

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Battling Doubt

Text: Matthew 11:1-6

Introduction/Aim: The first ten chapters of Matthew, are in a sense, a series of testimonies that prove who Jesus is.

POINT 1 - JESUS TEACHING AND PREACHING ALONE (VS. 1)

It is made clear that Jesus went out by himself to preach and teach. After He had finished giving instructions to the twelve (vs. 1) and we know this from Matthew 10:5, “**These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them.**” I want to focus in on a couple of points in this text. Jesus went and taught and preached. The ministry of Jesus, and subsequently ours, is to teach and preach the word. Romans 10:14-15, “**How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?**” In other words, this is what we are to do here and now. Let’s stop with all the gimmicks. Let’s stop with the props. Let’s stop with the post-modern idea of making the word of God a book that forms to what we want. Let’s teach and preach. Period.

The word teach is the Greek word *Didasko* which means “**to come along side, to hold a discourse.**” It has the idea of a long period of teaching, not at one time, but over time. Preach is the Greek word *Kerysso* and has the idea of “**to herald, proclaim, publish.**” Often to preach is a one time event at a place and teaching is a sit down, longer event. None the less, Jesus sent His disciples to do this, and He Himself was doing it as well. In the church today, week after week, we do the same thing. It’s biblical, it’s right, it’s the only fruitful way of discipling.

POINT 2 - THE DOUBTS OF JOHN

In vs. 2-3 we have John’s questions, and we have the response of Jesus. Before we condemn John, we must first look at his circumstances and then reflect upon our own life.

Let’s get some context, John 1:29-34, “**The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, after me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me. I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water. John testified saying, I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.**” John said this was the Son of God. John had confidence this was who He is. It does not seem that John was questioning the truth of the OT Scriptures. It seems he was uncertain about how all these truths were playing out.

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Note: This was a time of transition. Before the written revelation of the New Testament, there were many things that seemed uncertain, unclear and needed explanation. In fact, Jesus Himself said there was no greater man born than that of John the Baptist, cf. Matthew 11:11. On more than one occasion, Jesus said to His disciples, “O you of little faith”, “How long will you doubt?”

POINT 3 - DOUBT IS STILL SIN

James 1:6, “for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.” We have God’s sure word. We have God’s sure evidence. Yet, we still let our doubts consume us at times. A doubter of God is one that driven by circumstances, tossed by the wind as in James. In fact, we are commanded not to doubt God for what He has done, “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). Many times our doubt isn’t a result of sinful things, but weakness in faith. It’s a result of our circumstances.

The circumstances surrounding John at this time, he was in prison. And he was there because of what we find in Matthew 14:3-4, “For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had been saying to him, It is not lawful for you to have her.” He had baptized Jesus, announced His coming, proclaimed the lamb of God, but now he is perplexed. Dr. John MacArthur notes, “In his heart he believed Jesus truly was the Messiah and trusted Him as his Lord; but the events or lack of them, caused his mind or emotions to put a cloud of doubt over his assurance.”¹ Many missionaries and pastors have been in this place, when they went to a church or to start a church, and the results weren’t as they expected.

Application: Many times we go through this as well, we believe, but did we miss something, was I wrong? In Mark 9 a boy was demon possessed and the father of the boy cried out (the disciples could not cast out the demon) after speaking with Jesus about his boy he said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” Seems like an oxymoron, but that’s us in our Christian walk often.

POINT 4 - WHAT CAUSES OUR DOUBTS

Difficult circumstances² are often a cause of doubt. John was a fiery preacher, bold proclaimer and courageous. He preached in the wilderness, proclaimed the coming of the Lord, had many disciples and followers, but when he publicly condemned Herod for his adulterous acts, he was thrown into prison.

I suppose John was familiar with the Psalms 119:50, “This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me.” If Jesus was the Messiah, then why is he suffering in prison? Where is the

¹ The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 239

² The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 240

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promise of Isaiah 61:1-2a, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me, to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God.”

Note: When a believer has faithfully served the Lord for years, then sickness, the loss of a spouse or a wayward child dies or goes further away from the narrow path, whatever it may be we may be tempted to ask “God, where are you now?” This is where Satan comes to stroke those doubts. We are never more vulnerable to believe the lies of Satan than when we are suffering. Paul understood these circumstances as he wrote in Philippians 4:4-7, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” What are your requests? Lord don’t let me worry about who you are and what you are doing.

Incomplete revelation³ is another cause for doubt. An important note for us today, we have the complete revelation of God in His word. The problem today is many aren’t familiar with God’s word, so doubts come in easily when trials arise. When John said “he heard of the works of Christ” is because he was in prison, and hadn’t witnessed such things first hand.

You do not need a new revelation from God, it’s already in His word. The reason some of you doubt God in your circumstances today is because you aren’t familiar with what God has said in His word. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained the truth in God’s word, “And He said to them, O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). Furthermore, “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). In those moments when you aren’t sure why things are happening or what you are going through, open His word, read it, get grounded in it.

Worldly influence⁴ is another cause for doubt. John’s question was “are you the expected one?” It seems the coming Messiah was “expected” to do certain things. At least this was their view. Even John may have held to some of the common views of the day. The Messiah was expected to free Israel from the grip of the Romans. The pagan rule must be done away with and yet Jesus had done nothing to oppose Rome in word or in action. **Note:** Sometimes Christians today think the election of a certain party will bring about righteousness. And it will not. But when the unrighteous or wicked are elected, that doesn’t change my hope in God. I am comforted, and not fretting of this because of the Word of God, Daniel 2:21, “It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings.” In spite of all the miracles Jesus was doing, there was not kingdom, no rule, no elevation to a King on earth. Even His own disciples had misconceptions

³ The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 242

⁴ The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary; pp. 243

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about the Messiah. In Acts 1:6, after His resurrection, “**Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?**” He had told them of His plan and purpose, yet they were still influenced by the world. And so are some of us.

What is meant when John asks “**should we look for another?**” John had proclaimed Jesus would come and bring judgment and blazing power, cf. Matthew 3:11,12. Had John expected this to happen soon after Jesus came? Maybe. Today, many Christians are looking for the Lord’s return, but as the years go by they seem to lose their excitement about it. Jesus is coming. He said He is. There will be a visible, literal return of Christ. Again, don’t let doubt remove the truth of God’s word.

POINT 5 - THE RESPONSE OF JESUS

Jesus did not say John lacked faith. He did not ask why he didn’t believe. He said to tell them what they have seen and heard. Psalms 34:8, “**O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**” Tell of all that is being done. See what the Lord is doing.

Note: John’s circumstances didn’t change, in fact, he would be beheaded. The closing statement was specifically for John, and is best translated, “**And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**” The word offended has the connotations of “trapped or snared.” So John, don’t be trapped by the world’s view of who I am, or of how things aren’t turning out the way you want, don’t stumble at the truth.

Do not doubt God no matter the limbo, trial, or difficult circumstance you are in. God is faithful even when you are not. 2 Timothy 2:11-13, “**For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.**” Even though John the Baptist didn’t hear the words of the apostle John, but John understood this as well, as he looked towards eternity, “**Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**”⁵

⁵ 1 John 3:2-3