

Dealing with doubt and discontentment

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we come to you today, give us faith to receive your word, understanding to know what it means, the will to follow its path, and the joy of hopeful obedience.

All this we pray with confidence in your name. Amen. Now, whenever I do premarital counselling with couples, sometimes I ask them, what dreams do you have for your future life together? What expectations do you have of each other? Because let's face it, we all have expectations. We all have an idea in our heads about how things will work out in the future. We all have an idea in our heads about what kind of work we'll get to do. Or what kind of relationships we'll have. How our ministry or even our life will turn out. Expectations play a major part in determining our direction. And sometimes, our expectations are met. In which case, hooray, I suppose.

[1 : 15] But, as I'm sure we've all discovered at some point, sometimes they're not met. Indeed, sometimes all our expectations do is set us up for frustration and disappointment.

And sometimes, those disappointments can be pretty big. Big enough to cause us to doubt. God, what's going on?

Why is this happening? Why are my prayers not being answered in the way I expected? Sometimes they even cause us to question our belief systems.

Especially when they are alternative belief systems on offer. They begin to breed discontentment.

Why should I follow Jesus when he doesn't meet my expectations?

Is Jesus really the one? Or shall we look for another? Now, perhaps this morning, a couple of you listening in are not Christians.

[2 : 21] You're interested in Jesus. You've been listening to Luke tell us about him. But you're also still uncertain. Because you also have certain expectations of Jesus.

And so far, he hasn't met them. And so you two are asking, Is Jesus really the one? Or shall we look for another?

Well, today's passage is for you. Because today we are introduced to another doctor. Another person whose expectations haven't quite been met.

And his identity is a surprise. It's none other than John the Baptist himself. Don't forget who this guy is.

Back in Luke chapter 1, An angel appears to his father, Zechariah, And tells him, This guy is going to be great in the sight of the Lord.

[3 : 22] Even before he's born, He will be filled with the Holy Spirit. And what will his ministry be? It's none other than to prepare the way for Jesus himself.

And that is exactly what happens in Luke chapter 3. When the word of the Lord comes to him in the wilderness, And he goes around preaching a baptism of repentance For the forgiveness of sin.

And as he does so, He says, Look guys, I can baptise you with water, But there's going to be a guy who comes after me, And he's going to baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

He's got a winnowing fork in his hand That's going to separate the wheat from the shaft, The righteous from the unrighteous, And the fire will consume the latter.

So when it comes to doubting Jesus, John probably wouldn't be on your short list. On the contrary, You would have expected He of all people would be 100% certain about Jesus.

[4 : 43] But have a look at verse 19. And there we discover John has the exact same question as us. Are you the one who is to come?

Or should we expect someone else? Why? What has begun to plant the seeds of doubt in John's mind?

Well, what's been happening? At the end of Luke 3, We discover John's been thrown into prison by Herod. John's been uncompromising about his message.

So he's not been afraid to tell this guy in power What he's doing wrong. And so he pays the price. Meanwhile, Jesus' ministry begins to really take off.

He begins teaching and healing And casting out demons all around the place. But this makes John begin to wonder. Hasn't he just been declaring That the one to come Would bring about the day of judgment On anyone who opposes God?

[5 : 57] Hasn't he been saying That he's come to purify his people With his awesome, refining fire? But as far as he can see, All Jesus has been doing Is running around Hanging out with fishermen And tax collectors.

All he's been doing Is hanging around some sick people And making them better. So he's not doing John any favours. He's undermining the credibility Of John's message.

And even worse, He's just healed a Roman centurion. A guy whose boss Has just put John into prison. So John is scratching his head a little.

After all, Did Jesus not say He's come to proclaim Freedom for the prisoners In that famous synagogue sermon of his In Luke chapter 4?

Oh, that's very nice Jesus, John must have taught. But if that is the case, Why am I still in prison? Or are you all talk Without any action?

[7 : 11] Are you the one who is to come? Or should we expect Someone else? These are the thoughts Racing through John's mind And perhaps they are your thoughts as well.

Perhaps today some of you Find yourself in trying circumstances. And your experience of Jesus Hasn't met your expectations. And so you ask, Is Jesus really the king?

Is he really loving? And so this passage Raises the question, What should we do then With our doubts And disappointments?

Well, here's our first encouragement This morning. Jesus says, When they arise, Come to me. Isn't that what John the Baptist does In verses 19 and 20?

He brings his questions To Jesus. You see, in times of doubt, It's easy to just keep Talking and listening to Ourselves, isn't it?

[8 : 19] It's easy to just Keep it in And dwell on them On our own. But Jesus wants us to take Our doubts To Him.

Because God's not afraid Of our questions. He is certainly not afraid When the psalmist Asks him things like, How long, O Lord? Or, Why, Lord, do you stand Far off?

Or, Why are you so far From saving me? God's more than happy To hear them. What he doesn't want Is for you to Avoid him.

What he doesn't want Is for you to be Apathetic Towards him. If Jesus really is The God of all Authority And compassion As we saw last week, He certainly Won't be threatened By us Questioning His identity Because He knows Who He Is So go to Jesus With your doubts It's okay To have questions Just Go to Jesus With them Indeed, By recording John's doubts Luke wants to tell us This is not Unusual This is Normal Even this Devout Disciple Had them You see Doubt Isn't Necessarily Always Bad It's Good To be Doubtful When Someone Pretending To be A bank Officer Calls you On your Phone Or

When Someone Is Peddling Conspiracy Theories Online Doubting Can be Good When It Causes Us To Stop Being Indifferent And Ask Some Questions Instead Which In turn Could Lead To A Deeper Understanding Doubts Could Simply Be The Birth Pangs Of A Deepen Faith After all If Someone Never Has Any Questions That Can Only Mean They Are Satisfied With Where They Are But Questions Indicate That You're On a Quest For Something More For Something That Will Move You Beyond Where You Are Currently And So Questions And Doubts Can Be Good If They Eventually Move You Along To Somewhere

[11 : 01] Better They Are Only Bad If They Move You To Somewhere Worse So Let's Not Feel Like We Have To Shut Down Our Doubts Too Quickly Sometimes Christians Can Do That Can't They Why Ask So Many Questions Just Believe And We Fail To Give Young People Especially The Space To Express What They Are Feeling But John The Baptist Shows Us There Is A Proper Place For Questions God Doesn't Want Us To Have A Blind And Unthinking Faith After All The Opposite Of Faith Is Not Doubt The Opposite Of Faith Is Unbelief Unbelief Is The Consistent Choice To Refuse God And It Is Something We'll Encounter Later On In This Passage

And So What We Need To Guard Against Is Not Doubt In Itself But Letting Our Doubts Take Us On A Path To Unbelief Rather Than Back To Jesus And As We Bring Our Doubts To Him Jesus Says Three Things To Us First First First First He Says Trust The Evidence Trust The Evidence Now How Does Jesus Answer John's Question He Could Have Just Said Yes I Am The One Take It Or Leave It But That's Not How Jesus Answers Instead He Says Verse 22 Go Back And Report To John What You Have Seen And He He The Blind Receive Sight The Lame Walk Those Who Have Leprosy Are Cleansed The Dead Hear The Dead Are Raised And The Good News Is Proclaimed To The Poor In Other

Words Jesus Says Well Let's Consider What I've Been Doing Shall We Here Is A Detailed Breakdown Think Back Over What You Have Seen If You've Been Watching Me Over The Past Few Months In Luke's Gospel In 5 Verse 25 You Would Have Seen A Paralytic Get Up And Walk In 5 Verse 13 You Would Have Seen A Leper Cleanse Last Last Week In 7 Verse 15 A Widow Son Is Brought Back To Life What About Good News To The Poor Well Check Out My Teaching In 6 Verse 20 Blessed Are The Poor For Yours Is The Kingdom Of God Oh No Blind People Healed Yet Don't Worry That Is Coming In 18 Verse 42 So That's What Jesus Has Done

But What's The Point Is Jesus Simply Boasting Well No Because As John Would Have Immediately Recognized Jesus Isn't Just Describing What He's Been Up To He's Actually Referring To Different Parts Of Isaiah He Is Especially Quoting Isaiah 35 Although He Mixes In Other Parts Of Isaiah As Well And What Does Isaiah Say Well The Prophet Says How Do You Know When God Is Coming How Do You Know When He's Here To Establish His Kingdom And Restore His People Well It's Precisely When The Blind See The Deaf Hear And So On In Other Words Jesus Isn't Performing These Miracles Randomly They

Are Signs The Kingdom Of God Is Now Here They Are Signs That The King Is Now Here Jesus Is Presenting Evidence In J.R.R.R.

[15:19] Tolkien's The Lord Of The Rings There Is A Part Of The Story Where We Are Told How To Identify Who The True King Of Gondor Is Now Gondor Is The Kingdom Of Men In The Story If You Didn't Know And There Is A Prophecy In The Story That Says The Hands Of The King Are The Hands Of A Healer That's How The Rightful King Will Be Known And What We Get Is A Succession Of Scenes Where One Of The Main Characters Aragorn Calls People Who Are Grievously Wounded Back To Life And It's Not Long Before The People Catch On The Word Gets Out And They Begin To Say The King Is Come Again Indeed And That Is Exactly What Jesus Wants Us To Get By Highlighting This Miracles Jesus Is Inviting John To Join The Dots He's Saying Look At The Evidence

Does It Match Up With Isaiah If So Then Trust The Evidence Yes I Might Not Be Baptizing People With Fire Yet I Haven't Brought In The Day Of Judgment But I Have Already Begun The Acts Of Restoration You Can See The Signs Of The Kingdom For Yourself And So Am I The One Who Is To Come What Do You Think And This Morning Perhaps Jesus Is Also Saying To You Trust The Evidence Trust Him Right Now You Might Look At What's Going On In Your Life And You Can't Join The Dots You Don't Get God's Timing You Don't Get God's Working But God Says You Might Not Be Able To Join Those Dots But You Can At Least Join

The Dots Of Who Jesus Is He Is The Fulfillment Of Isaiah 35 Look Has Shown Us The Evidence Clearly Hasn't He And If So That Is Good News Because Isaiah 35 Says That Means He Is The God Who Will Bring Streams Of Living Water In The Desert He Is The God Who Will Crown Your Heads With Everlasting Joy Now You Might Protest Isn't It Easier For John The Baptist To Trust The Evidence After All He Was There Back In The First Century We We We We We We We Are Also In John's Shoes Don't Forget He Is In Prison Throughout Jesus's Ministry So That Means He Hasn't Seen What Jesus Has Done Up Close And Personal Just Like Us Instead Verse 18 He Has To Trust Based On What His Disciples Told Him Or Put Another Way He Has To Trust On The Basis Of Eyewitness Accounts Just Like Us And Look at Verse 22 Jesus Says To John's Friends You Go Back And Report To John What You Have Seen And Heard Jesus Seems To Think That's Good Enough That's All John Needs An Eyewitness Report And Why Not Even Today In Areas Like Law And Journalism And Sociology We Still Depend Heavily On Eyewitnesses And We Regard Eyewitness

Testimony As Valid And Admissible In A Court Of Law It's Good Enough And So Today We Do Have The Same Evidence As John We Do Have An Eyewitness Report It's Called The Gospel Of Luke And Over The Centuries It Has Shown Itself To Be Reliable Even Under Close Scrutiny Now If

That's something that interests you or you want to explore more then check out the books that I recommend in the bulletin today but what Jesus wants to know really is will you trust the evidence that doesn't mean that you have to be so 100% certain that it becomes impossible for you to even entertain any doubts whatsoever that's not the kind of certainty Luke is aiming for when he's writing his gospel rather

[20 : 21] He is saying that when you look at what Jesus does how he acts how he treats people you can have enough confidence you have good reasons to trust Jesus even if you don't always understand him after all John certainly didn't understand why Jesus didn't free him from prison he didn't understand why Jesus hadn't fully exercised his power to vanquish his enemies and reign over everyone and the truth is we don't always understand either why Jesus doesn't heal why Jesus doesn't get rid of all those wicked people why places like Sudan still exist why Jesus allows us to remain in difficult places up but whenever we see a miracle, whether in the pages of Luke or when we hear about it today happening in the world somewhere, we receive it as a gift of reassurance.

Because that miracle is a sign of the kingdom. It is a sign Jesus is King. It is a signpost for us to look forward to the day when all sickness is gone, where judgment will come on the wicked, where tears are wiped away.

Because in his word, we already know the greatest sign, the greatest miracle, the death and resurrection of Jesus. That was certainly a miracle that didn't fit anybody's expectations of what a Messiah would be like.

But that is all the evidence we need in the face of doubt. For the cross reveals God loves us. He's good towards us.

Because Jesus died for even people like us. And it reveals his power and control as he makes sure nothing will stop Jesus from dying and rising again.

[22 : 40] So the question that faces John and us is this. Will we trust the evidence that Jesus is who he says he is?

And receive him as such? Even if we don't understand everything else that's going on? Or will we too be offended that Jesus doesn't meet our preconceived ideas of what God should and shouldn't do?

Well, Jesus helps us know which is the right choice. Verse 23. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

So trust the evidence. But second of all, relish your position. Relish your position.

In verse 24, Jesus now speaks to the crowd. And he recognizes they might be confused about what's going on. Many of them, you see, would probably have known John.

[23 : 47] But now they see John questioning Jesus. And so doubts begin to surface for them too. If a pastor that we very much love and respect publicly begins to express doubts, we would too, wouldn't we?

Either we'll express similar doubts as the pastor because we trust him, we follow him. Or we express doubts about the pastor. And I think it's likely something similar is going on here.

But in verse 24, Jesus is simply a genius. I'm not sure how else to say it. He simultaneously answers their doubts about John and about himself.

First of all, he addresses their doubts about John by asking them some rhetorical questions. Verse 24. What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

A reed swayed by the wind? Why were you attracted by John's ministry? He's asking them. Because he was a wimpy and wishy-washy kind of guy?

[25 : 00] Obviously not. Someone who upset Herod enough to land in prison obviously isn't a lalang. Okay then, verse 25.

Did you go out to see a man dressed in fine clothes? Did you go out to hear a privileged and self-indulgent guy?

No, that is Herod in his palace. That doesn't describe John in the desert. No, you went to hear John. Verse 26. Excuse me.

Verse 26. Because you could tell he is nothing less than a prophet. And then Jesus presses his point home. Not only is John a prophet, he says, but he's a special prophet.

You see, John has a specially designated role. He's the one, Jesus says in verse 27, whom Malachi 3 talks about.

[26 : 01] The messenger who will announce the coming of the Lord himself. He is the forerunner of the one who will purify Israel. And he is the link between the Old and the New Testament eras.

And so Jesus honours John. I think it's so amazing, isn't it, that Jesus does that for someone who has just questioned him? I would probably be more petty and try to put John down.

But if you are someone who is honestly wrestling with doubts, but you are willing to still go to Jesus, know that Jesus will not try to bring you down.

But Jesus doesn't just stop there. Instead, he says something even more startling. Verse 28. I tell you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John.

And yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. Once again, Jesus says something to keep us on our toes.

[27 : 12] Whatever does he mean? Well, let me share a helpful analogy from the scholar, Dale Ralph Davis, to illustrate Jesus' point.

Susan Anthony was a prominent social reformer and women's activist in the 19th century. In particular, she campaigned for a woman's right to vote in America.

You could say she was very great in the movement. But she never enjoyed that right herself. She never got to vote. But post-1920, a simple housewife in a kampong somewhere in the USA can be considered greater than Susan Anthony because she now has the privilege to vote.

And you might regard yourself today as a believer in Jesus whom no one will know and remember for years to come.

You certainly won't be known and remembered like John the Baptist. But your position is greater than his. You are greater than John.

[28 : 31] You are greater than Elijah and Elisha. You are greater than Isaiah or any of the other Old Testament prophets. Why?

Because you live in the era where Jesus has already come, died and risen again. You live in the era of salvation. You live in the era where the kingdom of God has been established.

And so no matter how insignificant you think yourself to be, if you trust in Jesus, you have a place in the kingdom of God. And that is way better than remaining in the old era.

And so Jesus is once again dispelling doubts about himself. He's saying, If the evidence shows I am indeed the one to come, that means I can elevate you to a position that is greater than even John the Baptist.

Today your circumstances might cause you to doubt that following Jesus brings you any good. Your environment might tempt you to doubt that. Your environment might tempt you towards discontentment.

[29 : 48] But Jesus says, Relish your position. Do you recognize what your permanent privileges are in Christ?

In this new era, do you know what you have? You have new birth. John 3, verse 3. You have new life.

Romans 6, verse 4. You have a new heart. Ezekiel 36, verse 26. You have a new mind. Romans 12, verse 2. You have a new spirit.

Ezekiel 11, verse 19. You have new desires. Galatians 5, verse 24. You are in the new covenant. Luke 22, verse 20. You have a new name.

Revelation 2, verse 17. You have a new hope. 2 Peter 3, verse 13. And so, you have a new song. Revelation 5, verse 9.

[30 : 46] Because you know you will be in the new world. Revelation 21. These are all yours.

The one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. So, trust the evidence.

Relish your position. And then, third of all, don't become hardened. Don't become hardened. In verse 29, we're told about the response of some of the people to Jesus' words.

Tax collectors and so on. They turned towards God. They did what John the Baptist was always urging people to do. Repent. They acknowledged God's way was right.

They said, we're sinners. Jesus is the doctor. We want to come to him, even if we don't get everything just yet. But, verse 30, we discover not everyone did that.

[31 : 54] The Pharisees and the experts in the law did not accept John's message of repentance. And so, not surprisingly, they also don't turn towards God and accept Jesus.

They said, what? What? Me? A sinner? No way. Jesus is God the Savior? Rubbish! Anyway, we don't need that kind of salvation.

They have no doubts. They are sure Jesus is not the one. They have unbelief. And it is no different today.

You see, why do some people turn to Jesus and others don't? Well, let me tell you why Jesus says. Take the Pharisees as an example. That is who the people of this generation in verse 31 are referring to.

What are they like? Verse 32. They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other, we played the pipe for you and you did not dance.

[33 : 01] We sang a dirge and you did not cry. Jesus is saying, so often we are like childish kids playing games.

So, imagine a kid politely inviting others to play some game. But soon the other kid is saying, I don't want to play by the rules. I know I'm supposed to dance when the pipe is playing.

Or I'm supposed to cry when we're playing pretend funeral. But I just, toan, toan, toan, toan, toan, toan. I've said something else. And Jesus says, that's what people who reject me are like.

They say, Jesus, you may call the tune, but I absolutely refuse to go along with it. I want you to play by my rules instead.

I want to be the one calling the tune. This is my stand. And so they childishly throw a tantrum, refusing to go along with Jesus.

[34 : 11] You see, what happens when there is doubt and disappointment in your life? Jesus says, trust the evidence. Relish your position.

Know that in spite of everything, my ways are ultimately right. And life-giving to you. And life-giving to you. That's the way we should go. But the truth is, we could go the other way.

We say, oh yes, there is the evidence, but I don't give any weight to it. Oh yes, there's that position in Christ, but I don't think it has any value.

We go the other way because, in the end, the long and short of it is we just don't want God. We'll find any excuse to say, he is wrong.

I am right. And that is exactly what Jesus charges the Pharisees with. He says, verse 33, when John the Baptist came with a very sober ministry, with a hard-hitting message about judgment and repentance, you rejected his message, you demonized him.

[35 : 26] And then verse 34, he says, when I come with a message about grace and generosity, about being the friend of sinners, well, you reject me too.

You say, I'm too liberal. And Jesus says, the real reason you reject me and John, it's not because there's a lack of evidence.

It's simply because you have hardened your heart. You are not neutral. You just don't want to accept me. You have unbelief.

And so, my friends, be honest. Is that where you are in danger of going to today? Because the truth is, sometimes we reject God, not because he hasn't proven himself, but because we just want to justify ourselves.

Thomas Nagle is a famous and well-respected philosopher. He's still alive, I believe. He doesn't believe in God. Around 25 years ago, he wrote a book called The Last Word.

[36 : 38] And in this book, he reflects on the fact that he doesn't believe. And he made this very honest observations on the screen. He says this, I want atheism to be true.

And I'm made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and naturally hope that I'm right in my belief.

It's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be a God. I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time.

That is a very honest admission. Thomas Nagel is saying, at the heart of it, he doesn't believe in God, not simply because he thinks that's where logic leads him, but because in the end, he doesn't want to submit his life to someone other than himself.

Even should the evidence point towards Jesus as Lord of all, he will reject it because he simply doesn't want Jesus to be in charge. And he says, he thinks that is true of many people.

[38 : 13] And today, Jesus says to you and I, well, what position are you in? Are you in the position of those of the people of verse 29?

Those who turn towards God and so on? Or are you in the position of those of the Pharisees in verse 30? And if you are in the position of verse 29, you come to God, come to Jesus, don't be discouraged when it seems like other people reject Jesus because of their doubts.

It's not necessarily because they are rational and you are not. No, they're not neutral either. So don't go their way.

For verse 35, wisdom is proved right by all her children. That is, God and his purposes will ultimately be vindicated as we choose to follow his will for us.

There will be no regrets for any and every person who keeps trusting Jesus, no matter what. So this morning, what will you do with your doubts and discontentment when they arise?

[39 : 39] Don't suppress them. Instead, bring them to Jesus. Then let him remind you of who he is, what he's done, and what he's won for you.

In other words, come back to the gospel. And don't harden your heart when you hear the gospel again this Sunday and every Sunday. Instead, remember verse 23, blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word today. Thank you for reminding us that you're not afraid of our questions.

You're not afraid of our lament. You're not afraid when we bring our doubts to you. But help us to bring our doubts to you. Help us to open our hearts to you even when we are facing times of difficulty, times where we are struggling to trust in you.

Open our hearts so that we know you are still trustworthy you are the one who deserves our full confidence. You are the one in whom we know we have a secure future no matter what.

[41 : 02] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.