

June 11, 2017

## John the Baptist—Doubt & Greatness

**Matthew 11:1-15**

### What to Do with Doubt (v. 1-6)

*"When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' 4 And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'" (Matthew 11:1-6)*

- Jesus' ministry: *Matthew 4:23; Matthew 9:35; Matthew 12:9; Mark 6:2; Luke 6:6; Luke 6:17*
- John's perplexity was disclosed in the question: "**Are you the one** who is to come, or should we look for another?"
- Was this the doubt of an unbeliever or an inquiry from a believer? [Luke 7:19]  
How often did Jesus say to his disciples "O you of little faith", or, "How long will you doubt?" [Matthew 8:26; Luke 12:28] **THE BIG QUESTION: "ARE YOU THE ONE?"**

Does the Lord understand our doubts?

Does He condemn our doubts?

Is He pleased with our doubts?

***John's Bio: Was John seeking information or confirmation when he asked: "Are you the one? Was John like the man in Mark 9:24?"***

- Reports from John's disciples to John provided context for **The Big Question?** [Matthew 9:14 and Luke 7:11-18] ***Are you encouraged or discouraged by John's doubts?***

**4 REASONS FOR JOHN'S DOUBTS—CAN WE IDENTIFY WITH THESE REASONS?**

(1) Difficult Circumstances:

- a. His career as a preacher was down the tubes;
- b. He was in prison for being a faithful servant;
- c. He was in a desert dungeon at Machaerus;
- d. He had announced Jesus and baptized him;
- e. He had taken and followed the self-denying vow of a Nazirite;
- f. John knew Scripture by heart, including Isaiah 61:1-3; and,
- g. John had been called from birth as a prophet.

(2) Incomplete Revelation:

- a. He had been told about, but had not seen, Jesus' miracles;
- b. He probably had no access to written Scripture, even the O.T., in prison; and,
- c. His contemporaries, even outside of prison, did not fully understand the revelation. [Luke 24:27,32]

(3) Worldly Influences:

- a. Jesus teaching, preaching and doing did not square up with what religious leaders of that time thought the Messiah would be teaching, preaching and doing;
- b. The Jewish First Century thinking about the kingdom to come did not square up with Jesus;
- c. Jesus had done nothing to oppose the pagan Roman occupation—something the Messiah was expected to do;

- d. Jesus was not acting like Israel would expect of their KING [John 6:15, 26]; and,
- e. It was culturally expected that the Messiah would immediately bring an earthly kingdom.

“If Christ loves everybody so much, why do children die and people starve and get diseased and become crippled? If God is a God of justice, why is there so much corruption and injustice in the world? Why do so many good people have it so bad and so many bad people have it so good? If God is so loving and merciful, why does He send people to hell? If God is so powerful and false religions are so evil, why doesn’t He just wipe out those false systems?” [McArthur, *Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 244]

#### (4) Unfulfilled Expectations

- a. John’s question “**Are you the one?**” tells us he expected something different;
- b. John’s expectations for the events he prophesied about Jesus, as Messiah in John 3:11-12, were correct but his expectation for the timing of those events was not; and,
- c. John’s expectations of the means that God would use for judgment and a kingdom were not met because they were not God’s means.

“John knew from Scripture that he who gave the blind sight, made the lame walk, and preached good news to the poor could surely open “the prison to those who are bound” as prophesied in Isaiah 61:1. But Jesus didn’t do that for John.

So perhaps at this point, John doubted what he knew. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, John probably expected to have a role in his earthly kingdom. He wouldn’t have expected to start with such a high calling, preparing the way of the Lord in the wilderness, only to end his life and his ministry in a small prison cell. Besides, John preached that the Messiah would come with an unquenchable fire. With judgment! With power! He likely expected that to be in his lifetime.”

[F]or now, John has to accept the Messiah’s plans for his life. Plans that are different than what he envisioned. He has to dwell on what he knows to be true rather than fixate on his circumstances. He has to remember who God is and trust him from a dark prison.  
And so it is with me.

When my plans crumble and God takes me away from my dreams, I must trust in God's infinite wisdom. When my cup of suffering seems too much to bear, I need to rest in his immeasurable love. When my life spins out of control, I need to remember God's absolute sovereignty." [Vaneetha Risner, "Your Shattered Dreams and Shaken Faith", Desiring God]

### **JESUS' REASSURING RESPONSE TO THE BIG QUESTION:**

- (1) No simple "yes" or "no", but "*Go and tell John what you hear and see*";
- (2) Luke 7:21-22, to put "Go and tell" in context; and,
- (3) Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61.

"Out of love for his friend, Jesus didn't include Isaiah's phrase "proclaim liberty to the captives." John would understand." [Jon Bloom Modal, [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org)]

**WHEN IN DOUBT DO WHAT JOHN DID—**

**GO TO JESUS AND GET YOUR ANSWERS!**

*2 Timothy 2:13; 1 John 3:2-3; James 1:2-12*

## **God's Measures of Greatness** (v. 7-15)

John's 3 Indicia of Greatness

### **(1) John's Personal Character Illustrated by Three Factors**

- a. Humility illustrated by his words in Matthew 3:11 and his transparency in weakness; John 3:29-30.

*"Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:29-30)*

“Those words, as much as anything John ever said, revealed the heart that made him so great. He understood what his life was about: Jesus! The beginning of his ministry was about Jesus and, even more so, its end.” **[Jon Bloom, desiringgod.org, 2/28/2017, Lord, Prepare Me to End Well]**

- b. Strong Convictions illustrated by his uncompromising preaching, his speaking truth to religious authority and power [Matthew 3:7-10] and his bold speaking to political power and authority, calling sin to be sin and sinners to be sinners [Matthew 14:4-5].
- c. Self-Denial, illustrated by how he dressed, where he preached, and his Nazirite vow.

## **(2) John’s Personal Special Calling (Verses 9-11)**

- a. John was chosen to announce and prepare the way for the Messiah, Son of God, King of Kings, and this was announced to his father Zechariah by an angel of God [Luke 1:16-17; Malachi 3:1; Malachi 4:5-6];
- b. John the Baptist has been called “the valedictorian of prophets” and by Jesus, “more than a prophet”. He was both a prophet and a fulfillment of prophecy!;
- c. John’s first calling was to God—just as our primary calling is to God.

"Calling is the truth that God calls us to Himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to His summons and service."  
**[Guinness, *The Call*, p. 29]**

- d. Don’t despise secondary callings. [1 Corinthians 12:14-25] It may not be as spectacular as John the Baptist’s secondary calling, but it is still essential; and,
- e. What do we do with the second half of Matthew 11:11?

“John came at the dawning of the gospel day, and therein excelled the foregoing prophets, but he was taken off before the noon of that day, before the rending of the veil, before Christ’s death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit; ... All the true greatness of men [and women] is derived from, and denominated by the gracious manifestation of Christ to them. What reason have we to be thankful that our lot is cast in the days of the kingdom of heaven, under such advantages of light and love!” [Matthew Henry, *Matthew*, Chapter 11, verse 11]

### **(3) John's Personal Confrontational Conflict (verses 12-14)**

- (a) Look back at the great people of faith in God's Word, in human history, and in your own experiences, I believe you will find that their greatness involved some form of confrontation and conflict.
- (b) Following Jesus demands effort--not passivity. To be a Christian, a Christ-follower, in the first century, today, and in every century in between means to swim against the flow of the world, to go against its grain.

### **DO WE HAVE EARS TO HEAR?**