

What To Do When You Doubt

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Preacher: Nick Louw

- [0 : 0 0] I want to start by asking you, do you ever find yourself doubting all of this, you know, whether all this is true?
- Christianity, Jesus, the Bible, this stuff that we just said in the Apostles' Creed. Now, you might not share it with anyone, but do you ever find in the depths of your mind niggling doubts as to whether this is really true?
- Maybe you grew up believing, and you've always believed this because you grew up in a Christian home, but maybe you're scared to ask anyone, but how do I really know it's true?
- You know, my parents taught me to believe this, sure, but do I really know it's true? Or is it, do I just believe this because this is how I've been brought up, and I've always assumed it must be true?
- But is it really? Maybe you've asked yourself those questions, especially if you were brought up in a Christian home. Or maybe you became a Christian later in life, but every now and again, when you're by yourself, in your more skeptical moments, you have that irritating voice in the back of your mind, going, how do I really know this is true?
- [1 : 2 4] How can I really know? Or must I just carry on believing and not ask those kind of questions? And you quickly push those questions aside, and you never really share with people in your growth group that that's how you're feeling, because of course, if you're a Christian, you must just believe, right?
- You mustn't ask questions like that. You can't doubt. You're not supposed to think that way. You must just believe. Well, is that you? Does this resonate maybe with your experience? Do you find yourself doubting, but you've never raised it with anyone?
- Well, I want to tell you this morning, if that's you, then it's okay. I have my doubts as well. It's actually normal. In fact, all of Jesus' closest followers had moments of doubting Him, and today we're going to discover even His most loyal supporter, John the Baptist, the herald of Christ himself, had doubts.
- That's what we see in this passage, and it's quite surprising if you see what's going on, that John the Baptist himself has come to the point of doubting Jesus. And so we're going to look at this passage, and we're going to see how Jesus responds to that.
- How does He respond, not just to John the Baptist's doubts about Him, but also in the next half of the passage. So the passage in front of you, if you just look at it in your Bible, it's pretty much divided into two sections.
- [2 : 5 1] Verse 1 to 6 is Jesus responding to John the Baptist's doubts, and then verse 7 to 15 is Him turning to the crowd and responding to the people's doubts now about John the Baptist.
- Now everything is starting to unravel. If John the Baptist is doubting, then the people are doubting John the Baptist, and is this Messiah thing true, or have we just been swept up in it? What's going on?

And the reason they're doubting John the Baptist, of course, is if Jesus' closest supporters are doubting, then can we trust anything we've been told? And maybe that's the way you doubt.

Maybe you're not just doubting Jesus Himself, but maybe you're doubting the people through whom you've come to know about Jesus. And those are really the two sources of doubt we can have today, and today we're going to see how Jesus addresses both of those.

And so let's look at those in turn and see what Jesus says. Firstly, doubting the Messiah Himself. We've got to start by asking, why is John the Baptist doubting Jesus all of a sudden?

[3 : 55] I mean, just a few chapters ago, if you've been with us in Matthew, you'll see that he was, as I say, his biggest supporter. John the Baptist is the herald of Christ. He was announcing the arrival of God's King, God's Messiah.

He was getting ready for the coming of Jesus. But now, a few chapters later, he's wondering whether all that he himself preached is true. Why? Why is John the Baptist doubting Jesus?

Well, the reason we see in this passage is because things had not at all gone the way that John expected. Have a look from verse 2. Now, when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples and asked him, Are you the one who is to come?

Or should we expect someone else? Okay, you see where John is? That's quite an important detail. He's in prison. Okay, that shouldn't have happened in John's mind.

If the Messiah has come, why is he in prison? So, it's because he's in prison that he's suddenly asking these questions. Because when the Messiah came, he was going to judge evil people and he was going to liberate righteous people.

[5 : 09] So, what's going on? So, just so you know, kind of the kind of thing that John was expecting, let me read to you back from chapter 3. This is what John the Baptist said when he was preaching in the wilderness, talking about Jesus coming.

He says in chapter 3, verse 11 and 12, I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I'm not worthy to remove his sandals.

He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with a fire that never goes out.

That was John the Baptist's message. He was telling, you know, all his enemies, all his people who were skeptical of him, all the evil people who wanted to shut him up, he's like, just wait. Just you wait until Jesus comes.

Then you'll see. And now he's in prison. Do you see the disconnect between what John was expecting to happen and where he finds himself now?

[6 : 20] You can understand why he's a bit disillusioned. He expected Jesus to do more, quite frankly. And just maybe, as I say that, maybe you find yourself resonating right there with John the Baptist.

Maybe you've experienced a similar disillusionment with Jesus because you expected more from him, quite frankly. Either in your own life.

You know, maybe you find yourself now not experiencing the victory some preacher told you about. Or the fulfillment and the joy that you hoped for when becoming a Christian.

And you expected that more would happen. You expected that Jesus would do more. Or maybe, if not in your own life, maybe in the world around. As you look around the world in general.

And you ask yourself, wait a minute. If Jesus is really the Messiah. If Jesus is really God's Son sent from heaven to save the world.

[7 : 31] But, shouldn't it be a little bit different to what it is now? Maybe you expected more from Jesus in the world. Because it doesn't look like much has happened since he came.

I mean, in the core of humanity. You know, if you've got leaky pipes at home or a tap that's not working and you get a plumber to come fix it.

And then he comes and you pay him. And then you wake up the next morning and your taps are still leaky. And nothing seems to have changed. You're going to wonder whether that plumber was legit, right?

Well, 2,000 years after Jesus. Who has come to fix the world apparently. And yet, you're going to wonder. If you look around and you see the wars and you see the fighting.

And you see the sin and you see the wickedness. Listen, did he really do anything when he came? Maybe that's you. Maybe you expected more from Jesus. In fact, that's the very reason that most Jews still don't accept Jesus today.

[8 : 41] Even though they believe the Old Testament same as we do. I've had a number of conversations with Jews over the years. And almost invariably it comes down to when I ask, why don't you believe in Jesus as the Messiah?

Given all the fulfilled prophecies and given all the signs. They say, well, this is the reason I don't believe Jesus as the Messiah. Because he didn't do all that the Messiah was meant to do.

That's the number one reason Jews don't believe in Jesus today. They expected more from him. And so you see, I think John the Baptist's experience in this passage is in some way the experience of all of us sooner or later.

That this is not what I expected of Jesus. In my life or in the world around me. So that's John the Baptist's doubt.

That's what it's rooted in. Let's look at how Jesus responds to it. From verse 4. Of chapter 11. Jesus replied to them.

[9 : 43] This is John the Baptist's emissaries. His messengers. Jesus replied to them. Go and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight.

The lame walk. Those with leprosy are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the poor are told the good news. And blessed is the one who isn't offended by me.

That's Jesus' answer to John's doubts. And it's a very simple one. He's basically saying, look at the evidence. Look at what you can see.

Not what you can't see. Not what you expected and you don't see. But look for a moment at what you do see, John. Or at least what is reported to you.

From reliable sources. What do you see? What can you know about me? Objectively. For yourself. And then he lists what people can know about him.

[10 : 49] Based on what has been happening and what eyewitnesses have seen. And you know that right there, it's very simple, but it's really good advice. If you find yourself doubting Jesus.

What do you know about Jesus? Is ask yourself, what do I actually know about him? Not what has the preacher told me. Not what has my parents told me growing up.

But what do I know about him? What can I find out about him? What information do I actually have? And do an audit in your life of what information you know, you possess about Jesus.

What have you seen? There's this great Australian preacher. He's passed away now. But John Chapman, you may have heard of him.

Great Australian Bible teacher, preacher. Very, as Australians can be, frank and down to earth. And he admitted, even though he was a Christian for his whole life.

[11 : 53] And a great Christian leader. He admitted that even he had moments of doubt. But whenever he thinks about giving up believing because of his doubts about all this Christianity and Jesus and stuff.

Listen to what he does. And I quote. He says, when I get up. I'm not going to do the Australian accent. Sorry. I almost did there. When I get up in the morning and have had enough of being a Christian.

I sit on the end of the bed and swing my legs over the side. And I say, John Chapman. Have you had any fresh information that Jesus Christ did not live? No, I have not.

And John Chapman. Have you had any fresh information that Jesus Christ did not die for you and rise from the grave and promise to return? No, I have not.

Well, John Chapman. Then keep going. It is obviously the best thing to do. That's very simple advice, isn't it? And it's good advice.

[12 : 51] And it's the same advice Jesus is giving John the Baptist here. When you doubt, ask yourself, what do I know? What do I really know about Jesus? Where did I get that information? Is it reliable?

And have I had any other new information to contradict it? Because, you see, Jesus doesn't expect people to just blindly believe without real reasons to.

Maybe this is new for you. Maybe you've expected that if you're a Christian, you must just believe just because people say you must. Well, Jesus never expects that. He doesn't expect that of John the Baptist or anyone.

He doesn't expect you to blindly believe without having real reasons to. Without good reasons. And Jesus left good reasons.

Through the eyewitnesses of his events, through the apostles that recorded what has been happening and has been recorded in history for us still to have in front of us and investigate ourselves.

[13 : 50] Jesus has left us good enough reasons to see what we need to see about him. And all he says here is, look at the reasons. What can you know about me?

Not, what do you not know? What did you expect? But what do you know? Focus on that. What have you seen? And if you haven't yet seen good enough reasons for taking Jesus seriously, then it's not because they aren't.

It's because you haven't looked hard enough. And it's actually not hard. We run Discover Jesus, as I said earlier, every term. And that course is designed for you to see the evidence for yourself. If you haven't actually taken the step of going to a course like that or investigating, then your doubts are not anybody else's fault but your own.

You need to, you know, you've got so much time in this life and this looks like it's pretty serious. So you need to take that time to investigate this for yourself if you haven't yet.

Because there is enough to see. There are good reasons. Look into them if you haven't. And if you have, remember what they are. Remember why you believe. But there's another thing to see here in Jesus' response to John the Baptist.

[15 : 14] When he says, go and report to John what you see and hear. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Those with leprosy are cleansed, etc., etc. He's doing something very clever here. He is quoting a whole string of prophecies from the Old Testament of what would happen when the Messiah came to John.

And John would know these prophecies. So he's reminding John, prophecy is being fulfilled right now through me. It might not be how you expected, but it is being fulfilled.

In other words, he's assuring John that this is still exactly in line with what God has planned to happen. Even if it's not what you thought it would look like. It's all part of the way God has planned to save this world from evil.

For Jesus to come and not to bring final judgment yet that John the Baptist was talking about. But first, to reach individuals and to heal them from the brokenness of the world they're under.

And to heal them from the results of their own sin and the power of sin over them. And that's what Jesus came to do the first time he came. To rescue people from the results of sin and brokenness.

[16 : 24] And the power of sin over them. And of course that explains why he went on to do something nobody expected. Which was to die on a cross. Nobody expected that.

But we realize as we read the Bible that he did that to take our judgment on himself. To take the judgment of his people that they would have to face on himself first.

So that they don't have to face it if they trust in him. And nobody expected that. Nobody even had that concept in their mind. But that was the only way that if the Son of God came and died for the sins of others.

That was the only way in the whole universe that sin's power could be broken over individuals. So that we can survive the ultimate judgment that God has planned for this world.

And we can be part of the new world that God is going to make. That was the solution. But that was not a solution anyone expected. But it was the solution we needed.

[17 : 31] You know I once took my car in for a wheel alignment. Maybe you've experienced this before. You know the steering was drifting a little bit. I noticed over a month or so.

So I took my car in. And you know wheel alignment. I don't know what it costs now. But like 200 bucks or something. It wasn't going to break the bank. And yet the guy had to look at the car.

And guess what? He told me wheel alignment is not your problem sir. You need a whole replacement of your CV boot and blah blah blah. All this stuff. You know how it is with mechanics.

You take your car in for maybe what you think is a little problem. And they reveal that there's a much deeper problem. That's why we hesitate to do that. And it's like going to the dentist or the doctor.

You know please fix this problem. And then you're scared that they're going to reveal that there's something much deeper wrong. Well car mechanics sadly do that all the time. But you know what Jesus does that as well?

[18 : 30] That you realize you're getting not the solution you came to him for. But the solution you really need. Just like that wheel alignment guy.

He didn't give me the solution I came for. But he gave me the solution I needed to hear about. And that's why people don't like Jesus. Often that's why they stay away from Jesus. Because Jesus doesn't give us the solution we want often.

But he does give us the solution we need. Even if it's not what we expect. And that's why he says in verse 6. And blessed is the one who isn't offended by me.

In other words. Blessed is the one who accepts what I've come to give.

Even if it's not what they think they need from me. Even if it's not what they expected. You see Jesus may not give you what you think you need.

[19 : 32] But don't let that cause you to doubt him. Don't let that cause you not to look in and investigate what he has come to give you. Look and see what he has done.

And realize that's what you really need. So that's how he addresses John the Baptist's doubts. But now he moves on, interestingly in this passage, to another reason people might doubt his message.

And that is because of doubting the messenger who brought this message. In this case, people started doubting John the Baptist. And you can understand why.

Right? He's in prison. They didn't expect that. He himself is now doubting Jesus. And, you know, he's always been a bit of an oddball. John the Baptist.

You know, he wasn't regular and acceptable. He's not the kind of guy you would invite to a respectable dinner in your home.

[20 : 35] And so people always, you know, they're probably at this point going, you know, I've always had my suspicions about that guy in the desert. Now, now I know. Now I know that he's not legit. You know, if this is really God's chosen messenger, surely he would be more obvious and accepted by society as this is the word from God.

And everybody would listen to him. And he would be just more legitimate if he was really God's chosen messenger. Okay, so Jesus knows people are starting to think this about John the Baptist.

And so listen to what he says to them from verse 7. Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

A reed swaying in the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? See, those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces.

What then did you go out to see? A prophet. Yes. I tell you, and more than a prophet. Okay, so this is a weird thing to say to the crowds.

[21 : 42] What does Jesus mean by these words? Well, I think what he's saying here is, guys, what did you expect a messenger of God to look like? Okay?

Because if you're asking, how do I know whether someone's really a messenger of God? What did you expect when someone comes with God's truth to people who don't want to hear it?

What did you expect him to look like? He says, did you expect him to be someone who's popular because his message matches popular opinion?

Well, Jesus calls that a reed swaying in the wind. Someone whose message is accepted and comfortable for everyone because it matches what people want to hear. You get a lot of those kind of messengers, preachers today, don't you?

Reeds swaying in the wind who everybody loves. Nobody's got a problem with them because they always match their message to what people want to hear. But Jesus says, no, that's not John the Baptist.

[22 : 42] Did you expect someone who is rich and impressive and living his best life in soft clothes and royal palaces? Sometimes you see Christian preachers like that.

Oh, man, they're driving around in great cars and they've got these shiny white teeth and lovely faces and you see them on book covers. And they're just people.

Flock to them. Are those the kind of people we should be listening to if we want to hear from God? Are those the people who God speaks to us through? Jesus says, no. You didn't come to see someone who is legitimate or acceptable.

No, you came to see a prophet. And let me tell you, no prophet in the history of prophecy has been liked and legitimate and acceptable. And that's how you know they're the real deal.

Because their message is going to rub people up the wrong way. And that's what Jesus is saying here to these people who were doubting John the Baptist.

[23 : 46] He's basically saying the very reason you think he's not worth listening to is the reason you should listen to. Because God's messengers are never generally accepted by society.

It's the same today. Those who preach the word faithfully today don't have millions of people flocking to them. Don't have successful YouTube channels with thousands of followers.

They're not impressive. They're not rich. They're not popular. But typically they're struggling and they're seemingly unsuccessful with just small groups of people listening to what they have to say.

And you know, Jesus is saying all true prophets are like this. And John is the greatest of them. John, the one who looked the most weird. The one who was in prison.

The one who people were really skeptical about. Jesus says he's the greatest of all the prophets who have ever lived despite appearances. Verse 11.

[24 : 52] Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared. But then Jesus says something unbelievable.

In the next part of that verse, listen to what he says. And let this sink in. But the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. You see what Jesus is saying there? Okay? Just take this in for a moment. Jesus is literally saying here that the ordinary Christian, the person who comes into the kingdom of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ.

From this day forward, Jesus is saying, the ordinary Christian is greater than the greatest prophet of the Old Testament. Because John was basically the last prophet of the Old Testament era.

And he's saying from now on, ordinary Christians will be greater than him. How is that so? How can he say that? In what way is that true? Well, think about it. It's true because the Christian today has everything that the Old Testament prophet longed for.

[26 : 16] We carry God's complete revelation to humanity. None of the Old Testament prophets had yet God's complete revelation. We do today.

And more than that, God's spirit, the Bible says, for those who come into Christ through faith, God's very spirit dwells in us and empowers us for his work in the world.

We, you and I, are the ultimate messengers of God, Jesus is saying here. Because we have in our Bibles and in our hearts the ultimate message that this world needs to hear.

Now, we don't look at it, do we? We certainly don't look like that. We're unimpressive. We're very ordinary.

We've all got our struggles. But we need to believe this verse. The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist.

[27 : 24] We need to realize that being Christians in this world is far more important than we think it is. This work of the kingdom that we get to be part of.

This message that we know and we hear every Sunday that the world desperately needs. And the power of God coursing through our veins if we let him do his work through us.

This work of the kingdom we get to be part of. It is the greatest thing that this world has ever experienced. But it doesn't look it. We don't look like the ultimate messengers of God.

We don't look greater than all these Old Testament prophets. But we've got to believe what Jesus says here that we are. You know, this work that we are involved in, like being part of the local church, it often seems very humdrum and ordinary, doesn't it?

Yes, I'm on the roster. Yes, we've got to go to the cleanup on Saturday. Yes, we're doing a community cleanup. Yes, I'm going to help with tea.

[28 : 29] You know, it just seems so, it can very much seem very ordinary. And it becomes relegated often, you know, especially if you're a volunteer and this is, you know, you don't get paid for this, like Dylan and I do.

It can very easily be something you do when all the other important things in life are done. Then you can do a little bit of the churchy stuff. Your responsibilities in the church.

Once I've got rid of all the important stuff. Well, it's then that we've got to realize this is the most important work that you could ever be involved in.

Your attachment and the input you can give to your local church, which is the beacon of truth to this world. This is more important work than anything else you could do out there.

And that's what Jesus is trying to get us to see here. Because this, this unimpressive, struggling bunch of people, this is how God has decided to fulfill His plans in this world to defeat evil.

[29 : 36] This. And this multiplied thousands and thousands of times around the world. gatherings just like this of ordinary struggling people meeting around God's Word.

This is how. There's no other plan. This is how God has decided to do His work in the world and to fulfill His plans to ultimately overcome evil through you and me.

Doing His work. In His power. We're not the solution the world expected. And, and we're not the solution that your friend thinks they need.

But we're the solution they got. And we are the solution the world actually needs. Believe that. And take your work here seriously because it is the most important work you could do.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you allow us to have these moments of doubt.

[30 : 40] You didn't write off John the Baptist and your other followers when they doubted you. But you gave them a reality check and you helped them to see that there is real reasons they don't need a doubt.

And thank you for giving us those reasons and reminding us once again that, that you don't expect us to believe without real reasons to.

I pray for anyone here who has not yet looked into those reasons. That they would sign up for Discover Jesus. That they would ask questions. That they would read the Gospels.

And that you would give them the reasons they need. That you would help them to see what there is to see about Jesus. And Lord, we, we know that sometimes we don't, we don't want to hear about the real problems and the real solution you've come to bring.

And so forgive us for the times that we're disappointed because you don't give us what we want. But help us to embrace what you've come to give us, which is what we really need.

[31 : 47] And Lord, help us to be your messengers to others who need that same thing. In Jesus' name. Amen.