

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 11:1-6 | Doubt: Virtue or Vice?
Sunday November 12, 2023

WELCOME:

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 11.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Sermon Notes are in the foyer.

REVIEW:

Last Sunday, we finished our study of Matthew chapter ten.

We learned about the Twelve Disciples and discussed some of their personalities.

We saw how they lived with Jesus and died for Jesus.

We saw Jesus commission and ordain the Twelve into Apostles, giving them the same supernatural powers to heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead back to life.

We learned how Jesus gave the Apostles very specific instructions as He sent them out on a short-term mission trip.

Next, Jesus taught us the reality of ministry—that persecution will come because of this Gospel message.

For there to be good news, there must also be bad — and people respond to the bad w/ vengeance.

Jesus then encouraged the Apostles by telling them not to fear anyone or anything except God alone.

They are to fear the right thing and the right person.

And Jesus closed His sermon by discussing who is worthy of Him and who is not.

It was a message on priorities.

I then suggested that we ~~all should~~ review our own priorities.

It's always good to look in the rearview mirror every few days to see what direction we're truly headed in.

There were four areas to examine.

Are we prioritizing our schedule to glorify God or ourselves?

Our work is certainly a priority—it's a God-given gift—but are we there to serve it, or are we a slave to our work. ?

What about our hobbies, money and free time? Are those areas in our lives being sanctified?

Lastly, what about the cultural issues that we face?

Are the words that come from our mouths filled with grace and truth regarding politics, abortion, and all the forms of sexual sin that are glamorized?

Are we fearful to speak up?

All of that is a review of over the past five weeks.



INTRODUCTION:

Today, we start Matthew chapter eleven.

Jesus provides a teachable moment for us all—regarding a subject that we all deal with nearly every single day.

In some form or fashion, we deal with doubt.

It's one thing to doubt whether the Diamondbacks would win the World Series...

It's one thing to doubt whether so and so will win the election...
But what does Scripture have to say about doubt?

Do you sometimes doubt your own salvation?

Do you doubt that God has truly forgiven you of your sins?

Is doubt a virtue or a vice?

Those are the questions before us today, so let's find out!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 11:1—When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Matthew 11:2— Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples

Matthew 11:3— and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Matthew 11:4— Jesus replied to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see:

Matthew 11:5— The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news,

Matthew 11:6— and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."

These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

*You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord!
He is their help and shield. (Ps. 115:11)*

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 11:1—When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

The Disciples have been with Jesus for about eighteen months.

Jesus officially sends them off on their first short-term mission trip. Go Team!

We know from the other gospels that Jesus sent them out two by two.

their assignment is
They are to preach the Good News and heal people to prove that the Gospel is true.

Matthew 11:1(b)— He (Jesus) moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Notice that Jesus doesn't take a break. He's not on a sabbatical.

He continues to teach and preach "in their towns" (Galilee).

JESUS STAYS ON MISSION.

Although Jesus sent the Twelve, Jesus is not alone.

He most likely has other disciples with him, including His women disciples.

Notice the importance of Jesus' mission—it's twofold.

1. Teaching: We learned how Jesus read the Scriptures and explained the Scriptures.
2. Preaching: He told people to repent of their sins because the Kingdom of God is here and to put their faith in Him as their Savior.

+ **Matthew 11:2**— Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples

+ **Matthew 11:3**— and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

This John is John the Baptizer.

John has been thrown in prison because he rebuked King Herod for his sexual sin.

Long story short
Herod seduced his brother's wife—his sister-in-law, which is crazy weird—she leaves her husband and marries Herod. *-Awkward at family gatherings.*

Well, John calls Herod out on his sin.

And Herod reacts like most people do when we're called out on our own sin—

How dare you tell me what I can and can't do.

So Herod throws John in prison.

+ **Matthew 11:2**— Now when John heard in prison...

What did John hear? How did he hear it?

He probably heard about the power and purity of Jesus' preaching.

He heard about the miracles.

How did he hear about all this?—Through John's disciples.

Prison in the first century was not like our American prison system today.

Our prisons today are a Scottsdale resort compared to what John was experiencing.

Herod threw John into a dark hole at the bottom of the old fort at Machaerus and left them there to die.

Machaerus is a hot and desolate place near the northern part of the Dead Sea.

If family or friends didn't come to bring food, water, and clothing, John would have died in prison.


So, John's disciples are doing their best to care for him.

And you can bet they are giving John the update on Jesus every time they visit.

 **Matthew 11:2**— Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing,

Our Gospel writer, Matt, gives us a theological clue here in verse 2.

Why doesn't Matthew write *Jesus*? (...what Jesus was doing?)

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Matthew refers to Jesus'  title—the Christ.

Jesus is His first name and means “God saves.”

Christ is Jesus' title and means “The Anointed One/Messiah.”

So when you put Jesus' first name and his Messianic title together, we receive a monumental theological clue from God the Father.

+ *Jesus Christ = "God Saves through His Anointed One."*

Now, John the Baptizer knows this.

Before John was thrown in prison—he preached.

+ *Matthew 3:2—"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!"*

John knows that the Kingdom is now on earth.

He also knows who the king is—and that's why Matthew says Christ.

+ *Matthew 11:2— Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing,*

John has learned what the Christ is doing—preaching, teaching, and performing miracles.

But it seems that John is more interested in what the Christ is not doing.

+ *Matthew 11:2— Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples*

+ *Matthew 11:3— and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

So John has questions as he sits in prison— wouldn't you?

Prison tends to make men think.

Put yourselves in John's shoes.

When he first got thrown in prison, He probably thought, That's okay.

The Christ on the scene. He'll spring me out of here in no time.

And then a week goes by—two weeks—a month.

John continues to think....he starts to get Biblical with his questions.

Don't the prophecies say that the Christ shall open prison doors and set the prisoners free? (Isa. 61:1).

I won't be in here much longer! No problem!

But there again...John sat—with nothing to do— but think.

Another couple of weeks go by—maybe a month—but now he's getting frustrated and depressed as the one-year mark clicks by.

So the next time John's disciples visit, John sends them right back to Jesus with a question—

Matthew 11:3— and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

In other words, *What's going on? You are the Christ, aren't You?*

That's what I was preaching. Was I wrong?

No, I can't be wrong—I saw the Spirit —with my own two eyes—descend upon You —and I heard the Father's voice from Heaven with my own two ears.

Or am I wrong? Was it only a vision? Maybe a dream?

Why did Jesus need to be baptized in the first place if he wasn't a sinner? That still doesn't make sense.

Why was Jesus tempted in the wilderness since God can't be tempted?

What's with him asking four fishermen (of all people) to be His disciples?

And now that I think about it, why isn't Jesus in Jerusalem, the Holy City? What's the Christ doing in Cornville?

What's He waiting for?

Why hasn't He overtaken Herod? Why are the Romans still ruling if God in the flesh is walking among us?

And why am I still in prison?

Do you ever feel like that? You're not alone!

Do you ever get frustrated by what God isn't doing—rather than what He is doing in your life?

Are you all worked up by things you'll never be able to change?

Or maybe your questions are much more personal—

Lord, why am I still imprisoned with my family, ^{co-dependent} finances, job, anger, depression?

Why haven't You set me free?

Why haven't You worked it out, Lord?

Sermon in a sermon—this verse is embarrassing for the universal church.

Theologically, it meets what is called the “criterion of embarrassment.”

And it’s embarrassing to the church because many Christians believe that there is no room for doubt in our Christian lives.

So, let’s talk about doubt today.

Is doubt a virtue or vice?

More importantly, what does Scripture say about doubt?

The word ‘doubt’ is scarcely found throughout the Bible—but often times the sense is there. -

Meaning that even though the word is not used—the theme of doubt is baked within the passage. - feel the doubt

In the temptation of Adam and Eve, Satan asks a question that provokes doubt within God’s character. (Gen. 3:1–5).

Genesis 3:1—Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden’?”

When Joseph’s brother’s sold him into slavery, they took his robe, splattered it with blood and gave it to their father.

Genesis 37:33—His father recognized it. “It is my son’s robe,”

The sense here is, *Without a doubt, this is my son’s robe, and he was killed by a wild animal.*

When Job was talking to his friends—he used the word doubt.

Job 12:2—No doubt you are the (only wise) people, and wisdom will die with you!

Can you smell Job's sarcasm of doubt?

Fast forward to the NT, and who is the poster boy for doubt? ("Doubting" Thomas).

John 20:27 CSB—"Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe."

NIV—Stop doubting and believe.

NLT—Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

ESV—Do not disbelieve, but believe."

AMP—Do not be faithless and incredulous, but [stop your unbelief and] believe!

NET—Do not continue in your unbelief, but believe

NCV—Stop being an unbeliever and believe."

Doubt is closely related to fear, which Jesus taught on a few weeks ago.

After all, Jesus told Peter as he started to sink after walking on the water—

Matthew 14:31— "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When Jesus was walking with the disciples, and they saw a barren fig tree that Jesus cursed, Jesus said,

Matthew 21:21—“Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done.

After the resurrection, Jesus stood before the disciples and said—

Luke 24:36— “Peace to you!”

Luke 24:37— But they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.

Luke 24:38 “Why are you troubled?” he asked them. “And why do doubts arise in your hearts?”

So, if we’re not supposed to doubt, why is the greatest prophet?

John the Baptizer?

Many people use James’ epistle as a text proof regarding doubt—

James 1:5—Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.

Pause: Notice that asking God is precisely what John the Baptizer is doing.

James 1:6— But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Is John asking in faith?

In other words, is this a legitimate question?

It’s sometimes hard to know people’s tone as we read Scripture.

There had to be a different tone between the disciple’s doubt versus. John’s tone.

There must have been a longing and sensitivity in John's question that wasn't present when the disciples doubted.

So what's going on?

John's question provides an opportunity to clarify what kind of Messiah Jesus is.

John asks in faith because He knows that Jesus is the Christ—but the problem is that John doesn't know the whole story.

John doesn't have all the information—so he's asking Jesus to clarify.

It's not that John doesn't trust or believe in Jesus.

John is not hesitating to believe—or wavering in his faith—he's simply honest enough to come to Jesus, and ask a simple question to clear up some confusion.

James 1:7— ^{— who doubts} That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord,

James 1:8— being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

Ahh! Here, we get to a different type of doubt.

James is talking about wishy-washy people.

James is referring to the type of people who don't have a backbone.

They don't have any conviction about Jesus.

John the baptizer is a man of conviction — see this next week.

KEYPOINT 1:

Doubt is not always a sign of sin. It may be a sign that someone's thinking. (My paraphrase from Oswald Chambers).

However, whenever there is a critical attitude--

Whenever there is a hard heart, a prideful arrogance, and an unteachable spirit—faith is absent.

+ **Acts 17:32**^{MLT}—When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt,

Other translations say, “sneered, scoffed and doubted.

From an NT Biblical perspective, doubt equates to:

+ Most common—Unbelief (noun)—We choose not to trust.

Unbelievable (adjective)—Beyond belief or understanding.

Distrust (verb)—My mind is already made up.

+ **Definition of Doubt**
A state of uncertainty regarding God, his Word, and his works.

So, with all that as a background, let's look at John's question again.

+ **Matthew 11:3**— “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

This is a straightforward honest question. (Jesus likes questions like these.)

John is not coming at Jesus in anger—like the Pharisees and Scribes.

BTW, John is not the only prophet who has asked questions, had a bad day, or even a weak moment.

Elijah wanted to die after he found out that the crazy queen Jezebel was after him. (1 Kings 19:4),

Jeremiah cursed the day he was born. (Jeremiah 20:14–18)

Isaiah asked how long he was to preach, with no one listening. (Isa. 6:11)

And then we come to John the Baptizer, who is not just a prophet.

He's a prophet's prophet—John's the “super-prophet,”

And yet, it seems like even John has a kryptonite moment.

Pause—I hope you find that encouraging.

The most significant people in the Bible all had weak moments— Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, and others.

We know that John believed that Jesus was the Christ—

But John's circumstances have changed dramatically—he's in prison!

In addition, the delay in judging sin and the increasing opposition to Jesus have clearly shaken John's confidence.

Don't we do the same thing?

Something happens in our lives, and we start to ask questions.

We become disappointed that Jesus is not responding to how we think Jesus should be responding at this moment?

We ask, *If Jesus loves me why is He allowing this to happen?*

We put our expectations on Jesus—as if we know better than Him.

But once we grasp the truth and the reality that Jesus truly is sovereign—that there is not one single thing that is not in His control—

Then we realize that not only “did this” happen—but God ordained it to happen.

Why? For His glory and our good.

And since God ordained it—He also has complete control over it—even though we don’t see or feel it.

Have you ever wondered what Joseph was thinking when he was in prison in Egypt?

Would Joseph have guessed that he would one day be Egypt’s prime Minister while rotting away in prison?

And here we have John the Baptizer—the greatest prophet who had lived until his time.

And he’s a bit confused.

I pray that you take great comfort in John’s faithful (not faithless) doubt.

KEYPOINT 2:

Anyone can have doubts. Doubters are in good company.

How does Jesus respond to John’s doubt?

Matthew 11:4—Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see:

Matthew 11:5— *The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news,*

Matthew 11:6— *and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."*

First things first—notice the grace that was extended to John.

We, too, should extend the same grace when our friends and family start to doubt — and ask genuine questions.

Jesus' answer clears up the confusion.

John's confusion came from his own lens.

He viewed the Christ as someone bringing judgment—that's why John's message was about repentance.

But look how Jesus answered—not through judgment but salvation.

John got the cart before the horse—just ^{like} many of us.

John expected Jesus to bring justice and judgment along with salvation and healing.

But so far, Jesus has brought grace.

John said, "The ax is already at the root of the trees" (Matt. 3:10), but Jesus had not started swinging yet.

Before Christ judges people— He has to give them an opportunity to hear the Gospel message and repent.

Many times, when God gave His message to the prophets, the prophets did not always fully understand the message.

We see an example of this when Jesus came to John for baptism.

John balked at baptizing Jesus.

He couldn't understand why Jesus was asking him to baptize him since Jesus was sinless.

If John had completely understood Jesus' mission, he would have instantly baptized Jesus without questions.

Because he would have known that even though Jesus was sinless, Jesus still needed to obey the whole law of God.

Jesus' baptism wasn't about sin. It was about obedience.

Now, John asks his question in code...

Matthew 11:3— and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

NASB—"Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

The Expected One was a common designation for the Messiah.

So, how does Jesus answer John's question?

Jesus didn't give a simple 'yes or no.'

John had a real question, and Jesus took the time to give him a real answer.

Matthew 11:5— The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news,

Jesus answers the prophet's question through another prophet.

Isaiah's says—

1. He will make the blind see (Isa. 29:18; 35:5),
2. Make the lame walk (Isa. 35:6; 61:1),
3. Cleanse lepers (Isa. 61:1),
4. Make the deaf hear (Isa. 29:18; 35:5),
5. Raise the dead (implied in Isa. 11:1–2),
6. and bring Good News to the poor (Isa. 61:1–2).

Everything Jesus is doing was prophesied 500-700 years before Jesus was born.

So it's like Jesus is saying, "Don't worry John, I haven't forgotten about judgment—I've only delayed it."

Matthew 11:6— and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."

Blessed—highly favored by divine grace.

It's as if Jesus answers John's question—and then they turn and start walking away.

And then Jesus looks up at the crowd and says this statement.

It's as if Jesus says, Be careful of placing your expectations and opinions on Me.

Do you think John had all his questions answered before he was murdered by King Herod?

Do you think you will have all your questions answered before you die?

Or are you irritated and angry because you're living through questions you'll never be able to answer—demanding God answer these things before you believe?

Matthew 11:6— and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."

Offended/Stumbling—to be appalled or filled with disgust.

Refers to a severe loss of faith or even apostasy (where one walks away from Jesus altogether.)

Isn't it interesting that Jesus closes with what John expected?—judgment.

For those who are offended by Jesus, Jesus will judge.

For those who are not offended by Jesus, Jesus provides grace.

Today, technology has contributed to our offenses.

We live in an age where we are the easiest to offend.

We go out of our way to be offended!

Illustration:

Lawsuit / large cross

There is a difference between taking offense (feelings hurt) and being offended by a legitimate wrong or moral issue.

Many times, we take offense where none was intended.

Thin skin? ~~hard~~ hard heart, - other way around

We should also pause when the Scripture offends us.

Jesus blesses those who are teachable.

Having a spirit of teachability means that we "bend our thoughts and ways to God."

Being teachable means that you're able to adapt and change—

How do you know if your teachable?—

Answer: You're able to change your opinions about your opinions.

Being unteachable means that you would rather break your neck— than bow your head.

PREACH:

Is doubt a virtue or a vice?

Is doubt a sign of an open mind or a mind lacking conviction?

Let me give you some contributors to doubt.

The first major contributor to doubt are tragic circumstances.

When a believer has faithfully and sacrificially served the Lord for many years and then experiences tragedy, perhaps even a series of tragedies, it is normal to have doubt.

When a child dies, when a spouse dies, when a spouse leaves, when cancer strikes...

It's okay to ask questions.

There is a difference in asking, "*God, where are You when I really need You? Why have You let this happen to Me. Why don't You help?*"

Versus, "*God, where are You? I can't see you. I'm scared.*"

Please know that it's at this moment that we are tested.

The demonic forces of the world will magnify our faithless doubt — which in turn magnifies more faithless doubt.

So we want to take captive those thoughts unto Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5).

+ A second major contributor to doubt is incomplete revelation.

Many believers today doubt because of ~~incomplete information~~ — they don't have the full story.

They have inadequate knowledge or understanding of His Word.

However, the Christian immersed in Scripture has little reason to stumble.

When God is allowed to speak through His Word, doubt vanishes.

+ A third cause of doubt is the world and culture we live in.

Many Believers today are confused about world events and God's plan because they spend too much in the world.

Their minds are so full of the ideas and opinions of people that they fail to understand God's plan even when they read it in Scripture.

We continually hear people ask, "If God loves everybody so much, why, why, why?"

∩ If God is so loving and merciful, why does He send people to hell? "

Because the Lord does not fit their preconceived ideas of what He should be like, people doubt, are often indignant, and even blasphemous.

Mark 9:14

KEYPOINT: 3

Doubt is a state of uncertainty tucked midway between faith and unbelief.

PRAYER

BENEDICTION

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philip. 4:7)

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