

DEALING WITH DOUBT

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Matthew 11:2-6

1. Most people have had to deal with doubt, discouragement, disillusionment, and disappointment from time to time.
2. In verse 11 stated, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist,” and yet here we find him dealing with unanswered questions and perplexity.
3. John was in prison, and had probably been there for some time; possibly about a year.
4. Some of his disciples had access to him, but for the most part he was isolated from the events that were transpiring.
5. John had to depend on the second hand reports of his followers related to the ongoing ministry of Jesus
6. What precipitated John’s confusion and perplexity?

I. He was dealing with difficult circumstances.

- A. John had enjoyed great success.
 1. His ministry as the forerunner to Christ was very successful.
 2. He had identified Jesus as the Messiah and had baptized Him.
 3. He understood that Jesus must increase and that he must decrease, but he had probably not anticipated the situation he was currently in.
- B. His faithfulness to God had gotten him in trouble with the palace.
 1. King Herod had divorced his wife so that he could marry the wife of his brother.
 2. John confronted the king and told him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Mt. 14:4
 3. Herod had John arrested and thrown into prison.
 4. Herod wanted to put John to death but feared the multitude, because they regarded John as a prophet.
- C. Faithfully representing and speaking for God can have serious, personal consequences.

NOTE: In Acts 16 we read about Paul being clearly led by God to extend his ministry into Europe only to be thrown into prison in Philippi.

NOTE: Paul stated an absolute truth when he wrote Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Timothy 3:12
- D. John was perplexed, but he knew where to go for answers. He summoned two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus to ask, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”

II. He possessed an incomplete revelation.

- A. God had given John great revelations about the Messiah which he faithfully proclaimed.
- B. But like other Old Testament prophets John did not have a complete understanding concerning all the details of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.
- C. Jesus responded by telling them to go and report to John what they had been hearing and seeing.
- D. I am sure that God used their report to encourage John, but many of his questions were left unanswered.

E. You and I have a great advantage over John in that we have the full revelation of Christ that is contained in the New Testament.

F. Yet, in spite of our advantage, we are often like the discouraged disciples that Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus after His resurrection—in possession of the truth, but not possessors of the truth. Luke 24:25-27

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

III. He was influenced by the theology of his day.

A. I think John embraced the Messianic expectations of his day.

1. The Jews were looking for a Messianic King who would overthrow Israel's enemies and establish a kingdom in which they would be kingpins.

2. They also held various ideas about the return of several Old Testament prophets prior to the coming of the Messiah, hence John's question, "Are You the Expected One, or one of His forerunners?"

B. Even after Jesus' resurrection the Apostles still clung to those expectation. Acts 1:6

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Is it at this time that You are going to fulfill our Messianic expectations?)

C. John was probably wondering why Jesus had not dealt with Rome and its puppet Herod.

D. Even today our interpretation and understanding of Scripture can be clouded and incomplete because of preconceived notions and ideas.

E. What is sometimes true of us is always true of unbelievers. John McArthur observed, "Ignorance and unbelief always blinds the eyes of men to the realities of the kingdom that are all around them."

IV. His expectations were not being fulfilled.

A. Jesus had not done what John had preached He would do. Matthew 3:11-12

"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

B. Instead Jesus gathered a little group of true followers, and although He did and said some great things, He did not do what John and the Jews expected the Messiah to do.

C. Many people profess faith in Jesus based on "expectations" only to fall away when faced with "reality." Matt 13:18-23

"Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 "The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

D. Those who are true believers persevere and bear fruit because they are genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION

1. Following Jesus Christ involves keeping our eyes on Him, trusting Him totally, and obeying Him no matter what.
2. It also involves a growing knowledge of God's Word so that we are not cultural Christians, but biblical Christians.
3. Following Jesus also involves living a life that is characterized by ongoing prayerfulness.
4. Following Jesus requires that we be led by, walk by, and filled with the Holy Spirit.
5. Following Jesus is, if possible, best done in the company of other true followers.