

Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

Sermon Title: Dealing with Doubt

November 17, 2019

Today's Scripture: See insert

Introduction: Sarcastic description of John the Baptist asking Jesus if it is O.K. if he changes his strategy to a more popular approach.

Main point: One of Satan's most powerful tools is to use the world's values to create doubt about trusting in Jesus.

Context:

Exegesis:

1. Even the godliest believers can succumb to doubt and discouragement if their faith is based on inaccurate assumptions. *Now the disciples of John brought him word in the prison of all these works of the Messiah. Then John, summoning a certain two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying to Him, "Are you that One who is coming? Or are we to look for another?"*
 - Most likely John was expecting a Messiah that would reign as King much like the rest of the nation was expecting. Here are some passages that he may have been counting on: Isaiah 40:9-11; Isaiah 52:7-10; Jeremiah 23:3-4; Daniel 2:44
 - Remember, John was the son of a priest. His knowledge of OT Scriptures was vast and could have been slanted or imbalanced towards the positive.
 - Probably one of the most confusing verses to John would be *Isaiah 52:13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. (ESV)*
 - According to John's likely thinking, the coming Messiah would fulfill all these prophecies and if so, then John shouldn't be lingering in prison.
 - Now if John doubted, then obviously we are not immune to doubting either when our assumptions are inaccurate.
 - We sometimes doubt we are saved when we sin the same sin for the thousandth time. What is inaccurate about that? We fail to believe that it is God who is at work in us to finish the salvation process. Phil. 1:6 Did you feel remorse when you did it? Good! The Holy Spirit is working on you to convict. If you were not a believer, you wouldn't care.
 - We frequently doubt if God cares for us or truly loves us when we are being tested. False assumption here is that God's love is always soft. *James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (ESV)*

2. For John's sake and for ours, Jesus corrected his false assumptions by pointing to prophetic signs that unmistakably identify Him as the Chosen of God. *But in that same hour he healed many from their diseases and afflictions and evil spirits, and to many who were blind he granted sight. So Jesus answering said to them, "Go and report to John the things you have seen and heard. The blind are receiving sight, the crippled are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, and the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised, and the lowly are being told the Good news. And blessed is he who does not stumble because of me!"*
 - Jesus makes John think back to Isaiah where the prophet speaking on behalf of Jesus said this: *Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; (ESV)*
 - This means that if we want to correct our false assumptions we must be students of the word and not neglect to study the Old Testament. The NT is totally incomplete without the OT. For example, how can one understand redemption from sin without studying the fall in Genesis 3? How can we have an accurate understanding of God's justice unless we read of His requirement for sin offerings in Leviticus? How can we understand the transcendence of God unless we read the last chapters of Job?
 - People today are making the opposite assumption of John. He was awaiting a Messiah who would come in glory and power. Today's culture wants a God who is soft and warm and casual about enforcing justice.

3. Those who are able to see Jesus in His true light of both suffering Servant and coming King are able to do so because of God's grace. *And blessed is he who does not stumble because of me!"*
 - The very definition of the word blessed (makarios) is to be in a state of contentment because of the power and enlightenment of the Spirit upon a person. The best description comes from *1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (ESV)*
 - What this is indicating is that the believer who is undergoing persecution because of their belief in Jesus and their stand for Jesus is in a state of contentment provided by the power of the Spirit of God.
 - In John's case, once he gets Jesus' corrected assumption about the Suffering Servant role of Jesus then with that truth the Spirit of God will bring John to a relaxed state of contentment, even though it looks like he is heading for a beheading.
 - This promise is for everyone. If a person rightfully sees Jesus today as the one who had to suffer and die first before the Kingdom of Glory could be revealed then that person is going to rest in the contentment provided by the Spirit of God.
 - But the opposite is true. If someone is refusing to put their trust in Jesus because they have an idea that He is weak and powerless to lay down his life like He did then they will never be content and the Spirit of God will not open their eyes to that precious truth.

4. Stop listening to the lie that money talks and power is right. *Then, when John's messengers had left, he began to address the multitude concerning John: "What went you out into the wilderness to see-a reed tossed about by the wind? No! So what went you out to behold- a man*

arrayed in soft apparel? Lo, they who wear the soft, fine raiment and are living in luxury are in king's palaces! "So what went you out to behold? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a prophet! For this is he of whom it was written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.'

- Deep down we all know that Satan and the world he controls, lures us to believe that those with money, power and all the outward signs of success are to be followed. We need to follow our hearts when they tell us the opposite is true.
- Here is what the people liked about John and what attracted them to him.
 - 1) He wasn't a man who said what people liked to hear. A reed tossed about by the wind is exactly that, it's someone who decides what to say and do based on putting their finger in the air much like politicians do who base their policies on focus groups. Jesus is saying aren't you sick of that? Why turn your back on him now just because he's in prison?
 - 2) He wasn't motivated by money. Jesus was saying the reason you went out to hear and listen and respond to him was because he despised luxury and wealth and pomposity. He dressed in camel's skins or hair and ate locusts and wild honey. People were attracted to him because he was so counter-cultural and because he disdained the arrogance of the rich Pharisees.
 - 3) He spoke harsh truth just like the OT prophets did. No sugar coating anything. No people-pleasing platitudes. People loved him because he could not care less about who he offended. Finally, someone that revealed what everyone knew to be true. He called Pharisees hypocrites and told them they were soon going to feel the wrath of God as they deserved.
- Why did Jesus ask them to remember why they came out to hear him? Because now he was in prison. He was persona non-grata with the powers that be and if what he said was true shouldn't the Pharisees and Herod and the Romans be getting what's coming to them like he said. Even John might have been having these thoughts and likely was.

Application

Do you ever get jealous of non-tithers? Sounds like a strange question but it's not. You might not be jealous of your non-Christian friends who use 100% of their earnings to spend on themselves and take nice vacations and buy brand new cars. You understand that. But you may get jealous of fellow believers who are non-tithers who may give only 3% to their church (national average for Christians) and have 7% more of their income to spend on themselves than you do. Then this message is for you. Don't listen to the world. Your investment in eternity is lasting. Whatever you sacrifice for the cause of Christ now will be repaid exponentially in eternity. The 3 percenters are cheating themselves out of an enormous reward. They have bought into the lie of the enemy that says money talks and power is influence.

A dear friend shared with me about a pastor who had it all and was chasing the dream and his church was quote "on the cutting edge" of entertainment evangelism. Then his past caught up with him and now it's all gone. He believed the lie. Do whatever it takes to succeed. The ends justify the means. And now his hip church does not know what to do.

Application is simple. Do not live for the now and believe this world's lies. Live for eternity and do what pleases the Lord, even if it costs.