



“An Answer in Your Doubt”
Luke 7:18-23

Idea: Jesus answers and is the answer in your doubt.

Intro: Doubt, that feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction is a fact of life. At some point, every person experiences doubt on some level. There are times when you may feel doubtful about something small or trivial. Then there are other times when you may suffer doubt toward something life changing. This weekend, I experienced a moment of doubt from something small, but if my doubt would have become true, then the situation would have become life changing. I was doing what a lot of guys are doing this time of the year; I was hanging a tree stand. I found myself twenty plus feet in the air when the thought went through my mind, “What if this ladder does not hold my weight?” I was using a safety harness and was attached to the tree, but I became doubtful about the ladder I had put up. A few weeks ago, the same kind of ladder compromised on me while putting it up. In that moment, I had to reassure myself and hold to the conviction that my equipment would hold up.

There is a man named Joseph in the Bible who probably had to reassure himself over and over again about God’s plan for his life. At the age of seventeen, he had two similar dreams (Gen 37). In the first dream his brothers’ sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. In the second dream, the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him, depicting how his father and brothers would all be subordinate to him one day. Well, as you can imagine, his brothers resented him for the dreams, but his father wondered about them.

Not long after the dreams, Joseph’s brothers concocted a plan to kill him. One brother talked the others out of their plan, but when he was not around, the brothers decided to sell Joseph into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and sold to the captain of Pharaoh’s guard (Ex 38:1). There in Potiphar’s house, Joseph excelled until he was falsely accused. The accusation landed the young man in prison.

Thus far, Joseph’s journey had not been anything like what his dreams portrayed. As he sat in an Egyptian prison cell, God continued to be with him (Ex 38:21). He interpreted the dreams of two prisoners. Unfortunately, his service was not remembered by the cupbearer who was restored into the service of Pharaoh (Ex 40:23). Surely, Joseph began to doubt God’s plan for his life. I bet he spent a lot of nights thinking through those two dreams he had as a young man. Two whole years passed after interpreting those dreams. Then finally Joseph was summoned by Pharaoh through the recommendation of the cupbearer (Ex 41:14). He was told about a series of dreams that had plagued the Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted the dreams and explained that they indicated seven years of bountiful harvests that would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph counseled Pharaoh in what should be done to prepare the nation. As a result, Joseph was elevated to second in command of Egypt and given oversight over the preparations for the famine. Finally, the plans God had laid out for Joseph’s life had come to fruition. Later, his father, brothers, and their families all joined him in Egypt.

Their lives were preserved by Joseph. It had been a long journey. There had been many doubtful moments, but God proved to be faithful. He answered in Joseph's doubt.

Is it wrong or even sinful to doubt? Obviously, you would not think that doubting the ability of a man-made ladder to hold your weight is sinful. Is it wrong, however, to feel doubt in relation to God? It may encourage you to know that there are many people in the Bible who faced their own moments of doubt. They experienced uncertainty and a lack of conviction about their situations. Their stories teach us that it is not so much about the doubt but what one does with the doubt. As Mark Littleton has suggested, as believers, "turn your doubts to questions; turn your questions to prayers; turn your prayers to God." We see a beautiful picture of this in John the Baptist, who was experiencing his own season of doubt. As he turned it to questions and probably even prayers, Jesus answered him in his doubt.

Read Luke 7:18-23.

Inquiry: As I have pointed out, Luke 7 depicts five scenes that present five different windows by which we are to see who Jesus is. We also see through them how the people involved responded to Jesus. In the first scene, Jesus reacts to faith as the centurion believes on the Lord for the healing of his servant. We learn that faith is an exercise in reality as we rightly see ourselves and rightly see Christ. In the second scene, Jesus is moved with compassion towards a widow who is burying her son. In response the people stand in awe of His marvelous grace. In this third scene, the Lord receives a question from John the Baptist who is imprisoned and suffering with doubt. The men John sent to Jesus see the Lord's miracles and share the report with him. The miracles are the answer to his doubt.

According to Matthew 11:2, all these things took place when John the Baptist was in prison. He had been dedicated to God from birth. He had received prophetic visions, preached the coming of the Kingdom, and prepared Israel to receive the Messiah. He had even baptized Jesus. His entire life had been spent in preparation for this moment, yet John found himself in prison. As a straight-shooting preacher, he had condemned King Herod's marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife. In response, Herod imprisoned him in the dungeon of Machaerus, a desert fortress-palace near the Dead Sea. It is here that John's head would be given to Herodias (Mark 6:21-29).

John experienced a period of intense doubt while at Machaerus. From him we learn that faith and doubt can find room in the same heart. You can be a wonderful servant of God yet still have moments and seasons of intense doubt. If you struggle with doubt, know that you are not alone, you are not necessarily broken, and you are not necessarily wrong. We need to be careful how we look at doubt. Now, we do not want to go on living in doubt, but we also do not want to relegate it only to those who lack faith. Sometimes, Christians need to pray, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief."

The reality is doubt is a fact of life, and thankfully, the Lord graciously provides an answer in our doubt. We see four things that are helpful for us in our seasons of doubt.

1. Reality rarely meets expectations.

I doubt Joseph ever expected to be a family outcast, slave, or prisoner. Helping to rule the Egyptian empire was definitely more of what he expected from those dreams, but it took several years and many sleepless nights for them to become reality. Likewise, as John languished at Machaerus, he became increasingly perplexed by the reports he heard about Jesus' ministry. As the preparer of the way, John had preached a two-fold prophecy about Jesus (Luke 3:16-17). Through Him there would be a great work of the Holy Spirit among humanity. He would also bring judgment upon those who have rejected God. The works John heard about Jesus did not seem to fit together with those prophecies. The Romans still ruled the land. Their pawns like Herod and Herodias lived in comfort. The religious establishment were still as arrogant and self-righteous as ever. And John, who had spent his life in

service to God, was suffering in prison and receiving no help from Jesus. John's reality did not meet his expectations.

When your expectations do not match your reality, you will often be tempted to doubt God's direction and provision. Therefore, we need to recognize this tendency and work to move from doubt to faith, which leads us to a second helpful thing to consider in our season of doubt.

2. Discipleship is no easy path.

God has never promised that life as a Christian would be easy in this fallen world. In fact, He promised the opposite.

¹⁸If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you, as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

– John 15:18-19

This past week several Christians were arrested in a very unreached and thus dangerous part of the Middle East. Four of those arrested are new believers who were about to be baptized. I do not know the details of what happened, but it is plausible that they were arrested because of the baptisms. This situation reminds us that discipleship is no easy path.

As a purveyor of truth, John the Baptist understood the risks he took every time he preached. You dare not speak against the evils of culture and the sins of the leaders without expecting some kind of backlash. As John wasted away in Machaerus, he needed to be reminded that a commitment to following Jesus in this world does not come with the promise of an easy life. Likewise, you need to be reminded that living for Jesus and following His direction in your life does not guarantee an easy path. In many, if not most cases, your life will be harder than those who are living in rebellion to Christ. Even in this, the Lord is gracious.

3. Inquiries are welcome.

All throughout Scripture, we read of believers asking God, "Why?" Job struggled to understand God's plan in his suffering. Joseph wondered about the detours his life took on the way to greatness. David, the anointed king of Israel, questioned God's direction of his life as he evaded King Saul, day after day. Many of the psalms come from David's doubt and faith as he followed God. Therefore, it is important to note that Jesus does not rebuke John for his doubt and inquiry.

Today, in your doubt, Jesus does not rebuke you or treat you as a second-class citizen of the Kingdom. As we said earlier, doubt and faith both often reside in the heart. We can and should bring our questions and confusions about the situations in which we find ourselves to Jesus. He is big enough to handle them, and He is gracious enough to not resent us for them.

As we ask our questions, where should we direct our eyes? This brings us to the fourth helpful thing to consider in our season of doubt.

4. Evidence is evident.

As John the Baptist asks His question, Jesus assured him with evidence. He answered his doubt in a profound way. Rather than responding to the question of these disciples with a theological argument, Luke tells us that Jesus in that very hour answered with action (7:21). He healed the sick, freed the possessed, and restored the sight of the blind. He produced a riot of healing, leading to unrestrained joy.

Restored eyes beheld the blue Palestinian sky and the faces of family members, and both the healed and their loved ones cried out in joy. Newly restored minds engaged in noisy worship. As the messengers witnessed these miracles and the joy they generated, Jesus informed them that these miracles fulfilled the messianic prophecies given by Isaiah (Is 26:19; 29:18; 35:5; 61:1).

Jesus sent John's disciples back with overwhelming empirical and Scriptural evidence that messianic power was flowing through Him. This reminds us that the same are true in our situations. We need to open our eyes and see the way God has and is stepping into our struggles. And we need to read the pages of Scripture where we see how God has worked in the past in order to trust Him today and tomorrow.

Jesus is the answer in your doubt. While our reality rarely matches our expectations, we recognize that God has called us to follow Him regardless of how difficult the path may be. We can and will have questions. Doubt will come, but thankfully, evidence of his presence and power is evident.

Conclusion: Notice Jesus' final words to the messengers in verse 23. *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”* The Lord offers this encouragement basically saying, “John, you and others like you, will be blessed if you do not fall away because of your disappointment with the way I choose to work.” We all are puzzled and feel disappointment at times by what the Lord allows or even brings into our lives at times. Some people run off the rails of faith when tragedy hits them. Others choose to not believe in a God who oversees a world that is filled with injustices and evil. Regardless of what your doubt may be or the place from which it comes, this passage reveals to us that Jesus answers and is the answer in your doubt.

It is okay to experience moments of doubt and to ask questions. In those moments, there are three things you need to do.

- Doubt your doubts.
- Seek out evidence.
- Stand on that evidence.

What we need to do is turn our doubts to questions; turn our questions to prayers; and turn our prayers to God as we stand on the evidence of God's activity. He is faithful, good, and reigning supremely over everything. His children know this and experience it regularly. Those who do not yet know Christ this way, you can know it today.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?