

Dealing with Doubt

E.T.S.: John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to question if He was the one to come.

E.S.S.: We can grow closer to God and deeper in our faith, even as we experience doubts.

Christ Follower: Rather than stepping away, draw near when you are dealing with doubts.

Christ Seeker: Place your faith in Jesus Christ Who alone can forgive your sin and secure eternity in heaven.

Introduction

Would you join me in the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to Luke?

When you think about a relationship between God and people, what one word describes the God side of beginning and maintaining a relationship with people?

How about a one word description of the human side of beginning and maintaining a relationship with God?

Bible

(8) **For by grace are ye saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves: it is the gift
of God:

Ephesians 2:8 - KJV

Introduction

God, by grace, provides people with forgiveness of sin and eternity in heaven with Him through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. Jesus died for us, was buried, and rose again the third day!

People, by faith, receive the forgiveness and new life that God offers through Jesus. It is not of us at all; it is all of Him!

If you have believed Jesus for salvation, the Bible declares God saved you.

Bible

(9) That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:9-10 - KJV

Introduction

If you have not believed the death and resurrection for Jesus for salvation from your sin,

understand today that He alone can provide forgiveness for your sin and eternity in heaven for you. Believe Him!

If you have believed the death and resurrection of Jesus for salvation from your sin, today, would you think about that? The Word of God declares the perfect life of Jesus, His death on the cross where He became our sin and received God's wrath, and His resurrection from the grave. He rose from the dead!

You believe, but does that mean that your faith is perfect?

Illustration

Several months ago, I had a conversation with an individual who questioned if they had ever been saved. The reason they questioned it is because of their struggle to always believe God completely. They, sometimes, struggle with doubts.

Do you?

About faith, Paul David Tripp penned...

"Faith is simply never natural for us. We aren't born with faith in God. We don't come out of the womb ready to acknowledge his existence, worship him for his glory, and submit to his rules. We tend to live by sight, by personal experience, by collective research, or by good old intuition, but faith isn't natural. It's natural to give yourself to wonderment about mysteries in your life you'll never solve. It's natural to imagine where you'll be in ten or twenty years. It's natural to wonder why someone else's life

has turned out so very differently from yours. It's natural to panic at moments, wondering if God really does exist and, if he does, if he hears your prayers. But putting your entire existence in the hands of One whom you cannot see, touch, or hear is far from natural. This is why faith is only ever a gift of divine grace. You and I have all the power in the world to doubt and no independent power at all to believe."

Introduction

Do you remember that, following His resurrection from the tomb, He appeared to His disciples. However, one of the disciples was not there. When the others told him that Jesus appeared to them, he refused to believe them.

What do we call him?

We give Thomas a little bit of a bad rap. Because the Bible declares that there was doubt among many of them, even after they had seen Him. In Matthew 28, after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, He appeared again in Galilee as He told them He would.

The Bible says in Matthew 28:17...

Bible

(17) And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

Matthew 28:17 - KJV

Introduction

They saw Him. They worshiped Him. And, they doubted!

In Luke 7, a pre-crucifixion and pre-resurrection example occurs. Follow along as I begin in Luke 7:18.

Bible

(18) And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. (19) And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? (20) When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? (21) And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. (22) Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. (23) And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Luke 7:18-23 - KJV

Introduction

John the Baptist, who boldly proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world, was mightier than him whose shoes he was unworthy to undo, must become greater as he became lesser, that John experienced his own battle with doubt. He was not alone either. Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Paul, among others, had their own experiences

of doubt.

Today, I want to help you with your doubts, or help you to better understand and respond to the doubts of others. Rather than stepping away when you experience doubt, draw near. You can actually grow closer to God and deeper in your faith, as you experience and work through doubt.

Doubt and unbelief are not the same thing. Warren Wiersbe wrote...

"There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt is a matter of the mind: we cannot understand what God is doing or why He is doing it. Unbelief is a matter of the will: we refuse to believe God's Word and obey what He tells us to do. "Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong," said Oswald Chambers; "it may be a sign that he is thinking."

If you find yourself dealing with doubt, here are some actions you can take.

1...Ask the hard questions (v. 19)

Explanation

Think about John the Baptist for a moment. He seemed to know his place in God's redemptive plan. He recognized that God put him on earth at the time He did to pave the way for the Messiah. Now, for months, he had been languishing in a dungeon for doing what he was sent to do. Doesn't it seem from what is revealed here that John was struggling? His disciples

regularly visited him with the news of what Jesus was doing (v. 18), but something wasn't right.

Is it possible that he, like so many, had some misunderstandings about the true purpose of the Messiah?

Is it possible that, without any misunderstanding of the Messiah, he grew so weary of languishing in a dungeon that his emotions and mental state were off?

Whatever the situation, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Jesus if He really was the one.

Did John really wonder if Jesus was the one, or did he struggle to justify his situation with his belief in Jesus?

Application

Isn't this a place where doubts can creep in for you?

You believe in God. You believe in Jesus as the Savior. You believe that He providentially rules over all things for your good and His glory. You believe that God is good and that He does good. Then, some things happen in your life, and you struggle to connect those things you believe with what is actually happening in your life. The questions come and, with the questions, the doubts.

Is God real?

Does He really love me?

Is He hearing me?

Then, what?

Panic. Panic over the answers to the questions and panic that you are even asking the questions.

Let me encourage you.

Don't panic.

Ask the hard questions.

Ask them of God.

Your questions do not scare or offend God.

2...Talk about it (vv. 19-20)

Explanation

John, in efforts to get a message to Jesus, shared his struggle with two of his disciples.

In Psalm 73, Asaph expressed some of the doubts and struggles he experienced. When he went through them, he said that he didn't feel he could talk about because he might offend someone.

Illustration

A few months back, I came across an article written for pastors. The article was written to enumerate the difficulties of being a pastor because of things he can't do. One of the things the author listed was that a pastor cannot do is talk about his struggles, his down times, his doubts.

That's a really unfortunate view.

Application

Doubts multiply and are magnified in darkness, but they are overcome in the light.

If you are struggling with doubts, talk about them. Talk to God about them. Talk to trusted spiritual mentors, accountability partners, or godly friends about them. True friends will provide a safe space of grace for you to talk about your doubts.

Illustration

Those of you who have been around here have heard about some of the struggles I experienced last summer. In the middle of my struggles and doubts, Stephanie made plans for us to spend time with some good friends in ministry with the hope that I would share my story with my friend. Though I was ashamed and embarrassed to do so, partly because I was nervous about how he would respond, I shared my struggles and doubts. He didn't rebuke me. He didn't look down on me. He loved me, related to me, and encouraged me in the Lord.

My healing began, not with the answers to my physical symptoms, my healing began with bringing issues into the light that thrived in darkness.

Application

This family should be a safe space of grace for those conversations. I am committed to that for you.

3...Turn your eyes to what He is doing (vv. 21-23)

Explanation

Did you notice that Jesus didn't directly answer John's question?

Instead, He pointed to the works He did, even if they were not works directly done in John's life. Jesus was working, according to the prophecies which told of these works He would do, and that should encourage John.

Why?

Often, our doubts stem from or are exasperated by what we don't see God doing. Jesus turned John's attention away from what He was not doing to what He was doing.

Illustration

Can I share something transparently with you?

Often, the most discouragement I experience as a pastor is what I look at and see what God is

not doing...

Application

Do you remember the beginning of the 121st Psalm?

Bible

(1) I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. (2) My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2 - KJV

Application

The fact that the LORD made heaven and earth didn't address the Psalmist's immediate situation, but recognizing the works the Lord had done encouraged him.

Your doubts may be related to what God is not doing in your life. Stop focusing on what God is not doing, and turn your eyes to what He is doing - even if it is in the life of someone else.

Rejoice in the victories God is winning.

4...Reflect on who you are in Christ (vv. 24-28)

Explanation

We've not read these verses yet, so let's read them now.

Bible

(24) And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? (25) But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. (26) But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. (27) This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. (28) For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Luke 7:24-28 - KJV

Explanation

There are two parts to this encouragement that I want you to see.

First, notice that John's doubts did not change Jesus's testimony about him. He was God's prophet in place for a specific time and purpose. Jesus commended him, even as he struggled with doubts.

Second, Jesus put you on a higher plane than John the Baptist. It's an Old Covenant, New Covenant thing. You have something John did not and could not have. You are in Christ!

Application

When you struggle with doubts, be encouraged through reflecting on who you are in Christ and what that means for your life.

5...Beware a willful, unbelieving response to Jesus (vv. 29-35)

Explanation

Let's read the passage.

Bible

(29) And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. (30) But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (31) And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? (32) They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. (33) For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. (34) The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! (35) But wisdom is justified of all her children.

Luke 7:29-35 - KJV

Explanation

It's not doubts, but willful unbelief that you should beware. Jesus had people respond differently to Him. Those who willfully chose to not believe were rebuked.

Application

Do not chose willfully to not believe. Do not continue in that place. Receive and believe God, His Word, and His Son.

Conclusion

Christ Follower: Rather than stepping away, draw near when you are dealing with doubts.

Christ Seeker: Place your faith in Jesus Christ Who alone can forgive your sin and secure eternity in heaven.