

Unrealistic Expectations

In the late 1890's a famous tightrope walker named Blodin strung a wire across Niagara Falls, and then, as ten thousand people watched, he inched his way along the wire from the Canadian side of the falls to the U.S. side.

When he got there, the crowd began shouting his name, "Blondin! Blondin! Blondin!" Finally he raised his arm, quieted the crowd and shouted to them, "I am Blondin! Do you believe in me?" The crowd shouted back, "We believe! We Believe!"

Again he quieted the crowd and once more he shouted to them, "I'm going back across the tightrope but this time I'm going to carry someone on my back. Do you believe I can do that?" The crowd yelled, "We believe! We believe!" He quieted them one more time and then he said, "I need a volunteer"

The crowd became suddenly silent. It was easy for them to believe in Blondin after they had watched him accomplish his unbelievable feat...but when he asked them to trust their lives to him....then their belief faded into doubt.

It is the same for us in our relationship with God. There are times in life when believing God's promises is easy. When He's doing great things in our midst. When He blesses us with a healthy family and life is good. In times like these it is easy to say, "I believe in God. I trust in God." But when tough times come. When it seems like we are walking a tight wire through life and that we are about to fall over the edge into despair....

In times like these it is often hard to maintain that same confidence in God. It's difficult to trust Him with our lives and we often slip into periods in which we doubt God and His promises, maybe even His existence at times. If this has ever happened to you, or if you're there right now in life, then it is important for you to know that you're not alone.

All of us experience doubt in one form or another. So let's define doubt. Doubt is not unbelief. Doubt is a matter of our mind. We doubt when we don't understand what God is doing! Unbelief is rebellion and rejection of God and His word! I believe doubt is natural part of our journey and growth in our faith.

Oswald Chambers said it this way, "Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong. It may be a sign that he is thinking!" CS Lewis adds, "To believe

something with certainty, we must begin with doubt!"

Where does doubt come from and how do we deal with it?

Turn to Luke 7 pg 999

I. When Life is Tough We All Face the Danger of Second Guessing God **Read 18-20**

Fairly early in Jesus' ministry, his cousin, John the Baptist, had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, because John called him on the carpet for marrying his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. Herodias never forgave John. She pressed Herod to arrest John.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that John the Baptist had been imprisoned in Herod's castle at Macheras, a desert fortress in Perea east of the Dead Sea. Josephus tells us, "What was walled in was itself a very rocky hill, elevated to a very great height." This was a lonely place meant to isolate John.

Herod Antipas didn't have a reputation of being as ruthless as his father, Herod the Great, but still John's prospects of release were poor. He wasn't cut off entirely, though. A few faithful disciples braved the desert to bring him supplies and to bring him news.

When everything seems to be going your way, you seem almost invulnerable. But when your health breaks, your marriage fails, your business goes bankrupt, you lose everything you have, time and loneliness have ways of playing games with your mind. You second guess your decisions. You wonder, What if?

John began to wonder, if he'd been wrong about Jesus. Why, he hadn't heard from Jesus the whole time he's in prison. The Jewish leaders didn't do anything to try to help their fellow Jew and it didn't look like Jesus was doing anything either.

John had preached a powerful message. Multitudes had come out to hear him. Luke 3 tells us: *And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh*

*shall see the salvation of God.'"*Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

John took his job seriously. He ate locusts and honey, wore camel's hair clothing and preached a message of warning. Now he was in prison with no way of escape. Eventually he's going to be beheaded.

Can't you just imagine John kind of mumbling to himself in the bleak prison cell, "What happened? I'm a prophet of God. I was sent to prepare the way of the Lord."

"I told the people that Jesus was the one. I told them: His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

So John send some of his disciples to Jesus to ask, "What's going on? Are you the right one? Did I make a mistake?"

Warren Weirsbie helps to put this in context for us. He writes:
You and I can look back at the ministry of Christ and understand what He was doing, but John did not have that advantage. John had announced judgment, but Jesus was doing deeds of love and mercy. John had promised that the kingdom was at hand, but there was no evidence of it so far. He had presented Jesus as "the Lamb of God", so John must have understood something about Jesus' sacrifice; yet how did this sacrifice relate to the promised kingdom for Israel! He was perplexed about God's plan and his place in it.

There's a lot of things in life that we can become confused about. Why is there so much evil in the world if God is truly Lord? Why does everything seem to go wrong in our lives when we're trying so hard to please God?

When you begin to have those questions and doubts the first thing I want you to do is remember John the Baptist. It happens to the best of them!

In fact turn to I Peter 1 pg 1162 Read vs 10-11

There were many times when even the OT prophets themselves didn't fully understand. God would speak about his Messiah's sufferings and the about the exaltation and authority of Messiah. They couldn't put those two concepts together.

How could the coming King suffer and die and rule and reign at the same time? What they didn't know at that point was that there would be two comings separated by over 2000 years.

John didn't understand that either. There's often times when we don't understand. So what do we do? The answer is in Jesus' reply to John's disciples.

Back to Luke 7 Read vs 21-23

I. When Life is Tough We All Face the Danger of Second Guessing God

II. To Solve Our Dilemma We Must Go Back to Scripture **Read 21-23**

Jesus quotes from the only Scriptures that existed at that time. There was no NT to point to. He doesn't give a lecture on theology or prophecy. He simply points to Scripture.

The prophet Isaiah had given a clear description of Messiah and how to identify him. The blind would see, the lame would walk, and the dead would be raised.

That should settle it right there.

It was almost as if John was trying to force Jesus to do what he thought He should do. He thought Jesus should establish His kingdom. He should fulfill the prophecies of judgment and exalt Israel. John was saying, "if you're not the right guy I'm going to look for someone else."

The answer was read the Bible accurately and see what it has to say. The Bible said that Israel's Messiah would do certain miracles and Jesus did them.

We always need to go back to the Bible for our answers.

If John the Baptist could get thrown off so can we.

How do we answer questions like, is the Bible really true? We examine the evidence. Jesus said to John's disciples, "Here's what the Scriptures say and here's the evidence right before your eyes. Check it out."

We can do the same thing. We can read the prophecies of the OT and look at their fulfillment in history. When we do, we find that Jesus Himself fulfilled one specific, detailed prophecy after another. From His ancestry, to the place of his birth, to the way He lived His life, to His death. It was all detailed ahead of time.

When the circumstances of life cause us to question and doubt we need to go back to the Bible. Last month when we did the Sunday service at the Ordnance Road detention center a fellow hung back while the others were leaving. I could see that he had a question so I went over to him.

He did have a question but I think he felt ashamed for having it. His question was, what do you do when you doubt God and the Bible. He said he was a believer in Jesus but he was struggling with some doubts.

We didn't have much time to try to tackle the whole question of Biblical Authority but I tried to assure him that asking questions and having doubts wasn't bad. It's often the way we learn and grow.

Doubt only becomes a problem when we use our questions to excuse our unbelief. It's only a problem when we hide behind our questions.

John the Baptist might have been caught up in some wrong thinking but at least he was still looking for answers. He was still going to the source.

The Scriptures plainly pointed to the fact that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. That didn't solve the question of when the kingdom would be established, or when the judgement of God would fall. John still didn't have answerers to those details, but he could know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the one.

We're not going to have all the details of all our questions answered as to why things happen the way they do or how come we face the trials we face, but we can go to the Bible and learn the character of God.

Like John we can know who Jesus is.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

John 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

The plain declaration of Scripture is that Jesus is God incarnate. God who became flesh.

We can also know the purpose of His coming.

1Co 15:3 *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*

1Pe 3:18 *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,*

Jesus Christ is God's solution to our greatest dilemma. He died to take the punishment for our wrongdoing. Our sins.

Talk about a God we can trust with our lives. We trust him with our eternal destiny. We can trust Him with our everyday lives.

I. When Life is Tough We All Face the Danger of Second Guessing God

II. To Solve Our Dilemma We Must Go Back to Scripture

III. We Need to Recognize That God Works in Different Ways Through Different People

Multitudes of people were listening to Jesus interact John's disciples. Hundreds heard Jesus give a rebuke. It may have sounded a bit harsh to them. Is this a put-down? No. It's a straight word from one godly man to another.

Jesus doesn't want these people to doubt John in any way. I'm sure that many in this crowd had been baptised by John the Baptist. He's the reason that many of the are following Jesus. So He gives this explanation:

Read vs24-27

Jesus uses a series of rhetorical questions to get His point across. John and Jesus had two very different ministries but *God Works in Different Ways Through Different People*.

John wasn't a compromiser. He wasn't a reed shaken by the wind. He didn't use focus groups to see how people would react to his words and ideas. He knew truth and he pointed people to the truth. No one would have taken their time off of work and responsibilities to go out into the desert to hear from a reed blowing in the wind.

John wasn't a celebrity either. The people didn't go out into the desert to hear some guru living a luxurious life while his followers were in poverty.

John was a prophet of God. He didn't compromise what he preached or how he lived. "In fact," Jesus says, "He was more than a prophet."

His job was to introduce people to the Messiah. His job was to prepare the way for God's anointed. John had the great privilege as God's messenger of introducing Israel to her Messiah.

Read vs 28

One writer said: Jesus said there was no one greater than John. Not even Elijah who did not die, the no-fault Daniel, or Moses who divided the Red Sea, gave the Ten Commandments, and saw the glory of God.

There's not a greater prophet than John the Baptist because John didn't just prophecy about Messiah, He pointed to Him in the flesh.

And yet *he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*. Why? Because believers in Christ since that day have a greater understanding of spiritual realities. They understand the cross, the resurrection, the age of the Spirit, and the meaning of the second coming.

The Bible I'm using up here is a "red letter" edition. It has the words of Jesus in red. the only problem with "red letter" editions is that it's someone's opinion as to which words are Jesus' words and which words are someone else's.

In my Bible verses 29 and 30 aren't in red but I believe they should be. R.C.H. Lenski, the German commentator says at verse 29, This and the next verse prepare for the striking illustration that is to follow. The fact that Jesus is still speaking, and that Luke is not interjecting something of his own in these two verses, is so plain that it needs no proof.

Jesus is continuing giving an explanation of John's situation. **Read vs 20-30**

Some of the people were probably asking, "If John is such a great prophet, why is he in prison!" Here's the answer: because of the wilful unbelief of the religious leaders. The common people accepted John's message and were baptized by him as proof of their repentance. They "justified God," which means they agreed with what God said about them. But the religious leaders justified themselves, not God, and rejected John and his message.

Let me ask you, if you were one of the people listening to Jesus' words about John, what would you learn about Jesus from this?

One lesson that comes through loud and clear to me is that Jesus looks at a individual's strengths, not his weaknesses. Jesus' assessment of John is not critical or demeaning. Quite the contrary

There are times when we are weak. When we have taken a hit. When we are still reeling. Know this, that Jesus is not there to push you down you when you are struggling for air; he is there to help you. He doesn't push you down, but pulls you to the surface. It is Satan's voice, not God's, that constantly condemns.

If you need a shot of grace from God's throne, here it is from Romans 8:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-9:1)

The Bible is full of examples of God's people failing. Elijah, Moses, Abraham, Peter and many others failed God, but God didn't beat up on them. He lifted them up and restored them to fellowship with Himself.

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IV. We're Not to Judge According to Appearance, But Judge a Righteous Judgment.

Read vs 31-32

Here's what Jesus is saying; This generation is like a bunch of kids who are upset because John and Jesus won't play the game their way. "We played the flute and you wouldn't dance, We mourned and you wouldn't weep."

Read vs 33-34

John and Jesus were in a no-win situation. John lived out in the desert, had a stern message, and lived a simple life and people said, "The guy is crazy." Jesus sat down to eat and drink and He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. They said, "That Jesus isn't spiritual, He's worldly."

This was one of the lessons I had to learn early on in the ministry. You can't please all the people all of the time. I've been called a liberal, I've been called a legalist and everything in between.

There are issues of morality that are non-negotiable, but we need to be careful of making snap judgments about other people. Unfortunately it's an occupational hazard of being religious. Sometimes we're quick to judge people without finding out all the facts.

That's what happened to John the Baptist and it's what happened to Jesus. Now we look back and say isn't it terrible how religious people in Jesus' day misjudged Him? And it is.

But here we are, prone to do the same thing. We've come around full circle. We're back where we started with John and his doubts.

We believe in a God who is Sovereign, wise and loving. The word of God teaches us this and we have even experienced these truths in our daily lives. But sometimes we wonder...We look around our world at all of the pain and suffering. We see broken homes, drug addiction, sexual immorality, crime, disease and poverty. And as we look at this confusing mess, we wonder, even doubt, to ourselves...Is God really in control? As we walk the path of life before us, it is filled with disappointment, fear and pain, we wonder, even doubt...Is God really loving? As we are led into situations that seem dangerous and even risky, we wonder, even doubt, ...Does God really know what He is doing?

Here's the answer. **Read vs 35**

What does that cryptic sounding statement mean ...*wisdom is justified by all her children*? Commentators have come up with a number of different interpretations. Here's what I think.

The children of wisdom are those who are wise and discerning people. The verb "justified" is Greek *dikaioo*, "to show justice, do justice, vindicate." The idea is that true wisdom is proved out by those who practice it. Those who have discerned that John and Jesus were of God will ultimately be vindicated in their choice. Their faith may be tested by hard times, but ultimately it will be shown up as the path of wisdom.

Listen to Jesus' command from John 7:24 "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*"

Don't just look on the surface of things to make your evaluation. Make a righteous judgment. We're commanded to judge. We're supposed to make evaluations. But there's only one way to make a righteous judgment. We need to use a righteous standard.

There is only one unqualified, changeless, fixed, certain source of truth. It isn't our feelings. It isn't the latest psychological fad. It isn't what they're doing in Hollywood. It's God's Word the Bible.

When we doubt, when we question, when we wonder, Jesus are you really the one? It's God's Word that will settle the doubts and answer our questions if we look openly and honestly. God's Word will stand the test of examination because, It's forever settled in heaven. It's the Word of Truth.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.