

# Beyond the Shadow of Doubt

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*Luke*

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**Bible Text:** Luke 7:18-26  
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Well, turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 7, continuing to just move around the gospels and hit some passages that have been particularly meaningful in my life in recent months as we've, a lot of it's come from the Bible study we have on Friday mornings, a couple of men's Bible studies, one of them Friday mornings that I lead here at the church and we have a Zoom component too, 6:30 to 8. We've been going through the Gospel Mystery of Sanctification. We'll meet again this Friday and then we'll break for a couple of weeks and then we'll start back into systematic theology moving into the doctrine of the church, and we're going to be talking about the doctrine of salvation for a while. So we'll be doing that, and then Saturday morning there's a Bible study led by one of our elders, Jack Enter, and they've been working through 1 Peter. And so those two men's Bible studies, ladies' Bible study on Tuesday mornings and Thursday evenings led by Barbara Enter and Jennifer Guthrie. Lot of ways to study the word of God together.

But anyway, on Friday mornings the passage, that book has really been so meaningful personally to me, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification." I'm going to read from it a little bit later but one of the passages that had jumped out in recent weeks is the story of John the Baptist and the title of the message this morning is "Beyond the Shadow of Doubt." Beyond the shadow of doubt. The reality of doubt in the life of faith. We're going to talk about that this morning and look at a passage that provides really an astonishing account of doubt in one of the most surprising places, among the most unlikely candidates, John the Baptist of all people. We're going to think about the presence of doubt in the heart of the believer when doubt casts its dark shadow over our lives. Sometimes there are storm clouds of adversity come and they darken our soul, adversity leads to perplexity and confusion and doubt. Doubt can be dangerous. It is the cousin of unbelief. Yet doubt is not inconsistent, doubt is not inconsistent with genuine faith.

We are sinners saved by grace and so some mixture of doubt is there in the greatest faith. As long as we're in a fallen world and we live in this body of sin, this body of flesh, there will be a wrestling with doubt, and we see this, we see this in the Old Testament, when we read through the Bible we see great men doubting: Abraham, Job, Elijah, the psalmist in a number of places. And today we come to a passage where we see the faltering faith of one of the greatest men of faith in the Bible, John the Baptist, and we can learn much from him and find much encouragement from his story. This story is told in two of the

gospels, Matthew 11 and here in a passage we're looking at, Luke 7. The same account, a deputation from John. He sends two of his disciples to Jesus with a question.

So we're going to read just the first few verses and then I'm going to read the rest as we go forward in unpacking this narrative, but we'll start with verse 18 and we'll read to verse 20 right now, and then eventually we'll read through verse 28. Verse 18,

18 The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. 19  
Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are  
You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?" 20 When the  
men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask,  
'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'"

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning as we open Your word confessing our confidence in the perfection of Your word, Your revelation, and also confessing the weakness of our faith, the inability of our soul to grapple with eternal truths apart from Your grace. We ask You to pour out Your grace upon us. We ask that Your Spirit would be given to us without measure and enable us to have ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to believe and to love our Savior. We pray this in His name and for His glory. Amen.*

Beyond the shadow of doubt. I want us to work through this passage, three main points this morning, and the first is: a stunning question. A stunning question. This is absolutely just striking that this man is asking this question. And I tell you, when you compare the different accounts between Matthew and Luke, both are inspired, all of Scripture is given by inspiration of God and it has different distinct purposes, and so we gain much from looking at various passages, but I think in comparing them myself, I think Luke is even more appalled at John the Baptist than Matthew, and one of the reasons that I say that is because he repeats the question twice. Matthew doesn't do that. Matthew just tells us that John sent them and they asked and he does this. Luke lets us know this is what John said to the disciples, "Go to Him," to the Lord, "saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'" Then when they come, they say, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or should we look for someone else?'" The question reverberates. It's almost as if, you know, someone says something that you find incredulous, you say, "Could you say that again? It's possible my ears are deceiving me. Say it again." That's what happens here.

It's a stunning question and it's made even more so when you look at the context, when you look at when this question was asked. Verse 18, "The disciples of John reported to him about all these things." Then he summons two of his disciples. What is this about all these things that they just reported to John? Well, when you read the rest of chapter 7 leading up to verse 18, you see there are two miracles that Luke tells us about in the seventh chapter. Verses 1 to 10, he tells us about the miracle of Jesus healing the centurion's slave, that a certain Roman centurion has a slave who was ill, the centurion is concerned about him, he's a God-fearing man, he sends people to Jesus and says, "Don't

even come to my house. Just say the word and I know that he will be healed." And Jesus says, "I've not found such great faith in all of Israel. This man believes that I can heal from a distance." And so Jesus heals the man's slave from a distance. He doesn't have to go, he just speaks the word and the man is healed miles away. Extraordinary miracle. Then you read in verses 11 to 17, look at what it says, Luke 7:11, "Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her." Jesus encounters a funeral procession. They're carrying the man in an open casket on their shoulders out to bury him. Verse 13, "When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her," that is, the young man who has died, his mother, he felt compassion for her, "and said to her, 'Do not weep.' And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother." That was some funeral procession day, wasn't it? "Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'" Verse 17, "This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district." Now, "The disciples of John reported to him about all these things." Do you hear that? Jesus just raised a man from the dead. Jesus just healed a man from a distance. John hearing that says, "I've got to send you to Jesus to ask Him a question. 'Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?'" John, are you serious? What is going on?

When you consider not only when he asks the question but who it is that asks the question, John the Baptist. Luke begins his gospel with the account of the birth not of Jesus but of John the Baptist. Chapter 1, he tells us about the miraculous birth of this man, John the Baptist. He was born to a couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were advanced in age and childless. Zacharias, the priest ministering in the temple at his turn encounters the angel Gabriel. Gabriel tells him, "You're going to have a son, Elizabeth is going to bear you a son in your old age." Zacharias, a man who's longed to have children with his wife all these years, childless, can hardly believe it. He says, "What sign will you give me?" I mean, think about that, an angel appears to you in the temple, there's nobody else with you because only one person can be, I mean, only the priests can be in the temple, not others. He's in there ministering the incense and the angel appears and he still wants a sign. "What sign will you give me?" And the angel says, "Here's a sign for you, you won't be able to talk until the child is born." So he goes out and he can't even tell them what happened. He's trying to motion to them and for nine months the man cannot talk until John is born, and on the day that he's named, Elizabeth says, "His name is John," and the people are like, "No, his name can't be John. There's nobody in your family named John," and Zacharias writes on, this was part of what was acted out the other night if you remember in the performance, Zacharias writes down, "His name is John." At that moment, his tongue is loosed and he's filled with the Spirit and he prophesies and he gives us that song that was the basis of our musical the other night, "Zacharias' song."

Well, even before this, though, we're told but Luke tells us about the angel coming, he tells about us Zacharias' song but he sandwiches in the middle Gabriel visiting at six

months gestation, this is six months after John has been conceived, in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Gabriel goes to Nazareth to another woman, this woman, though, a virgin, Mary, and he says, "You're going to have a child." She and he tells her, "Your cousin Elizabeth, your older cousin Elizabeth who is childless, is now pregnant and expecting." Mary leaves and goes to see Elizabeth and turn with me to chapter 1 and let's look at this, verses 35 to 42, what happens when Mary arrives, actually I'm sorry, verse 39 to 45, what happens when Mary arrives in the hill country of Judah, she has to take a journey of two or three days by foot, she doesn't just walk across town, and she goes to see this cousin she's not seen probably in years. She "entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth," verse 40, Luke 1, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you,'" now think about this, Elizabeth doesn't know this is going to happen. She just knows she's having a son who's going to be used mightily of God to prepare the way for the Messiah, but she doesn't know the Messiah is going to visit her like this. She is now filled with the Holy Spirit, "'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.'" John the Baptist recognized Jesus when he was in the womb and Jesus was in the womb. He says, "That's Him! He's the One!" That his calling from the womb was to point to Jesus.

You see this in his ministry. In John 1, the gospel of John, this isn't written by John the Baptist but John the apostle speaks about John the Baptist when he says in chapter 1 of John's gospel, verse 19, "This is the testimony of John," that is, John the Baptist, "when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?'" John is preaching the message of the kingdom saying, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He's baptizing and so the Jews from Jerusalem send out people to say, "Who are you? What's going on with you?" "And he confessed," verse 20, "and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am a voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord," as Isaiah the prophet said.' Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, and said to him, 'Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them saying, "listen, why are you baptizing? He said, "'I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

I think when we read the gospels carefully, John had never seen Jesus with his eyes. They didn't have regular family reunions among the extended family apparently. He had never seen Jesus because he's going to tell you later on in the gospel, "I didn't recognize Him when I saw Him. I didn't recognize Him just by looking at Him. But I did recognize Him because of what happened when I saw Him." Listen what he says. Well, he does recognize him but he explains how. Verse 29, "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" He sees him

and he knows it but he's trying to say it's not because of how he looked. I didn't recognize, you know, that I see the family resemblance that that's my cousin. No. Look what he says next, "This is He on behalf," verse 30, "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,'" here he explains it, "'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 didn't recognize him just by looking at him but when I saw him, the Spirit descended upon him and remained upon him and I shouted out, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" And it ends up in verse 34, "I myself," this is John the Baptist, "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." Do you see the clarity? He knows who Jesus is.

Now turn back to Luke 7. How can he be asking the question, "Are You the Expected One?" Some translations say are you the coming one, that's more literally what's actually said here, the one to come. It's a way of saying are you the Messiah, are you the Christ, are you the Son of God?

Some commentators find it so difficult to understand this that they actually say John was really just helping his disciples. His disciples didn't believe and so he sent them. But when you read the text, there's just no way to conclude that. We read in verse 19 summoning two of his disciples, he said to them, "You go ask the Lord, 'Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?'" They go and say, "John the Baptist sent us to You to ask." And then when Jesus answers, a little bit later he's going to say, "Go and report to John." It is John the Baptist that is doubting. How can this be? How could he ask this question? If he could doubt, certainly much less than he can doubt like you and me.

I think the answer is found in looking at the content of his preaching and understanding what his expectations were. John had a certain measure of truth given to him that God had clearly given to him, and when John took what God had given to him and looked at what he saw, it didn't match up in his mind, and at some point the dissonance was so great that it created doubt in him. Now he wasn't doubting that Jesus was from God, he was just doubting that Jesus was the final one that we were to wait for. He's thinking, "There must be another one coming after You because You're not doing what I expected You would be doing in light of what God told me You were going to do." John did not see the whole plan of God.

Now let me show you this. If you look back at Luke 3, Luke tells us about John's early ministry. After he introduces us to him through his birth and his parents, he tells us in John 3:1, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness." So John is now an adult man probably around 30 years old,

six months older than Jesus, and he has the word of the Lord come to him and now his ministry begins and he goes into all the district, verse 3, "of the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every ravine will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God.'"

One of the things that John's saying, "Listen, God sent me to do demolition work, road building." Think about what happens when roads are built. You know how you're driving along an interstate and you look and you see to your side a slope of rock, and you know how that road got built with a slope of rock. They blasted it, dynamite. They blew up the mountain to make a way for that highway. John's ministry is that kind of ministry. He's coming in to demolish mountains, to raise up ravines, to make straight the way of the Lord and he understands that and so he's a hard man. But he also has a view of what Jesus is doing and look at his tone even in verse 7, this is his preaching, "So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him," these people are coming to him. This is a good opening line sermon. This is a seeker-sensitive sermon. Look what he says to the people coming, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" He uses an image, "You are a brood of vipers." He says it's like snakes where a field has been set ablaze and the fire is coming and the snakes are crawling out ahead of the fire. "Who has warned you to flee the wrath to come? I have come to tell you wrath is coming but who warned you? You're already coming but how did you know?"

In verse 9, "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Listen, judgment is coming. It's like the axe being laid at the root of the tree. You know, when the axe, when a person puts the axe at the tree like that, it's not just to sit and let the tree, you know, live for another 20 years. No, it's going down and he says, "Listen, Israel, God is bringing His judgment now."

Verse 15, skipping on down a little bit, "Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, John answered and said to them," this sounds like John 1, doesn't it, we read a moment ago, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." I'm baptizing you with water to prepare you for the one who is coming. He will baptize you with fire. Fire is judgment.

Look what he says in verse 17 about the one who's to come after him, the coming one, "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Jesus is coming to clean house, that's what he's saying, like a man with a winnowing fork that's clearing out the threshing floor. He's going to come and he's going to separate the wheat

and the chaff and the chaff is going to be burned with unquenchable fire. It's coming. It's even now happening. The axe is at the base of the tree.

That's his preaching ministry. Now his ministry and he understands who Jesus is, he says, "I must decrease," John the Baptist must decrease, "He must increase." And the crowds began following Jesus. John is imprisoned and he's hearing the reports of Jesus' ministry. He's hearing about him preaching and teaching, he's hearing about him healing, but he's not hearing about judgment and wrath. The character of Christ's ministry is different than he expected and so he's left in wonder. The system, the unjust corrupt system is still in place. The ungodly religious leadership that is burdening the people is still in power. Wickedness is still spreading. Little repentance, little faith. And so when John looks at what the word of God that he had was to come, he was to come and he was to blow things up, yes. He came with a thundering message of judgment but he didn't understand that after him was going to come the King not on the white stallion of Revelation 19 but on the donkey of Zechariah 9. He doesn't understand and because expectation does not be reality, he's left with doubt.

How instructive that is for us. You know, you and I, we have access as we grow and we walk in the life of faith, we come to know more and more of the ways of God, we come to know more and more of the plan of God, we come to know more and more of the glory of his gospel and yet you know we still see in part and we know in part, and so we will continually find ourselves coming up against things we don't understand. God will not work the way we expect. It's normal, I mean, if you get your expectations met, circle that day on the calendar, laminate it, put it up on the wall, because that's not the norm. It's not even close because God's ways are not our ways. We know so little though we're knowing more, we're growing, we're really being changed. If you know Christ, you come to know him in a living real relationship. He is working in you. He is completing the good work he began in you until the day of Christ Jesus and yet even when it's done, you still know so little.

Very often we are doubting and discouraged, we are sidelined because we have expectations that are not appropriate. Expectations are just things you need to lay down. "I expected God to do something different therefore I'm discouraged. I doubt His goodness. I doubt that He's really working in my life. I doubt that He's working in this area of my life. I didn't expect marriage to be like this. I didn't expect it would be so hard to have children and raise them. I didn't expect that I would still be struggling with sin the way that I am." Well, forget about your expectations and be faithful to God.

John was doubting because his expectations were dashed but, you know, what he did, the one thing that we must get out of this, we're still under the first point, a stunning question. We've talked about when he asked the question, who was it that asked the question, how did he come to have this question, fourth little subpoint, what he did right with his question. He did one thing absolutely right that true genuine faith will do. Listen, doubts can be the thing that separate the true believer from the false and doubts are not to be excused and winked at. No, they're things we need to deal with. But what did John do with his doubt? He was in prison but he sent word to Jesus; in the only way he could, he

took his doubts directly to Jesus. That is what you must do. You take your doubt directly to God, directly to Christ.

This is the universal testimony of the Scripture: the faithful doubt but the faithful don't doubt and tell others about it, the faithful don't doubt and run away from God, the faithful take their doubt directly to God. This is what the psalmists are doing when they're asking, "How long, O Lord? How long will You allow this circumstance to be this way? How long will the wicked prosper? Why, O Lord, why are You doing this?" Who are they saying it to? They're saying, "Why, O Lord?" Job, he wants an audience with God. Now he was very high-handed and he was arrogant, right, in the way he wanted it because he's thinking, and when you read Job, he's thinking he's just. He doesn't deserve this. He wants an audience with God and he gets an audience with God, and when he gets the audience with God it wasn't exactly what he wanted. But isn't God gracious to show up and talk to Job? That is the God of the Bible. He is a God who invites doubt and he says, "Come to Me with your doubt. Now come to Me humbly with your doubt, yes, come ready to learn. If you're a scoffer, My heart will have no pleasure in you." God laughs at the scoffer but the honest doubt that humbly comes to God and says, "I believe, help my unbelief," the Lord receives.

You see this because the second thing, it's not just a stunning question but a gentle answer. The second point: a gentle answer. Jesus is amazingly tender in his response to John's really appalling question but Jesus is not so appalled as he is concerned about John. It's amazing too, even something, let's read on down and we'll look at his answer. So they say to him, "Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?" The end of verse 20. "At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind." Isn't that amazing? At that exact, that means literally at that hour. They show up with this question and it happens to be in the midst of Jesus, one of his flurries of miraculous ministry going on. In the providence of God, everything is timed perfectly.

So they show up and he is healing people of all these afflictions and evil spirits, giving sight to those who were blind. Verse 22, "And He answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.'" Go and report to John what you see and hear. I love it, he doesn't say just a simple yes. "Are You the Expected One?" He could've said, "Yes, tell John to chill out and buck up and stop asking stupid questions." He says, "Go and report to John what you see." And God has orchestrated that they would see what they saw when they came. Now they had just heard about the resurrection of that guy in the funeral procession and they had just talked about that, but here they are seeing him healing all of these various afflictions, sight to the blind, evil spirits, diseases being healed, right as they come up and as they're waiting in line to ask the question this is all happening. And he says, "Go to John and tell him what you see."

And the wording that he uses is intentional and powerful. When he says the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the



poor have the gospel preached to them, he's deliberately using the language of Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 61:1. If you turn there to Isaiah's prophecy, it was Isaiah that John knew. Remember when he was asked in John 1, you know, "Who are you then?" He said, "I'm the voice of one calling in the wilderness," just like Isaiah the prophet said. John knew Isaiah's prophecy well and Jesus reminds him of some other words of Isaiah. This is chapter 35 is about the coming of the Messiah when God will bring his salvation. Verse 5, this is how you know the Messiah is saving people, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah," in the desert. Streams in the desert. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear.

But he's also when he says that last phrase "the poor have the gospel preached to them," he's reminding him using the same wording as Isaiah 61:1. The 61<sup>st</sup> chapter of Isaiah begins with this, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted," that is, to preach the gospel to the poor. Same word actually. If you look at the Septuagint version, the Greek version of the Old Testament, "bring good news to the afflicted," is the same word that is used in Luke 7 to preach the gospel, as he says, the poor have the gospel preached to them. The poor, same word in Greek translates the Hebrew word for afflicted, poor, lowly.

So he's basically saying, "John, in your doubt what do you need to do? You need to go back to the word of God. Look at what you see and go back to the word of God." That's what you do with your doubt, you go directly to the Lord and you go to the word of God. And going to the Lord doesn't mean you just go off and you pray and you wait to feel an impression. No, you pray, you pour out your heart to God and you dive into the word of God because that's where you hear him speak, the word of God. He speaks through the Bible and so Jesus is calling John the Baptist back to the Scriptures, saying, "John, you know this." And he's basically quoting those passages, Isaiah 35:5-6, Isaiah 61:1. "Guys, go back and tell him that and tell him what you see. Look at what the word says, look at what you see, that answers the question. He's the Messiah."

The word of God is the key to overcoming doubt. How does the faithful deal with doubt? The faithful deal with doubt by going to the word of God. You don't pretend that you don't have doubt. This is one of the traps that you may fall into, that we can fall into, that we think we're not supposed to have doubts so we just stuff it away. That's not a godly response, that's a hypocritical response. You confess what is true. Confess means to say the same thing God says about it which is acknowledge it. We can't hide anything from God. You go to him, though. You don't go to others. You don't talk to others. You don't try to stir up doubt in other people. There are times where you may go to another brother, a more mature brother to help you, or someone who can handle it, not a weak and immature believer. But ultimately you go to God and when you go to another believer to talk about that, somebody comes to you with their doubt, the thing that you need to be, your goal needs to be as a counselor to them is, "Let's go to Jesus together." That's the answer. He has the answers. He's the Wonderful Counselor. He's the one that will help

you. He's just like he was when John sent people asking him and when you look at this, what an amazing Savior.

But it's really how the faithful, I mentioned Abraham and Elijah. You know, Abraham is a great man of faith but his great faith was tested and so it was obvious that his doubt, he had to die to doubt and trust in the word of God. Doubt is something that is mixed in with faith and a growing faith is a faith that is learning to turn doubt into trust but you never get rid of all the doubt. I would encourage you to read Romans 4:18-21, Hebrews 11:17-19. For the sake of time I'm going to summarize them for you. Romans 4:18-21, Hebrews 11:17-19. Romans 4:18-21 is talking about Abraham as the father of faith to those who believe, Jews and Gentiles who believe, who believe in the promise of God and are saved because they believe the promise of God. That's the way you're saved, you believe God's promise that he can save you through Christ. And Abraham is our forefather in that he had a promise that he would be the father of a great nation, that he would have a son, Isaac, and through Isaac salvation would come, through Isaac the Savior would come. And he doesn't have a son and Romans 4 is talking about the fact that, listen, when God told him, what did he do when God told him he was going to have a son, do you remember? Abraham laughed. He chuckled. Then Sarah laughed and God called out Sarah's laugh. Apparently her laugh was a little more vigorous than Abraham's was, but they both laughed. Then they named their son Isaac which means laughter. Their laughter of doubt and unbelief turned into the laughter of great joy, unspeakable joy at God's promise being fulfilled. But Abraham laughed. "How can this be?" In Romans 4 it says Abraham contemplated his own body as good as dead. He thought about the deadness of Sarah's womb. And what happens when you think about that? Doubt. He's doubting the promise and yet what did he do? He looked at that, he looked at all the things against it and he held that up against, honestly, transparently facing the reality, the impossibility of this and he put that on a balance sheet and he put the promise of God on the other side. The promise of God was, "Through Isaac your descendants will be named. You, through your body and through your wife Sarah, I'm going to bring a Savior." And Abraham believed that, in hope against hope he believed. You see, faith wrestles with doubt and overcomes it with the promise of God. Not something that you want. You don't name it and claim it. No, faith does not declare what it wants, faith responds to what God says. It believes what God has said.

So that's what Abraham did. Well, then I mentioned the Hebrews 11 passage, it's talking now about Isaac as a 12 or 13 year old boy, God tells Abraham to go kill Isaac. That was also in our play on Friday night. "Abraham, go to Mount Moriah and offer Isaac as a burnt offering." Abraham goes all the way and he's ready to bring the knife down upon his son and the Lord says, "No, Abraham, now I know that you fear God." The author of Hebrews tells us something very important, the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 11:17-19 that Abraham's faith was so great that he knew that if he killed Isaac as God told him to, that God would certainly, beyond a doubt, raise him from the dead. How do you know that? Because he was counting on the fact that God had said, "Through Isaac your seed will be named." That was the great faith but imagine the doubt the man has after he hears that word and he's walking all that long way to Mount Moriah, and his son asks him, remember when his son says, "Father, we have the knife, we have the fire for

the burnt offering, we have the wood, but we don't have a lamb." Abraham says, "The Lord will provide." And the Lord provided.

You see, doubt turns to faith with the word of God. It's not feeling, faith is rooted in the truth against your feeling, against the witness of things around you. It's not that faith's unreasonable, faith is the only reasonable thing but the way we interpret the world, the way we see things is often askew and so you must cling to the word of God and Jesus basically says to John, "Cling to the word of God." Now he gives a little bit of an edge to this at the end when he says, "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." It's a little bit of a stern word in the midst of this gentle answer. "John, you need to remember what the Bible says and how happy is the person who does not get trapped by doubt because of My ways." That's what "blessed" means, "O how happy."

Some of the reasons that you're depressed or you struggle to have joy is because you're not walking in faith, you're not believing the promise of God over against your circumstances. You're just focusing on your circumstances which are not getting better and they probably won't. I mean, life gets worse. The older you get, the worse it gets. Happy news for those of you who are young. It's just true. And there are ways it gets better, you get closer to heaven. It's going to all get better. Life gets richer with Christ. It really does, so please understand I'm talking about the natural things, though. The natural gets worse but as the outer man decays, the inner man is being renewed day by day. So in reality it's upward and onward in the life of faith but it doesn't mean it's not hard. It's hard.

Look at this last point, the third point: an astounding response. An astounding response. This is absolutely staggering. I'm talking about how Jesus responds from his heart to John's doubt. Think about what Jesus must have felt when he heard these words, "Are You the Expected One or are we to look for someone else?" Jesus was dealing with unbelief continually. His disciples were always clueless, the crowds had no idea who he really was. He was experiencing rejection, rejection, rejection. We looked a few weeks ago at John 6 where the disciples, many of his disciples turned away because of his hard sayings and he says to the 12, "Will you also leave Me?" Hurting. Asked them and Peter says, "Where should we go? You have the words of eternal life. Where would we go, Lord?" How much harder must it have been to hear John say this. "The one who recognized Me in My mother's womb, the one who when he saw Me by the river Jordan said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,' and here he is saying this?" How painful, how that must have cut to his heart and yet look at the lavish generosity of the Son of God.

Look how he responds. Verse 24, "When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John." He asked six rhetorical questions and these questions, what he does basically is he verbalizes a defense of John the Baptist. He defends him from any potential criticism at his doubt.

He asked the first two questions in verse 24, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" Why did you guys leave Jerusalem and all over Judea

and all over Israel, and why did you go out to the Jordan, to the desert area around the Jordan, why did you do that? What were you going out to see? Was it just a reed that was...? I think he's basically voicing, it seems that John right now is a reed because he's bending with tribulation, he seems to be wavering, right? Is that who you went out to see? And there's an implied "no" in it. In fact, the word "but" that comes next is a strong aversive. It's basically, "No! But what did you go out to see?" So he's saying, no, he's not a reed, John was an oak tree, that's what Jesus is saying. "John is an oak tree, that's why you went out to see him." He was an oak tree of righteousness.

Then he says next, the next two questions, "what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?" Did you go out to see a guy dressed in finery, in silk, nice clothing? And again, an implied "no." "Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces!" And here he knows the crowd knows John is not in the king's palace, where is John? John is in the king's dungeon. "You went out to see a man in soft clothing, no." All the gospels make a point of this except for John, Matthew, Mark and Luke, he had camel's hair and he ate locusts and honey. He was not a soft guy. John was like Bear Grylls on steroids. Okay, he was a man's man. He wasn't soft. And he was in jail because he told Herod to his face that, "You need to repent and give your wife back to your brother."

So he's reminding them of John's excellence and he asks again two more questions, "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet." Because this prophet was also prophesied about before he came, which is never true of the prophets. They never had anybody telling you a prophet's going to come like this prophet. "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" Look what he says in verse 28, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." This is a commendation of the highest order by Jesus after John has just, in his wavering doubt, insulted the Messiah. Jesus in the infinite compassion of his heart, knowing John's belief, knowing that John when John really, it wasn't ultimately any kind of blasphemous insult but it was a genuine perplexity of heart that said, "Lord, I don't understand. I know that You're from God. I know You must be." And it's as if he's saying, "But I just can't make sense of it." And yet that wavering, that weakness, Jesus says, replies to him, "Look at the word of God." And then he turns away from those men as they're walking away and says, "I want to tell you guys about John." And he blesses him and here you see the lavishness of grace in the gospel, the lovingkindness of God.

You know, you deal with your doubts by taking them to Jesus and you believe the word of God. You know, one of the things that often I run into and have experienced in my own life, but sometimes people will believe or wrestle with, "Am I, is God saving me? Am I a Christian? I know the gospel and I believe the gospel, I'm trying to follow Christ, I'm trying to rest completely in Him but am I saved?" And a lot of times it happens to people who've come new to Reformed theology and they now understand about the doctrine of election and they're wrestling with, you know, "Has God chosen me? Perhaps He hasn't. I look at my fruit and I don't see the fruit I'd like to see. Am I really saved?" And there's a place for examining fruit, there's a time and place for that, but sometimes

we get tripped up in staying looking at our fruit so much that we forget to look to Christ and it's important for us to learn that we must go to the word of God to deal with your doubt. If you're doubting if you're a child of God, go to the word of God. And what does the word of God say? The word of God says basically it's not your affair to wonder about election, you are called to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if God calls you to believe, he will enable you to believe, and you're to believe that he will enable you to believe. You're to believe that he's generous to you just like he was generous to John and if you believe that, you will find that to be true because he will never disappoint the one whose hope is in him.

I mentioned that book, Walter Marshall, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification." I'm going to read to you some of the things he says about this. Dealing with doubt over the issue of your salvation. He says, "You are to believe assuredly that it is the will of God for you to believe in Christ." You're to believe that it's the will of God for you to believe, "and therefore to have eternal life by Him as well as any other person, and that your believing is a duty very acceptable to God, and He will help you as well as any other in this work, in this duty because He calls and commands you by the gospel to believe in Christ." So believe the truth. You see, take your doubt and put it up against the word of God.

He says, "Here we are not to meddle with God's secret of predestination or the purpose of His will." It's none of our business. It's the purpose of his will to give the grace of faith to some rather than to others but we're not to worry about that. We're to only concern ourselves with his revealed will, with his gracious invitations and commands by which we are required to believe on Christ. This is the will of God and it's confirmed by his oath. Ezekiel 33:11, "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye and live. Turn ye and live. Why will you die, O house of Israel?" Do you hear that? God is beckoning to you to believe his willingness to save you. 1 Timothy 2:4 says God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

He says, "What if the wrath of God were to be revealed from heaven against you in many terrible judgments and the word and thine own conscience were to condemn you and Christ were to seem to reckon you no better than a dog, as He did the woman of Canaan?" What should you do in that instance? "You are to make a good interpretation of all of these things that the purpose of them is to drive you to Christ as was the end of the curses of the law and all the terrible dispensations of them."

I love this. He says, "If a prophet or an angel from heaven," think about this, "If a prophet or an angel from heaven were sent of God on purpose to declare to you that the sentence of everlasting damnation is declared against you," do you get that? God sent an angel to tell you personally that you are going to go to hell. And he's exactly right in this, listen to what he says. "If that were to happen it would then be your duty to believe that God sent him to give thee a timely warning for this very end that you might believe and turn to God by faith and repentance."

And he reminds us of the preaching of Jonah. Jonah preached nothing but certain destruction to Nineveh. There was no "but" in Jonah's preaching. Jonah said 40 days and Nineveh is destroyed, 40 days and the wrath of God is falling on Nineveh, but what did the Ninevites do. They heard in that word of wrath the hope in time of repentance and they repented and God put his wrath away and it made Jonah furious.

That's the God of the Bible, a God of immeasurable grace. "The most absolute and peremptory denunciations of divine vengeance against us, while we are in this world, must always be understood with a secret reserve of salvation for us upon our faith and repentance." The reason he does it is to make you know that there's grace available. You think you've committed the unpardonable sin, the very fact that you're concerned about it is a good sign, and if you think you have, run to Christ. And the fact that you're even now hearing that means that he's inviting you, run to Christ.

So with your doubt always run to Jesus. That's the message. Always run to Jesus. Doubt is a part of living in this fallen world and doubt is an opportunity and a reminder to run to my Savior and to, in that moment, encounter him and to grow in faith and to grow in joy.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of the salvation that You've made known to us in Jesus Christ. Your lovingkindness truly stretches to the heavens. The generosity of Your heart overwhelms us and yet, Lord, we know it's urgent that people repent. If they don't repent, they will get what they deserve, they will go to hell forever and it's so senseless and needless because Jesus is willing to save, He's able to save. Lord, thank You for Your grace. Thank You for opening our eyes to see it. May everyone in this room, everyone within the sound of these words believe Your promise, the promise of a God who cannot lie when He says, "Come unto Me, come to the waters, drink freely. Come and be saved." All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. For Your glory we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.*