

# 06/01/25 - Luke 7:18-35 - "The War Between Doubt and Unbelief"

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[ 0 : 00 ] Will you open with me to Luke chapter 7 as we read verses 18 through 35.!

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?

In that hour, he healed many people of diseases and evil spirits. And on many who were blind, he bestowed sight.

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.

[ 1 : 19 ] And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowd concerning John.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 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 king's courts.

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is he of whom it is written. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

[ 2 : 16 ] 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.

When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

To what then shall I compare the people of this generation? And what are they like? 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 for you, and you did not weep. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine.

And you say, he has a demon? 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.

[ 3 : 36 ] Yet wisdom is justified by all her children. This is God's word.

We praise the Lord for another Sunday. We made it. And we're continuing in our series in the Gospel of Luke today.

And I wanted to start with a couple questions for you. And the first being, what do you expect when your expectations, what do you expect when your expectations are not matching your experience? What do you do about that? What do you do when your expectations of God don't match what's going on and what's unfolding in life? Parents?

Yeah. You know, a lot of parents even have old adult children that are not following the Lord, that are straying, whom they're praying for.

[ 4 : 46 ] What do you do in that situation? What do you do when you believe God would come through, but silence is filling a void? When the path that you thought would be straight is a little bit more rocky and dark than that preacher made you think.

This is where we meet John the Baptist here. And this is a different John the Baptist. This is not the fiery preacher of Luke chapter 3, calling out from the wilderness for sinners to repent.

But this is John the prisoner, locked away to rot. In fact, the great voice calling out to prepare the world previously is now just this cracked whisper of a man locked in prison, rotting away, who is doubting Jesus Christ.

It's easy to forget that even spiritual giants, as great of an evangelist that John the Baptist was, it's easy to forget that even spiritual giants can find themselves disoriented in the dark.

Right? John's story feels especially relatable. It falls short, but you remember 2020? I believe all y'all were with us.

[ 6 : 26 ] That was wild. Where many of us experience this unanticipated, a unique type of isolation that we've never known before.

You can't go out and get groceries? The grocery stores close? You go down the street of Boardman and there's no cars? Globally, depression and anxiety surged 25% according to the WHO.

And in the U.S., one in four young adults, young adults reportedly considering suicide during the first months of what was known as lockdown.

People felt forgotten. People felt abandoned. Even by God, they began to doubt. Maybe that was even you during COVID. Now, doubt in that sense isn't an intellectual, isn't just an intellectual problem.

It is very personal. It has to do with our emotions. It creeps into our view of how things should be, and it doesn't line up with what God is allowing.

[ 7 : 43 ] In other words, doubt is the tension of our expectations. It's important that we understand, however, doubt is not the same as unbelief.

Doubt is not the same as unbelief. Where doubt wrestles with God, unbelief walks away. Doubt asks questions in the dark.

Where unbelief shuts the door completely to the light. Doubt asks why, and unbelief says no. And if we're honest, many of us over the last few years, maybe even last few months or last few days here today, whether a pandemic, personal hardship, or prolonged silence from God, you have realized how vulnerable we all are to both doubt and unbelief.

How quickly we can fall away in our faith and start to question, and some of us breaching the borderline of unbelief.

Today we're invited into two battlegrounds. One of solitary confinement in this prison cell filled with a lot of questions.

[ 9 : 01 ] And then also a public square filled with opinions. And in both places, spiritual warfare is taking place. One waged by a faithful but discouraged prophet, John the Baptist, and the other by the proud who refuse to listen.

And the question before us today is this. What do you do when God's plan looks nothing like yours? What do you do when God's plan looks nothing like yours?

Will you fall away, or will you press in? The points that we will see in this passage is that the gospel demands submission to God's path.

Even when it doesn't match ours. This will be reinforced throughout this passage. And by the end of our time, I believe you will see that.

We're going to have two sections in the passage today. I had four. I was wrestling with this passage on Friday. Was not looking forward to Sunday.

[ 10 : 13 ] But praise the Lord for the Holy Spirit to bring this together for us today. And so what we have is two sections.

The sermon title is The War Between Doubt and Unbelief. The War Between Doubt and Unbelief. And so let's break this passage up into two sections.

And before we do, I want us to pray and ask for the Holy Spirit's help in continuing the effort that God's people hears the Lord today. Let's pray.

Father, we come to you with situations and circumstances that some of us may just be unable to fathom the amount of trials and darkness that some of us are experiencing.

Some of us here today may feel disconnected, lost in the dark, doubting. We're on the verge of unbelief altogether.

[ 11 : 19 ] Father, we pray that you minister to these folks, all of us, even if we're encouraged. We know these seasons will come. We know you're sanctifying us through trials and hardships.

So speak to your church today by the power of your Holy Spirit as it's written in your word that we may be lifted from that place. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The first section today is the warfare of doubt. And in verse 18, we see the decaying man in prison.

He's receiving word of healings and miracles. But absent from any of these reports that he receives in prison, is judgment falling upon sinners.

There's no fire consuming the chaff. Rome still stands. And Herod is still feasting. Religious leaders are still mocking as John sits there rotting away in his cell.

[12:28] Listen to the echo of John's heart and spiritual condition here. Verse 19. Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

Are you the one who is to come, Jesus, or shall we look for another? This isn't the ministry that I left off to you.

Healings and miracles and everything. These people need to repent. And the rawness of Luke's account here ought to rattle us to our core.

There was intense doubt going on in this prison. Intense doubt. What do you do with your doubts when you experience them?

Be honest with yourself. Do you suppress them in fear that even vocalizing your doubts, God's judgment is all of a sudden going to rain upon you?

[13:37] And everything that could go wrong is going to go wrong because he's going to discipline you for doubting? Maybe you'll hide them from anyone else.

The preacher's always asking for prayer requests. You wish that you could vocalize the prayer requests that you are struggling with doubt and with God's plan in your life? And you don't even want other people to know because they'll think less of you in your mind?

What do you do with your doubt? Well, let's follow John the Baptist. What does he do with his doubt? Well, in verse 19 and 20, he submits them to Jesus Christ.

John broadcasts his doubt to go to the ears of Jesus Christ. And notice that Jesus doesn't rebuke John, you of little faith.

Cheer up. Prison cell's not that bad. Right? He actually, Jesus reassures John. In verse 21 and 22, to reassure John, Jesus performs miracles in front of the messengers to strengthen Jesus Christ's authority of being God.

[14:59] To send this Isaiah-shaped hope back to those prison walls. The blind could see. The lame were able to walk.

The deaf could hear. The dead lived. And the poor rejoice. And for John, with this message and this miraculous testimony of what God is doing in the world, Jesus leaves one thing unsaid.

There is no promise of rescue for John. For that, Jesus responds to John with a beatitude of persevering faith in this verse.

Verse 23, And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Another translation kind of clears up that muddiness of offend.

He says, Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of me. It's beatitude, perseverance. You see, faith and doubt, church, can live within the same heart.

[16:19] Faith and doubt can live within the same heart. Even the greatest preachers on earth still have seasons of intense doubt. Right? Is there any amen to that?

Amen. We can treat doubt as though it's some condemning evidence of lack of trust, though. But instead, the faithful Christian will not suppress their doubt, but submit their doubt.

And I believe that honest Christianity is most honorable to God when it's authentic before God. you can express what's going on in your heart.

The Lord already knows. What are we trying to hide? Right? And for the crowd, many of them being followers of John the Baptist, I mean, you could imagine, they're like, what did John say?

They're doubting, he's doubting Jesus? He's lost his mind. But Jesus corrects any confusion. Look at this robust resume. In verse 24, as John's disciples leave, the message of endurance and the beatitude is sent back to those prison walls.

[17:37] Jesus turns to the crowd to defend John, sort of rhetorically, asking the crowd, what did you go out in the wilderness to see?

Have you forgotten who John the Baptist was? This wasn't just some soft character, this was a rugged man. Not a reed swayed by the wind.

Not a soft clothed noble. You saw a prophet, rugged and bold. You saw the forerunner. Verse 27, this is he of whom it is written, behold, in Malachi 3, behold, I send my messenger before your face

who will prepare your way before you.

John was the forerunner, the last prophet of the old era of prophets whose voice went out as the kingdom of heaven dawned on earth.

John was appointed. He was appointed. But not only that, verse 28, Jesus continues, I tell you, among those born of women, none are greater than John.

[ 19 : 01 ] Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. What a robust remark. You can't get a higher praise than that of all the women.

John, this man who's questioning and doubting Jesus, is among the greatest of all born of women? The man in prison waging war against his doubt was the greatest man alive, according to Jesus Christ. Meaning that he had irreplaceable value.

John was appointed and he had irreplaceable value. You see, the greatest in the kingdom is not about status, it's not about sacrifice, but it's about spiritual rebirth and nearness to Christ's proximity to Jesus Christ.

John pointed to what we now possess by our faith in Jesus Christ. And even furthermore, there is one thing that our doubt can never redefine.

[ 20 : 19 ] Our secured belonging to Jesus Christ and the irreplaceable value that we possess, the righteousness that we are given, not a righteousness of our own, but close in the righteousness of Christ by our faith in him.

This is profound. You can be rotting away in a prison cell and still be radiant in the eyes of God. Don't give in to your doubts.

Give it away. Give it away. Give it to Jesus Christ. And when we do, regardless, if we're rotting away in prison, we can hold tightly to the same reason to believe as John did.

Verifiable evidence communicated in God's word for all of us to go back to time and time again, doubt after doubt after doubt, the mighty works of God right here.

Scripture is the evidence and only means of relieving our doubts in this life, in which it is also the object of certainty for the truth of our salvation.

[ 21 : 46 ] In Scripture alone, our doubt is exchanged for faith. And we are promised, no matter how great John was, we see Jesus reassure us here.

Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is even greater than John. This is the status bestowed to us by our faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the good news of the gospel. Believe in it. We have to note the tender and compassionate attributes of our Lord Jesus Christ, right?

That we see here. If you have doubts submitted to Jesus Christ today, do you have questions? Raise them to Scripture.

Allow Jesus to prove to you time and time again that the narrow path in life is the only path. And it doesn't always feel good, but it is the way, right?

[ 22 : 54 ] Even in trial and suffering, we see something shift in this passage in the second section as a warfare of unbelief.

In verse 29 all the way to the end, John inserts a little bit of commentary here. Or Luke inserts a little bit of commentary here.

It says, when all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, you know the tax collectors, these are like the mobsters. Come on, we live in Youngstown.

If you not know where you live, you know who these tax collectors are. When all the people heard this and the tax collectors, they too, they declared God just, that God is righteous.

having been baptized with the baptism of John, they were reassured in their doubts. Is John losing it? Nope, not at all. Everything about their faith in the baptism of repentance that John administered was true.

[ 24 : 02 ] They were faithfully following God's path and plan. You see what happened there in verse 29. The doubt of John actually turned the doubt of his followers completely around.

One honest preacher actually created a 180 for the people he's preaching to. And doubt was turned around because of it and they rejoiced.

I don't know about you, but the more I read the struggles of great men of faith, I think of Confessions by Augustine, thanks Tom for the book that I lost and then found.

The more I read these men right writing down their honesty, their authenticity, the more my faith is invigorated and open to the Lord to be honest with him.

It's not the same for you. However, we see another warfare go on. The war of doubt is over. Look at the next warfare in verse 30.

[ 25 : 09 ] It's not a warfare of doubt, but a warfare of unbelief. Verse 30, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

In their unbelief, they're glad that they weren't baptized by that kook in the prison and they're glad they're not following Jesus now. Right? Whereas doubt was asking questions, we see unbelief here in a stark difference.

Unbelief rejects truth altogether. And Jesus Christ responds, I love it, to what then shall I compare the people of this generation and what are they like?

It's like, oh buddy, no trigger warning given. They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another.

We played the flute for you, you didn't dance, we sang the dirge and you did not weep. It's comparing these Pharisees and these lawyers to children. In other words, the answer to Christ's question in verse 31 is to compare this generation to sulking kids in public.

[ 26 : 30 ] That'll gain following. That'll gain some likes on your Instagram. crap. The unbelief of this generation was unconvincing. They were drowned in the cynicism and rejection.

Nothing would appease them. In verse 33, John was too ascetic, he was too harsh to his body, so he was accused of being demonic. Get John out of here in his baptism.

verse 34, Jesus was too joyful. He sat with tax collectors and sinners. Well, he's accused then of being a glutton and a drunkard. Get rid of him.

Get rid of John. Get rid of Jesus. Don't you see what Jesus is doing here? He's saying you can't reason with unbelief. Only the power of God has that type of authority.

Only the power of God within the heart of a sinner has the power to awaken them. to their need of truth. We see this answer here. Jesus gives in verse 35, he says, yet wisdom is justified by all her children.

[ 27 : 47 ] I wrestle with this because I'm like, what in the world does that mean? Another translation, the NASB says, divine wisdom will be vindicated. God. Or maybe I can just explain what that means.

In context, Jesus is saying, John may have been radical and strict over on this side. John's kicked over here. But look at the repentant people that his ministry produced.

Look at the fruit, wisdom of God. And Jesus, Jesus may eat with sinners, sinners, but look at the transformed lives that he brings into the kingdom.

Those changed lives, her children, as this passage indicates, are the evidence that God's wisdom was at work. His plan was unraveling.

And even if the religious elite didn't want to acknowledge it, the fact remained, God was working in this world through John as the forerunner and Jesus as the Messiah.

[ 28 : 54 ] You see, you'll know God's wisdom not by who approves of it, but by the fruit that it bears. In attempts to contextualize Jesus Christ's arguments, the unrepentant elites of the day would never be satisfied.

They could touch the holes within Jesus' wrists, the holes in His feet. They still wouldn't believe. And today, we see this unfold today in the Christian who resist the church because they just are too judgmental on one side or maybe too soft on the other side or maybe that the Bible, they talk too much about the Bible as if that's some type of problem in the church today.

Here we are able to diagnose unbelief. Unbelief results from anyone who has no room for God regardless of the reason.

There is no justification. And the one who has no room for God is guilty of committing idolatry. Idolatry. The only way to remove an idol of the heart is through repentance.

This crowd of religious elites that had it all together would not repent of their sin. sin. And true repentance that steps off our thrones and submits our unbelief is the most visible, testifiable act of a changed life to be considered her children to reveal the wisdom of God and His plan in this world.

[ 30 : 54 ] Do you have room for God in your life? I know we got a lot of visitors. Welcome. We preach the word. Deal with it. Welcome.

We're a really nice bunch. But I love you enough to tell you the truth that if you don't have room for God there is no hope when you come to judgment at the end of your life.

This is serious life or death. This isn't optional. Do you want truth or do you just want control in your life? Maybe we didn't sing enough hymns to your liking.

Do you want truth or do you want control? Maybe we're too judgmental. Do you want truth or do you want control? Do you have room for God?

Here on full display in this passage is a wake-up call that there is a God who is worthy of our submission and has proof sufficient based on the evidence that we find within the Bible.

[ 32 : 03 ] Repent and believe in Jesus Christ today. Repent of your sin and cling to him. Even for those who may have had a lifetime of bad decisions, you found yourself straggling in here today, well, one single decision will reveal true wisdom in this life.

to have faith and believe in Jesus Christ and follow him, not because your parents told you that that's what you need to do, but because that's what the word tells you you need to do. When the current is closed on John's life, there was no dramatic rescue.

There was no angelic jailbreak that you see in the book of Acts. There was no vindication in the public eye.

For John, the greatest man alive, according to Jesus, appointed and cherished by God, the forerunner, lived the rest of his life in darkness, in shadows, waiting to be beheaded.

But Jesus said to that man in the prison, among those born of women, none is greater. He said that for a reason, because greatness in the kingdom isn't about a spectacular ending, and they lived happily ever after.

[ 33 : 34 ] That's Hollywood. It's not the Holy Bible. It's how faithful you remain amidst the shadows. John brought his doubts to Jesus.

The Pharisees clung to their unbelief. One wrestled and was reassured, and the others refused and were rebuked. So where are you today?

Are you doubting? I'd invite you to not suppress it, but to submit it. Bring it honestly to the one who welcomes questions, but warns against rejection.

Are you resisting? Maybe unbelief sounds a little rational to you. It makes sense. You read a book from Darwin, and that seems to connect some dots for you.

Unbelief may sound rational, but Jesus Christ warns, wisdom is proved right by all her children, by the fruit, and the fruit of faith, is vindication, and the end of unbelief is judgment.

[ 34 : 46 ] So don't give in to your doubts. Give it to Jesus. Don't let unbelief harden your heart today. Repent and make room for the only King who is our only hope, full of wisdom and absolute truth.

Repent today. You see, the gospel demands submission to God's path, even when it doesn't match ours. And in that submission we find not only assurance, but blessing.

Blessed is the one, Jesus says, who does not fall away on account of him. That's not just a statement of comfort. It's a call to endurance, church. finish. What? What? What? What? What?