

## “Waves of Doubt”

- Luke 7:18-35

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
at JF Believers Church  
in Menomonie, Wis  
on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016



**Luke 7:18-35** Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. 19 And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" 20 When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" 21 And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. 22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. 23 "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." 24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. 26 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to 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 "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29 And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. 31 And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? 32 "They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not weep.' 33 "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 "But wisdom is justified by all her children."

**For those of us that are King's Kids**, the beginning of our race no doubt looked very different than what it looks like today. Certainly the longer the gap between us and the starting line, the greater the contrast. We likely began with high ideals and unshakable convictions. We were like kids at "Toys-r-us" just before Christmas; wide eyed and moonstruck, *we were overwhelmed with excitement*. It was all good!

But then somewhere along the way there was a reality that hit us. Things didn't happen the way we imagined they would and we were shocked to find that the world of faith was not made of lollipops and sugarplums. Eventually...almost universally, that day came or certainly *will come*, for all of us. Sometimes we have experienced such a dilemma numerous times, but we all seem to remember that *one* time when the wave of doubt appeared and our world as we knew it was suddenly called into question.

When John the Baptist first came onto the scene it appeared he would be an unflinching force. Roaming around in the desert...shopping at Whole Foods...eating locusts and honey, all decked out in leather and camels hair. I have to think John would have been a sight in any generation! Certainly he would have stood out in a crowd. John was found there in Matthew 3 facing down the religious right...yelling “*you bunch of snakes! Who warned you to flee God’s coming wrath!*” After all, those pious religious boys just showed up out of curiosity, professional jealousy, and general malfeasance! John was on to them immediately and showed no fear *of* them and no patience *for* them. In those days, John seemed that he was truly a guy to be reckoned with. At the first appearance of Jesus, it would be he who would personally declare “***Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!***” Wow. John was the *man*...!

But now here we find John a seemingly much different individually. We see him at this point locked up in prison for essentially just exercising the ministry for which God had called him. Herod didn’t like some of the things John had to say about him and his marital situation so he had John locked up. And the prisons in those days weren’t the marginally clean and comfortable establishments we have today to incarcerate. No three square meals a day and bathroom facilities! No, this institution would be...well, *may we say*, more “*basic*.”

At this point in the story, John would have been in prison for 12 to 18 months. The time for the “stiff upper lip” had long since passed, and things were hard and things were bleak! He would certainly have had plenty of time on his hands: time to dream about the past, what the present was like, and what he had believed the future would be like, *or at least what it should be like in his opinion*. He had believed and he had moved in that belief. He knew Jesus was on a mission and he was, *or at least had been* on mission with him.

John must have thought about all of this over and over again while he was in prison. He no doubt would have been strong at first, believing that his imprisonment was just part of the mission or part of the divine cause. But surely as the months began to pass, John would have started wondering if he had made a mistake: if he had done something wrong, *if he had failed somehow in his mission*. No doubt many of us take that same road when things do not go as we expect. John must have thought, “*What am I doing in here?*” “*Where is my rescue?*” “*Why must I endure this if I was just being obedient and serving God?*” “*When is Jesus going to start the kingdom?*” And then finally, the ‘other shoe’ would drop one day when he would finally succumb to the desperate thought “*Is Jesus really the Messiah?*” “***Is all this stuff real?***”

It seems to be universally true that when we find ourselves in such times of trouble...when the painful events and situations seem incorrigible and eternal, we begin to look around for the scapegoat. We look around for something and/or someone for which to blame. For how can we make sense of such events if there is literally no cause and no one to fault for our situation and our status? That would mean the world is mad! We seem to *need* to put it all to reason and give some sort of order to be able to wrap our minds around it! There must be someone, *something*, that we can quantify and personify and thus hopefully rectify. And I have learned that there literally is no one excluded from that grab bag of possible guilt...not even God. So John wondered and then he finally wondered out loud. And two of his boys would then carry that message of enquiry back to Jesus: “*John wants to know if you really are the one...if you really are the Messiah.*”

Most of us would tend to be forgiving herein with John. “Misery loves company” and we have all been there so we perhaps have a level of sympathy beyond the average “doubting Thomas.” Because according to historical records John would certainly have been truly suffering! He surely would have known the words of Isaiah the prophet... *the sick would be healed and the dead resurrected, and “prison doors would open.”* (Isaiah 42:7, 61:1) Yet, here he is, the herald of the King, locked up in prison with no help in sight. He must have wondered, “Everyone else is feeling the Lord’s compassion, but what about me?”

Oh, how we can relate! How we get to such a point matter's little, for we get there just the same and it can be...*and perhaps it was for John too*, a crossroads in our lives. Such was the case on the day that Jesus walked a whole bunch of folks "up to the line" and told them something real hard to receive. He said "*unless you eat of my flesh and drink of my blood, you cannot be my disciple.*" And we know the rest of the story don't we? Scripture records that many, if not most, of those folks 'took a hike.' Surely it is in the time of crisis that compels us to commit one way or another...to *decide* ...to "Call or Fold." As the old saying goes: "*People are like tea bags... You'll never know how strong they are until they are put in hot water.*"

What Jesus did next...how he answered John, was the 'stuff of awe' for sure. For Jesus didn't go find John in prison to talk him down. He didn't send a couple of his apostles to go council John through his crisis! There was instead more of the treatment of Job in 37:14 "*Listen to this, O Job; Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.*"

Jesus answered and said to them, "*Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*" The evidence of Christ...that He was indeed the Messiah...the "chosen one of God," lay not in words or reason. The proof was in the evidence of His hand. The testimony lay in the miraculous that was going on around Him. Essentially He was asking John "how can you explain this in any other way?" Look around John!

No doubt the same can be said to us in such times of doubt! "Look around...*what do you see?*" How can you explain all of this in any other way? We need look no further than the people who are around us in this church community! The "blind see"...the "lepers have been cleansed"...the "deaf hear"...the "dead have been raised." The "gospel is being preached!" When we stop and look around at the evidence of His reality, His power, and His presence, we are utterly disarmed!

Those of us that are living out our lives and walks today are certainly not the first to feel such doubts. Scripture makes no attempt to hide such hearts from its readers. We all know about "Doubting Thomas". We all know about Judas! What was happening in *HIS* head and heart? Then there is the whole of the book of Hebrews which was written to some Jewish Christians who were also struggling in their belief and faith about Christ. But one thing that rings out through the totality of scripture is that our gravity is not rooted in ourselves or our own fickle emotions but rather in "the Rock" that is Jesus! In 1 Timothy the apostle Paul writes these words: "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*"(2 Tim. 2:13) We are told also in Hebrew 10:23, "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful . . .*" Not "suck it up and be strong...be faithful", but rather look around and you will see that I have it all under control and I have *your* back!

He told those messengers to tell John "*blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*" You are blessed if you do not turn away...if you do not stumble because of me. Please note that Jesus was not apologizing for His priorities nor did he offer John an excuse or a defense for the lack of a rescue. Often there have been those who sought for Jesus to be one thing or another, or to do one thing or another according to their own will and desires. But Jesus never changed for man. Scripture records in John 2:24 that "... *Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men.*" He "*knew what was in mankind...*" Jesus was indeed on a mission. One that would not be altered for the wants and desires of men even if such seemed reasonable and maybe in our sympathy, *deserving!*

But Jesus did not come to stumble men away from God either. He came to “*seek and save that which is lost.*” He was not without compassion and that included John who he obviously cared for deeply. But His answer was not based on theology. He did not argue with John through reason and emotion. He could have replied “oh, come *on* John! You know me! How can you say that?” No, he simple said “John, ...open your eyes and see!”

When we find ourselves under pressure...maybe really sick or in trial, reason and sense seem to go out the window. We can begin to throw people and history ‘under the bus’ because we don’t understand what’s going on. We want God to be “fair” by us, never mind that such is based on a human reasoning of what that even means! What we must do in those times is open our eyes to a world beyond ourselves. What do we see? Is God still doing the miraculous? Is His hand still evident? Is His work still being done? Are the stars still up there and did the sun come up today and did ‘Bobby’ get reborn and is “he who was dead alive once again?” Our error lies in the fact that we say we believe that God is sovereign and in control of our lives, but when such is exercised we manifest that our expectations of the future and how such would play out supersedes God’s plan in our individual worlds.

Such a picture is given in the latter section of our reading today where Jesus described mankind “...like children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, ‘*We played wedding songs, and you didn’t dance, so we played funeral songs, and you didn’t weep.*’ We want faith to fit into *our* lives and plans rather than truly surrendering to Christ and fitting into *His* plans for us and for His kingdom! Today, we want a God who is perfectly holy and good and infinitely loving. Yet, how often we fail to understand that a perfectly good and holy God will execute His plan according to the will of His Father, and that may not always match with ours. Therefore many take offense at Jesus and thus reject Him and/or whatever scapegoat we can find to heap upon additional blame. God provided these words in Isaiah for all of us who think that God should be like us,

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.  
(NASB) Is. 55:8-9*

And then in Psalms 50, verse 21 the point is even more abundantly clear...

*“You thought that I was just like you . . .”*

John’s story doesn’t have a humanly happy ending. John died in there, and he died because Herod had him beheaded. I wonder what he would say today about the whole matter? I can’t speak for him, but I think I know. John was a part of changing the world.

From where I sit, *he still is*...