

TRINITY

BIBLE CHURCH DALLAS

The Sermon

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Luke 7:18-23

"Doubts from a Dungeon"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, we've got a great passage that we're going to be looking at today. I'm so thrilled at this opportunity. In the old covenant, the church, the people of God actually met on the last day of the week just to kind of wrap things up. But in the New Testament, the church met on the first day of the week, the day Christ was raised from the dead, and part of that is the intent to springboard us into the week. So, I don't know what lies ahead for you this coming week, but this is a part of the preparation for you to be ready to face whatever challenge or opportunity comes your way.

So, having said that, take your Bible and turn with me to Luke chapter 7, Luke chapter 7, as we continue our walk through the gospel of Luke. And we are loving it and enjoying it so much, our lives are being greatly enriched. And today we come to verse 18. Luke chapter 7, beginning in verse 18. And the title of this message is "Doubts from a Dungeon."

Beginning in verse 18, we read, "The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?' 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?'" At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind. 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.'" This is the reading of God's Word. Let us go to Him in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, as always, whenever we open Your Word, we are in need of instruction by Your Holy Spirit. I pray that You would use me simply as a secondary teacher, but that the Holy Spirit would be the primary teacher in our midst today. And I pray that the truth of this passage would be clear and its relevance be clear as well. And so we look to You now as we come to Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses that I have just read, we see the doubts that arose in John the Baptist concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. And there are different kinds of doubts that a person can have. Some doubt is just a flat out rejection of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, some people doubt the authenticity of Scripture, and so therefore they reject Christ. Other people doubt the perfection of the atonement of Jesus Christ for sin, and they reject Him. And still others doubt the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone, and they doubt the finality of heaven and the eternality of hell; and because of that, they reject Christ because of these doubts, which in reality, it's just blatant unbelief.

But what is being experienced by John the Baptist here is doubt of a different kind. It's a doubt that springs from disillusionment about what's going on around you. It's a doubt that arises from disappointment in the outcome. It's a doubt that results from unfolding events taking an unexpected turn that leaves you baffled. This is what we could call an honest doubt. We could call it a sincere doubt. And even the best saints down through the centuries have had their weak moments of doubt.

Let me just remind you, Abraham doubted that he could have a child at age 100. I mean, Sarah doubted that she could conceive at age 90. Moses doubted that he could go to Pharaoh and have any effect. Gideon doubted

that God could use him. Elijah doubted that there are any other prophets in Israel. And the apostles at times doubted the Lord. Even Thomas doubted that Christ had been raised from the dead. So, doubt must not be allowed to cultivate in our heart. Doubts must be taken to the Lord Himself and inquired of the Lord: "What have I missed? Where have I missed this? Strengthen my wavering faith." And that is exactly what we see here with John the Baptist.

Let me remind you that no believer, no true believer in Jesus Christ can ever become an unbeliever. Unbelievers can become believers, but believers can never revert back to become an unbeliever. So the doubt that John is experiencing here is not him returning to unbelief, a state of unbelief; it is surely the result of confusion of how God's plan is working out. You and I can be subject to times of doubt like this as well, when prayers go unanswered, when circumstances in our lives take an unexpected turn for the worse at times, and doubt can creep in as to, "What did I miss? What went astray?" and, "What is God doing?" That's where we find John here.

So, there's four headings I want to set in front of you, and the first is in verse 18, "the positive report." We read in verse 18, "The disciples of John reported to him about these things." Let's just work our way through this. The disciples of John: these are those who have gone out into the wilderness to hear John preach the message of repentance, and they have repented of their sins, and they have been baptized in the River Jordan by John, and they have not left with part of the crowd that would go with Christ, they have remained with John, but they are true believers who have repented. "John" here refers to John the Baptist who is mentioned more specifically in verse 20.

And so, "The disciples of John reported to him about these things." What does that mean? Well, some background is necessary. At this moment, John is in prison. It's not directly stated in the passage, but other passages inform us. John has been arrested and thrown into prison because he has told Herod, "It's unlawful for you to have your brother's wife," and it's going to cost him his head.

And so, John is in a prison in a remote place. It's on the other side. It's on the east side of the Jordan River about five miles on top of a hill overlooking the Dead Sea. It's the summer palace of Herod, and he is confined in a portion that would be like a fortress, and he's awaiting his own execution. He understands that there will be no release from this, and so he's staring death square in the face.

And it's at this time while he is incarcerated that his disciples come to him. They have access to be able to come to where he's being held captive, and they give him the report about these things. So the question is, "What are these things?" And it's everything that is just preceded immediately in Luke's account. It refers to, really, the rise of the popularity of the public ministry of Jesus Christ in Galilee. I mean, it has become so explosive that thousands of people are following Christ. They want to make Him king. And He is preaching, He is teaching, He is healing with countless miracles. Massive crowds are following Him. He literally has just raised the widow's son at the city of Nain from the dead. So this is just poured gas on the fire as far as the spread of the excitement about the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he receives this report. He's in prison. This is very confusing for John because he's already announced that Jesus is the Messiah, that He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He's come as the forerunner of the Messiah and has prepared the way of the Lord and has announced that when He comes, He will baptize with fire, which is the baptism of judgment upon the enemies of God.

Just to remind you of what came out of the mouth of John, earlier in Matthew 3 - the parallel is in Luke 3 - but in Matthew 3 beginning in verse 7, John the Baptist has called the Pharisees and the Sadducees a brood of vipers and has told them to flee from the wrath of God, and the wrath of God will be executed by this coming Messiah. And then in verse 10, he says, "The axe of the divine judgment is already laid at the root of the trees," that He's already come now to to cut down the false religious leaders of Israel, and He has said that these false leaders bear no good fruit. And then in verse 11, he says that this Coming One, the Messiah, Christ, is

mightier than John, and he's unworthy to even untie the sandals of the Messiah. And in verse 12 of Matthew 3, "This Coming One will baptize with fire, and His winnowing fork is already in His hand ready to separate the wheat from the tares; and He will toss the tares into the lake of fire and brimstone."

I mean, this is a takeover moment for the nation Israel. "At last, at last the Messiah is here, and He's going to clean house in Israel. The days of domination by the Pharisees and the scribes and the Sadducees and the false prophets and the false teachers, it's over. Jesus is now here."

But something has gone wrong or so it seems. The Messiah is here, and the messianic age should be present. The Messiah will usher in the golden era that had been spoken of for centuries by the prophets of Israel. The Messiah will deliver Israel from foreign oppressors and break the yoke of outside nations. He will set the nation free. He will restore Israel to the glory days of King David and King Solomon. It's what the prophets said will happen when Jesus the Messiah comes. He will restore Jerusalem to be the glory of the earth. He will remove false teachers from Israel. And all the nations of the world will be drawn to Jerusalem to worship the one true God in the temple in Jerusalem. It's all prophesied in the Old Testament, the Messianic age.

But it's not happening. Rome is still in control. Jesus is here, and Caesar is still in control. Jesus is here, and the Pharisees and the scribes are still our teachers. Jesus is here, and the nation is apostate and is in unbelief. Jesus is here, but He is not seated on the throne of David. Jesus is here, but the Gentile nations are not pouring into Jerusalem to worship in the temple. And on top of that, Jesus is here, and John the Baptist is in prison. What's gone wrong? What's going on?

Before we move on, you and I can easily make similar mistakes in judgment. We look around our country and wonder, "Where's God?" We see rampant evil everywhere; a blind man can see it. Homosexuality used to slink down the back alley, now stretched down Main Street. Lesbianism,

transgenderism, which is too evil to even depict. Drag queen shows in kindergarten, government failing to protect the innocent and not punishing the guilty. I mean, we could, kind of, easily put ourselves into John's sandals and look around and also be bewildered: "Doesn't the Light extinguish the darkness? Isn't the gospel the power of God and the salvation? Doesn't Jesus answer whatsoever we ask of Him?"

Now, this leads to verse 19, "the perplexed reaction." I mean, John responds confused. So, verse 19, "Summoning two of his disciples," - he obviously has many more disciples who are still with him, loyal to John the Baptist. I mean, he's the one who God used to bring them into the kingdom. He's the one who God used to bring them to repentance. You always remember the one who brought you the message of the gospel.

"Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord." Why? Because he can't leave. Now, the Lord is to the north and to the west, John is to the east and to the south, and so they're not next door to each other, and so he sends two of his disciples. They're going to have to cross probably the Jordan River and then work their way up to the Sea of Galilee somewhere.

"Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying," - and this is what you are to say on behalf of John - 'Are You the Expected One?' - literally - 'Are You the Coming One? Are You the One we've been waiting for? Are You the One we've been looking for, or do we look for someone else?'" He is not denying that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, but he is in a state of confusion: "What's going on? What are we missing? What am I missing?"

There's a disconnect in John's mind between who Jesus is and what the Old Testament prophets said will happen when Jesus comes and what's going on. I mean, if anything, John knows too much Bible, not enough. The world's scene is not matching up with what the prophets said would happen when the Messiah comes.

And so, here's John's problem: he failed to distinguish between the two comings of the Messiah. Just to remind you of the obvious, there's the first coming of Jesus, and there's the second coming of Jesus, and he fails to differentiate what will happen at the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and what will happen at the second coming of Jesus Christ. And for John, it's become almost like an omelet, it's just all merged together. He needs a divider plate to separate it out.

And he failed to see that the glory of the messianic age will come not at the first coming of Christ, but at the second coming of Christ. Even the prophets themselves had trouble sorting it out. And what it's like is like when you go to Colorado, you go to North Carolina, and you see these mountain ranges, and you see the mountain peaks, but you can't see the valleys in between. And so it just looks like all the mountain peaks are just side by side by side by side, until you drive further up into the mountains and you realize, "Oh my goodness, there's a huge difference from this mountain peak to this mountain peak."

That's the way it was with the prophets in the Old Testament. Everything they said was true. God was revealing to them the mountain peaks, but God was not revealing to them the time in between the mountain peaks. So from their perspective, it's all kind of a one event. But in the, what we call, progressive revelation, the further unfolding of truth, we see, "Oh, there's a distance between the first coming and the second coming. It's not all going to be fulfilled at the first coming."

Let me give you just a couple of verses that will help explain this. In 1 Peter 1:10, Peter writes, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come" - referring to the Old Testament prophets as they looked ahead to the future - "the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches" - the idea is they couldn't fully connect all the dots - "they made careful searches and inquires, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted" - now listen to this - "as He

predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." They just had it all merged together: the sufferings of Christ, the glories to follow.

Well, it's pretty easy for us right now. There's at least 2,000 years separating the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. But the prophets, when they wrote this, they didn't have the full perspective, yet everything that they wrote was correct.

I want to give you one more verse, Isaiah 61:1 and into verse 2. Isaiah, who in many ways is the prince of prophets, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," - now, is upon Isaiah. Ultimately, it's a messianic prophecy concerning Christ. And Jesus will quote this very passage in Luke 4:18 that He is the fulfillment of this. So there's a near fulfillment and a far fulfillment. There's an initial fulfillment and then a consummate fulfillment in the Messiah.

So, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," - Isaiah says - "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" - All of that is the first coming of Christ. The next line advances now what is for us at least 2,000 years - "and the day of vengeance of our God." And when Jesus goes into the synagogue in Nazareth and reads this passage and says, "Today this has been fulfilled in your ears," He leaves off that last part of the sentence, "and the day of vengeance of our God," because His first coming was not the day of vengeance, it was the day of salvation.

So, this is the distinction that the prophets had to even sort through and didn't fully grasp until further revelation in the New Testament. And this is what has John the Baptist puzzled because he's expecting the glories of the messianic kingdom to be fulfilled right now: "Why am I in prison if the Messiah is here?"

Well, you've got to understand the difference. When Jesus came the first time, He came to bring salvation; when He comes the second time, He comes to bring condemnation. When He came the first time, He stood before Pilate; when He comes again, Pilate will stand before Him. Great is the difference between the two appearing of Christ.

So, this leads us now to verse 20, "the prophetic response." So, in verse 20, "When the men came to Him," – when the two disciples of John, after they've made this trek, this journey from east of the Jordan River now up into the Galilean area and they come to Jesus, these two men – "they said," – verse 20 – 'John the Baptist has sent us to You to ask, "Are You the Expected One or do we look for someone else?'" So, no doubt, John's faith has been shaken. It has not been dissolved, it has not been destroyed, but it has been weakened. And you and I would be trying to sort this out as well if we were in John's place.

And so, the wisest thing that John can do at this moment is what he's just done: "I just need to go straight to Jesus. I need to bring my doubts to Jesus." Now, he cannot escape from prison, so he has to do the next best thing, which is to send two of his disciples. But rather than just sit in prison and brood over this and play this over and over and over and over in your mind – and you know what happens when you do that? The situation gets worse and worse and worse and worse and worse the more you play it over in your mind. It becomes like the devil's playground in your mind.

No. What we learn from this is you need to take any doubt or any confusion or any disillusionment, any doubt, you need to take it straight to Jesus. And John 7:17 says, "If any man is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching." I mean, if you will humble yourself and bring this to the Lord, the Lord says He'll sort it out.

So, verse 21, "At that very time," – so that means as these two disciples come walking onto the scene here to ask these two questions – "at that very moment, at that very time, He" – Jesus – "cured many people of diseases" – The word "diseases" here means "sicknesses," "illnesses,"

"any unhealthy condition bodily." And "afflictions" is a word that literally means "scourgings from a whip." And the idea is the painful nature of the diseases, that the diseases have inflicted afflictions, severe pain - "and evil spirits," - These are demon spirits. And there could even be a connection here between what they are suffering and the demon spirits - "and He gave sight to many who were blind." And the word "many" here means "a great many."

Verse 22, "And He" - Jesus - "answered and said to them, 'Go and report to John what you've seen and heard.'" And you know what the idea is? "The answer to your question is what you see and hear. This is objective, tangible, physical, audio evidence of your question. Am I the Expected One? Well, here's the answer." And it's an indirect answer. Jesus could have just said, "Yes, I am the Messiah. Yes, I am the Expected One." But He actually appeals to Scripture as the authority for His answer. And so Jesus now quotes from the Old Testament concerning what will happen at the first coming of the Messiah.

And so, He says, verse 22, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight." Now, that is a direct quote from Isaiah 35:5, which says, "The eyes of the blind will be opened." It's a messianic prophecy. And that is exactly what is taking place this very moment. As they come walking up, these two disciples, as Jesus is in Galilee, these miracles are a confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah, that He is the Son of God, the Son of Man. He is the long Expected One who has come now with the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Him, and every miracle that He performs is an authentication and is a confirmation that Jesus is the Expected One, and these miracles confirm at His first coming. It's what we could call "the inauguration of this new era, this new messianic era," but it will not reach consummation and climax until the second coming. So, this whole time between the first coming and the second coming is a new era in God's unfolding economy for human history. "The blind receive sight." And there are untold numbers of blind who were healed by the Lord Jesus Christ during His public ministry in Galilee.

And then He says, "the lame walk." And that's the next verse in Isaiah, Isaiah 35:6, "The lame will leap like a deer." In fact, early in Jesus' ministry when He goes to Capernaum, remember they bring the lame man on a stretcher, four friends, and they crawl up on the roof, and they remove the roof, and they lower him down, and Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven," - What? Only God can forgive sin - "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin. I say to you, take up your pallet and walk," and he walks out. This has all taken place already.

And then it says, "the lepers are cleansed." This is going on right now. And then He says, "and the dead are raised. You go tell John that the dead are being raised from the grave right now, that the Messiah has authority and power over death itself and over the grave." It is an authentication that Jesus is exactly who He claims to be. So, where John is off track is when the golden age will come; and it's not now, though there these initial miracles that are authenticating Christ.

But then He comes to the end of verse 22, and all of this is building up. Follow the argument here of Jesus. It's like going up a mountain slope and the summit is this last thing that He says that is greater than raising the dead, that is greater than making the lame walk, that is greater than the blind see, "the poor have the gospel preached to them." The greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs is the new birth. The greatest miracle that God ever performs is the conversion of a lost soul. Greater than raising the physical dead is when God raises those who are spiritually dead and trespasses in sin. Greater than making someone who is lame walk physically is to make someone who is paralyzed by sin and is a spiritual quadriplegic be able to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. That is the greatest work of God on the earth.

And so, when He says, "the poor have the gospel preached to them," that's a direct quote from Isaiah 61:1 that is obviously fulfilled at the first coming of the Messiah. Jesus Himself read this earlier in Luke 4:18 in the synagogue at Capernaum. And "to have the gospel preached to the poor" means that the gospel will penetrate all the way down to the lowest of the low. It will reach those who are at the bottom rung of society. God will

bring the gospel down to those by reaching to the bottom of the barrel. Even the poor have the gospel preached to them. It's the greatest work that God ever does. The eternal work is always greater than the temporal work. The heavenly work is always greater than the earthly work. The spiritual healing is always greater than the physical healing. That is what is taking place here.

So, Jesus graciously, kindly, even patiently gives the answer to these two disciples of John to take back to John, that "Yes, I am the Messiah. And this is what happens at My first coming." Though He does not say it here, we nevertheless know because we have the rest of the gospel of Luke that John the Baptist did not have in which Jesus talks about His second coming.

In Luke 21:25, in his Mount Olivet Discourse, Jesus says, "At the end of the age, there will be signs in sun and moon and stars." At the time of Christ's return, it will be so cataclysmic that there will be celestial signs and wonders in the sky above and on the earth, dismay among the nations. There will be tribulation and anguish among the nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, and it pictures the unrest of the nations like the angry sea. Verse 26, "men fainting from fear," as they see the unfolding of what is described in the book of Revelation, in Revelation 6 through 18, men literally fainting from dread and terror as these bowl judgments and dish judgments and trumpet judgments are unleashed upon this earth, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are upon the world, upon the inhabited world is going to come crashing down upon this Christ-rejecting world at the end of the age. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and everything that is not tied down will be shaken down.

Verse 27, "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory." And a door will open in heaven and a white steed will come stampeding out. "And Him who sat upon it has many diadems upon His head. And His robe is drenched in blood, and out of His mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword to slay His enemies and cast them into hell." Now the Son of Man is coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Verse 28, "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." That's the second coming. At His second coming, He will come stampeding in a full gallop on a white horse out of heaven. But at His first coming, He rode a lowly donkey into Jerusalem, and they're putting palm branches in front of Him. At His first coming, He was the suffering Savior; at His second coming, He is the sovereign destroyer of His enemies; and He will then usher in a reign of a thousand years upon this earth. What a difference it will be. You've got to keep the two comings separate.

And it's important for us to remember even today. We're still in a fallen world. We're still the minority. We're still the few on the narrow path. And we have moments of victory, and we have seasons of triumph, but there will be no peace until the Prince of Peace comes back.

So, this leads, finally, to verse 23, "the permanent refuge." This is the last thing that Jesus told these two men to go tell John. It's true for John. It's true for these two disciples. It's true for Herod. It's true for Herod's wife. It's true for anybody and everybody. "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

The contrast in this verse could not be any greater between the word "blessed" and the word "offense." "Take offense" is actually one word in the original language, *skandalizō*, which comes into the English language as "scandal." It means "to fall into a snare." It means "an animal that is trapped in a bait and switch." It means "to trip and fall because of a stumbling block."

And so, everyone in the world is either blessed, which means graced and favored, and all the blessings of salvation (justification, redemption, reconciliation, et cetera). "Blessed is he" – and the "he" is emphatic, he alone: "This is the only one who is blessed, who does not take offense at Me." To take offense at Christ means to trip over Christ as the stumbling block, and to be blessed is to build your life upon Christ as the rock of refuge.

In 1 Peter 2:6, God says, "I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNERSTONE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." Verse 8, and, "HE IS A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE." That's what Christ is. He's either a rock of salvation or a rock of stumbling, nothing else in between. And everyone in the history of the world has either built upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ and they are blessed by God, or they have tripped over and stumbled over Christ, the deity of Christ, the deity and humanity of Christ, the perfect life of Christ, the substitutionary death of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the present enthronement of Christ, the soon return of Christ. Those who trip over that message will be cast down into the lake of fire forever and ever, never to escape again. If they die in unbelief, they will die in their sins, and they will be without any forgiveness of sin.

But those who have by faith repented of their sins and believed in Jesus Christ, they are blessed, and they do not take offense at Christ. They believe what Jesus has said about Himself. Earlier, Simeon said in Luke 2:34, "Behold, this Child is appointed to the fall and rise of many." Everyone will either fall or rise according to their relationship to Jesus Christ.

So, this is quite an episode, quite a scene that Luke has pulled out of the unfolding narrative of the life of Christ and has recorded in this gospel that we are studying. And what we will see next week - you've got to be here next week - is that Jesus will say that John the Baptist who has temporarily had this sincere doubt about what's going on, he is the greatest man ever to be born of woman to this time. If the greatest man could have a moment of weakness and doubt, then that says something to the rest of us, not that we doubt who Jesus is, but that we doubt and don't understand exactly how He is working out His plan and His purposes in our lives.

There is the mystery of providence, but we need to take all of our disillusionments to Jesus. We just need to go to Him and lay them at His feet and say, "Lord, I do not understand, but I know exactly who You are. You are the Expected One, and I look for no one else but You." I trust that

that's your testimony today, that you're not looking to the left, you're not looking to the right, you're not looking anyplace but to Christ to be your permanent refuge. May God fasten you to His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Prayer] Father, thank You for this passage that has so much to say to us. Help us to grasp the truths that are being unfolded here. Help us to maintain an eternal perspective and even a biblical perspective to differentiate between the first and the second coming of Christ, and not to expect everything that will accompany the glories that follow the second coming to already be taking place in the world right now. Now, Jesus said we will have tribulation in this world until He comes. Continue to make us a lighthouse here. Grant to us seasons of reformation and revival and awakening, and may it spread far and wide. But we await the return of Christ for the greater glory. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
[End]

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." God bless you.