

April 14th 2013: John The Baptist #7: John The Doubter :Luke 7:18-23

The title for my message about John the Baptist this morning is John the Doubter, **and you may feel** that is a **little harsh** in light of the amazing and effective ministry that this man had.

But the truth of the matter is that I have not chosen such a title in order to have a go at John **but to show how even those closest** to God can have doubts about the way God is doing His job from time to time.

When John had this moment of uncertainty about Jesus, he was in **prison** and had been for some time. **King Herod had put** him there because of the things he had said about the king marrying his brother's wife Herodias while his brother was still living.

Something forbidden by the Mosaic law.

John's prison experience was far from pleasant **but the worst** thing for John was that it separated him from his mission as the announcer of the Messiah. **He would have known that the chances** of him ever having his freedom again were extremely small, **and now** he was beginning to wonder **whether his ministry had been effective.**

When he had been able he had faithfully pointed to Jesus **as** the coming Messiah who was much more powerful than him, **for John could only** preach a coming Judgment **but the Messiah** would bring that judgment into being. **John had declared concerning Jesus in Luke 3:19**

"I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps 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 he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

That was His expectation of the Messiah. As one who would instantly **bring into being the judgment** that is to come against the unrighteous, and **then set up forever His kingdom** on earth.

What John didn't understand at that point was that his **expectations were true but his timing was way out.**

That there will come a day when the Messiah will judge the earth and all in it with righteousness, **but first must come the day of God's Grace.**
The day of God's favour. The day of God's rescue.

So John's doubts resolved around the fact that **Jesus was not** doing what the Messiah he had so publicly announced, should be doing, **and neither was He** being that strong, powerful, take no prisoners sought of character that he had predicted and in his mind the world needed.

And it is also strongly possible that **John began to question** the fact, **that if Jesus was** indeed this strong and powerful Messiah, **how come** that He was content to leave him, His so faithful prophet, **in a hell hole of a prison, at the mercy of a weak king and a vindictive woman?**

Consequently, whereas previously John had spoken of the Messiah as ***“one who is more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. Now,*** through his disciples he asks Jesus, ***“Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”***

Os Guinness in his book “In Two Minds” wrote this about doubt:-

“To believe is to be ‘in one mind’ about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be ‘in one mind’ about rejecting it. To doubt is to waver between the two. To believe and disbelieve at once and so be ‘in two minds’.

That probably sums up John’s position, and it’s a position that most of us at one time or another, will find ourselves in, **even if it is only for a moment.**

I read that in his book ‘Spiritual Depression’, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:-

“Doubts are not incompatible with faith.....Some people seem to think that once you become a Christian you should never be assailed by doubts. But that is not so. Peter still had faith(as he panicked in the storm in Matthew 14).....His faith was not gone, but because it was weak, doubt mastered him and overwhelmed him and he was shaken

John was shaken for a while by his doubts **and I think we can all** understand that and empathize with him. **But the more important thing** for us to see is **how Jesus responded to John the Doubter.**

For John made his doubts official when he selected two of his disciples to approach Jesus and **to deliberately ask Him** that very strong question:-

"Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"

The question was asked in public by two witnesses. **John's doubts** about Jesus are **right out there in the open.** Everyone waits to see what Jesus will do. **Waits to hear** what He will say **for His number one supporter is wavering.**

And the amazing thing is that **Jesus just keeps on doing** the things He has been doing all along. **We read in v21**

At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.

And then He turns to the two disciples of John and says, v22-23(CEV)

"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. Blind people are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People who have leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can now hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news.²³ God will bless everyone who doesn't reject me because of what I do."

For those who knew their Old Testament, and that definitely included John and his disciples, **the connection Jesus makes here** between His acts and several passages in Isaiah **is totally obvious.**

Isaiah 35:5-6 ***Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.***

Isaiah 61:1

***The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,***

And just as obvious was the way Jesus answered John's doubting by causing him **to focus on what Jesus was doing** constantly around him, **rather than** on the things John thought He should be doing that He wasn't.

And also, to focus on all the promises of Scripture that He was **constantly fulfilling, rather than** the image of an all conquering and all judging Messiah, **that John seems to have preferred.**

The Baptist World Aid magazine, "be change" is available today and the first article in it is written by Scott Higgins, one of Baptist Aid's

He begins his article in the following way:- ***In February 2011 I walked into my doctor's rooms to be told I have Parkinsons disease—that over time I will lose the ability to control my body. At 45 years of age I was young to be diagnosed. There is no cure.***

For years I have wondered about the role of God when the world doesn't function as it should. I have debated, theologized and speculated. Now the questions are much more personal. Did God will me to contract Parkinsons? If so, why? If not, where is God in this?

Then a little later in the article he goes on to say this:-

I don't know why I have Parkinsons or why the Tsunami hit Aceh. Indeed, it may well be there is no higher purpose to explain them. What I do know is not an answer, but a person. God. Revealed to me through Jesus. Good. Wise. Loving. Graceful. Kind. Trustworthy.

Scott is doing in his life exactly what Jesus instructed John to do.

He is accepting that there is **not an answer available** for him at this point of time **for all the things that niggle** at the edge of his beliefs, but **there is a person—God revealed in Christ Jesus.**

And what that person has done and still does for Him and so many others **is beyond all doubt. God has revealed** His willingness to suffer out of love for us, **and despite** all the questions that arise **and** the doubts they at times generate, **that love** is solid like an anchor holding fast to our souls.

We do not know how John responded to the message that Jesus sent back to him, **but we do know** what Jesus thought about this John.... who

For straight after those messengers left Jesus begin to speak about John in glowing and commendatory terms. **He never rebuked him** or disparaged him before **others for his lapse in trust**, but praised him for his faithfulness.

Jesus knew that John would pull through this because John belonged to God and God would keep him.

And that is the most encouraging part of the whole story for me.

That whatever trap I may fall into at times **of feeling** despondent with God, or **maybe doubting** the way that He is doing His job, **He never** stops looking upon me with love and joy **as His** special and unique work of art.

And that I can know with certainty that whatever weaknesses there are in me, **my journey as a child of God** depends ultimately upon Him and **not me.**

And that the Lord Jesus who gave His life for my eternal future **can cope** real well with any issues in me, **and has given** me the supreme promise, **that he who** began a good work in me and in you, **will carry** it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6 God is the one who began this good work in you, and I am certain that he won't stop before it is complete on the day that Christ Jesus returns.

