

Series: Luke
Text: Luke 7:18-35
September 27, 2015: Gospel Community Study Guide

This Study Guide is based on a sermon by Dr. Joshua Mack. You will find the link to the sermon here.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sid=1011553030>

Getting Started:

We are going to talk a little bit this evening about a believer's doubts. Do you think doubt is good or bad? Why or why not?

The Big Idea:

In heaven, we won't ever struggle with doubt. But until heaven, genuine believers might have to work through difficult doubts. In this lesson, we will look at Jesus' response to John the Baptist's doubts and learn how to deal with our own.

Into the Bible: 7:18-23

Read Luke

Let's try to get the context for this story. What has happened in verse 17? Why do you think that was happening?

One of the results of this was that the followers of John heard about what Jesus was doing and reported these things to him. Why did they have to report these things to John? Why couldn't he have just heard about it himself?

What has John done that got him in the position he's found himself?

Now, we need to put this in perspective. Read what Jesus says about John the Baptist in Luke 7:28. What are some of the things that make John the Baptist great?

Here is a great follower of Christ, and yet what is he doing in verse 18 and 19?

What reasons did John the Baptist have for knowing the answer to this question already? And yet, at this point he was struggling with doubt. What does that tell us about doubt and the Christian life? How does it help us to know John struggled with doubt?

Why do you think John was struggling with doubt at this point?

John MacArthur suggests several reasons. Read the following and answer the questions that follow:

“Number one reason, personal tragedy. Doubt can sort of be broken out into these factors. I mean, think about John. He is in a stinking dungeon, been there months, probably going on a year. Humanly speaking now, this is his reward for a life of faithfulness. He is a thread width from death and that's what he gets for being the forerunner of the Messiah, the most exalted prophet of all prophets. He had been bold, bold before the most powerful sinner in his world, Herod Antipas. And as a result of his faithfulness and his courage and his boldness, he's sitting in this dungeon in the desert. His personal tragedy didn't seem consistent with his faithfulness. Where was the blessing that's supposed to come to faithfulness? And his personal tragedy didn't seem consistent with the Messiah's power. Couldn't the Messiah do something about it? In fact, Jesus had never even been to visit him. And it didn't seem consistent with the purpose of God. Messiah's going to come, and this is going to happen to the bad people, not the prophet.”

If you had to summarize the reason Dr. MacArthur is suggesting that John struggled with doubt here, how would you do so? Do you think Christians are tempted to doubt for similar reasons today?

“There's a second thing that causes doubt. Not only personal tragedy but popular influences...popular influences. John was in part a victim of the current misconceptions about the Messiah. I mean, it's a clear picture of the Messiah in the Old Testament, very clear. But the suffering of Messiah, such as in Isaiah 53, the sin-bearing work of Messiah, those things were sort of pushed aside and the Jewish community had created an image of Messiah...what He would be, what He would do. And John had been just as the disciples were, influenced by that...First they thought there would be a military movement on Messiah's part in which He would massacre the Romans, it would set Israel free from Roman occupation. Then there would be the great society would come. Abrahamic blessing would flood the land. There would be a welfare state, free food for everybody...health, wealth, prosperity, the whole business. All the wicked people will be thrown out. All of the apostate people would be judged by God in a day of the Lord kind of holocaust. And the glory of the Kingdom would fill the earth and everybody would come to Israel and the desert would blossom like a rose and there would be a river opened from Jerusalem flowing east, and the lion would lie down with the lamb and everything the prophet said about the glories of the Kingdom would come to pass. And David's greater Son would sit on the throne and He would reign and rule and all nations would be subject to them and Israel would be the glory of God on earth. They had it all figured out. But it was because of these popular conceptions that they had so much doubt and Jesus didn't do that. They couldn't figure out...why doesn't He knock off the Romans? Why is He being constantly victimized by these Jewish leaders?”

Sometimes the wrong ideas that people in our culture have about Jesus actually make it difficult for us to trust Jesus. What are some wrong ideas people have about Jesus today that make it easier to doubt?

“The third reason, and this is the compelling matter, doubt arises out of personal tragedy when we can't square our circumstances with our faithfulness, out of popular influences when we start to believe the popular image of someone, including Jesus. They also come because of incomplete revelation, this is really the crux of the matter. John's doubts came because he didn't have full information.”

What information was John missing that would have helped him with his doubts? Now we have that information where? So, we really are in a better position than John. But, all that information we have doesn't help us if we don't study the Bible. Sometimes people doubt because they don't really know what the Scripture teaches very well. What are some examples of how a lack of understanding of Scriptures can tempt us to doubt?

“There was one other component in the case of John that contributed to his doubt, wrong expectation. And it was tied to the information issue...wrong expectation.”

What expectations did John specifically have? Think about his message. What was he thinking Jesus would do? What did Jesus do instead after he was baptized?

What does John do about his doubt? What does that teach us about the way believers should deal with doubt? When do doubts become dangerous? When can doubts be helpful?

How does Jesus respond to John? Get specific. What is the first thing he does in verse 21? Then what does he ask the friends to do in verse 22? When he asks them to report this to John, is he asking them to report new information to John really? If not, then how was this supposed to help John? And what is the challenge he gives in verse 23?

What is the one thing Jesus doesn't do in response to John's doubt?

Bringing it Home:

One thing you can't say about Jesus is that he wasn't honest about how life in this world until his return would be.

We can't say, oh, the reason I am doubting, is because I thought following Jesus meant, I am going to get everything I ever wanted right now, and my life is going to be full of all these breakthroughs, and deliverances, and it's going to be easy, easy, easy. We can't say that, because the person who came to announce Jesus as King got beheaded, and Jesus Himself got crucified.

I am afraid that some of you are hearing all the time, if you just believe and trust, then everything is going to go awesome for you all the time, and if you follow Jesus, everything will be better right away, a better marriage, a better life, a better fill in the blank, and if this is why you are following Jesus and this is what your hopes in Jesus are ultimately about, everything fixed right now, then I am not surprised you are doubting, and you are going to do more than doubt, because in the end, that's not the kind of Savior, God sent.

God sent a Savior. And it's true, Jesus is going to fix things. I am not saying things are not going to get better. They are. There is going to be a resurrection of the dead. There's going to be freedom from all sickness. There is going to be a place with no financial problems. There is going to be a place where there's going to be no sin. We are going to be in the presence of God, forever.

As a preacher, I am happy to be able to proclaim that. And I am sure it's coming, because I mean, look at the kinds of things Jesus did. When the king was walking around on the planet, he gave us a picture of what the kingdom would be like when He came back as he healed the sick, cleansed the unclean, and raised the dead.

And it's that kingdom I am living for.

Not this world right now.

Because, I know, it's not going to get all better, until Jesus finally returns, and that's the hope I am living for and that's the kind of hope I think you should be living for as well.

Summing Up:

What are some of the main encouragements or challenges you have taken from what we have studied together today? Is there any specific word of praise you would like to give to God for what you have learned about Jesus today? How about questions? Do you have any thing you are still wondering from what we have talked about? What are some of the practical differences what you studied makes on your life? What would you like to share with someone else? Is there any specific issue that this study has brought up that you want the members of your gospel community to be praying for you about?