the womb of Mary,
 - b. ... grown up in Jesus’ extended family with parents who were persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah (Elisabeth & Zecharias),
 - c. ... prophesied that the Messiah was coming, ...
 - d. ... announced the arrival of the Messiah, identifying Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,
 - e. ... declared his unworthiness to baptize Jesus,
 - f. ... baptized Jesus to inaugurate His Messianic ministry,
 - g. ... listened to the voice of God affirming His Son,
 - h. ... declared that Jesus must increase, and John must decrease.
 - i. ... proclaimed that the axe was at the roots of the tree in judgment at the hands of the Messiah (Luke 3:9)
6. His faith was strong, but had been shaken due to the “failure” of Jesus to fulfill His personal expectations:
 - a. His confidence in his vision of what the Messiah would do had given him confidence to boldly & fearlessly confront the sin of Herod & Herodias – guilty of immorality, divorce, incest and a host of other sins – cp. [Mark 6:17](#)
 - b. His expectation was that the Messiah was “make all things right” – and his negative circumstances were confusing him

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since he had sought to be a faithful and sacrificial servant of the Lord.

- c. Again, when a person is in rebellion and sin, negative circumstances are able to be explained – but, when a person is faithful, devout, and sacrificial in their service to God, they have a hard time explaining difficulty.

B. PARTIAL REVELATION – v. 18

1. Another reality that John struggled with was a lack of complete revelation concerning the agenda for the Messiah.
2. We are told that while he was incarcerated, his connection to Jesus and what He was doing was limited.
3. We are told that he was dependent on the reports that his disciples would bring to him – *“The disciples of John reported to him about all these things.”*
4. He wasn’t able to have personal, first-hand information about Christ – but relied on the reports of others.
5. Additionally, he was lacking a major detail in God’s agenda – the reality of the distinction between the 1st and 2nd Advents and the purpose of God to call out for Himself a people from among the Gentiles.
6. The rejection of the Messiah by the people was not something that John and the Messiah’s leaving the house of Israel in desolation until the 2nd Advent was a total mystery to John.
7. Often our own doubt results from our ignorance of God’s Word – we have failed to properly discern the plan of God to bring Himself glory in our lives, the attending graces that He promises to provide, and the revealed obligations to remain faithful and true to Him for “better or for worse.”

C. POPULAR OPINION – v. 19

1. A third and related cause of doubt is the influences of popular opinion (or conventional wisdom).

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2. The prevailing opinion of the day was that the Messiah was going to come and crush Rome as a conquering king.
3. According to the Jewish religious leadership, prior to the coming of the Messiah, God was going to send a series of prophets who would “reappear” – to prove God’s activity in sending the Messiah – cp. [Matthew 16:13-14](#)
4. Hence, John asks Jesus: *“Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?”*
5. In other words, are you the Messiah ... or simply one of the expected prophets?
6. In our day, a majority of “Christians” believe that God wants them to be healthy, wealthy, and happy – that anything that conflicts with this is not from God.
7. When they experience anything such as disease, deprivation, distress, or difficult causes them to question God’s sovereignty – not knowing that there are times when God brings these things into our lives to refine us or give to us the opportunity to glorify Him.
8. The ungodly can glorify God when they know health and wealth, but only genuine recipients of grace can glorify God when life is difficult, diseased, and distressed.

D. PRESUMPTUOUS EXPECTATIONS – *vv. 19*

1. Connected to all of the previous three, this cause for doubt expects God to make things right by judging sinners.
2. This is why his preaching was so focused on repentance – calling people to get right.
3. He condemned the Pharisees declaring that the axe is already at the roots – a God-given prophecy, but improperly interpreted by John as a reference to something that would happen immediately.
4. When Jesus didn’t fulfill John’s expectations to bring swift

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and soon judgment, he was confused – “... *do we look for someone else?*”

Application:

- What are some ways that you have found to prioritize truth over experience?
- Why is it necessary to carefully screen undesirable voices – that is, those that conflict with Scripture?
- When you have struggled with doubt, are there any common stimuli? What can you learn from this?

II. The Anchor in Doubt is the Word – 7:20-22

A. THE CONSULTATION WITH THE LORD – v. 19-20

1. It is important how a believer approaches the problem of doubt – “*When the men came to Him, they said, ‘John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look from someone else?”’*”
2. John understood that the issue of doubt boils down to a relational issue – the personal appreciation and confidence in Jesus Himself; thus, he went to Jesus with his doubt.
3. Jesus Himself is the One who compels our faith – He draws men to Himself, He is the point of why we believe.
4. We don’t merely believe things about Jesus, we believe Jesus – cp. Acts 16:31
5. This is the key to the vitality of our faith – the abide in Christ – to have our faith be something that is nourished, enriched, fruitful due to a constant consultation, consideration, and cultivation of a relationship with Christ – John 15:4-8
6. Hence, John turns immediately to Christ when he struggled with doubt – not to the Rabbi’s, Pharisees, Scribes, or other authors of writings about the Messiah, religious expectations, or philosophical meanderings – but directly to Christ – cp. Colossians 2:8.

B. THE CONSIDERATION OF HIS LORDSHIP – v. 21

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1. Luke comments how that Jesus, not coincidentally to John's approach through his disciples, engaged in a flurry of signs and wonders – *“At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind.”*
2. Jesus' compassion for John caused Him to provide ample evidences of His grace and character as the Messiah by doing the very things that the Messiah was foretold would do.
3. Note how that Jesus refused to provide evidence to people who did not believe in Him, who were not merely doubting but denying that He was the Christ – *Matthew 12:38-39*
4. Yet, for someone who was believing in Him, but struggling, Jesus provided more than ample evidence through His grace.
5. He then tells John's disciples to tell John about what they'd seen: *“And He answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you have seen and heard ...’”*

C. THE COMPREHENSION OF THE SCRIPTURES – v. 22

1. Jesus then lists for them how they ought to summarize what they had *“seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”*
2. Each of these “signs” provide fulfillment of what the prophets in the Old Testament had provided as indicators of the Messianic role – cp. *Isaiah 35:4-6; 61:1*
3. This is the very passage that Jesus had used to authenticate Himself as the Messiah in Nazareth over a year previously – cp. *Luke 4:16-20*
4. Jesus pointed John back to the content of Scripture as the basis for His faith – not simply to what he experienced or expected.

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5. Jesus wanted John's faith to be based on what the Scriptures said – even as our faith must be based not on what we experience, but on what God's Word teaches – cp.

2 Peter 1:16-19.

Application:

- What are some ways that we can insure that doubts cause us to pursue Jesus with greater devotion?
- How can a review of the accomplishments of Christ help settle our doubts?
- Why does a study of God's Word provide us with confidence in our faith; and, what have you found to be the correlation between doubt and the absence of Bible study?

III. The Allegiance in Doubt is to Christ – v. 23

A. THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE STRUGGLE

1. Jesus completes this exchange with John's disciples by making the issue about Him.
2. He says: *“Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”*
3. By saying this, Jesus acknowledges that believers in Him will struggle, but He expresses confidence that they will overcome the challenges to their faith and maintain their hope in Christ.
4. The phrase *“take offense”* [σκανδαλίζω] (Aorist Passive Subjunctive) – describes a person who possesses vulnerability of being brought to a downfall or lured into the sin of unbelief; to be shocked to or trapped in unbelief.
5. We are constantly assailed by various experiences, disappointments, unfulfilled expectations, trials, popular assertions about God and His Christ, and questions about what we do not know.
6. In all of these, we are told that the bottom line is not a focus on all of these, but our focus must be on Christ – *“... at Me.”*
7. Jesus makes our faith about Him – not all of the unknowns, questions, expectations, and assertions that our minds

generate.

8. When I was thinking about marrying my wife, I paused with doubts: “What if she changes? What if I cannot be satisfied? What if she isn’t who I think she is? What if there is someone out there who would be better? What if, what if, what if ...” What caused me to overcome all of these doubts and fears was Pat herself. When I looked at her, talked to her, prayed with her, and worshipped with her, my doubts evaporated, and I became confident so that on my wedding day, I was as calm and assured as any groom has ever been. How much more ought Christ to assuage and abolish any and all of our doubts?

B. THE ASSURANCE IN THE STRUGGLE

1. As we do focus on Christ, and allow our faith to grow in Him, He promises that there will be a blessing – “*Blessed is he ...*” [μακάριος] – a singular reference that is personally addressed to John but applies to us all.
2. To be “*blessed*” is to be especially favored – that is, additional grace is heaped upon the person who looks to Christ, believes in Christ, loves Christ – they find fulfillment and joy.
3. No one who turns to Christ and abides in Him will ever be disappointed – cp. *Romans 10:11*.

Application:

- Should one consider doubt to be a relational struggle or merely intellectual? Why or Why not?
- Does Jesus take our doubt personally? Why do you answer that way?
- What assurances can we maintain even when we doubt certain things in our faith?