

Did you ever wonder why?

One of the routines of a comedian (perhaps you've heard it) went something like this:

You tell a man there's 400 billion stars and he'll believe you, but tell him a bench has wet paint and he has to touch it? Why?

Why is it called a hamburger when it's made out of beef? Why do you put suits in garment bags and put garments in suitcases? Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle? Why isn't there mouse-flavored cat food?

Why do they lock gas station bathrooms—are they afraid someone is going to sneak in there and clean them?

If man evolved from monkeys and apes, why do we still have monkeys and apes? Why are there five syllables in the word monosyllabic? When two airplanes almost collide, why do they call it a near miss—it sounds like a near hit to me?

Why do banks charge you a non-sufficient funds fee on money they know you don't have? Why do you drive in a parkway and park in a driveway? Why are they called apartments when they're stuck together? Why are they called buildings when they are already finished? Shouldn't we call them built? If the black box flight recorder is never damaged during a plane crash, why isn't the whole airplane made out of that stuff?

“Why?”... Probably the most asked and least-answered question in the English language. ... When we have a lot unanswered questions of why... that we ask of God... what happens...? ... Cynicism and doubt creep in and affect our faith.

Cynicism kills in the manner of frostbite. The only symptom is a deadening numbness. ... And even Christians are often tinged with this frostbite.

Callousness and doubt numb us to life and joy. We find ourselves leaving

the triumphant lyrics of the songs we hear on the radio and sing in church on the church doorstep... because they appear hopelessly out of step with the world waiting outside.

Doubt can be a temporary state of mind — or it can be a way of life.

Have you ever doubted what the Bible says about God? ... What about the gospel? ... When you're alone... do you ever sit and wonder whether the things that we believe as Christians are actually real?

If you've wrestled with doubts about God and His Word... take heart... because you're not alone. (You might not even need to feel guilty.) ... Alister McGrath said... "*Doubt is natural within faith. It comes because of our human weakness and frailty.*" ... McGrath contrasts this doubt with unbelief:

Unbelief is the decision to live your life as if there is no God. It is a deliberate decision to reject Jesus Christ and all that he stands for. But doubt is something quite different. Doubt arises within the context of faith. It is a wistful longing to be sure of the things in which we trust.

Likewise, John MacArthur observed,

When the New Testament talks about doubt, whether you're talking about the gospels or the epistles, it primarily focuses on believers. That's very important. It's as if you have to believe something before you can doubt it; you have to be committed to it before you begin to question it. So doubt is held up as the unique problem of the believer.

The reality is that even for those who seem to be the most faithful... faith is sometimes hard... particularly when the burdens of life feel heavy. ... But the good news is... that even in our doubts... the God whom we seek to be

sure of... is certain to meet us where we are. ...He desires to assure us of His faithfulness. Doubting does not prove that a man has no faith... but only that his faith is small. And even when our faith is small... the Lord is ready to help us.

- Pursued by Jezebel and finding that even the fire at Mount Carmel had not been sufficient to dislodge idolatry from the land... **Elijah** asked for God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4).
- Pursued by Saul and frustrated by continual obstacles to God's promises... **David** nearly committed a murderous act against Nabal (a very foolish man)... that would have stained the rest of his career... if God had not intervened through wise Abigail (1 Sam 25:21-35).
- (And then)... Dismayed by long delays in fulfillment of God's promises to Israel... David... this inspired psalmist... protested his people's humiliation (Ps 89:38-51).
- **Jeremiah** cursed the day of his birth (Jer 20:14-18).

All men and women of God... have the same doubts and passions that rise from them... that we do. ...These godly saints remind us... to always trust in **God's** power rather than **our own**.

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet who ever lived. ... And even **he** struggled with doubt. ... Jesus called John the greatest man ever born up to that time. (We will see this in one of our verses today - Matt 11:11)... and yet he wavered over the identity of the Messiah. ... John needed to be reminded of something that He already knew... just like you and I often require.. ... This is at the heart of the message of Matthew 11... one of the

most beautiful passages in this Gospel. ... Jesus invites us to rest in Him when faith is hard and burdens are heavy.

Today we will only consider verses 1-19... in Matthew 11. ... It will introduce a common theme that runs through the chapter. You see... Matthew 11 reminds us of **four portraits of Jesus**... that should help you and I combat doubt... and strengthen our trust in Him. Today we see the first of the four. **Jesus Is the Promised Messiah**

Matthew 11:1-19

Matthew has already mentioned (five chapters ago) the fact that John had been arrested... and placed in jail. ... By the time of these events (here in chapter 11)... John has (no doubt) been in prison for a while.

John's disciples have been watching Jesus and reporting to John. John was expecting any day for the door of his prison to be opened...

Isaiah 61:1 (ESV)

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;

I have no doubt that John was very familiar with Isaiah 61:1... And it is not very hard for me to imagine John thinking along the lines of... “*Yoo-hoo! Jesus... These prison doors of mine are still locked... I am still being mistreated...*”

John doubts Jesus... so he sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus a question.

Matthew 11:3

John the Baptist had triumphantly heralded the coming King... had introduced Him to the people at the Jordan... He had seen God's Spirit descend on Him... and had given up some of his best disciples to leave him and follow Jesus.... And then John had been thrown in prison by Herod when John condemn the tetrarch's marriage to Herodias — and then adding insult to injury - Jesus had done nothing about it. John may have been thinking... *“I know that I said, ‘He must increase and I must decrease’, but this is not quite what I meant...”*

Worse still... the proclaimed Messiah was certainly not doing much to establish the kind of earthly kingdom that John (and everyone else) had expected. ... He began to have second thoughts. Had he been mistaken?

Forgotten and all alone... John may have sensed that his life was about to be taken from him. ... Indeed... his life was about to come to a very violent end – and why? ... **All because of** – John's faithful obedience... to the commission God gave to him. ... His life would end... at the whim of a woman who hated him - for the truth that he spoke. ... His life would end... because of the lust of a depraved king... for the woman's daughter.

But isn't this precisely the vision that Jesus painted... (which we saw in chapter 10)... as Jesus commissioned His disciples? ... He warned them that they might meet a similar fate if they were faithful to Him. ... (To be forewarned is to be forearmed.) ... Jesus exhorted them to never allow doubt to creep in... because of opposition to the gospel. ... He said to them... “Don't fear those who can only kill the body... but fear God (Who

can destroy both the body and the soul in hell.”) ... When the Lord's disciples faced their own deaths... Jesus wanted them to know that He would be with them.

Jesus was careful to provide encouragement and confidence despite these horrible possibilities. It seems to be contrary to human logic: *Why should faithfulness to a loving God result in hatred, hostility, and even death?* It would seem that such a diligent and obedient servant (like John)... who labored long... and so arduous... on behalf of Christ's kingdom... should result in a quiet and peaceful retirement. - That is the reasoning applied by many Christians today. ... But we must emphasize that this is human thinking... not that of the divine commission that Jesus outlined for His disciples.

Because we often find ourselves doubting for reasons similar to John the Baptizer here... we need to consider **the anatomy of doubt**. ... There are at least three things we learn about doubt in this passage.

First... doubt often arises during **difficult situations**. We've already seen John, a prophet in the wilderness who had proclaimed God's Word with boldness, preparing the way for the Messiah and pointing people to Him (Matt 3:1-12). But now... as a result of his bold and faithful proclamation... John was experiencing shame... hunger... physical torment... and emotional struggle... as he sat there alone in prison. ... We're reminded again of Elijah... a tired prophet... who was running from Jezebel and ready to give up (1 Kgs 19). ... Such difficult situations tend to produce doubt.

Second... accompanying the difficult situations were all those **unmet expectations**. It was becoming clear by this point that Jesus was not meeting many of the expectations that a lot of Jewish people had for the Messiah. ... John the Baptist had prophesied about the judgment that the Christ would bring about (Matt 3:11-12)... but Roman rule was still in place—and John was in jail because of it! ... It must have been confusing for the prophet to see Rome in charge... sin still rampant... and political and religious corruption still ruling the day. ... Everything seemed to be just as it had been for generations. Instead of overthrowing Rome... Jesus was spending time with irreligious sinners... teaching them about forgiveness... and to the great surprise of some... He wasn't even fasting. ... Surely John was thinking... *"Isn't the Messiah the One who is going to deliver us?"*

Third... in the midst of his struggles... John suffered from **limited perception**. ... He simply didn't understand everything that was happening... or not happening... around him... so he sent his disciples to question Jesus.

In reality... many of our questions and doubts often spring from these same factors. ... It's often in the midst of challenging circumstances that faith is hardest to come by... especially when we have been walking with the Lord... faithfully serving and worshiping Him... and then tragedy hits... maybe even multiple tragedies. ... We think, *"God, where are You?"* We don't understand why certain things are happening... especially when our trials seem to be getting in the way of our desire to serve God. ... We know He's good... but we can't understand why the struggle won't end.

Oftentimes... trials come as a result of sin in our lives or sin in the lives of others around us. ... However... even when our trials don't seem at all to be a direct result... of our disobeying God... we must remember that our perception is limited. ... For example... John the Baptist had no idea how this story of Jesus the Messiah was going to play out. ... God was ushering in a totally different type of kingdom than most Jewish people expected.

This was more than just a political regime change. ... God was ushering in redemption of the entire world. ... John (no doubt)... understood much of this... when many people didn't... yet he was almost certainly perplexed regarding the timing of it all. ... *“When would this kingdom kick into high gear?”*

John's perspective was limited... and so is ours. ... Whenever we go through difficult situations with unmet expectations and questions rising up within us... we need to remember that our perspective is always limited. ... In the end... we must trust that God knows what He is doing.

Now that we've seen the anatomy of doubt... we need to see something even more important — **the answer to doubt**.

Matthew 11:4-6

The answer of Jesus is remarkable and can be understood only in light of the credentials which the Old Testament said the Messiah would have. This is a direct reference to Isaiah 35:4-6;

Isaiah 35:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall

be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

Now... waters did not break out in the wilderness... nor were there streams in the desert when Jesus came... because He did not establish the Kingdom when He came the first time. ... But He was the King... and He had the credentials of the Messiah - that is all He is saying. ... John would recognize the credentials. ... But he needed to be reminded of them.

In this text and in our lives... the answer to doubt seems to be (at least) twofold. ... First and foremost... we confront doubt with **biblical revelation**. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the things from Scripture that we know to be true.

Jesus very tenderly answered John by telling his messengers: "*Go and report to John what you hear and see.*" ... Then Jesus used familiar Scripture... to describe the miraculous works He had been doing... and to show that He was indeed the Promised One. ... He tells John... for instance... that the blind were receiving their sight.

In the entirety of the Old Testament... no blind person ever received sight... nor is there any story in the New Testament... apart from Saul's conversion (Acts 9:17-18)... where Jesus' followers restored a blind man's sight. ... Jesus was fulfilling what Isaiah had long ago prophesied... "*Then the eyes of the blind will be opened.*"

Interestingly... the passages that Jesus quoted from in Isaiah refer not only to healing... but also to the judgment that the Messiah will bring. ... Jesus' miraculous works were evidence of the in-breaking kingdom. Therefore

John needed to trust that Jesus would indeed bring full and final judgment... .. God will be true to His Word... and to try to fight doubt without a foundation in the truth of His Word is futile. ... God's Word is a rock... not because it makes everything easy... but because it keeps your feet out of sinking sand amid difficult situations and unmet expectations.

I have never been scuba diving, but ever since I was a little boy... I have imagined myself to be just like Lloyd Bridges... strapping on those life tanks... and exploring the water world below. ... Some of those memories returned as I recently read a conversation between a Christian author and a former navy diver wrote about diving deep—really deep. ... He began by quoting the navy diver:

I have been in situations so deep and dark that it was almost impossible to keep from becoming disoriented and confused. What a terrifying feeling—being under water, unable to see your hands in front of your face, not knowing which way is up, panic engulfing you. I immediately interrupted my friend, "So what did you do?"

"Feel the bubbles," he said.

"Feel the bubbles?" I asked.

"That's right. When it's pitch black and you have no idea which way to go, you reach up with your hand and feel the bubbles. The bubbles always drift to the surface. When you can't trust your feelings or judgment, you can always trust the bubbles to get you back to the top."

As Christians... we need a way to determine what is real and true. When doubt gets us disoriented and desperate... God knew that we would need air bubbles that lead us to the surface... and a safe environment. ... In the 66 books of the Bible we have a reality library — narratives... prophecies...

letters... instructions... and examples from God... that tell us what is true and real. ... My air bubbles that lead me to the surface and out of the deep waters of doubt... very often... are the Old Testament prophecies that are perfectly fulfilled in Christ. Another is watching end time prophecy that is being fulfilled before our very eyes today.

So... the first antidote to doubt is **biblical revelation**. ... This is what Jesus gave to John. ... Second... we battle doubt with **joyful submission**.

After Jesus recounts His great works to John's disciples... He closes by saying... "*And if anyone is not offended because of Me, he is blessed*" (v. 6). ... To not be offended because of Jesus... is essentially to trust Him. Even when it's not easy... and trusting Christ seems contrary to reason... we need to remain grounded in biblical revelation... and look to Him in faith. The reward is blessing... and that's a promise from God.

As John's disciples leave to take this message back to him... **Jesus defends John** in verses 7-19. ... Jesus took this opportunity to affirm John for who he was... and what he had done.

Matthew 11:7-8

John was not a moral weakling... easily blown about by public opinion or human authority. ... John was no easily bent reed. ... Also... John was no pampered prince... or court prophet... who might be tempted to be bought off with money.

Jesus told the crowds that **John was the greatest prophet**. ... More than that... Jesus said John was also the greatest person born of woman. ...

Wow! That is quite a statement! ... Even compared to Old Testament spiritual giants like Abraham... Moses... Elijah... and King David... Jesus says that none of them was greater than John. ... So what are we to make of this shocking claim?

Jesus' statement about John... had to do (*not primarily*) with John's person... but with his position in redemptive history. ... He was a prophet... a position of highest honor as a spokesman for God... But he was not just any prophet. ... John was *the* prophet whom God had promised would come and announce the Messiah (Isa 40:3; Mal 4:5-6).

So many prophets had come before him — Elijah... Isaiah... Jeremiah... and a host of others — but none of these holy men of God had the distinct privilege of announcing the arrival of the King. ... John's ministry was the prophetic climax... (the apex... the peak)... of all prophetic revelation that foretold the Messiah. ... John had the greatest understanding of all the prophecies... and could see how they pointed to Jesus.

The greatness of John's position in redemptive history sets the stage for the absolutely astounding statement that Jesus makes next: "*but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*" (Matt 11:11).

While John was the climax of all who had come *before* and pointed to Christ...none of them... (not even the highest of them)... had the position and privilege that is reserved for all believers... who would come *after* John. That's because all men... (including John the Baptist)... had an incomplete picture of the Messiah. ... Their perspective was limited in terms of what to expect from the Messiah. ... However... even the least

person who comes into the kingdom after John the Baptist... has a greater understanding of the Messiah... than everyone who came before Him.

As followers of Christ today... we should be amazed and grateful that **we have a greater privilege** and position than John the Baptist did. While John was unclear on all that the Messiah would do... we know all that Christ has done. ... Furthermore... we have the privilege of proclaiming the crucified and resurrected King to the ends of the earth.

What a position in redemptive history we have! Therefore... let us take hold of this truth and be faithful to our task... a task that is greater than all the prophets of the Old Testament. One of my seminary professors (D. A. Carson) has written about our privilege:

So often Christians want to establish their "greatness" with reference to their work, their giving, their intelligence, their preaching, their gifts, their courage, their discernment. But Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed that even the least believer is greater than Moses or John the Baptist, simply because of his or her ability, living on this side of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, to point him out with greater clarity and understanding than all his forerunners ever could. If we really believe this truth, it will dissipate all cheap vying for position [in this world] and force us to recognize that our true significance lies [simply] in our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. (Carson, God with Us, 65)

Followers of Christ today should rejoice in their privileged position.

However... just because we have this privilege does not mean that things will be easy. **Like Jesus and John, we will be opposed by this world.** In verse 12 Jesus says...

Matthew 11:12

In other words... the kingdom of heaven experiences opposition as it advances... a truth we've already seen in Matthew 10 in Jesus' instructions to His disciples. ... This opposition was present in John the Baptist's ministry... and it will become increasingly evident in Jesus' ministry in the chapters ahead. ...Our greater privilege of proclamation comes with a price: persecution.

Just as John and Jesus were opposed... so our message about the Messiah will be met with hostility. ... **We will be criticized in this world...** regardless of how we present the truth of the gospel. ... Every spokesman for God... (each of His prophets)... suffered the same thing. ... The privilege of proclamation comes with a price. And that is persecution.

John the Baptist was just like Elijah in so many ways. He even suffered... for obeying his commission – just like Elijah.

Matthew 11:13-15

John was not a resurrected Elijah... but he took on Elijah's prophetic role — boldly confronting sin and pointing people to God... ministering in Elijah's spirit and power... and suffering violence against himself... just like Elijah.

In verses 16-19 Jesus speaks of how different His ministry was from that of John the Baptist.

Matthew 11:16-19

Jesus compared John's rejection and his own to the behavior of childish brats who would not play either the wedding game or the funeral game.

Neither John's ascetic abstinence (compared to mourning or singing a dirge at a funeral) nor Jesus' enjoyment of food and drink (likened to dancing at a wedding feast) was satisfactory. John barely ate or drank anything... and it was claimed that he was demonic. ... Jesus... on the other hand... ate with sinners and they called Him a "glutton and a drunkard." ... Sinful hearts rebelled against both of them.

The world will react similarly to you and me when we speak the truth... but look what verse 19 says... Wisdom — (or) right living before God — is "justified" ... (it is proven)... by her deeds."

Even in the middle of difficult situations... unmet expectations... and limited perception... Jesus is worthy of our trust. Telling others about Him won't be easy... but it is a calling worth giving our lives to. ... We fight doubt *in* this world and fight fear *of* this world with faith in the promised Messiah:

Although followers of Christ may experience doubt, we must trust in and submit to the truths of God's Word concerning who Jesus is and what He has provided for us in the gospel.

If you are not regularly feeding God's Word into your heart and mind... you will have doubt.

Doubt can be a state of mind—or it can be a way of life.