

Intro:

How often do you struggle with disappointment with God?
Today's message is about how we can approach doubt positively.

Read Text: Luke 7:11-23

The beginning of the story is clear enough with this. Jesus is just coming from another amazing healing of a yet another social outcast- a centurion. Here, he comes upon a funeral procession, and his heart goes out to the mother who is losing her son. She's not just losing her son, as you know- she's losing her well- being as well. She is a widow, and to lose both a husband and son is to have no caretaker at all.

Jesus, full of compassion, goes and brings the son back to life. He touches the bier, or stand, that is carrying the corpse or frame, those who are carry it stop, and Jesus says simply- be raised. Note that there's no mention of faith from the mother- Jesus just does it because he cares.

People praise Him, and not just in general. They say he is a prophet- a spokesperson of God like those in their storied history (note that this was something the greatest prophet Elijah did). God is visiting his people as in the days of old when God directly intervened in their history- again, the language used here points to that.

You would figure that, if you were there and saw these things, you would have no doubts about Jesus as being God's savior for us; you would join in with the crowd and say yes, this guy is God's guy for us! He is indeed the Savior!

Doubts about Jesus arise when Jesus doesn't meet our expectations.

Yet doubt is lurking around, even among the most spiritual. And it arises because Jesus' doesn't meet people's expectations.

As the news of this healing gets spread all around, our passage focuses in on the story getting to a man named John the Baptist. John was introduced to us earlier as the great man of God who had helped prepare people for Jesus. He was so great, Jesus would later say of him that there was no prophet in history as great as him. But here he is, this great spiritual person, the greatest of the prophets according to Jesus, doubting. (read text). Note how his doubt is repeated twice.

The question is of course: why is he doubting who Jesus is? Two probable reasons, which are our reasons today as well.

1. Jesus doesn't do what he/we expect of him.

According to Luke 3:15-17, the last word we read of John's take on what Jesus is about, John's picture of a Savior seems to be one of deliverance from evil in the land, evil in the Roman oppressor, of judgment (look at text). Jesus isn't doing his job of hoped for Messiah/deliverer, at least in John's eyes. But Jesus, of course, is doing His job- he's bringing deliverance from all the effects of evil- the brokenness and disease of our bodies, the demonic torment of our souls- all of that, according to the Bible, is a result of evil. And he is aiming for the ultimate- the evil that resides in the human heart- he will break that power through the cross. He's showing the compassionate side of deliverance, if you will. This doesn't fit into the judgment paradigm John is expecting.

Our context: For us today, this is true for us as well- we doubt Jesus, we are hesitant to follow Him or listen to Him, because we see things about Him in here (the Bible) that don't fit our expectations. But we tend to be on the opposite side, I think, as it relates to the issues of judgment and compassion. We expect Jesus to be compassionate, gracious, merciful. But when Jesus talks about how He will be the judge of the world (John the Baptist was right- there are plenty of texts on Jesus as judge), or when he says and does other things that don't fit our expectations- that's when we have our doubts. Or worse yet, perhaps we don't doubt- we just dismiss what he says and ignore it. We doubt because Jesus doesn't do what we want.

2. Jesus doesn't meet his/our most immediate personal need.

But there's a second reason why I think John doubts. It's not just about how Jesus doesn't do what he expects. It's not that Jesus isn't doing what John thinks He should do on some sort of factual, theoretical level. It's that Jesus doesn't meet his most immediate personal need.

It's important to note that John is in prison in this story! We know that based on what's in Luke 3. And as he hears about the miraculous with others, he wonders- what about me, Jesus? I was your main man, preparing people for you. Why... why am I still here? Especially if you are about helping the down and out, freeing those in captivity? (see Luke 4:18-19) Are you really the one? Or should we expect someone else?

Our context: this is perhaps at the core at many, if not all, of our doubts. Things start going wrong in our life, and the nagging feeling begins to creep into our hearts and minds- God, where are you? God, why aren't you here, getting me out of this situation? God...! It might be the chronic pain of an impossible physical condition, the sense of loneliness that

overtakes you as you see others have fun in their dating and social life, the financial crunch of not having a job. We doubt because Jesus isn't here meeting our most immediate need.

The Way Forward:

So what to do? How do we move forward with our doubt? There are a number of things to note about Jesus' answer here in v.22-23.

1. Know that Jesus is the compassionate Savior.

He reaffirms John's point of contention: yes, I am the compassionate Savior you have been hearing of.

Our context: even as we wonder if he cares because he seems distant or judge, know that all things He does through the grid of compassion. Is he trying to hurt or help?

2. See Jesus in light of the larger story of the Bible

read v.22. Jesus can't be just saying look at all that is going around- remember, that's why John's doubting in the first place- He's seeing all that's going around and he's wondering this isn't going the way I want it to! I mean, sometimes- sure, we need to get outside of ourselves and see how God is at work- I think that is important and needed.

I think what Jesus is doing is talking about himself in light of the Scriptures of old. Each phrase is based in some key prophecies of the Scriptures of old- some are even direct quote- of the coming era of the Savior of God. John probably knew about these, but needed reminding. Jesus is saying- remember me, John, in light of the Scriptures. I am God's Savior, I have finally come.

Our context: are we in the Bible, the whole Bible? Confidence is built in this way.

Summer actions:

- Read the Bible
- Get in Formatio
- Join a CG

3. Take a future perspective with life

v.23- the idea of blessed more often than not is used in the context of future blessing in light of some type of present hardship or action. Just in the previous chapter, it was used to highlight people in difficult situations- that they were indeed blessed as they held on to God and looked toward the future.

So it is here.

Our context:

If we're going through tough times: look ahead at the reward of obedience and persevere.

If we're going through good times: look ahead at the reward of obedience and invest!

4. Get community

Note how all this requires other people to encourage John- Jesus himself, and his two disciples. We need the same.

Our context: we need to commit to it- both being open to it, and also developing compassionate hearts for one another.

Questions/Comments:

Challenge:

- take your doubt to Jesus
- take your doubt to community
- commit to the Bible