

# “Facing Giant Despair”

Luke 7:18-23

Pastor John Miller

## I. Introduction

- A. John Bunyan, in his classic book “Pilgrim’s Progress,” describes the two pilgrims, Christian and Hopeful on their way to the celestial city, who had wandered off the path and fallen asleep near a castle called “doubting castle.” The owner thereof was “Giant Despair.”
  - 1. Have you ever been taken captive by giant despair and been locked up in a doubting castle?
  - 2. If so, you’re not alone.
  - 3. “The floors of this gloomy prison are damp with the tears of some of the choicest sons and daughters of God.” – Clovis Chappell
- B. In our text today, we find one of them, John the Baptist
  - 1. John is in prison
  - 2. It’s the dungeon of Machaerus (Luke 3:19-20)
  - 3. Even the children of the light can find themselves in a dungeon of darkness and doubt
  - 4. Bring your doubts to the light of God’s Word

## II. John’s Confusion (Luke 7:18-20)

- A. John’s question (vv. 19-20)
  - 1. Are you he that should come? (v. 20)
  - 2. “Or look we for another?” (v. 20)
- B. Why did John ask this question?
  - 1. For the purposes of argument or speculation
  - 2. To satisfy his own wavering disciples
  - 3. John asked this question to satisfy himself
    - a) Jesus said, “none greater than John” (v. 28)
  - 4. John was believing his doubts and doubting his beliefs
    - a) Only a few months earlier, he had preached with such certainty and power, but now finds himself perplexed and confused
    - b) He had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River and saw the heavens open and heard the Father’s voice
    - c) He had pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God”
    - d) Now, perplexed, confused, and filled with doubt
    - e) There is a difference between doubt and unbelief
    - f) Doubt is a matter of the mind. We can’t understand what God is doing or why He is doing it
    - g) Unbelief is a matter of the will. We refuse to believe God’s Word and obey what He tells us to do
    - h) It’s because we believe that we have questions
- C. What was the cause of John’s doubt?
  - 1. It was not because he was unacquainted with Jesus

- a) It is the same for many today. They don't really know Him.
- 2. It was not because John had fallen into sin
  - a) For many, sin is the cause of doubt
  - b) Not for John. He was in prison because he had stood by his convictions and rebuked King Herod's sin.
- D. Why was John having doubts?
  - 1. Because John was human
    - a) "Among all those born of women" (v. 28)
    - b) "Elijah was a man just like us" (James 5:17)
    - c) Illustration- John had been drained emotionally
    - d) Illustration- Elijah (1 Kings 19)
  - 2. Because of his circumstances
    - a) John was a man of the desert, and now he's in a dungeon
    - b) He is now idle
    - c) And there, in the confined, narrow limits of his cell, his heart sank
    - d) He's living by sight, not by faith
    - e) Illustration- Hospital sickbed, loss of a job, a marriage, or loss of a loved one
    - f) It's easy to become confused and doubt God's love, care, wisdom, or plan
    - g) Are you walking by faith or sight?
  - 3. Because of unfulfilled expectations
    - a) Picture the scene and conversation
    - b) John was expecting the Messiah to bring a baptism of fire
    - c) John misunderstood the two comings of Christ, so he had a false expectation
    - d) It's the same today. Many understood the Scriptures, and so have false expectations
    - e) Why isn't the Lord doing something about the evil in the world today?
    - f) Why hasn't Jesus come yet to set up His kingdom?
    - g) Your own expectations. When God doesn't do what you thought He would
      - 1) Job
      - 2) Your marriage
      - 3) Heal you
      - 4) Open a door of ministry
  - 4. John was perhaps most perplexed by the dealings of Christ with Himself
    - a) John had lived righteously, yet he was suffering unjustly
    - b) He's helping others, why not me?
    - c) Many wonder why the righteous suffer
      - 1) (Psalm 73)
      - 2) Does it pay to serve God?
      - 3) Many believe God ought to pay them for being loyal

### III. The Lord's Confirmation (Luke 7:21-23)

- A. Jesus didn't give John's two disciples a lecture on theology or prophecy; rather he invited them to watch (v. 21)
- B. Then go and tell (v. 22)

1. All signs of the Messiah's ministry
    - a) (Isaiah 26, 29, 35, 61)
  2. Jesus of Nazareth (Isaiah 61)
- C. Jesus offered no explanation as to why fiery judgment had not yet happened, nor did he explain why John was in prison or offer any hope that he would be freed
1. God doesn't answer all our questions
- D. He does pronounce blessings to all those who trust him and do not stumble (v. 23)
1. It's both a beatitude, "blessed is he," and a gentle reproof, "whosoever shall not stumble because of me"
  2. "Does not find me a stumbling block"
  3. So many today are offended by Jesus
    - a) By the cross
    - b) Saved by His sacrifice
    - c) Must come as a humble child
    - d) Must repent of sins
    - e) That Jesus is the only way
  4. Believers who are stumbled by God's dealings with them don't trust Him
    - a) Job- "though he slays me, yet I will trust Him"