**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 17** Luke 7:18-35 Jesus and John the Baptist!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture, and how does it apply to your life?
2. Read Wiersbe pages 93-96.

What is the difference between doubt and unbelief?

1. Read Luke 7:18-23. The Confusion of a Great Prophet!

At this juncture, John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to the Lord Jesus to ask a few questions because John was puzzled.

We have met John the Baptist before in Matthew and Mark. His dress was quite picturesque and unusual. There are those today who adopt peculiar dress, which may indicate a religious crank or a religious nut. While it is true that John the Baptist used an unusual dress, that is not what made him unusual. It was his message and ministry that set him apart. He was called of God—and we had better be sure we are called of God if we are going to wear religious garb. Many people think that by adopting the outward trappings of Christianity, they will become Christians.

Not long again a young woman was in front of our radio headquarters, taking a survey, and asked me what my occupation was. I told her that I was a minister and then asked her what a person had to do to become a Christian. She replied that to be a Christian you had to be good to your neighbors, not criticize anyone, and be friendly rather than harsh. She went on with quite a list of things that one should do to become a Christian. I told her, “You think Christianity is something you do on the outside. It is not. Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is more than trying to imitate Christ, or wearing certain religious garb. You must be born again. To be a Christian means to have an experience with Christ. ‘If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation’” (2 Cor. 5:17).

John the Baptist seems to be misplaced in the New Testament; he does not belong in the   
New Testament at all. He is the last of the illustrious Old Testament prophets. He is the bridge over the yawning chasm between the Old and New Testaments. He ranks with such notables as Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Christ told that generation to whom He preached, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets” (Matt. 23-29-31). They proved themselves genuine children who inherited the nature of their fathers because John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, was at the time in prison, and his voice was soon to be silenced in death.

While John was in prison, doubt had captivated his mind.

There are those who try and give a psychological explanation for the question John the Baptist asked, “Art thou he that should come?” John was looking for the Messiah and wanted to know if Christ was the one. To try and psychologically explain it away is rather amusing. They say that because he was in prison, he was depressed, discouraged, and dejected. I don’t believe a word of it. John had announced the Kingdom and denounced the nation. He had pronounced the coming of the King. He was a highway builder for the King. John identified the Messiah and said, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable” (Luke 3:16-17). This is strong language. John was not expecting a Sunday school picnic. John was expecting Christ to establish the Kingdom in all of its glory and power. Since this had not happened, John sent some if of his disciples to ask if Christ was   
the One they were looking for, or were they to look for another?[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Apparently, some disciples were still following John rather than Jesus. While John was in prison, he sent them to Jesus with a question. What was this question?
2. What are some of the possible motivations behind John’s question?
3. What was Jesus’ response?
4. (Personal opinion) Do you believe doubt, for a believer, is sinful?   
   Explain your answer.
5. What do you learn from the following texts concerning doubt?

Matthew 21:21-22

Mark 9:24

Luke 1:11-17

James 1:5-8

John 20:25-28

Doubt is an experience common to all people. Even those with faith in God struggle with doubt on occasion and say with the man in Mark 9, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (verse 24). Some people are hindered greatly by doubt; some see it as a springboard to life; and others see it as an obstacle to be overcome. The Bible has something to say about the cause of doubt and provides examples of people who struggled with it.

Classical humanism says that doubt, while uncomfortable, is absolutely essential for life. René Descartes said, “If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.” This is similar to what the founder of Buddhism said: “Doubt everything. Find your own light.” If we take their advice, we would have to doubt what they said, which seems rather contradictory. Instead of taking the advice of skeptics and false teachers, we will see what the Bible has to say.

A working definition of doubt is “to lack confidence, to consider unlikely.” The very first expression of doubt in the Bible is in Genesis 3, when Satan tempted Eve. God had given a clear command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and had specified the consequence of disobedience. Satan introduced doubt into Eve’s mind when he asked, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” He wanted her to lack confidence in God’s command. When she affirmed God’s command, including the consequences, Satan replied with a denial, which is a stronger statement of doubt: “You will not surely die.” Doubt is a tool of Satan to make us lack confidence in God’s Word and consider His judgment unlikely.

Lest we think that we can lay all of the blame on Satan, the Bible clearly holds us accountable for our own doubts. When Zechariah was visited by the angel of the Lord and told that he would have a son (Luke 1:11-17), he doubted the word given to him. He logically assumed that he and his wife were too old to have children, and in response to his doubt, the angel said he would be mute until the day God’s promise was fulfilled (Luke 1:18-20). Zechariah doubted God’s ability to overcome natural obstacles – many people today share the same doubt. Any time we allow human reason to overshadow faith in God, sinful doubt is the result. No matter how logical our reasons may seem, God has made foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Corinthians 1:20), and His seemingly foolish plans are far wiser than man’s. Faith is trusting God even when His plan goes against human reason or experience.

Contrary to the humanistic view that doubt is essential to life, the Bible says that doubt is a destroyer of life. James 1:5-8 tells us that when we ask God for wisdom, we are to ask in faith, without doubt. If we doubt God’s ability to respond to our request, what would be the point of asking in the first place? God says that if we doubt while we ask, we will not receive anything from Him, because we are unstable. “He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6).

The remedy for doubt is faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). God gave us the Bible as a testimony of His works in the past, so we will have a reason to trust Him in the present. “I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago” (Psalm 77:11). In order for us to have faith in God, we must study to know what He has said. Once we have an understanding of what God has done in the past, what He has promised us for the present, and what we can expect from Him in the future, we are able to act in faith instead of doubt.

The most famous doubter in the Bible was Thomas, who declared that he would not believe that the Lord was resurrected unless he could see and touch Jesus himself (John 20:25-28). When he later saw Jesus and believed, he received the gentle rebuke, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” We can have confidence even in the things we cannot see, because God has proven Himself faithful, true, and able.[[2]](#endnote-2)

1. In verse 23 Jesus said, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” What do you think Jesus meant by this? How can doubt ensnare a believer like a deer caught in the headlights?
2. What is the remedy for doubt? Explain your answer.
3. What do you learn from the following texts regarding the keys to possessing   
   great faith?

Psalm 77:11

Psalm 119:11, 113-114

Romans 10:17

Hebrews 11:1, 17-19

1. (Personal question) Doubt is part of the Christian life and, if we’re honest, we will all admit that we struggle with it from time to time. Do you struggle with doubt? Will you share with your group how doubt has affected your walk with Christ?
2. Read the following article from Got Questions Ministries concerning doubt in   
   the life of believers. What truths do you learn from this article?

**Doubting God -** **how can I overcome doubt in my relationship with God?**

There are two primary ways Christians can stop doubting God. The first is reading the Bible. In order to stop doubting, trust must be built. But it is hard to trust a stranger, or even an occasional acquaintance. When salvation occurs and the Holy Spirit takes up residence in one’s heart, it is just the beginning of a lifelong journey (and beyond) of getting to know God. The primary way of knowing God is reading the Bible. One thing that the Bible makes abundantly clear is that God is faithful, trustworthy, and good. As we fill our minds with the proofs of God’s power and love through history, we are better able to overcome doubt. “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17).

The Bible is unique because it is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), which means the words on the pages may look ordinary, but they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. God’s Word even “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Bible reading encourages us (Romans 15:4), satisfies and sustains us (Matthew 4:4), and guides us through life better than any GPS (Psalm 119:105). The Bible simultaneously reveals God to us—what He is like, what He loves, and what He hates. And the more a believer learns about the person of God, the more his faith will increase—and the less he will doubt.

The second way Christians can stop doubting God is prayer. Prayer may be the most difficult discipline to develop in the believer’s life, but it is also the most rewarding. Our reading of Scripture should prompt our praying. In Daniel 9:2–3, we read, “I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So, I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.” In other words, Daniel knew from Scripture that God was going to end Israel’s captivity, and that knowledge spurred him to pray. Why did Daniel pray for what he already knew would happen? Because Daniel knew that God uses the prayers of His people in the working out of His eternal purposes. If God is so benevolent that He would allow us such an important place in His plan for this world, surely, we can trust Him to hear our prayers and answer them.

Not only does God hear our prayers, but whatever we ask in accordance with His will shall come to pass (Luke 11:9–13). In the words of Andrew Murray, “Let no delay shake our faith. Of faith it holds good: first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Each believing prayer brings a step nearer the final victory. Each believing prayer helps to ripen the fruit and bring us nearer to it; it fills up the measure of prayer and faith known to God alone; it conquers the hindrances in the unseen world; it hastens the end.”

Our prayers should be made daily, in a quiet place with no distractions. It’s good to keep a prayer journal. There’s no need to write down every detail of your prayers, but do write some of your petitions, and, when God answers, write that down also. It won’t be long before you have a bona fide record of how God supernaturally speaks into the lives of His children through answered prayer. This can be a tremendous help in overcoming doubt.

God doesn’t want His people to doubt Him; He wants them to be confident in His love, watchfulness, and protection. Do not hesitate to call to Him; He has promised to answer (Jeremiah 33:3).[[3]](#endnote-3)

1. Read Luke 7:25-29.
2. Why did the people go out into the desert to hear John?
3. What prophecy did Jesus reference to explain who John really was?
4. How did Jesus commend John?
5. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom   
   of God is greater than he.”

After sending John the Baptist’s disciples back to him with such a challenging answer, Jesus evidently sensed that some who had heard his words might wrongly begin to depreciate John’s ministry, a situation the Savior would not let go unchecked…

A reed swaying in the wind was metaphorical for an easygoing person. That did not describe John! In keeping with his unyielding stance, John rejected “soft” clothing. He preferred prophetic chic—a camel’s hair coat, leather belt, and so on. There were no palaces for him. His life was gloriously alfresco. No one owned him but God. He kowtowed to no one.

He was “more than a prophet” because he fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 as the messenger sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel Gabriel had referred to the Malachi passage when he announced John’s birth to his father Zechariah (1:17), Zechariah referenced the text again in his song after John’s circumcision (1:76), and now Jesus cites it of him as well (v. 27).

John the Baptist was one great man, as Jesus attested: “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater then John” (v. 28a). John was the greatest man who ever lived,   
except of course for the God-man himself, Jesus. The qualification— “yet the one who is   
least in the kingdom of God is great than he” (v. 28b)—does not diminish the fact of John’s greatness. The kingdom must be superior to its announcement. The people of the kingdom must be superior to its announcer. A position in the kingdom must be greater than that of its herald (though, of course, John was also a member of the kingdom). So, kingdom membership aside, John and his ministry were the greatest—greater than that of Abraham, Moses, or Elijah. This divine validation set the stage for the ultimate revelation of the human condition, which would be seen in the people’s response.[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. Read Luke 7:29-35.
2. What was the response of

* All the people?
* The Pharisees and experts in the law?

1. What was the problem with these religious leaders according to the following texts?

Jeremiah 23:9-12, 16-18, 21-32

John 8:31-47

Matthew 23:16-19, 25-32

1. (Personal) Do many religious leaders have a similar problem today?
2. (Challenge question) What did Jesus mean when he said the following?

Verses 31-32

Verses 33-34

Verse 35

Jesus points out that in the end such thoroughly unfair and bitter criticism and intolerance will get nowhere. The victory is on the side of truth. He says, **Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children**. The wisdom of John the Baptist, when he insisted on conversion, and of Jesus, when he held out the hope of salvation even to those with whom many in Israel would have nothing to do, was shown to have been fully justified by what it accomplished in the hearts of lives of “all her children”; that is, all those who allowed themselves to be guided   
by that wisdom.

John and Jesus each had his distinct mission to perform. Each carried out his assignment. By Jesus, who himself in person was and is “wisdom from God” (1 Cor. 1:30), this assignment was carried out flawlessly; by John, by and large superbly. Wisdom’s children, then, are all those who were wise enough to take to heart the message of John and of Jesus.

Between John and Jesus there was this similarity: both proclaimed the gospel. Even John’s message was certainly not without hope (see especially John 1:29). Even when his emphasis was on repentance, his exhortation was hope-inspiring. See Luke 3:16, 18. Yet between Join and Jesus there was a contrast, not only the one pointed out here (7:33, 34), but also this, namely, that while John proclaimed the good news, Jesus not only claimed it but came into this world that here might be good news to proclaim!

Today we know that to a considerable degree wisdom’s vindication has already arrived. For example, has not the designation that was originally intended as a disparaging nickname, “friend of tax-collectors and sinners,” become one of the Savior’s most hope-imparting and soul-stirring titles? Is this title not being “justified” by thousands upon thousands of lives that have taken to heart and acted upon it? And will not the full and final vindication arrive on the day of the consummation of all things, and ever afterward.[[5]](#endnote-5)

1. What is the greatest truth you have learned from this lesson and how will you apply   
   it to your life?

1. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible Commentary Series: The Gosples: Luke* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 98-100. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “What does the Bible say about doubt? Got Questions Ministries, accessed January 27, 2021, [https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-doubt.html] [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “Doubting God — how can I overcome doubt in my relationship with God? God Questions Ministries, accessed January 27, 2021, [https://www.gotquestions.org/doubting-God.html] [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 277-278. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Bake Book House, 1978), 401. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)