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ESF, Lord's day service message

Encouraging Answers to Life's Unfairness

Luke 7:18-23

¹⁸John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, ¹⁹he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

²⁰When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' "

²¹At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. ²²So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ²³Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

We are often perplexed at life's unfairness. We may not understand why "bad things do happen to good people" and "Good things happen to bad people." "If God is just, why isn't life fair?"

John the Baptist had the same question when he served God faithfully but was imprisoned and suffered.

Doubt can either drive us away from God or motivate us to draw closer to God.

Here in this text, Jesus teaches us how we can positively deal with doubts and discouragements in life's unfairness and draw nearer to God.

Bring your doubts to God honestly

At this point in time, John was the most important person among religious leaders. He was known throughout the whole country of Israel. Most of the people in Israel believed he was a great prophet. Many of them had gone out to the desert, where John lived a very plain, simple life, to hear his teaching. John said they had to turn away from their sins, and be baptized in water to prepare the way of God's salvation. John preached that Jesus was the way of God's salvation, the Messiah, the Lamb of God. And many believed John's message and were baptized.

But later John was imprisoned by King Herod. John had been faithful in carrying out God's ministry. He believed that Jesus came as the Lamb of God. He faithfully preached that Jesus was the Savior and led people to Jesus. Then why did God allow him to remain in prison? Why didn't Jesus do or say anything about John's imprisonment? At that point John began to doubt whether Jesus was really the Lamb. He sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

John was confused about Jesus' role as the Messiah who could "set the prisoners free." Because Jesus had introduced himself early in His ministry as the Savior, who would set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18). John was wondering about that apparent inconsistency in his experience. If Jesus came to "set the prisoners free," and John was a "prisoner," he could reason that Jesus should come and set him free.

John expected that if Jesus was the Messiah whom he believed in and testifying about, Jesus should do something to help him. But Jesus wasn't doing what John expected him to do. Jesus acted differently than John expected him to act. Things were not turning out the way John expected.

And if Jesus wasn't who John thought he was, was John's ministry for Jesus in vain? Maybe it wasn't God's call for John to do ministry for Jesus. So John was confused and perplexed. It's no wonder John

struggled with doubt and questions. No wonder he asked: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” No wonder he thought: “this isn’t fair!”

It is not unusual to experience doubt and confusion while we are serving God and trying to live according to God’s will. Almost all of the heroes of Scripture at one time or another found themselves enduring periods of doubt and uncertainty. Moses was ready to quit on one occasion: “*Why have you brought this trouble on your servant...*”(Numbers 11:10-15), and so was Elijah: Elijah prayed, “*I have enough Lord, Take my life. I am no better than my ancestors...*” (1 Kings 19) and Jeremiah: “*O Lord, you deceived me, ..I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocked me...*”(Jeremiah 20:7-9, 14-18), and Habakkuk: “*How long, O Lord, must I all for help but you do not listen?....*” (Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-17), and even Paul knew the meaning of despair: “*we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life...*” (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

God doesn’t condemn us when we wrestle with doubts or ask questions. God eventually listened to all those who brought their doubts and questions to God.

Moses- “Is the Lord’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you” (Numbers 11:23).

Elijah – “get up and eat...Go back the way you came...I reserve seven thousand in Israel all whose knees not bowed down to Baal...”(1 Kings 19:7-18).

Jeremiah- “The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail” (Jeremiah 20:11)

Habakkuk- “Then the Lord replied, the righteous will live by faith....Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,.. though there are no sheep in the pen...” (Habakkuk 2:4; 4:17-18)

Paul – “The Lord has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us” (2 Corinthians 1:10).

Look how Jesus reacted to John’s doubt. Did he rebuke or condemn John of his doubt? Was John disqualified from any role in the kingdom of God because of his doubting? Did Jesus think less of him? No. Look at verse 28, where Jesus says: “I say to you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John!”

That’s amazing. Jesus gave John the highest compliment in the world at the same time that John was in the midst of doubting!

And in the midst of your doubts and your questions God does not condemn you either.

Oswald Chambers once said, “Doubt is not always a sign that a man is wrong, it may be a sign that he is thinking.”

God wants you to be honest with him about your doubts and questions than to profess a phony faith. He wants an honest relationship with you. An honest relationship means we need to tell the truth to God about how we feel.

Having doubts doesn’t mean you’re devoid of faith. In fact, you can have a strong faith and still have some legitimate questions. You can be heaven-bound and still express some uncertainty over certain theological issues. Struggling with God over the issues of life doesn’t demonstrate a lack of faith – that is faith. You can see that throughout the Psalms!

So, there’s nothing wrong with having questions or doubts – as long as you use them to propel you toward answers. Otherwise, they can fester inside of you and grow larger than necessary. In some cases, unless they’re dealt with, they can develop into outright disbelief.

What doubts are you struggling with this morning?

Maybe you doubt that God has really forgiven you. Or you question why God lets people suffer. Or you've been praying for help with a struggle in your life, but so far there has been silence, and you're wondering whether God exists. You wonder if God exists why he doesn't answer.

Whatever doubt you may have, bring it out to God honestly. As you do, don't be afraid of questions. God is willing to hear your questions. By listening to your questions God helps you grow stronger in faith.

Accept that God's way is higher than your way

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus and asked him whether he was the Messiah or not, he did not directly answer the question. To directly answer John's question Jesus should have said either "yes or no." But Jesus did not answer with yes or no. Jesus said, *"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."*

Jesus was telling John's disciples to bring this message to John – "Just tell John what I am doing among the people of Israel. Tell him that I am healing the sick and preaching the good news to the poor."

That's the same way he answers us most of the time. Have you ever sought God for the answer to a prayer and not received a clear answer? Why does God not answer our questions with a clear-cut "yes" or "no?"

Because God's ways are higher than ours. We must recognize that God does not have to work by our expectations, because His will is far greater and higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).

We often expect God to do something in a certain way, and if he does not, we think that God has failed us. When things do not go as we expect,

we think “God, this is not fair. Why you are treating me like this. Why don’t you do something for me?”

We believe that God is fair. But on the other hand, sometimes He doesn’t seem fair. His fairness is certainly not confined to our definition of fairness. When we think of fairness – don’t we tend to think of things like: Equal rights - Equal opportunity - Equal benefits.

It’s part of our national constitution. While it’s true that we are all equal in value, we are not equal in gifts and abilities. The parable of the talents tells us that God creates some of us to be one talent people, some to be two talent people, and some to be five talent people. Is it fair that God created me as a one talent person and you as a five talent person? Yes, it’s fair but not necessarily according to our definition of fairness. Understanding the inherent shortcomings of how we define fairness is important.

Because as we go through life - there will be times when God is going to test our definition of fairness. God encourages us to reconsider and possibly redefine what really constitutes fairness. He’ll do some things we don’t understand. And He won’t do some things we expect Him to do. When God begins to stretch us to redefine our definition of fairness, God helps us to trust that his ways are higher than our ways. He enlarges our faith.

Build your faith not upon your situations but upon the Scriptures

When John struggles with doubts of whether Jesus was the Messiah or not, Jesus encouraged John to think whether Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture concerning the Savior. Anyone who claims to be the Savior (Messiah) must be confirmed by the Scriptures. He was telling John to do what every believer must do today: “compare the prophecies of the Scriptures with the deeds of Jesus.” Jesus pointed to his deeds and to the scriptures that speak of those deeds. The words that Jesus spoke alluded to words of the prophet Isaiah (26:19, 29:18, 35:5,

61:1). He encouraged John to focus on his blessed miracles and ministries in spite of his imprisonment, and on how the Scriptures were fulfilled through Jesus' ministries. The words of the prophet Isaiah regarding the Messiah (26:19, 29:18, 35:5, 61:1) were fulfilled through Jesus.

The application for us today is clear. Examine the evidence, is Jesus truly the Son of God, is he alone the fulfillment of the prophecies of scripture?

We sometimes expect God to do something in a certain way, and if he does not, we are confused and perplexed. But we must put our expectations in line with Scripture.

There may be many things which may go against our expectation. But when we focus on the words in Scriptures that Jesus is still fulfilling, we can overcome doubts. We can trust in God's goodness even if life is unfair.

Even if there are still troubles in your life, turn your eyes from the troubles and see whether the words of Scripture are being fulfilled by Jesus. Then the evidence will prove who Jesus really is. And you can overcome your doubt and remain strong in faith.