

Luke 7:18-35 – False Expectations Causes Doubt

- Have you ever been really excited about something?
 - Maybe you have dreamt about it for a long time?
 - Saved up for it?
 - Waited and waited for it to come?
 - The build-up and the expectations are huge
 - But when it finally arrives you are left feeling disappointed
 - Following that disappointment is a question of doubt?
 - Was it really worth it in the first place?
- That is what we see happen in this story
- We jumped in at chapter 4 in this series so let me just give you a bit of background as to who John the baptise is.
 - John the Baptist was a bit of a miracle baby himself
 - Not on the same level as Jesus but he was born to a woman far too old to be having kids.
 - He was a special gift to Elizabeth because he had a special purpose.
- Now John was a little bit odd
 - He lived in the desert
 - We wore clothes made of camel hair
 - He ate locusts and honey
- But he was an important guy
 - He was prophesised about.
 - The prophesy was that he would come right before the Messiah, Jesus.
 - Luke told us back in Luke 3 that Johns role was to prepare the way for Jesus.
 - And he told us how he did it
 - He went around preaching that people need to repent and believe for the time is near
 - And baptising people with water
 - His entire purpose was to point to a greater one coming.
- John knew that and was looking out for Jesus.
 - When they met at Jesus' baptism
 - John recognised Jesus and said to Jesus I am not worthy to baptise you
 - But Jesus makes him
 - He witnesses that great event that I mentioned at the start of this series where straight after being baptised a dove descends on Jesus and God the Father declares this is my son whom I love.
- John knew from that moment that Jesus was the one he was preparing the way for and saw it with his own eyes.
 - Jesus then headed off into the desert for 40 days where he is tempted
 - John carried on doing his work and preparing the way for Jesus.
- John the Baptist has a good and successful ministry.

- As he pointed people to God and to their need for salvation and repentance many became followers of John and he baptised them
 - They turned from the law of Judaism to the freedom of salvation in God.
- But by the stage that we are at now John the Baptist finds himself in prison.
 - During the end stages of his ministry he goes to the king of the time, Herod, who wasn't a nice man and tells him to repent of his sin
 - Herod had taken his brother's wife even though his brother was still alive
 - You can't do that.
 - Not then and not now.
 - But rather than repent Herod threw John in prison and having been in prison for some months it's from prison that he sends some of his followers who are still loyal to him to ask Jesus this question, are you really the messiah I thought you were?
 - John is doubting whether Jesus really is the one.
- The great John the Baptist doubts
 - It must have been difficult for John a man accustomed to living in the wilderness to be confined to a prison.
 - John had served God faithfully and one of the promises of the coming Messiah was that he came to set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18)
 - So John must have been thinking if Jesus is the real messiah why am I still in prison.
 - John had formed, understandably, false expectations of what Jesus was here to do.
 - That had led to doubt.
 - So, doubt is ok
 - John is not the only person in the Bible to doubt
 - Moses was ready to quit on one occasion (Numbers 11:10-15)
 - As were Elijah (1 Kings 19) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah chapter 20)
 - Doubt is a matter of the mind
 - It is reasoned questioning
 - We cannot understand what God is doing or why he is doing it.
 - And often we think that God should be doing something else which leads us to doubt God.
 - Unbelief on the other hand is not ok.
 - That is a matter of will
 - We refuse to believe God's word and obey His will
 - John's questioning of Jesus was born from the emotional and physical strain of being in prison and a false expectation upon when Jesus would act.
 - John had pronounced judgement, but Jesus was doing acts of mercy and love
 - John had promised that the kingdom of God was near but there was no evidence so far
 - John had heard from his followers the wonderful and marvellous things Jesus was going about doing for individuals

- But that in John's mind was only half the job
 - What about overthrowing the evil leaders such as Herod or setting the prisoners free
 - John was expecting the messiah to establish a political kingdom and when it didn't come it caused him to question
 - Plenty of cause for confusion and doubt.
- Hindsight is a wonderful thing isn't it
 - As believers we will all go through seasons of doubt, and even before being a believer you doubt Jesus, but as you look back you can understand what God was doing.
- Let's look at how Jesus responds differently to John's doubt and the unbelief of those in the crowd that we see in this passage.
 - In response to doubt Jesus provides confirmation
 - In response to unbelief Jesus provides commendation and condemnation

Confirmation

- John has sent these two messengers to ask Jesus a question
 - How does Jesus respond?
 - With the theological lecture? No
 - He invited them to watch as he healed many people of many afflictions and gives them physical evidence not words.
 - He heals the lame
 - Casts out evil spirits
 - Heals diseases
 - Gives sight to the blind
 - Makes the deaf hear
 - This list literally correlates to the prophecies about Jesus in Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:4-6, 42:1-7.
 - Jesus wasn't establishing a political kingdom as many, including John, expected but the kingdom of God.
 - Now John would have known the prophecies about Jesus well since it was his job to prepare the way
 - So as his messengers reported back he would have been mentally ticking off the list
 - And found the one about freeing prisoners missing.
 - John almost falls into the trap of focussing on what Jesus wasn't doing rather than what he was doing
 - But as a man of faith he doubts his doubts and receives the message from Jesus to trust him.
 - Jesus is saying through his actions I am the Messiah and I am fulfilling the prophecies about me; I just haven't got to the one you want yet.

- Jesus is fulfilling in part what he will fulfil in full in his perfect timing.
 - The preaching of the gospel to individuals take priority over judgement on governments.
 - Judgement will come but when God is ready not when we are ready.
- Many people today expect the church to change the world and criticise it for not.
 - They expect the church to be the solution to the economic, political and social problems of the world.
 - And the church has for centuries been at the centre of humanitarian service and reform
 - But just as Jesus then was in the business of changing the hearts of individuals that is true today.
 - It is then the work of the individuals who have been transformed to seek to transform culture in-line with God's will.
 - The main job of the church is to bring lost sinners to a saviour and the rest is a by-product.
- Having taken the time to deal with Johns doubt Jesus then focusses on those listening who have unbelief.
 - First, he commends John then he condemns them

Commendation of those with faith

- What we think of ourselves or what others think of us is not as important as what God thinks of us.
 - Jesus waited for Johns messengers to depart and then he commended him whilst exposing the sinful hearts of those who had rejected John.
- John was not a compromiser – a reed blowing in the wind – easily swayed as Ephesians 4:14 puts it.
 - John had a tough message to bring to prepare the way for Jesus, but he didn't shy away from it no matter what happened to him.
- He also wasn't a man of celebrity status dressed in fancy clothes and hanging out with the elite.
- Jesus goes as far as to tell us that there is no one greater than John born of a woman.
 - John held unwaveringly to his task of preparing the way for Jesus.
 - John was the herald of the king, announcing the coming kingdom.
 - Johns ministry was the beginning of God revealing His redemption plan for the world.
- Jesus was greater than John, but Jesus was conceived of God not woman.
 - As we will celebrate next month through Christmas.
 - Jesus is greater in authority and power.
- But the religious leaders would reject Jesus just as they had rejected John.

Condemnation for the unbelief

- The religious leaders were proud people thinking they had a right standing with God because of their good deeds. How wrong they are.

- Jesus probes their conscience to unveil their unbelief.
- Despite who John was, people had flocked out in their thousands to see John.
 - But they didn't like his message, so they tried to forget it
 - But Jesus won't let them.
- They had gone out to see John because they believed he was the forerunner of the long-awaited messiah
 - And if John was the forerunner then Jesus was the Messiah.
 - They should have been turning to Jesus, but they weren't.
- Jesus calls them childish, not child-like.
 - Nothing pleased them.
 - If you have had or looked after children you will understand this.
- John preached a stern message of coming judgement and they wrote him off as having a demon
- Jesus brought a gracious and loving message of salvation and they wrote him off as a drunkard.
 - They weren't happy with either message, so they ignored both.
 - They loved their law so much they weren't interested in God's truth.
- People who want to avoid hearing the truth will always find an issue with the message bearer.
 - It's how they justify themselves.
- But God demonstrates his way to be the best through the transformed lives of those who believe.

Summary

- Unbelief - beware you are rejecting a free offer of salvation and forgiveness.
 - Jesus didn't come to judge the world but to save the world.
 - Will you open yourself up to Jesus?
- Doubt
 - If you are listening and wondering if what Jesus claims to be true, then keep searching.
 - Jesus is bigger than your questions
 - We would love to help you answer them
 - Why not get in touch and ask for a free copy of God's big questions
 - If you know Jesus and you are going through a tough time at the moment and it is causing you to doubt,
 - Know that is ok
 - we will all be there at some point.
 - If you are wondering where God is and why is he letting these bad things happen then be assured there is nothing currently going on in your life that God isn't aware of and in his infinite wisdom hasn't allowed.

- It is all part of his purpose and plan for his glory and eventually your joy.
- You may not understand it until much later, but I can assure you God has not forsaken or abandoned you because that is not who he is.
 - He is a faithful God so keep trusting him through the doubt.