

Confronting Doubts  
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Matthew 11:1-6, 16-24

Let's take a poll with a quick show of hands. Think of three types of people:

- One extreme: The **"But Why?" People** (Natural questioners—"I want to know how and why about everything!")
- The other extreme: The **"It Is What It Is" People** (Roll-with-it types—When things don't go as planned, they adapt quickly and don't overthink it.)
- The middle group: The **"Let Me Think About That" People** (They are thoughtful processors. They don't panic or overanalyze, but need time to process and understand before adjusting)

Which are you? Show of hands, Questioners? Roll-With-It? Let me think about that?

In this brief study from Matthew chapter 11 we are talking about the very human tendency to have DOUBTS and specifically about our faith in Christ. Some people strive to never doubt while others consider doubting and questioning as a badge of honor.

- Is it okay for a Christ-follower to sometimes have doubts about our relationship with Him? Statement: Jesus can handle your doubts, if they are sincere doubts.
- In this passage, even John the Baptist experienced sincere doubts about Jesus.

The point (in three points):

- The most committed follower of Christ will experience moments of doubt. When we bring Jesus sincere doubts, He will lovingly reassure us and grow our faith.
- Sometimes doubters become followers because their sincere investigation of Christ pierces their heart with the truth of Who He is.
- Sadly, those who reject Christ with a closed mind and a hard heart will face judgment.

**Matthew 11:2-3 (NLT)** — 2 John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 3 "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

- This is the same John who baptized Jesus and heard the Father's voice.
- The same John who saw the Holy Spirit descend like a dove upon Jesus, confirming Him as the Son of God (John 1:32-34).
- The same John who declared Jesus the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- This is the same John who testified that Jesus must increase while he himself decreased, pointing his own disciples to follow the Messiah (John 3:30).
- What do you think changed to cause John's doubts that Jesus was the Messiah?
- How do expectations and preconceived notions provide "soil" for doubts to grow?
- Doubt often comes not from rebellion, but from unmet expectations.

- It's possible that Jesus' ministry didn't meet John's Messianic expectations.
- John likely expected swift judgment because he said of the Messiah, "*The axe is laid to the root of the tree...*" "*He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.*"
- Instead, so far in His ministry, Jesus was hanging with sinners and showing mercy. Judgment was coming, but not yet.
- Perhaps John's personal situation caused his doubts. "*Jesus, if you're the Messiah, why am I rotting away in this jail cell and likely to be executed?*"
- "*Jesus, why aren't you overthrowing the Romans and evil Herod Antipas?*"
- Maybe John thought of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 61 like a checklist:

**Isaiah 61:1–2 (NLT)** — **1** The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me [CHECK], for the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor [CHECK]. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted [CHECK] and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed [CHECK]. **2** He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come [CHECK], and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. [NOT YET...where is the judgment?]

- John wasn't rejecting Jesus—he was asking, "*Why don't You look like what I expected?*" Look at Jesus' response:

**(NLT)** — **4** Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—**5** the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." **6** And he added, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me."

- Jesus didn't rebuke John for his questions. He simply stated the facts.
- Putting verse six in plain language: "*Even when you don't understand me... even when you're disappointed... stay with me. Don't let unmet expectations turn into unbelief.*"
- How do we know Jesus wasn't mad at John's questions? In verses 7-15 Jesus affirmed John as God's messenger, the forerunner to Christ.

**11** [Jesus said,] "I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. **[THEN look at this statement]** Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is!

- John was great, but he died before the cross and the resurrection so He never experienced what you and I can experience today in our relationship with Christ.
- The Life Application Study Bible tells us, "*No person ever fulfilled his God-given purpose better than John. Yet in God's coming kingdom all members will have a greater spiritual heritage than John because they will have seen and known Christ and his finished work on the cross.*" John announced the arrival of Christ. We can be IN CHRIST with His Holy Spirit living IN US.
- Jesus not only welcomes sincere doubts, He also welcomes sincere inquiry.
- Sometimes doubters become followers because their sincere investigation of Christ pierces their heart with the truth of Who He is.
- I think of St. Augustine, C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, and Lee Strobel.
- They all came with questions and no intention to believe, but the answers to their questions pierced their hearts leading them to trust in Christ.

- C.S. Lewis wrote of feeling *“the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet...[when] I gave in, and admitted that God was God...perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”*<sup>ii</sup>
- Sincere questions can turn skeptics into followers.
- In verses 16–24, Jesus shifted from doubt to rejection as He confronted those who were not merely uncertain about who He was, but who with hardened hearts—dismissed Him outright. Their continual rejection meant judgment.
- He condemned cities that witnessed His miracles yet rejected Him completely.
- He said, *“...even Sodom will be better off on judgment day”* than those cities.
- Back to where we started: The most committed follower of Christ can experience moments of doubt. What kind of doubts can followers have?
  - Am I really saved? If I’m really saved, why do I still struggle with sin?
  - Why hasn’t God answered my prayer?
  - This is not what I expected; did I misunderstand God’s will?
  - If God is good, why is this happening?
  - Why does evil seem to prosper while righteousness suffers?
  - Why do some of God’s promises feel delayed?
  - Why don’t I feel close to God right now?
  - Why do believers—including leaders—fail so badly?
  - Do I really understand who Jesus is and how to live for Him?
- We may think of having doubts about our relationship with Jesus as shameful.
- I would contend that sincere doubts could be a sign that our faith is about to grow. Let me explain.
- When a young child is suddenly clumsy, tired, constantly hungry, it may not be a bad thing. We often say, *“Ah, they must be about to have a ‘growth spurt.’”*
- Sincere doubts are not evidence of unbelief; they are often a sign that our faith is about to experience a growth spurt—**if we take those questions to Jesus.**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The most committed follower of Christ will experience moments of doubt.
- When we bring our sincere doubts to Jesus, He will lovingly reassure us and use that experience to grow our faith.
- John MacArthur said, *“When the New Testament talks about doubt...it primarily focuses on believers...It’s as if you have to believe something before you can doubt it; you have to be committed to it before you begin to question it. So doubt is held up as the unique problem of the believer.”*<sup>iii</sup>
- When we bring Jesus our sincere doubts, He will lovingly reassure us and grow our faith. So how do we do that?
  - We bring our doubts to Jesus honestly and openly.
  - We bring our doubts humbly, not defiantly.
  - We bring our doubts seeking answers through prayer and Scripture.
  - We bring our doubts patiently, knowing His timetable is better than ours.

- We bring our doubts in community, not isolation. Christian friends and family can be a great comfort in times of doubting.
- In seasons when our doubt has worn us OUT. We should turn to the end of this chapter and embrace Jesus' words in **Matthew 11:28 (NIV) — 28** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened [and let's add DOUBTING], and I will give you rest.

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<sup>i</sup> Tyndale. NKJV Life Application Study Bible, Second Edition (Function). Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/877675-surprised-by-joy-the-shape-of-my-early-life>

<sup>iii</sup> Solving the Problem of Doubt. Matthew 11:1-6. The article originally appeared (www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/2285) at www.gty.org. © 1969-2008. Grace to You. All rights reserved.