

LUKE 7:18-35 DOUBT

Jake had been a Christian for many years. He had been bought up in a Christian home and made a commitment to faith at 15 at a camp. He was part of a local church and served in various ministries. Him and his wife ran a home group. But recently Jake had been reading some stuff that suggested that much of what he thought to be true in the Old Testament was not true. The authors were suggesting that much of it was just myth. These authors were not utube conspiracy theorists but serious scholars. Doubts had begun to form in Jake's mind that he could not shake. Maybe the Bible could not be trusted. Maybe what he had always believed was just because he had never really studied the evidence. Jake went to an older elder in the church to share his doubts. However, he came away feeling condemned and confused. The man had casually dismissed what he had been reading, told him he needed to just believe. The elder also shared Jake's doubts with the pastor, who began to question if Jake was a suitable person to be leading a home group. Jake learnt very quickly that sharing doubts was not safe. Even his wife could not understand why he suddenly had so many questions. Jake felt he was failing as a Christian and just needed more faith. After a few months though, Jake stepped down from his roles in the church and began to slowly withdraw.

Jessica was a mum with two kids. She had married young, to a good looking guy in the youth group. 5 years down the track, he was not interested in going to church or spiritual things. He was drinking with his mates most weekends and had occasionally been abusive when he came home. He always promised to change the next morning, but nothing really changed. Jessica had remembered how she had felt God lead her to this person and how she had believed that God would bless her family and home. Now she was feeling lonely, depressed and disillusioned. She felt God had let her down, and what he had promised her had not come about. She felt torn between leaving the marriage, and staying. She was also wondering about ditching God, because she felt so deeply disillusioned. Where was God in all of this?

Two made up stories of people who are struggling. One with doubts that they feel guilty about and have no safe place to process them. One with unmet expectations of her life and what it would mean to follow Jesus.

Luke 7:18-35

John the Baptist was a prophet who was a forerunner to Jesus. He was born to elderly godly parents and set apart for God. He became a recognized prophet for the people of Israel, the first they had had in 400 years. He lived in the wilderness, the desert region. Lived a very simple life. No flashy clothes, no great meals. He preached a message of repentance and judgement in line with the OT prophets.

We read that he baptized Jesus and recognized that he was the one he had been talking about who would come.

Soon after this, John is thrown in to Macherous prison. He had repeatedly warned Herod about marrying his niece. I.e. his brother's wife. Scholars suggest he spent up to two years in prison and now he is having doubts

The reports he is hearing do not seem to line up with what he expected. Jesus is not bringing judgement or leading the simple lifestyle that he led. His disciples do not seem to fast. He has large crowds following him. He is eating with tax collectors. John wonders if he has got it wrong.

These doubts are not helped by being in prison. This was a man who was used to being out in open spaces. Now he was confined, probably chained, in dark, pitiful conditions. This would have been depressing, and dehumanizing. He had seen so many people come and be baptized. The Spirit of God had powerfully anointed his ministry. And now he is languishing in prison with no future.

Here is a person whom Jesus described as the greatest person ever born grappling with doubt, and depression. It is important to realize the doubt is normal for Christians. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. In fact, you cannot have faith without doubt. Faith is being certain of what we cannot see says the book of Hebrews. We do not need faith for things that can be proved. Therefore, we need doubt or else we would be guillube for any thing around. The opposite of faith is unbelief. Doubt forces you to re-examine why you believe what you do. It forces you to seek truth.

I suspect those who are deep thinkers often grapple with doubt more. In addition, other Christians frown upon often doubt. They give off the impression, even if they do not say so that clearly you are not a committed believer if you have doubts. Doubt can be debilitating, especially if in the past you have felt very certain of what you believe and do not believe. Doubt can be unsettling and can lead to dark places.

It is also easy to be rattled when God does not act in ways we expect. Maybe God has not acted in ways you expected in your personal life. Maybe you expect God should move in a certain way in church. John preached a message of judgement and I think he was deeply rattled when Jesus did not bring that judgement as he expected. John preached sin and repentance. He carried a strong sense of the holiness of God and the justice of God. Yet here was Jesus with a reputation for hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes. Here was a rabbi that did not fast like John's discioles but seemed to spend more time at parties of dubious people.



It is very easy for us to put God in a box based on our upbringing and our culture. Jesus reply to John was not to rationalize with him about his doubts. Or to tell him off. In fact, John is commended. But Jesus points John to two things. He points John to the supernatural signs he has been doing. These are kingdom signs. These are signs of the kingdom of God coming to earth. That God is reversing sickness and death. And we should expect to see reversal in our ministry as a church. It might not always be in the supernatural. But whether the kingdom goes there is a reversal. Where there was violence, there will be peace. Where there is sickness there will be healing. Where there is despair there will be hope. Where there is poverty, there will be self sufficiency. Where God's kingdom comes there is a reversal. The enemy wants to steal, kill and destroy anything that is good within families, society, communities, nations, work places.

The second kingdom sign Jesus pointed to was that the poor were hearing the good news. Those on the bottom of society, those shut out from the religious system of the day, those shunned by society because of sin or sickness were hearing God's good news. Jesus words were deliberately alluding to the words of Isaiah in Ch. 60 and 61.

John would have recognized those words and would have heard what Jesus was saying. I am fulfilling prophesy. You expected judgement but actually, what I am doing is fulfilling the words of the prophets. Jesus was helping rearrange John's pre conceptions.

V28 sounds strange. Commentators say is referring to the two different eras. Pre Christ, post Christ. In addition, that we have so much more than any OT figure, with Jesus, clear revelation, and the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus goes on and uses a funny sort of parable. V31-35

He accuses the generation there of being childish. Children playing in the market place was a common sight. Sometimes they would play pretend weddings, but some kids would not want to play. The others would want to play funerals but then the first group would say no. He says to them: What did you go out to see when John was in the desert? A reed swaying in the wind. I.e. did you go out to see the scenery? No (Or he could be saying a weak person) the answer is No. Did you go out to see someone fleshly dressed. No. You saw a prophet who fulfilled the words of Isaiah to prepare the way for me

You see they wanted to put God in a box. They wanted God to conform to the way they wanted God to be. Not too strict like John. However, not so liberal like Jesus. In addition, Jesus accuses them of being childish. In a bad way.

I think though the same accusation could be made of our generation. We want a DIY God. One who suits us? However, if God is God, we have to come to God on his terms, not our own.

Therefore, what can we learn and what should we do with this passage

Acknowledge your doubts. Jesus describes John as the greatest person ever born, and yet he struggled with doubt. Science, archeological discovery, your own behaviour that makes you doubt God can love you. Could be suffering that seems unbearable and unfair. OK to have doubts. Tell them to God. Share them with someone else. Say. This is a church where it is OK to have doubts. OK to express doubts. You will not be judged and made to feel less than. John's season of doubt did not cancel out his prior faithful ministry. There is reward for those who live with suffering and pain in this life and yet keep hanging on the goodness of God. When a child dies, or when you end up with cancer in the prime of your life. Alternatively, some other tragedy. When you live with pain that makes no sense and keep hanging on to God, you will discover a richness in God that you did not know was possible.

Beware putting God in a box. Jesus was not meeting John expectations. The people were analyzing Jesus and John and could not make up their mind where God was. We can be so caught up in what we think the Bible says, or what God is like, that we miss God's agenda. We need to have a humility to recognize God might be doing things differently than what we think. The pharisses knew the Bible better than most Christians yet they missed Jesus. John was the greatest prophet ever yet misunderstood Jesus. So we need to have a humility to remain open.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Recall a time when you struggled with doubt. What was the trigger? How did you overcome it?

When have you had an expectation of God that did not happen? How did you react?

Discuss the statement. God's kingdom brings reversal. What would you like "reversed" in your life? In our community?

What are some kingdom signs you have seen of late? I.e. where you have seen God at work, or where you have seen peace, joy, generosity, reconciliation, etc

Keith made the statement that he wants Central Baptist be a safe place to have doubts. What might that look like?

What might be evidence that you have put God in a box. I.e. in what you think God is like, how he moves, how church should be etc.

How can you open yourself to more of God, and new things?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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