

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH

### “SINCERE DOUBT VS. CYNICAL DENIAL”

For individual study or group discussion

*“Whatever be the ground of one’s distress, it should drive him to, not from God.”*

John Flavel, *Keeping the Heart with All Diligence*

Do you suffer from doubt? Do you struggle with trusting God? In Luke 7:18-35 we read how the greatest of all prophets (v. 28) had been thrown into a prison near the scorching sands of the Dead Sea and began to doubt Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. It’s not surprising that John the Baptist had doubts as he languished in such a place, for even those who are closest to Jesus experience doubts and questions when trials occur (vv. 18-20, 24-28).

- If you recall from our earlier readings in Luke, John the Baptist was no “reed shaken by the wind” (v. 24). He foretold the Messiah’s ministry largely in terms of judgment (see Luke 3:1-17). Had he been wrong about the coming judgment?
- Read Isaiah 61:1-2 and then compare it to Luke 4:18-19 and 7:22. Notice the line that is missing in Luke, “...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of the vengeance of our God.” Both times Jesus leaves off the part about “vengeance.” Why do you think he did that? What expectations did John have (Luke 3:1-17), and what did Jesus do instead after he was baptized?
- How would you summarize the reason John struggled with doubt? Do you think Christians doubt for similar reasons today?

R.C. Sproul was known for asking his seminary students the following question: “Who was the greatest Old Testament prophet?” After his students gave answers such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, etc., he would correct them by stating, “It was John the Baptist,” reminding them that in terms of redemptive history, John belonged to the era of the Old Testament, under which all of the practices of the old covenant were in place (see Luke 16:16). Note in verse 28, Jesus also says that “none is greater than John” and then Jesus anchors his own work and Word in the Old Testament prophecies as he assures John’s disciples of his identity (vv. 21-23).

- St. Augustine is known to have said, “*The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.*” How does the Old Testament point God’s people forward in time to the work of Christ in the New Testament?
- Remember Luke 1:46-55? In Mary’s *Magnificat*, she rejoiced in the mercy of God that is “from generation to generation” as God spoke ancient promises of a Savior to come to the Patriarchs (v. 55). How does Jesus remind his listeners of God’s ancient promises in Luke 7? (See Mal. 3:1)

In verses 29-35, we see the Savior unmask the cynical denial and spiritual childishness of the Pharisees that were in the crowd. Those in the assembly (v.29) who had received John’s baptism of repentance (Luke 3:3) understood that the advent of Christ’s kingdom brought a greater sense of blessedness than even John would experience. But the Pharisees would have nothing to do with it (v. 30). Jesus compares them to children who will not interact despite the occasion. They won’t dance at a wedding, nor will they weep at a funeral. They refuse to participate, regardless of the activity. Puritan theologian John Owen summarized a hardened heart: “*He that hath slight thoughts of sin never had great thoughts of God.*”

- The Pharisees’ cynicism was born from a heart of self-righteousness. They made obedience to God’s law external, and therefore didn’t truly understand God’s law with the One who came to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Explain how following Christ is more than keeping the law?
- In verse 35 Christ says, “Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.” Who are wisdom’s children? (cf. Hosea 14:9; Psalm 111; Proverbs 1:5-7)

DATE: April 3, 2022

SPEAKER: Joe/Chad

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 7:18-35

## Family Dinner Table

Many of you are familiar with John Bunyan’s famous Christian allegory, *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The hero of the story, Christian, becomes lost and stumbles onto the grounds of Doubting Castle where he and his travel companion, Hopeful, are caught and held captive by Giant Despair. Bunyan wrote his epic while imprisoned for preaching the gospel, and during his time he, like John the Baptist, felt overwhelmed by despair and doubt. But what is most instructive in Bunyan’s allegory is how Christian finally finds a way to escape:

*“What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a key called Promise that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle.” “Then,” said Hopeful, “that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it.” Then Christian took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that Christian and Hopeful immediately came out.<sup>1</sup>*

Christian held in his chest pocket, close to his heart, the key to his escape—the promises God has given to every believer. (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 2:25; 2 Cor. 1:20; Hebrews 12:10)

- **Discuss as a family a moment when you struggled with doubt during a time of crisis. Did you, like John, turn to Jesus?**
- **During times of confusion and brokenness, how has God reassured you with his promises? As a family, commit to reminding each other of God’s promises this week.**

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Metanoia Prison Ministries

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Emma Kate Mooney

<sup>1</sup>Bunyan, John. *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Paraclete Press, Inc., 2006. 168