

Sermon: What Did You Expect?

Text: Luke 7:18-35

Gary L. Wackler

August 23, 2009

Introduction: In the style of the Old Testament psalmists we hear John the Baptist lamenting his condition with God. He is confused about how God in Jesus is conducting ministry. John wonders if his life has counted for something because doubt has crept into his prison cell. In light of John's calling and his recent exposure to Jesus, what did you expect?

Down through salvation history we have encountered unexpected examples of how great people of faith have had doubts. We should not be surprised when we struggle with our faith. What did you expect?

DOUBT

**Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord, Just once.
You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be ...your Moses.**

**Let me meet you on the water, Lord, Just once.
It wouldn't have to be on White Rock Lake.
Just on a puddle after the annual Dallas rain
And I would surely be...your Peter.**

**Let me meet you on the road, Lord, Just once.
You wouldn't have to blind me on North Central Expressway.
Just a few bright lights on the way to chapel
And I would surely be...your Paul.**

**Let me meet you, Lord, Just once.
Anywhere. Anytime.
Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes
Must I always be...your Thomas?**

Norman Shirk, April 10, 1981, KQ (Dallas Seminary)

If you have doubts about Jesus or your faith, you're in good company. Moses and Aaron doubted ([Numbers 20:12](#)), Elijah wanted to quit and die ([I Kings 19:3-4](#)), and Jeremiah was often depressed and wished he was never born ([Jeremiah 20:14-18](#)), even the Apostle Paul knew despair ([II Corinthians 1:8-9](#)).

Can we admit that there have been times in our lives where doubt has attacked us? When you confessed faith in Jesus and stepped out of the watery grave of baptism into new life in Christ what did *you* expect?

In our story John the Baptist finds himself isolated in a prison fortress called Machaerus (Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 184), east of the Dead Sea; and he is anticipating his death. John is wondering if Jesus was truly “The Coming One” whom Isaiah had spoken of, and Jesus had quoted in his inaugural sermon.

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV) ¹The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

John was a prisoner, and he thought: “why not free me?” So John sent some of his disciples to get some answers and check out Jesus’ ministry first-hand.

Luke 7:18a (NIV) ¹⁸John’s disciples told him about all these things.

“All these things” is exactly the miracles and teachings of Jesus we have been exploring the last few weeks.

As we walk through the text, let’s take in some impressions and try and draw some conclusions. Let’s look at a:

I. Seemingly Silly Question (vv. 19-20)

Luke 7:18b-20 (NIV) ^{18b} Calling two of them, ¹⁹he sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” ²⁰When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’”

A. In light of John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ history

If you will remember John had only months before called Jesus the “Lamb of God.”

John 1:29-34 (NIV) ²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”

What happened? He seemed to be so clear in his identification of Jesus earlier. Life happened, prison happened, isolation happened, second-guessing happened because John thought that Jesus was going to go at ministry in a different manner. Political overthrow and righteous judgment against all evil was expected. “John anticipated Jesus would take an instant road to glory. When he did not, John had questions” (Bock, *Luke*, p. 213). When the Messiah comes everything was supposed to be put right, John thought!

How could a prophet of God make such a mistake, after all:

B. John the Baptist had the Holy Spirit

Yet, John also had Satan yelling in his ear that he had made a mistake. If the Devil could tempt Jesus in the wilderness, might he also try and get John off message, who is in prison waiting to be executed.

Just because a follower of Jesus has the Spirit of God does not mean they are invincible or can lead a sinless life. It seems to me if the sinless Jesus would later feel forsaken by God, we should not be too hard on the Messiah’s cousin, John.

Just like in his wilderness experience with Satan, Jesus gives John’s disciples a:

II. Scriptural Answer (vv. 21-23)

Luke 7:21-22 (NIV) ²¹At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²²So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

A. Jesus alludes to the O.T. prophets.

Jesus wants John to know he is the kind of Messiah Isaiah had predicted.

Isaiah 29:18-19 (NIV) ¹⁸In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. ¹⁹Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 35:5-6 (NIV) ⁵Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Isaiah 61:1 (NIV) ¹The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

Many of the things Jesus says and does become a part of the scriptural records. Here:

B. Jesus gives a beatitude.

Luke 7:23 (NIV) ²³Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

This becomes a word of encouragement as well as warning to John and others who might follow Jesus. There is a danger in falling away. We can be arrogant like the Apostle Peter who said on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion:

Matthew 26:33 (NIV) ³³... “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

... and after that, Peter went on to deny Jesus, not once, but three times.

Everyone has expectations of Jesus (God), and when things don’t happen the way we envision, there is a tendency to lose heart. Even when episodes feel like Good Friday, you need to know Easter is coming!

As John’s disciples are returning the 80+ miles to where John is, Jesus gives John a:

III. Superior Tribute (vv. 24-28)

Luke 7:24-28 (NIV) ²⁴After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ²⁵If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. ²⁶But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is the one about whom it is written: “‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ²⁸I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

Jesus asked the question of John’s audiences: What did you expect?

John was a principled man who was not swayed by public opinion, but spoke for God. John was unbending in his message of repentance and coming judgment. He was in a remote area, so you had to want to go out to see and hear him. He was a strong type-A personality who represented King Messiah. He dressed and acted the part of a prophet, but Jesus said he was more than that.

A. John the Baptist’s ministry fulfilled Scripture.

Malachi 3:1 (NIV) ¹“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

Jesus was not going to allow John's present doubts to overshadow his tremendous contribution to the Kingdom of God. In quoting this O.T. passage Jesus was also saying: "Messiah is here!"

John the Baptist was the first prophet in 400 years, and because of his relationship to Jesus:

B. He was the greatest person in the O.T.

John the Baptist was considered great because of the grace of God. He was great because John helped to create the bridge from the O.T. to Jesus' ministry which would produce a new covenant with man. Alfred Plummer says of John: "The whole man was a sermon."

In the midst of all these accolades Jesus makes it clear that those who are under the new covenant will be greater - not in position or character necessarily, but in opportunity. Under the New Testament all our sins can be forgiven. We are no longer under Law, but grace. We can have an eternal home with Jesus and in the meantime we have the Holy Spirit to live in us and help us with our walk if we submit to God's plan in Jesus.

When the Gospel is proclaimed there will always be a:

IV. Salvation Response (vv. 29-30)

Luke 7:29-30 (NIV) ²⁹(All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

You might notice a break in your red-lettered text here; and some versions, including the NIV, would put these two verses in parentheses.

A. Some acknowledged God's way as right.

It says these people had been baptized by John. But it was not just the baptism that made the difference in their relationship with God, it was that they were willing to repent of their sins. It takes a humble mind and right attitude.

B. Others rejected God's plan for them.

Many of the very people who should have recognized God's coming and a prophet in their midst, did not! Their hearts were hard. They were *not* humble. And because God had not worked through them, in their arrogance, they refused to see John and Jesus in their various styles as God's answer. "They do not recognize their need to repent and so reject God's counsel." - Bock, *Luke*, p. 212

Jesus tries to open eyes by telling a:

V. Simple Parable (vv. 31-35)

Luke 7:31-34 (NIV) ³¹“To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’ ³³For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.””

This is called by Darrell Bock the “Parable of the Brats” (*Luke*, p. 216). It is a parable of rebuke. John the Baptist and then Jesus did not sing or dance to the tune of their critics. They did not do or say what they wanted. They were mostly rejected because they refused to be under the authority of anyone other than God. They certainly had:

A. Two different styles

The critics claimed John had a demon because he was not what the religious leaders expected even though he was very much after the pattern of Elijah and others. Jesus was discounted out-of-hand because in his objectors’ eyes he didn’t live an ascetic life, and more than that, he associated with the wrong people. I think, by that I mean, he was not buddy-buddy with the religious elite and refused to fall under their authority. Jesus would not play their tunes or dance for them. Jesus was targeting confessed sinners, people who knew they needed a doctor.

“Some Christians today give the faith a bad reputation because of immoral excesses, but probably a larger number would never have to worry about being so caricatured because they come nowhere close to imitating Jesus’ fellowship with disreputable people.” - Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 190

John was reclusive, Jesus was outgoing; yet both were in God’s plan. Isn’t it great to know that God can work with different styles and personalities to see His plans advanced? He can work with any of us who are willing to humble ourselves and repent.

Jesus finishes with:

B. One proverbial conclusion

Luke 7:35 (NIV) ³⁵“But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

God’s way (wisdom) will be vindicated. Those who truly hear the teachings of John, and now Jesus, will prove the validity of their messages by their lives, actions (**Matthew 2:19**), and works. This is what Jesus means by wisdom’s children.

People may demean and reject you for being faithful to God, but eternity will prove who is wise and who is foolish, who are wisdom's children.

Conclusion: Jesus was always doing the unexpected. We should not be surprised when God chooses a different course for us than what we have planned. The prophet Isaiah shares with us:

Isaiah 55:6-9 (NIV) ⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

When we have doubts, just like John the Baptist, we should go directly to Jesus for the answers.

Agnostics and believers have doubts, even athiests. If there is no doubt, there can be no faith. If faith can be built (and I believe it can be), if faith can be improved, matured and grown, then by logic it can also be weak or atrophy. Out on a once-stormy lake, Jesus asked Peter “why did you doubt?” - [Matthew 14:31](#)

In a book by John Ortberg: *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat*, p. 81 - “When people wrestle with doubt, they may tell themselves that they will try harder to have more faith. But faith is not the sort of thing that can be acquired by trying harder.” (President Obama and his family were just out in Yellowstone National Park.) “Imagine if someone were to say to you, ‘I find myself doubting Old Faithful. I’m not sure it can be trusted.’ What would your advice be? Not ‘Try harder to believe!’ The best advice for such a person would be, ‘Just hang around Old Faithful. Get to know Old Faithful better.’ And because Old Faithful is faithful, the better you know it, the more you will trust it.

It is the same with God. Never try to have more faith--just get to know God better. And because God is faithful, the better you know him, the more you'll trust him.”

Worship, fellowship, studying the Word, prayer and communion all help us to remember our Lord, trust our Savior, and help us decrease doubt and build faith.