

Sunday, July 2, 2023 | Everyday Disciple

Week 12 | Luke 7:18-35 | "Evidence-Based Faith"

We've been going through the so-called 'Sermon on the Plain,' and we've covered several topics:

Last week, Pastor Bob unpacked the amazing story of how Jesus resurrected a widow's son. We learned that, as my brother so aptly put it, "When the Lord speaks, even the dead hear." Had it not been for Jesus, this widow would've had a hard life as she would've been left alone to fend for herself. But, as she learned, she was not left alone in grief. Jesus was there to bring new life to hers. Likewise, Jesus extends the same security to us. Like the widow's son, we can be resurrected if we believe in the gospel.

Today, we'll be grappling with the topic of doubt. And Luke uses two examples to show the right and wrong ways to handle uncertainty. The first example is none other than John the Baptist. The last time Luke mentioned him, he preached to the masses, baptized Jesus, and was imprisoned by Herod (cf. Lu. 3:29-19). And one would think that a man of his spiritual caliber would *never* struggle with things like a lack of faith or skepticism. But even great men of faith have their doubts.

The second example is the religious leaders. They have been Jesus' harshest critics. They had severe misgivings about this roaming Rabbi. In this way, John the Baptist and the religious leaders struggled with Jesus' identity. However, the difference between the two is that John was an honest seeker, wanting reassurance, whereas the religious leaders were pigheaded skeptics, looking for any excuse not to believe. To the former, Jesus was ready with a word of encouragement, but to the latter, the Lord didn't have much hope to give. Like a bunch of obstinate children, the religious leaders refused any and everything offered to them.

Jesus does three things in this passage:

i. **Jesus clarified John's understanding (vs. 18-23).**

READ: Luke 7:18-23 (ESV)

¹⁸ The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ²⁰ And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for

another?"²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. ²² And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

We're not sure what caused John's doubt. The most likely scenario was that Jesus wasn't what John expected. After all, John's message was one of imminent judgment, and then Jesus' ministry was characterized by grace and mercy. Perhaps John saw the discrepancy and thought he got it wrong on the banks of the Jordan.

Luke seems to care very little for the inner motivations of John the Baptist. Instead, he wants to focus on John's question and Jesus' answer. Because, after all, doubt can arise for a variety of reasons. But the answer to every doubt is to come to Jesus, which is precisely what John did. He went to the source and examined the evidence.

Likewise, when we doubt, we must bring those doubts to Jesus. The same way John's question was answered is the same way our doubt can be answered: *believing the testimony of Jesus*. John did not see Jesus' ministry firsthand. He got his news second-hand. He had to get it from his disciples because he was in prison. Likewise, we did not see Jesus do the things he did; we have to rely on the written testimony of those who did: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Believing, rather than being offended, in the testimony of God secures blessedness in our life.

ii. **Jesus commended John's ministry (vs. 24-30).**

READ: Luke 7:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."

²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." ²⁹ (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the

baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

Jesus affirms John's purpose in the plan of God. He says that there is none greater than John the Baptist. But then immediately overshadowed that statement by saying the "least in the kingdom of God is greater than" John the Baptist. This is not a critique of John. This does not imply John wasn't a part of the kingdom of God. Jesus' point is that John the Baptist represents the Old Testament; he was a part of the old guard. He will forever be a figure of great importance as he was the last of the prophets and the herald of the Messiah.

However, a child who accepts Jesus and has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit has a position in God's kingdom that John did not, at least at that time. This means John's audience—i.e., the sinners and tax collectors—those who were baptized, those who were prepared for Jesus' arrival, have been shown greater favor by God than John. This is why they, as Luke put it, "declared God just." They felt reassured in God's love for them because of Jesus' words. They thought to themselves, "God is just. He did not abandon us. And because of God's doing, we are new members of his Kingdom."

But if John's people felt justified in God's eyes, there were the Pharisees and lawyers who were offended by John's message. They, as Luke put it, "rejected the purpose of God" by refusing to be baptized by John.

iii. **Jesus condemned the religious leader's unbelief (vs. 31-35).**

READ: Luke 7:31-35 (ESV)

³¹ "To what then shall I compare the people of **this generation**, and what are they like?
³² They are like **children** sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.'
³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'
³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'
³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

Talking about the Pharisees and lawyers specifically, but, generally, all those who refused to believe, Jesus likens them to stubborn children. These children wanted to control, so they sat in the marketplace, calling out to their fellows, telling them to, on the one hand, "dance" and then, on the other, to "weep." But no one listened.

When it came to John the Baptist, the religious leaders wanted him to dance. They thought he was too severe, too extreme. He didn't feast or drink with them. Instead, he was a recluse living in the desert. But rather than engage with his message, they criticized the messenger. They said he had "a demon."

When it came to Jesus, the Son of Man, the religious leaders wanted him to mourn. They thought he was too relaxed, too agreeable. He would feast and drink with the worst of the worst! He even called a tax collector to be one of his disciples. Unlike John, who was too strict, Jesus seemed to have no standards at all! But the religious leaders disregarded the Lord too. Rather than engage with Jesus' message, they criticized the messenger. They called him a "glutton" and a "drunkard."

Thus, Jesus' point is that it was impossible to please the religious leaders. When God sent them John, they thought he was too extreme. When God sent them his Son, they thought he was too relaxed. The problem, it seems, wasn't with God but *with them*. They wanted *control*. They wanted to play music and watch God dance or mourn. But God doesn't move to any music that is not his own.

Anyone wanting to be justified must come to God on his terms, not our own. We must align our thoughts and life according to his plan and not our own. In doing so, we will have recognized the Lord's actual superiority. And we will be like the children of wisdom who recognize their own mother.

So, what's the takeaway?

Honest skepticism is the hallmark of a faithful generation. Stubborn cynicism is the hallmark of a faithless generation.

An evidence-based faith is not afraid of doubt. It invites us to ask tricky questions. A faith that cannot be questioned is a faith not worth following. However, at some point, questioning itself should not be the end-all-be-all. At some point, questioning should give way to believing. Otherwise, we risk being like the children in Jesus' story who, no matter what answer is given, were never satisfied.

Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: