

Shaken Faith

Two Types of Doubt

What do you do when your faith is shaken? As a believer, what do you do when your belief has collided with a situation that has challenges and tries you? What do you do when the very foundation of your life has been pulled out from under you, like a magician pulling the tablecloth out from under a setting of dishes? How is your faith when you are told you have cancer, a loved one dies, your life plans are shattered when your career is suddenly gone. When Christians have doubt is it sin? What are we to do with doubt?

In our passage from Luke chapter 7, we have two types of doubters. The first is represented by John the Baptist or his messengers. John has been placed in Herod's prison because he did what God wanted him to do. John was sent to be the forerunner of the Messiah and was obedient to God's calling. John preached what God wanted him to preach. He called everyone who came to listen to his preaching to repentance and faith in the Messiah. He did everything God asked, including telling King Herod that he was in a sinful lifestyle for having a relationship with his brother's wife. John is obedient to God's calling and because of his obedience he is thrown into Herod's prison for telling the truth and for saying things that needed to be said, things no one else dared to say.

John was the forerunner of the Messiah. When he preached at the Jordan River, he introduced Jesus to all gathered, "[Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!](#)" (John 1:29) Now in prison his faith had been shaken and doubt or impatience has crept in. He was no skeptic, he was faithful, but

where he needed help was - could he place his life, without reservation in the hands of God. After all, look where following God and trusting Christ had gotten him so far. John stands as a monument that sometimes God's will for one of His children is not comfort and a life security - but faithfulness is filled with trials and suffering.

In Luke chapter 3 when people asked John if he was the Messiah, he responded, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (v.16-17) John may have wondered why Jesus as the Messiah had not begun to affect change in the world by gathering the believers and burning the chaff, the unbelievers, like Herod with unquenchable fire. John's followers may have wondered this as well. So, he sent 2 of them to see Jesus and his mighty works to bolster their faith. Upon their return they would share these mighty works with John's other followers. I wonder if I am, at times, like John – it is not Jesus I doubt but I doubt my own faith, my ability to live faithfully.

The second set of doubters are represented by the Pharisees and Lawyers. They are skeptics. They have no faith at all but are relying on their own righteousness, intellect and logic. They were disbelievers and as verses 34 and 35 show - when it came to John the Baptist, they said that he had a demon. They were also skeptics and disbelievers concerning Jesus and called Him a drunkard and a glutton. They were offended when John and Jesus preached repentance to them. Their approach also meant they did not have to recognize their sin and need for a Savior.

How does Jesus restore the faith of John? How does Jesus restore the people's confidence in him as a prophet? Beyond prophet, how does he help them have faith in his Messiahship. What steps can we take when we find our faith is tried by life's struggles? I hope this morning we will see how Jesus helps John, how he deals with the skeptics, the Pharisees, and how we need to approach our doubts.

Please stand and hear the inspired Word of God. Reading Luke chapter 7 beginning at verse 18, "The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John,¹⁹ calling 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?'"²⁰ And 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?"'"²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.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.²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'"

²⁴ "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? A reed shaken by the wind?'²⁵ What 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.²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'"

²⁸ "I 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,³⁰ but 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? ³² They 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.” ’ ”

³³ “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ 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!’ ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”

Doubting Believers

In verses 18 to 20 doubt has shaken the faith of John and some of his followers. John is now in prison under one of the most wicked tyrants of the ancient world, King Herod. John is suffering all this for doing the right thing! When John’s faith was being tested, when he doubts - he went to the one place we must all go if our faith is ever tested – he goes to Jesus. Since John could not go himself, he sent messengers to Christ.

John’s personal struggles were beginning to take a toll on his faith. As he lay in Herod’s castle prison wondering, thinking, and considering he asks, is Jesus really the Messiah? I believe he may have doubted himself rather than Jesus. He asked himself what he really believed. Was Jesus really the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of God’s people? Was Jesus the One or should John and his followers look for another? Is this really the Kingdom of God? Is Israel really

being restored? John may be asking, “Why is all this happening to me? If Jesus is the Messiah, then why am I here in prison? Why isn’t Jesus changing the world?”

Many people today, when they doubt, do not go to Jesus. They would rather build their case on hearsay or what they believe is true by their sin nature and man’s logic or they set up a “straw man” argument. They do not go to the source of life and eternal truth. Where did John go when doubts began to attack his mind? When he doubted, he went to Jesus. Since He couldn’t go himself, he sent two messengers to Jesus and they asked John’s question word for word, “[Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?](#)” (v.19)

What was John asking of Jesus? John is asking, “Are You the Messiah that I thought God showed me, are you the one we have been waiting for or should we keep looking?” Understand John is no skeptic, he has been faithful to God’s calling. However, things were not going like he thought and he was confused and discouraged and did not understand what God was doing. How was his being in prison going to help usher in the New Covenant?

Have you ever been in that situation? Have you ever been confused and tried by the will of God? Have you ever been obedient to God and then confused by how things unfold and doubt crept in? Like you and me, John is a man born in sin who believes in the promises of God who knows and controls the future while we do not know the future.

Here is what I believe is the real issue going in John’s thinking – John is asking himself, “Do I really believe and do I really trust Christ with my life even though things are not going well. Why am I suffering and going through this trial?” John was suffering and so doubt has crept into his faith. I remember when I became a Christian and everyone told me my life would now be so wonderful. Yet, in the beginning it was gut wrenching as I had to face my sin.

The peace came but doubt often filled my mind in those early days. My doubt was my doubt. There is only one source for answers and peace.

Jesus Alleviates Doubt

As the source of eternal truth, Jesus gives answers, spiritual strength and these bring peace. Reading at verse 21, “*In that hour he Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.*”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.*”²³ *And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’ ”* Jesus answers John’s messengers in 2 ways; first he shows them his power to do the supernatural because he has the power and authority of God the Father and then he quotes the Scripture of God.

This account found in 3 verses of Luke is amazing. Jesus is asked the question by John’s friends, “Are you the One?” Jesus answers, “You men, go and wait over there and watch” ... Luke uses the phrase “*In that hour*” to show God’s perfect timing. It is like Jesus says to John’s messengers, “Don’t take someone else’s word for who I am or am not or listen to stories others have told. I will show you, watch and see for yourselves. In that hour Luke tells us, Jesus heals those with diseases and plagues, he casts out evil spirits, he restores sight to the blind and many other things not mentioned. Wow, is not God’s timing perfect? At the very moment John’s friends come to Jesus, people are already lined up for Jesus to miraculously heal so that John’s friends could be eyewitnesses and go back and share with John the answer he sought. Jesus is, in fact, the One, the Messiah, the Christ.

Not only does Jesus tell the disciples of John what he has already been going on in his ministry, he now shows them, but then He does something to add weight

and give even more proof. Jesus knows that John the Baptist is a student of the Old Testament and knows the Scriptures. Jesus quotes passages of Scripture to bring John's mind and thinking back into proper order. When one studies the Scripture, it gets our focus off ourselves and our struggles and sets our minds on the things of God. Jesus quotes Isaiah so these men will quote Scripture to John.

These scripture verses say that during the reign of the Messiah ... verse 22 quotes Isaiah, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped ..." from chapter 35:5 and from chapter 61, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ..." (v.1) As Isaiah also wrote, "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead." in chapter 26, verse 19. Jesus continues quoting the Old Testament and prophet Malachi in verse 27.

Jesus shows John's disciples that he is doing exactly what the Old Testament scriptures of the Bible says the Messiah will do. Jesus shows them and then tells them to go back and share the miracles they saw and quote these verses to John. He knew John's followers having seen miracles and quoting these verses from the Scriptures to John would give John the context and all the verses surrounding those quoted and his faith would be strong again. John knew what Isaiah said about the Messiah not only in chapters 26, 35 and 61, but in all of chapter 53. For John the prophet Isaiah would confirm who Jesus is.

What I find interesting is that Jesus doesn't quote the ending of Isaiah 61:1. This was the very problem John was having. You see, John was in prison and he could not figure out why he would be in prison. For if the Messiah had

arrived the Scripture prophecies teach that those in prison and those who are captives would be set free. Jesus does not quote the end of verse 61:1, which reads, “[he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound ...](#)” Why did Jesus not finish verse 61? Can you think of a reason why? The answer is, because it was not that time yet. In order to set the captives free, Jesus was going to have to die and the time for His death had not come yet. For John, he needed to be reminded that some of the promises concerning Messiah were coming to pass but in God’s providence, they all had not come to pass yet. If Isaiah chapter 53 predicted Jesus’ death, then could John have peace about his imprisonment and possible death?

John would understand as he was in prison now, but that the day is coming when King Jesus will reign over all the earth. Even though now His reign was just in certain areas, a day is coming when it would be worldwide. I believe he took comfort in that day. We can also. King Jesus currently reigns in the hearts of believers. There is a day coming when all the earth will be His footstool and His reign will be universal. The Psalmist asked in 11:1 and Luke quoted and wrote in Acts 7:49, “[Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?](#)”

Even in the day of John’s trials, liberty was proclaimed to the captive and the prison was opened for John. Physically he was confined, but his heart was set free as he began to see that King Jesus could be trusted in all things, even suffering. John could place his trust in Jesus. We too can place our lives in the hands of Christ. When we have doubt - seek Jesus, trust him and he will give you answers and peace.

Jesus speaks about John in verses 24 to 27. Jesus tells the people that John was a prophet and more than the prophets who came before him because he alone

was the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus concludes that John is greatest of prophets, verse 28 says, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.” John’s greatness was founded in that it was he who introduced Jesus as the Messiah to the world. All of the prophets of the Old Testament before John longed to see the day when their prophecies came to pass. Only John prophesied and then lived to see it unfold.

Jesus follows his statement about the greatness of John in verse 28 with “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” The newest and weakest Christian is greater than God’s prophet John the Baptist. How can this be? As a new Christian I did not live out my belief as faithfully as John. However, the answer is simple, we are the least in the kingdom, but because of Jesus resurrection, we have experienced the finished work of Jesus. We know from the Scriptures things John only dreamed of. Because of the resurrected Christ we have God the Holy Spirit living within us to help deal with our sin and doubt. We have experienced sin, like all Old Testament saints, but we have experienced repentance and forgiveness and because of the dark Friday of the cross and the empty tomb of Sunday. We know of Jesus’ conquered sin and death for those who believe. We know from the right hand of God the Father in heaven he intercedes for the saints. These are things John did not experience. John saw the beginning the redemption for all mankind through Christ – we see Jesus’ redemption and anxiously await his return and eternity. The Apostle John tells us in Revelation about the end of history – Satan’s defeat, the death of all sin and life for eternity in heaven in the presence of God. This is what we wait for.

Two Responses To Christ

Not only did John’s messengers witness the miracles of Christ and the confirmation of Jesus found in the Old Testament, but there were many other

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

The first response comes from many of the people that observed Jesus and the messengers of John, among these witnesses were tax collectors. This group declared God right and just, they recognized their sin and their need for a Savior. They knew they needed to repent before the Holy God and His Messiah. The second response came from those heard, but disagreed with John’s teaching and refused to accept the miracles and teachings of Jesus. They did not want to admit their sin so they disputed what they saw and heard. They justified themselves and felt no need for repentance. To avoid the truth these Pharisees and lawyers went on the attack. These Pharisees began saying John was a demon and therefore could not be believed. Jesus could not be the Messiah because they claimed he was a glutton and drunkard because he spent time with the lower classes of society – with tax collectors and sinners and they were neither and therefore they were able to judge both their fellow Jews and the only begotten Son of the Living God who stood before them justified by many proofs found in the Scriptures and in Jesus’ miracles and teachings. It would not matter if they saw God part the Red Sea or bring manna from heaven they would refuse to believe. They would never agree with God for he got in the way of what they wanted. It is the same truth today for those who recognize their sin and need for a Savior and those whose hearts are of stone and refuse to believe despite the many proofs that Jesus is the Christ.

The Pharisees said John was insensitive to people’s needs because what he taught was narrow, harsh and exclusive. Jesus came preaching repentance but they did not respect his authority, he was too concerned with social needs and was too inclusive. For these hard-hearted unbelievers, either approach was wrong and they

would never agree with God, but God's truth is not dependent upon their agreement.

Today it is the same there are two groups – those that respond to God's truth and their need of repentance and a Savior and those who reject God because of their ambitions.

John was used mightily by God even though he had doubts. Peter denied, Thomas doubted, but they saw the truth of Jesus in the end and they were used for the kingdom work of God. You can be used by God even though at times you doubt. When we doubt, like John, we are to turn to Jesus for answers and trust he has a purpose for all things – even though we cannot see the future. This is basis John preached and this is why we are to share the Gospel of Good News without regard of how people respond.

My beloved be filled with the Holy Spirit of God and surrender to him and your doubts will be fewer and you will bless others in the name of Jesus Christ. I pray we will be a source of blessing to each other and to those God places in our lives. Jesus is the source of all truth and he alone takes away our doubt.