

“Are You the One?”

November 10, 2019

Luke 7:18-35

I. Introduction

Since we were young people—young like Alison or Lily or maybe even younger, there is a question we have all been asked many times—for some strange reason, I still get asked this question, “*What do you want to be when you grow up?*” (Actually, for some of us older, more mature people, the question has become: “*What do you want to do with the rest of your life?*”) Thinking back about that original question and then looking at your life, did things work out the way you thought they would? Were there times you doubted your choices; times you even doubted God’s leading? Weren’t there times when circumstances or other issues seemed to get in the way or cause doubts? Well, you aren’t alone—we’ve all been there—even great men and women from the Bible, like Abraham ([Genesis 17:17](#)), Sarah ([Genesis 18:2](#)), Moses ([Exodus 3:10-15](#)), Elijah ([1 Kings 19:1-14](#)), and the Apostles ([Matthew 8:23-26](#); [Luke 24:38](#)) had their moments of doubt. Even John the Baptist had doubts.

Even before his birth, there had been high expectations for John—[turn to Luke 1:13-17](#). [Luke 3:3](#) records that just before Jesus came on the scene, John “[went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.](#)” In [verse 16](#) John said, “[I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.](#)” But things didn’t work out as anyone thought, John was arrested less than a year after Jesus came on the scene—[Mark 1:14](#) says that John’s arrest led to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. As we come to today’s Scripture, John has been in prison for about a year and he is beginning to have doubts.

II. John had doubts

Mathew wrote in [Matthew 14:3-4](#) that John was put in prison by King Herod for preaching against Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife. Before his arrest, John had proclaimed Jesus as the coming Messiah, had called Him the Lamb of God, had baptized Him in the Jordan River, and had even said in

John 3:30 “He must become greater; I must become less.” But now John had doubts. He was puzzled by what he heard was happening, so he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, ““Are you the one who is to come, i.e., are you the Messiah, or should we expect someone else?””

Rather than allowing his doubts to grow and become insurmountable, John didn't wait but he sent his disciples to Jesus right away. I suspect that in his heart, he believed that Jesus was the Messiah and he trusted Him as his Lord, but things weren't going the way John expected. Because of this, John started to develop some doubts. He was asking for confirmation for his faith—he believed but his faith had become weak. Like the man in Mark 9:24, John was saying, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” It has to be reassuring that a man of John's calling and gifts was subject to doubts. In today's Scripture, we see at least 2 reasons for his doubts—the same reasons that can make us doubt today. The 1st reason is

A. Difficult Circumstances Seemingly, John's brief career had ended in disaster. He had a divine mandate from the angel of the Lord to preach and announce the coming Messiah. But now he was silenced. He had been an active man, a man of the desert who had lived in the wide-open spaces and now he was caged. After only about 18 months of preaching, he was locked up—confined and isolated.

John began to wonder if he had been right. He started to second guess himself. Where was God's justice? Why was he in jail unable to be God's messenger? Who was Jesus really? In his mind he may have been praying, “*Lord, why don't you help me?*”

John knew where to go to find the answers to his questions and doubts. John's response was to go to Jesus; so, he sent some of his disciples to the Teacher. “At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.” In His love and understanding, Jesus didn't chew out the disciples and send them back to John with their heads hanging low. Instead He performed some miracles just for John's and his disciples' sake.

B. Unfulfilled Expectations

A 2nd reason for doubt was unfulfilled expectations. Like everyone else, John had expectations of the Messiah. If Jesus was the Messiah all Israel had been looking for, why wasn't He doing anything to

oppose Rome, either in words or actions? Oh, He was eliminating suffering. The miracles were fine, but they weren't universal. The Jews were expecting many prophets before the coming of the Messiah, not just Elijah. Maybe Jesus was just one of those other prophets.

For that matter, John had preached that the Messiah would bring judgment on all people. **Turn to Matthew 3:11-12.** So where was this “unquenchable fire,” this judgment? Jesus was healing and preaching that the kingdom was at hand but there was no judgment. Jesus didn't even avenge the righteous—like John, who was suffering in jail. Jesus didn't even defend Himself. John had some incorrect expectations and they were causing his doubts.

We all need to know the truth of God's Word—we must study it continually. Then we will know what it says, and we won't have unrealistic or incorrect expectations. This in turn will protect us from doubt and help drive it away when it does come. We need to be like the Bereans who, as Luke wrote in **Acts 17:11**, “were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”

III. Jesus' Response

Jesus didn't respond to John's question with a simple “Yes” or “No.” As the “**Creator of all things**” (**Colossians 1:16**), Jesus knew that John needed more than that. Jesus gave John's disciples evidence they could take back. Before their very eyes He displayed His power and authority by doing many miracles. Jesus didn't do anything to relieve John's physical suffering, but He sent proof that He was the Messiah. Just like Isaiah had prophesied concerning the work of the Messiah in **Isaiah 35:5 and 61:1**, Jesus caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, those who had leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are made alive, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Jesus finished by giving a gentle warning: “**Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.**” John and his disciples had to look at the big picture—look at the blessings and judgments that were being brought—blessings of healing and good news to the poor and oppressed and certain judgment to those who rejected Jesus' ministry and message.

IV. Jesus' tribute to John the Baptist

But Jesus didn't stop there, He went on to give a tribute to John. Jesus turned to those gathered around and gave a glowing tribute to this “greatest of those born to women.” There were several reasons for this tribute.

A. First, John was not a compromiser. John didn't waver like grass or reeds in the wind. He stood firm against the winds of danger and oppression. That's why he was where he was. Whatever the people went to see, it wasn't a weak or indecisive man. He stood up to the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and even to King Herod himself. John had strong convictions from God and he would not compromise.

B. John denied self. John not only spoke like a prophet, he also lived like one. He didn't live a life of luxury, enjoying the friendship of great people and the pleasures of wealth, “dressed in fine clothes.” He was so consumed by God's call that he was not attracted to the world and its standards. His devotion to his ministry outweighed personal interests and comforts. He denied self for the sake of his ministry.

C. John was more than a prophet. John was a prophet because he was God's spokesman—the 1st spokesman in almost 400 years. But John was more than just a prophet. He was the one about whom prophesy had been given. He was the prophet who would announce the arrival of the Messiah. Turn to Malachi 3:1. In Matthew 17:12 Jesus said, “But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” John was more than a prophet, he was the herald, the forerunner of the Messiah.

Jesus went on to say that “among those born of women there is no one greater than John.” To emphasize the seriousness of what He said, Jesus said, “I tell you, i.e., LISTEN TO ME!!—Matt. 11:11 adds ‘the truth’.” Truly, John was the greatest human being who had lived until that time.

John's message was great because of the greatness of the One he introduced. But so that the people didn't misunderstand the nature of John's greatness, Jesus added, “Yet the one who is least in the

kingdom of God is greater than he.” Although he was a spiritual giant among men, John’s unique greatness was in his role in human history, not in his spiritual inheritance, in which he would be equal to every other believer.

D. John divided the nation. Luke then added an editorial comment emphasizing the results of John’s message: “All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” John’s teachings divided the nation. Some admitted that they were sinners and that God was holy, righteous and just to condemn them for their sin. They repented and were baptized by John, demonstrating to all those gathered at the Jordan River, that they acknowledged their need of God’s forgiveness. Others, like the religious elite, refused to repent and be baptized. Most of them were the Pharisees who were proud, self-righteous, and viewed themselves as spiritually superior to the common people. They were unwilling to acknowledge that they were sinners.

V. A Parable of Warning

Thinking of those who refused to believe, Jesus finished with a parable of warning. Jesus compared that generation to people who were childish, and nothing pleased them. In particular He was referring to Pharisees and the experts of the law. John was an individual who preached a stern message of judgment, and they said, “He has a demon.” Jesus mingled with the people and preached a gracious message of salvation, and they said, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” The self-righteous wanted neither the funeral of John nor the wedding of Jesus, because, like spoiled children who wanted their own way, nothing pleased them.

People who want to ignore the truth about themselves can always find something in the messenger to criticize. This way they are “proved right” or justify themselves. But God’s wisdom, God’s judgment isn’t overturned by the arguments of the so called wise. God’s wisdom—the wisdom of salvation “is proved right by her children,” i.e., by the changed lives of those who believe.

VI. Conclusion

John knew his call was from God. He had done what God demanded. Even Jesus said that he was the greatest of those born to women. And what were the results? He had already spent over a year in jail and, although John didn't know it at the time, it would end with his being beheaded. This wasn't what John expected and he began to doubt.

Difficult circumstances and unfulfilled expectations are painful and trying for everyone. When things aren't going the way we expect or want, we may begin to doubt God and His love. When that happens, our response should be the same as John's—going to the Lord and asking Him to put a stop to our doubts and anxieties and fears. In [Matthew 11:28](#) Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” [James 1:5](#) says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” Jesus will answer and He won't belittle anyone for his or her doubts. [Turn to Psalm 34:4-10.](#)

But when we go to the Lord, we must not expect His solution to be our solution. If John expected to be released from of jail, he didn't get what he wanted. God's ways are not necessarily our ways. In [Isaiah 55:8](#) He said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” But as the omniscient, loving, eternal God, we know that His way and His timing will be the best for us. We need the same attitude and goal as the Apostle Paul. [Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.](#) Our attitude should be to seek to bring praise and glory to God. Our goal isn't this temporal short life, but eternal life in heaven and a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21](#)) when we stand before our Lord and Savior. As Paul wrote in [Romans 8:37](#), “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Jesus' parable of spoiled children indicates how superficially pious people want God to approach them on their own terms. They want God to respond to their music, their plans, rather than following God's tune, God's plans. Do we ask God to serve us? Or do we serve Him? Jesus makes it clear that He is the only way. The blessing of being greater than a prophet comes only from following Jesus' call to

enter into God's grace and to follow His plan for your life—as wrote in **Romans 12:1**, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your true and proper worship.”