

“More than a Prophet”

(Luke 7:18-35)

Introduction

- At this point in Luke’s Gospel, we have already been told about the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah (Lk.1:5-25 [only in Luke]); the birth of John the Baptist (Lk.1:57-66 [only in Luke]); and the life and ministry of John the Baptist (Lk.3:1-19 [Matt.3:1-17; Mk.1:1-11]); and the imprisonment of John the Baptist:

Luke 3:18-20 ~ “So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.” (Matt.4:12; Mk.1:14)

Later, we will read of the death of John the Baptist:

Luke 9:7-9 ~ “Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. ⁹Herod said, ‘John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?’ And he sought to see him.”

Matt 14:1-12 ~ “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, ²and he said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.’ ³For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, ⁴because John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ ⁵And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. ⁶But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, ⁷so that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.’ ⁹And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. ¹⁰He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, ¹¹and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. ¹²And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.” (Mk.6:14-29)

- As we turn to Luke 7:18-35 (also found in Matt.11:2-19), we find John imprisoned for several months and possible for as much as a year (all for courageously and faithfully proclaiming the Word of God). While languishing in prison, doubts concerning Jesus as the Messiah began to creep in John’s heart and mind.

✓ Illust: “John was incarcerated in the dungeon of Machaerus, the desert fortress-palace perched on a desolate high ridge by the Dead Sea, where today the remains of the castle’s dungeons can still be seen, complete with iron hooks. A more desolate, formidable place is difficult to imagine. And it was there that John’s head would be given to Herodias (cf. Mark 6:21-29)” (R. Kent Hughes; *Preaching the Word: Luke*; p.267).

Luke 7:18-35 ~ “The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ ²⁰And when the men had come to him, 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?’”

²¹In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²²And 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. ²³And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’

²⁴When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury

are in kings' courts. ²⁶What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' ²⁸I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.'

²⁹(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

³¹'To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.' ³³For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ³⁵Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.'"

➤ When studying this long passage, it can be helpful to separate the verses into distinct headings.

1. The Question from John (vs.18-20)

- The first heading is the question from John: *"The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' ²⁰And when the men had come to him, 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?'"* (vs.18-20). Since John was incarcerated, he was dependent upon his disciples to give him news about Jesus and to give Jesus a message from him. At this time, most all (if not all) of John's disciples were following Jesus (Jn.3:25-30). Thankfully, they did not utterly abandon John in his time of need. They were visiting him in prison (Matt.25:36-46).
- To be sure, to whatever degree, John began to doubt if Jesus was indeed the Christ. John was not doubting his faith, doubting God, or even doubting God's promise of a coming Savior. Like many saints in the Bible, especially when going through trials or persecution (e.g., Jeremiah, Elijah, Thomas, etc.), John had uncertainties with regard to how God would fulfill His redemptive plan. From the view of his prison cell, it was difficult to see if Jesus was indeed the Christ.
- Notice that John did not wallow in his doubts. He did not allow them to fester. He proactively sent two of his disciples to Jesus, asking this direction question: *"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* (vs.19). And this is what they did (vs.20).

2. The Answer from Jesus (vs.21-23)

- The second heading is Jesus' answer to John's question. But first, Luke informs us that *"In that hour [Jesus] healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight"* (vs.21). This is one of the many summaries found in the Gospels concerning Jesus' miraculous powers.

Luke 4:40-41 ~ "Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. ⁴¹And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ."

Matt 8:16-17 ~ "That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'" (see Is.53:4)

Mark 1:32-34 ~ “That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered together at the door. ³⁴And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him”

Luke 5:15 ~ “But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.”

Luke 9:1-2 ~ “And [Jesus] called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”

- There was simply no one that Jesus could not cure, which showcased His divine (supernatural) authority over all creation. John’s disciples approached Jesus in the midst of His healings, or perhaps just after, and gave Jesus the question from John. Notice that Jesus did not rebuke John (through his disciples), or show displeasure at John’s question. He patiently answered John’s question, giving him the assurance that he needed – the assurance that Jesus is indeed the Christ!

Conversely, when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign Jesus refused because of their hardness of heart and their unbelief (Matt.12:38-42; 16:1-4). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were insincere, and He knew that John was sincere. Therefore, Jesus harshly rebuked the Pharisees and graciously answered John: *“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. ²³And blessed is the one who is not offended by me”* (vs.21-23).

This assurance comes in three forms: the miracles, the Gospel, and the Beatitude. Each one of these offered John biblical proof that Jesus is the Christ.

The Miracles

Jesus essentially told John’s disciples to tell John what they had witnessed: *“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”* (vs.22). While Jesus’ miracles showcased His power, it also was a fulfillment of prophecy concerning the coming Messiah (e.g., Is.35:5-6).

The Gospel

Jesus also gave John the biblical proof that the Messiah would come preaching the Gospel: *“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard ... the poor have good news preached to them”* (vs.22). Jesus was not merely a miracle worker. His miracles served to authenticate His message, and His message was to *“[preach the] good news”* (euangelizō). This, again, was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the Messiah (Is.61:1-2).

Luke 4:16-22 ~ “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸*‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor’* [Is.61:1-2]. ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

The Beatitude

The third proof that Jesus is the Christ came in the form of a beatitude (lit. a declaration of blessing): *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me”* (vs.23; “offended” [skandalizō]). This would have undoubtedly exhorted John to persevere in his faith, but it also gave proof that Jesus is the Christ. For Scripture has always declared that the Messiah was the Savior for all people but not the Savior of all people. God’s promised Messiah would not be received by everyone, for many would be offended by Him and His exclusive Gospel message (see Lk.2:34; Rom.9:32-33; 1Cor.1:23; 1Pet.2:8).

Like all the beatitudes in the Bible (see Matt.5:3-11; Lk.6:20-22), this blessing has an implied (negative) consequence. Which, in Luke 7:23 would be, “cursed is the one who is offended by Jesus” (Matt.15:12-14; Jn.3:16, 18).

➤ Jesus did not tell John to “check his brain at the door” and “just believe”, and He was not offended at John’s honest question. With compassion and grace, Jesus gave John empirical and scriptural proof that He was the Messiah.

✓ Illust: In 1971, a young Christian named Hien Pham served as an interpreter for a famous Christian speaker in Vietnam. Shortly after Vietnam fell, Hien was imprisoned on accusations of helping the Americans. His jailers tried to indoctrinate him against democratic ideals and the Christian faith. He was restricted to communist propaganda in French or Vietnamese, and the daily deluge of Marx and Engels began to take its toll. ‘Maybe,’ he thought, ‘I have been lied to. Maybe God does not exist. Maybe the West has deceived me.’ So Hien determined that when he awoke the next day, he would not pray anymore or think of his faith.

The next morning, he was assigned the dreaded chore of cleaning the prison latrines. As he cleaned out a tin can overflowing with used toilet paper, his eye caught what seemed to be English printed on one piece of paper. He hurriedly grabbed it, washed it, and after his roommates had retired that night, he retrieved the paper and read the words, ‘Romans, Chapter 8.’ An official was using the pages of a Bible as toilet paper! Trembling, he began to read, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him ... for I am convinced that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Hien wept. He knew his Bible, and knew that there was not a more relevant passage for one on the verge of surrender. He cried out to God, asking forgiveness, for this was to have been the first day that he would not pray.

What his tormentors were using for refuse – the Scriptures – could not be more treasured to him. After this experience, Hien asked to clean the latrine so he could find more pages of Scripture. Each day Hien retrieved pages of the Bible, cleaned them off, and added them to his nightly devotional reading. It was the truth of God’s Word that enabled him to persevere in his faith, even in the darkest of times.

3. The Message from Jesus (vs.24-28)

➤ We find the third heading after “*John’s messengers had gone*” (vs.24). Jesus then turned to the crowds that were following Him – those who were healed and witnessed His healings, as well as those who heard Him preach – and spoke to them concerning John the Baptist. In rapid succession, Jesus asked the crowds three rhetorical questions.

First, Jesus asked, “Did you expect to find a chameleon or a coward” (“*A reed shaken by the wind?*”; vs.24)? John was not someone who was swayed by public opinion or political correctness. His biblical convictions were unshakable, and his morals were immovable. John was faithful and courageous. He not only confronted Herod (Lk.3:19), but he also confronted the self-righteous religious leaders, saying: “... *You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*”⁸ *Bear fruits in keeping with repentance*” (Lk.3:7-8; see Matt.3:7-8).

Second, Jesus asked, “Did you expect to find someone soft or fancy” (“*A man dressed in soft clothing?*”; vs.25)? We know that John literally “*wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey*” (Matt.3:4). More than describing John’s clothing, this description reveals John’s character. He was not indulgent or worldly. He did not dress in “*splendid clothing*” or “*live in luxury*” (vs.25). He “*came preaching in the wilderness of Judea*” (Matt.3:1; Lk.7:24). He was not self-promoting or vain. John was preoccupied with Christ, and with proclaiming the coming of Christ.

Third, Jesus asked, “Did you expect to see a prophet of God” (“*A prophet?*”; vs.26)? This question Jesus directly answered His own question: “*Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you’*” (vs.26-27). Quoting from the Old Testament (Mal.3:1; see Lk.1:17, 76; 3:4-6), Jesus declared

John the Baptist to be the promised forerunner to the Christ. John not only proclaimed the inerrant Word of God (as was true of every faithful prophet) but John also proclaimed the incarnate Word of God (Jn.1:1-3, 14).

This was also prophesied several hundred years before John the Baptist's birth:

Isa 40:3-5 ~ "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

Isaiah likens the proclaiming and preparing that John will do to the making of a highway through the wilderness. This spiritual excavation, according to Isaiah, will be accomplished by raising up every valley, lowering every mountain and hill, leveling all the rough ground and rugged places. In other words, the mission of the forerunner is to bulldoze anything that stands in the way of the coming of the Messiah – to make a highway where there was no highway – "*to prepare the way of the Lord*" (Lk.3:4; Matt.3:3; Mk.1:3).

➤ Perhaps shocking the crowds, Jesus then said: "*I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John*" (vs.28; Matt.11:11). Jesus said that John the Baptist was among the greatest people to ever live. That means that Abraham was not greater than John; that Moses was not greater than John; that David was not greater than John; that Job was not greater than John! This is a remarkable commendation from the Lord. And John was worthy of such praise because He was remarkably faithful to Christ. John's whole life was totally dedicated to being the forerunner to the Messiah. He had no life apart from his life for Christ. He had no wife, no kids, no job, no hobbies, recreational activities. It would seem that John lived in the wilderness until it was time to proclaim the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Potentially shocking the crowds again, Jesus said: "*Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*" (vs.28; Matt.11:11). John's "greatness" was in his faithfulness, godliness, and humility (not worldly greatness, fame, or status). He was blessed with the calling to announce the coming of the Savior, and he was faithful to that calling.

We need to understand that "greatness" and "least-ness" do not refer to personal status or merit, but to blessedness. The New Testament Christian is immensely blessed to be living in the kingdom of God where the risen Christ reigns! John lived before the cross of Christ (before Christ died and rose from the dead), we are blessed to live after the cross of Christ (Christ died, rose, and ascended to heaven).

4. The Response from the Crowds (vs.29-30)

➤ Fourthly, we see the response from the crowds. As it so often is with Jesus, the people were divided: some receive Him as the Christ – "*(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John)*" (vs.29) – and others rejected Him as the Christ – "*but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him)*" (vs.30). Notice that it was the self-righteous religious leaders who rejected Jesus as the Christ (see Lk.18:9-14).

➤ In His teaching Jesus revealed that there are only two options with regard to God and His saving grace; no third option, no middle-road, no neutral ground. Jesus unapologetically declared, "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters*" (Lk.11:23). The exclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that there is only one way to God – one way to be forgiven, one way to heaven, one way to be saved – and that is only through a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 ~ "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (cf. Jn.3:16-18, 36)

Acts 4:12 ~ “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

1 John 2:23 ~ “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”

1 John 5:11-12 ~ “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

- Jesus has always been, and continues to be, a polarizing figure – received or rejected, loved or hated, worshipped or blasphemed. Everyone in the world can be divided into one of (only) two groups: 1) Those who are saved, and 2) Those who are unsaved. Those who are saved have truly received Jesus Christ as their (only) Lord and Savior. Those who are unsaved, no matter how moral or religious, are those who have rejected Jesus Christ as their (only) Lord and Savior.

5. The Parable from Jesus (vs.31-35)

- The fifth heading is the parable from Jesus. In response to the response from the crowds Jesus asked, and answered, another rhetorical question. This parable is a scathing rebuke of those rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ (*“this generation”*; vs.31; cf. Lk.9:41; 11:29; 17:25). He likened them to *“children”* (vs.32; *paidion*) playing in the streets and no one would join in either the celebrating (perhaps a mock-wedding) or their mourning (perhaps a mock-funeral): *“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep”* (vs.32). Neither John nor Jesus would play (participate) in their self-righteous religious games.

In response, like bratty children, the religious leaders demonized John (*“For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon’”*; vs.33), and blasphemed Jesus (*“The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”*; vs.34).

- Both John and Jesus called for them to repent (Lk.3:3, 8; 5:32; 13:3, 5; Mk.1:14-15), but they refused. Steeped in self-righteous pride, they rejected Christ (and the forerunner to the Christ, and the apostles of Christ, as well as the prophets of God).
- In stark contrast to the self-righteous religious leaders, Jesus said: *“Yet wisdom is justified by all her children”* (vs.35). That is, the true *“children”* (vs.35; *teknon*) of God will vindicate (*“is justified”*; *dikaioō*) God’s *“wisdom”*, repent of their sins, and be truly saved – by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Conclusion

- I want to close this sermon where it began – and the issue of doubting. While this is not the main point of the passage, it is a topic worth exploring biblically. Here are seven

Seven Ways to Deal with Doubt

1) Remember that even great and faithful followers of Christ were not perfect.

Moses ~ When God called Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he free the Israelites from their 400 year enslavement in Egypt, Moses repeatedly questioned and doubted God’s plan (Ex.3:11, 13; 4:11, 10, 13).

Abraham ~ Both Abraham and his wife Sara doubted (laughed at) God’s promise that they would have a child in their old age (Gen.17:17; 18:12) – in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham (Gen.12:1-3; 15:5).

Job ~ After Job’s initial godly response to his immense suffering and sorrow (Job 1:20-21; 2:9-10), he would later curse the day of his birth (Job 3), hope that God would kill him (Job 6:9), and contend with the sovereignty and character of God.

Elijah ~ After the great victory against the 450 prophets of Baal, Elijah feared for his life, felt all alone, and hid in a cave asking God to kill him (1Kgs.19:4).

David ~ One of Israel's greatest kings, David was at times prideful, a liar, an adulterer and a murderer.

Thomas ~ Although Thomas was faithful and courageous (Jn.11:16), he infamously doubted Christ's resurrection declaring "*Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe*" (Jn.20:25).

Peter ~ As with all the apostles, Peter often doubted Christ and most notably denied Christ three times (Matt.26:69-75; Lk.22:54-62).

John the Baptist ~ Of whom the Lord said, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John" (Lk.7:28).

Remember, Jesus alone is the only sinless human!

2) While doubts are common, they must be brought to the Lord.

John the Baptist is a great example for us of going to the Lord with your uncertainties or doubts. While we cannot send messengers to Jesus (as John did), we can seek Him through prayer and the reading/studying of God's Word. What we must not do is withdraw from the Lord – stop praying – in times of discouragement, doubt, or despair.

Prov 3:5-6 ~ "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Mark 9:21-24 [Jesus healing the boy who was demon-possessed] ~ "And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. ²²And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything [*dynamai*], have compassion on us and help us.' ²³And Jesus said to him, 'If you can [*dynamai*]! All things are possible [*dynatos*] for one who believes [*pisteuō*].' ²⁴Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe [*pisteuō*]; help my unbelief [*apistia*]!'"

Phil 4:6-7 ~ "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

James 1:5-8 ~ "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

3) Battle your doubts with the truth of God's Word.

Jesus assured John with the prophecies and promises from Scripture. Unfortunately, all too many Christians spend little time in the Word of God making them unprepared for the spiritual battles of doubt and discouragement (they use the Bible for "break glass in case of emergencies" only). Others set aside the Bible when they are discouraged, doubting, struggling in their faith.

Ps 119:11 ~ "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

Rom 10:17 ~ "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Eph 6:10-17 ~ "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”

4) Make distinctions between ignorance, doubt, and unbelief.

These are important distinctions to make. It is good to be reminded that God’s knowledge is infinite and perfect, and our knowledge is not. Sometimes, what feels like doubt or uncertainty can simply be ignorance or questions. None of us have all of the answers. Having questions about God, or God’s Word, is not the same thing as doubting or disbelieving God.

Matt 6:28-30 ~ “And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”

Matt 8:23-27 [Jesus calmed the storm] ~ “And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing.’ ²⁶And he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid [*deilos*^(3x); or “timid, cowardly”], O you of little faith [*oligopistos*]?’ Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. ²⁷And the men marveled, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’”

Matt 13:58 [Jesus rejected at Nazareth] ~ “And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief [*apistia*].”

Matt 14:31 [Jesus, and Peter, walking on water] ~ “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith [*oligopistos*], why did you doubt [*distazo*^(3x); or “waver”]?’”

John 20:27-29 ~ “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve [*apistos*], but believe [*pistos*].’ ²⁸Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ ²⁹Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed [*pisteuō*] because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed [*pisteuō*].’”

5) Don’t let doubts keep you from growing in your knowledge of, and faith in, God.

Satan wants you to struggle with, and wallow (spiral) in, your doubts. He wants you use your doubts to keep you from growing spiritually. He wants you to stay “in the valley” so you will not try to climb to the “mountain top.” We must fight spiritual battles in order to grow and persevere in our faith.

Eph 4:15 ~ “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ”

Col 1:10 ~ “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Heb 12:1-2 ~ “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set

before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

2 Peter 3:18 ~ “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

6) **Focus your thoughts on God’s character, power, and promises and not on your problems or performance.**

Feelings are not a safe storehouse for our assurance of salvation. Likewise, self-centeredness (“living in a room full of mirrors”) does not lead to spiritual maturity. When we are preoccupied with self, our minds drift away from the goodness and greatness of God.

Luke 7:22-23 ~ “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. ²³And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’”

2 Cor 4:16-18 ~ “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Col 3:1-2 ~ “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

7) **Don’t let what you don’t know eclipse or supplant what you do know.**

Sometimes, for various reasons, we can unduly fixate on the more peripheral (even trivial) things while ignoring (or forgetting) the more important truths. Satan is a liar and a deceiver (Jn.8:44; Rev.12:9). He desperately wants to destroy your faith (Lk.22:31; 1Pet.5:8). We can be assured that God has revealed (or will reveal) to us all that we need to know, and that *“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness”* (2Pet.1:3; Eph.1:3).

Ps 42:11 ~ “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

2 Tim 2:11-13 ~ “The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; ¹²if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; ¹³if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.”

2 Tim 3:14-17 ~ “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Heb 6:13-19 ~ “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴saying, ‘Surely I will bless you and multiply you.’ ¹⁵And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. ¹⁶For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. ¹⁷So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for

God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain”

- Doubts can arise for many reasons (fear, suffering/sorrow, temptation,). The antidote is basically the same, no matter the reason. We need to persevere in our faith, taking our troubles and trials to the Lord in prayer and fighting against doubt (or disbelief) with the truth of God’s Word.

Jude 1:1 ~ “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept [*tēreō*; guard (observing carefully)] for Jesus Christ”

Jude 1:20-23 ~ “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep [*tēreō*; guard (observing carefully)] yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. ²²And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”

Jude 1:24-25 ~ “Now to him who is able to keep [*phyllassō*; guard (protecting against attack or loss)] you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

1 Peter 1:3-9 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept [*tēreō*; guard (observing carefully)] in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded [*phroureō*; guard (keeping safe)] through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

- God commands us to keep ourselves in the faith, and He promises to keep us (true believers) in the faith (1Jn.2:19). God instructs us to persevere in Him, and He enables us to persevere in Him. God calls us to put our faith in Him, and He assures us that our faith in Him is neither irrational nor in vain. God commands that we hold on to Him “for dear life”, and He assures us that He is holding on to us – even if our grips on Him slips.

Rom 8:38-39 ~ “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

John 10:28-29 ~ “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Ps 94:18 ~ “When I thought, ‘My foot slips,’ your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.”

Phil 1:6 ~ “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”