

The Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Come to Jesus (Week 3) - Doubting John (Mt. 11.2-11):



1) John the Baptist is one of the most underappreciated seismic figures in the New Testament: half of Luke's Advent story is about him, he was heard and sought by throngs, many lives were transformed because of his ministry, and much of what he taught runs parallel with what we hear in Jesus.

2) And yet Matthew 11.2-10 tells us that near the end of his story as told in the gospels, he doubted deeply, being unsure about Jesus, the very person for whom he had been "paving the way" (Lk. 3.4-6; Mt. 11.10).

3) So if someone as spiritually gifted, acclaimed, and successful as John can doubt, we shouldn't be surprised when we or others do.

4) Deep doubt is a trait experienced by many of the legendary, impactful "saints" from the annals of church history: Pastor Chris used the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta as one such example yesterday.

5) It's noteworthy in Mt. 11.2-11 that it's AFTER John's disciples report his doubts to Jesus that He turns to the crowd and praises John profusely, calling him the greatest person ever born to the human race (11.9-11).

6) Thus, if Jesus' opinion of John wasn't diminished by his doubts, how can we not conclude that our own questions, hesitations, and skepticism won't change His disposition toward us either?

7) The seedbed for John's doubts were his misconceptions about Jesus (his own expectations about the Messiah are recorded for us in Lk. 3.15-17), so Jesus had to realign and correct those ideas (Mt. 11.5).

8) We see in John's example that doubt often shows us what we need to lay aside enroute to a better, truer version of faith.

9) In fact, one way to tell the story of your spiritual journey is through the things you have been willing to doubt, unlearn, and then relearn.

10) Fundamentally, we trust the positive, productive effect of doubt in our lives because we trust God: as Mother Teresa's spiritual director, Father Joseph Neuner, once told her, "You are not responsible for fixing your doubts, God is."

11) In conclusion, may we carry with us these simple beautiful words from Jude 22: "Be merciful to those who doubt"...to the others in your small group or Sunday School class, to our skeptical culture, to spiritual seekers who don't trust church, and, maybe most of all, to yourself.

(We went one sentence over this week, 11, not 10. Apologies. 😊)

Quotes Worth Hearing Again

Knowledge and doubt are inseparable to man. The sole alternative to knowledge-with-doubt is no knowledge at all. Only God and madmen have no doubt. (Martin Luther)

Doubt can be a tool in God's hand wielded, in the lives of those who allow it, for the strengthening, not the destruction, of faith. (George MacDonald; hugely-influential Scottish Christian author; 19th/20th century)

If ours is an examined faith, we should be unafraid to doubt. If doubt is eventually justified, we were believing what clearly was not worth believing. But if doubt is answered, our faith has grown stronger. It knows God more certainly and it can enjoy God more deeply. (C. S. Lewis, himself a devotee of George MacDonald quoted above)

Resourcing You about Faith and Doubt

1) Spend your Bible reading time this week making your way through the story of John the Baptist in the gospels:

[Luke 1 NRSV](#)

[Luke 3.1-22 NRSV](#)

[John 1.19-34 NRSV](#)

[Matthew 11.2-11 NRSV](#)

[Matthew 14.1-12 NRSV](#)

2) Pastor Chris mentioned an interview with Christian author Philip Yancey near the end of the sermon yesterday. Here it is - at several points, it touches on the theme of faith and doubt:

[Philip Yancey live Q&A on faith, doubt and the future of the US church](#)

3) More written Q/A with Philip Yancey about faith and doubt, a recurring theme in his writing:

[Faith and Doubt - Philip Yancey](#)

4) An easy, accessible read about faith and doubt is "Know Doubt," by John Ortberg (first published under the title, "Faith and Doubt"):

Here are some excerpts for you to explore - [Faith & Doubt Quotes by John Ortberg](#)

And here's the book itself: [Know Doubt: Embracing Uncertainty in Your Faith: Ortberg, John](#)

5) Interested in learning more about the late Mother Teresa's struggle with doubt? Try these as good points of entry:

[Doubt: A meaningful part of Mother Teresa's story](#)

[Mother Teresa's Crisis of Faith](#)

[Addressing Doubt With Mother Teresa](#)

And here is the biography which includes many of her posthumously-published letters and journals: [Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta: Mother Teresa, Brian Kolodiejchuk](#)