

HOW DO YOU HANDLE DOUBT?

Luke 7:18-35

Have you ever dealt with the issue of doubt?

-Struggling with the reality of your faith, and trying to make sense out of some things you didn't quite understand and that didn't quite make sense?

How do *you* handle doubt?

The following statements are taken from documents, newspapers and magazines widely read during their day. Listen to what the "authorities" had to say:

1840 - "Anyone traveling at the speed of thirty miles per hour would surely suffocate."

1878 - "Electric lights are unworthy of serious attention."

1901 - "No possible combination can be united into a practical machine by which men shall fly."

1926 - (from a scientist) "This foolish idea of shooting at the moon is basically impossible."

1930 - (another scientist) "To harness the energy locked up in matter is impossible."

Sometimes traditional thinking ought to be questioned.

Oswald Chambers: "Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong, *it may be a sign that he is thinking.*"

One of the tendencies of young people as they begin to think for themselves—part of the growth process that God created them to go through—is that they begin to ask questions.

Some of that questioning sounds a lot like unbelief—especially when it comes from young people who haven't learned to question with "acceptable" wording.

I lose patience rapidly with adults who try to stop that process—who try to get them to "stuff" their questions, as if that will make them go away. It doesn't. It only teaches them to hide the questions because adults don't have the answers anyway!

Well, cheer up! You've got company! And plenty of good company at that:

Moses was ready to quit Num. 11:10-15

Elijah 1 Ki. 19

Jeremiah 20:7-9, 14-18

All these godly men had times of doubt!

Paul 2 Cor. 1:8-9

Wiersbe: "There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind: we cannot understand *what* God is doing or *why* He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will: *we refuse to believe God's Word and obey what he tells us to do.*

C.S. LEWIS: "I think the trouble with me is *lack of faith*. I have no *rational* ground for going back on the arguments that convinced me of God's existence: but the irrational deadweight of my old sceptical habits, and the spirit of this age, and the cares of the day, steal away all my lively feeling of the truth, and often when I pray I wonder if I am not posting letters to a non-

existent address. Mind you I don't *think* so—the whole of my reasonable mind is convinced: but I often *feel* so. However, there is nothing to do but to peg away."

"There are things, say in learning to swim or to climb, which look dangerous and aren't. Your instructor tells you it's safe. You have good reason from past experience to trust him. Perhaps you can even see for yourself, by your own reason, that it is safe. But the crucial question is, will you be able to go on believing this when you actually see the cliff edge below you or actually feel yourself unsupported in the water? {OR ARE PUT OUT OF YOUR PRESENT BUILDING AND DON'T YET HAVE WATER IN THE NEW ONE?} You will have no *rational* grounds for disbelieving. It is your senses and your imagination that are going to attack belief. Here, as in the New Testament, the conflict is not between faith and reason, but between faith and sight. We can face things which we *know* to be dangerous if they don't look or sound too dangerous; our real trouble is often with things we *know* to be safe but which look dreadful. Our faith in Christ wavers not so much when real arguments come against it as when it *looks* improbable—when the whole world takes on the desolate *look* which really tells us much more about the state of our passions and even our digestion than about reality."

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH HONEST QUESTIONS AND DOUBTS!

THE ISSUE ISN'T WHETHER WE ASK THE QUESTIONS, IT'S WHAT WE DO WITH THEM WHEN THEY COME KNOCKING AT OUR DOOR THAT MATTERS!

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DOUBTS?

**John the Baptizer had a problem.
He couldn't make sense out of what he saw.**

**He wasn't alone.
Great men and women of God have moments of doubt
– moments when they don't understand what God is doing.**

John shows us *how a genuine truth-seeker deals with what he can't understand.*

Responses to the Son of Man's ministry 4:14-9:50

Definition of alternatives 7:1-9:50

Acceptance by outcasts of society 7:1-8:3

The beneficiaries of Christ's ministry included:

Gentiles (7:1-10),

A widow (7:11-17),

Sick, lepers, poor, and tax collectors 7:18-35 In the midst of these, Luke takes time out to deal with John's doubts:

JOHN'S DOUBT 7:18-23

What was John's question? – 7:18-20– "Are you the One?"

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS QUESTION?

Why is it so important?

John, as God's appointed forerunner, was expected to accept as evidence that Jesus was Messiah, His miraculous deliverance of the suffering and oppressed, whom the religious leaders rejected.

Jesus implies that John is going to accept the evidence the signs provide. He will understand what's going on when he sees how Jesus delivers the afflicted from suffering and oppression.

John's question **demonstrates what Israel's leaders should have investigated, but chose not to.**

Jesus had certainly not fulfilled the popular expectation of what Messiah was supposed to be! Was He really the one?
Or, should they keep looking?

How did Jesus answer his question?

Jesus didn't reply with a theology lecture!

He showed them some believable things that God was doing to confirm that He was in fact the Messiah. 7:22-23

If he would be faithful to Jesus, in spite of contrary appearances, he would be *SATISFIED* with the results of God's plan.

John was expected to receive the evidence.

JOHN'S WITNESS 7:24-29

Jesus takes advantage of John's inquiry to instruct the crowds.

What does Jesus say about John?

The people recognize John as a prophet from God (20:6).

Jesus identifies with John, calling attention to his role in God's plan
7:24-28

John wasn't a compromiser—a reed blown by the wind. 7:24
He wasn't a celebrity, enjoying friendship of the wealthy 7:25=>7:26-27

He was a *spokesman for GOD!*

John was the greatest of the prophets—chosen to prepare for Messiah.
7:27

What is the significance of Jesus' words concerning John?

The logical conclusion is that if John is the forerunner and he is witnessing concerning Jesus, then Jesus must be the Messiah.

Those who recognize this and accept Him will become **participants in His kingdom**. They will occupy a **better position than John** himself.

John has prepared the way but has not entered the experiential realization of that kingdom. They will enjoy that privilege.

NOTICE the contrast in 7:29-30! What does it mean?

[I believe Jesus' words continue here—keep the red letters in vv. 29-30!]

Elements of the contrast:

All the people and the tax-collectors	Pharisees and lawyers (scribes)
Heard and acknowledged God's justice	Rejected God's purpose
Received John's baptism	Refused John's baptism

Notice the focus of the conflict—it's **GOD'S PLAN** they reject!

What is the significance of our Lord's illustration in 7:31-34?
LEADERS' REJECTION 7:30-35

Once Jesus explained the significance of events they are witnessing, and traced the contemporary Messianic framework, He must deal with the issue of rejection.

In spite of clear and sufficient evidence of the Messianic significance of these events, only the common people are willing to receive Him.

The religious leaders rejected God's plan.

Jesus' explanation of their rejection centers in John's ministry, rather than His.

They are not really in conflict with John nor Jesus.

They have rejected God's plan for His people.

The identification of John and Jesus clarifies the nature of their rejection.

Jesus uses *an illustration* to demonstrate the nature of their rejection:

He compares Israel to **children playing in the marketplace**.

It's a common scene to anyone living where the market is the center of activity:

Children play as parents barter nearby.
Confusion and quarreling reign.

The children represent that generation. Like children with their playmates, each complains when they don't get their own way.

They don't complain about *issues* based on *convictions*.
In the case of John and Jesus, they even contradict themselves.

The problem is that neither John nor Jesus will play the game by their rules.

They won't recognize the leaders' authority and submit to them.

John is too ascetic for them.
Jesus is not ascetic enough; He doesn't separate from the common people.

Religious leaders don't want to play with them; they won't do things their way.

The issue is not whether they eat and drink.
It isn't whether they mix with sinners or not.

The issue is: will God's plan prevail, or their traditions. *Who's in command here?!*

What is the significance of the proverb in 7:35?

The discussion provoked by the messengers is concluded with a proverb: **"Wisdom is vindicated by all her children."**

Jesus' message is verified by the lifestyle it produces in those who respond to it.

The interpretation of the proverb centers in the three key words used: *sophia*, *dikaioo*, and *teknon*.

"Wisdom" originated from the concept of skill. It came to describe the "skill" of using the intellect in a practical way, understanding, discernment or wisdom. It is used to describe one's philosophy or world view (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:19-20).

Why did the religious leaders reject Jesus? What philosophy might such a decision suggest?

"Justified" deals with obedience to established rules or customs—doing what is right or expected

- result of testing. That which has been tested is shown to be right.
- the way something is viewed. It may be acknowledged right, or fit for a specific purpose

"Children" has literal and figurative meanings, derived from the verb *tikto* which describes birth.

- that which is born, begotten, or produced. **"Children of wisdom" may refer to that produced by the wisdom**, the message of God's messengers, that is, those who have responded to the message.
- or, to those who are characterized by wisdom, as in the familiar Hebraism.
- or, to that which is produced by wisdom.

"One's philosophy is demonstrated right (or wrong) by what it produces."

The true evaluation ought not to be based on social class nor religious sect, but on the practical proof of their underlying philosophy seen in their lives.

It would thus be roughly equivalent to "By their fruits you shall know them;" or, **"The proof of the pudding is in the eating."**

Applying this proverb back to the rejection of John and Jesus, He wants them to see that **THEIR OBJECTIONS ARE A SMOKE SCREEN!**

They say they can't accept John or Jesus because of unacceptable practices.

However, the real truth will be discovered when you evaluate their lives to see what their "religion" is producing.

Luke directs our attention back to one of his major premises: the religious leaders rejected Jesus because they want to protect their own interests.

They are motivated by pride, greed, and self-serving attitudes.

The real motives behind their actions will be exposed (2:35; 6:8; 12:1-3).

When actions and motives are evaluated, the cause of their rejection will be evident.

The true evaluation will not be based on their words but on the practical effects their religion is producing in their lives.

We have studied a lot of history and theology today.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH US?

WHAT DOES GOD WANT US TO DO WITH THIS TRUTH THIS WEEK?

Importance of personal faith in Christ.

Importance of hearing God's word, in general.

Importance of giving top priority to doing God's will above all else.

Danger of centering our attention on our worries—on things—[on buildings!]
—or on personal comfort and pleasure.

How do you deal with the doubts that you face?

The real issue isn't *whether* you doubt! [We ALL will at times!]

The issue is how do you handle the doubts when they come.

John had his doubts.

There were some things he didn't understand.

He went to the right source and asked!

"We'll talk it over in the bye and bye" I doubt it!

But we can talk it over now!

VANCE HAVNER: "The fable of the mother bear who told her cub, "Shut up and walk!" when he wanted to know which foot to put forward first is a perfect illustration of what we are driving at. Faith in Jesus doesn't wait until it understands; in that case it wouldn't be faith."

C.S. Lewis: "I ended my first book with the words *no answer*. I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?"