

Seeing through Doubt

Matthew 11:1-19 - NCBC, April 26, 2020

Main Point: **Overcome your doubts by seeing Jesus for who He really is.**

- Focus on what you already know about Jesus (2-6)
 - Look at what Jesus has done
 - Look at what Jesus has said
- Focus on what Jesus taught you to expect (7-15)
 - Look to be prepared
 - Look to be persecuted
 - Look to be persuaded
- Focus on the end result of your beliefs in Jesus (16-19)
 - Look at the end of unbelief
 - Look at the end of wisdom

Application: **Force-feed on God's promises when you begin to doubt.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Remember to visit myncbc.org** and follow our NCBC Facebook page to stay informed on all ministry/event updates during this season of sheltering, that has now been extended by our Governor through the month of May.

<<Christ our Hope in Life and Death>>



I'm so thankful for Tom introducing us to that new song this morning. In this season of shutdowns and troubles, it is so good to sing that God is good, and that Christ is our sufficient hope in life and in death.

No matter what happens to our health, finances, businesses, employees, or loved ones... if we have Jesus, we have all we need.

That's surprisingly easy to sing with our lips...but I know from what I lived through personally in 2006...that when you're trying to follow Jesus and do everything right... and you still lose your job, and your dreams, and your reputation...because of the decisions of others that are out of your control... it's natural to doubt whether Jesus alone is truly enough or not.

In fact, as we open our Bibles this morning to **Matthew chapter 11**, that's exactly where we find John the Baptist. He's been put in prison as a political prisoner of Herod, and he'll soon be executed if some miracle doesn't happen first. And from the pressure-point of his pain, John starts to doubt.

Let me ask you, do difficult trials ever cause you to doubt God's goodness or God's greatness? My guess is that many of us will encounter doubts this very month, as our community begins to slide deeper into the economic consequences of our extended shelter-in-place.

And loved ones, doubt is the necessary consequence of being a finite and limited human whose faith has not yet been perfected. I have doubts. You wrestle with doubts. John the Baptist had doubts. To have doubts is simply to be tempted. And Jesus Himself was tempted.¹

So it is not sinful to experience doubts or have real questions about the goodness or greatness of God. But how you respond to your doubt will determine whether they are the birth-pains of greater faith... or the birth-pains of deadly unbelief.

In **Matthew chapter 11** Jesus teaches us how to overcome our doubts.

So let's read now from **Matthew chapter 11**. And while you are opening your Bibles, let me just remind you again that the links alongside your livestream provide you with fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, my full manuscript, children's coloring pages, and additional study guides for families. At any time you can pause this video, download and print those files, and then come back to rejoin our worship as soon as you have the notes in front of you.

Please read with me now from **Matthew chapter 11, verse 1**, in the English Standard Version:

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. ² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

¹⁶ "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

¹ Hebrews 4:15
Page **2a** of 13

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

This is God's Word.

Let's Pray Together.

Loved ones, God's word is living, and active.² It is relevant and sufficient to grant you wisdom and life for every day. Although it was written thousands of years ago, these are the very words of God Himself – and when He speaks, His children are blessed.

So I want to encourage you as we continue this season of sheltering ... consciously prioritize time reading and meditating upon God's Word. Kids, adults, seniors – I really want to encourage each of you – when can you set aside extra time every day just to read God's Word, and think about its life-giving wisdom for yourself?

As more of us start to experience the mounting pressures and temptations of an extended shelter-in-place order, **Matthew 11** is so relevant. The Holy Scriptures are good and able to teach us, convict us, correct us, and train and equip us so that we know how to live and die in a manner that glorifies God in this season.³

So let's quickly set the table for our study in **Matthew 11** this morning.

² Hebrews 4:12
Page **3a** of 13

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW				
1-3 Presentation of the King				
4-7 Proclamation of the King <i>Sermon on the Mount (5-7)</i>	8-10 Power of the King <i>Sending out the 12 Apostles (10)</i>	11-13 Rejection of the King <i>Kingdom Parables (13)</i>	14-20 Program of the King <i>Topsy-Turvy Values (18)</i>	21-25 Progress of the King <i>Olivet Discourse (24-25)</i>
Kingdom offered to Israel			Kingdom offered to all Nations	
26-28 Passion & Proof of the King				




Remember **Matthew** reveals Jesus as King in fulfillment of God's promises. Matthew invites us to Behold King Jesus!!

Matthew has an opening Presentation, and a concluding Proof...but the body of this book is organized topically into 5 main sections. Each of these sections begins with the *works* of King Jesus, and ends with extended *words* of King Jesus.

Last week we finished **chapter 10**, so today we start a new section in the book. **Chapters 11-13** are the very center of **Matthew** – and these 3 chapters focus on Israel's Rejection of their King.

³ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW		
Created by the Bible Project		
1-3 Presentation of the King		
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Kingdom offered to Israel		King
26-28 Passion & Proof of the King		

11-13 RESPONSES TO JESUS		PARABLES ABOUT THE KINGDOM (or 13)
POSITIVE:  PEOPLE	JESUS IS THE MESSIAH!	PARABLES = COMPARISONS
NEUTRAL:  JOHN THE BAPTIST	IS HE THE MESSIAH..?	
NEGATIVE:  PARABLES	HE IS NOT THE MESSIAH!	

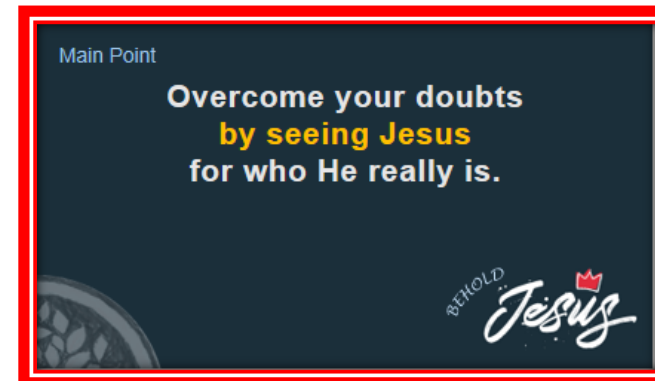
In fact **Chapters 11-12** are full of different responses to Jesus. A few believe that Jesus is the Messiah and so they respond positively. Others, like John the Baptist, are more neutral, as they question whether or not Jesus is truly the Messiah. Many others respond with negative unbelief and rejection. Once Israel's leaders ultimately reject Jesus, Jesus begins to speak in parables in **chapter 13** in order to hide the meaning of His kingdom purposes from those who have already rejected Him.

So as we study **chapters 11-12** over the next several weeks, we are going to be repeatedly confronted with the question, "How will I respond to Jesus?" "Do I really believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior?"

So it's not a coincidence that this account of John the Baptist's doubting Jesus comes immediately after **chapter 10** where he exhorts His disciples to expect to suffer and be persecuted as they follow Him.⁴ Because Jesus knows that worldly troubles will cause us to doubt Him at various times. In **verses 2-19**, Jesus' responses to John the Baptist's doubt model we how should respond to our doubts.

⁴ Matthew 11:1
Page **4a** of 13

Many of us struggle following a Savior we don't fully understand. Doubts are common whenever we suffer deeply after we've followed Jesus for some time.



Therefore here's our main point today: **You overcome your doubts by seeing Jesus for who He really is.**

We all have doubts. **Jude 22** teaches clearly to "have mercy on those who doubt." So no one is coming after your doubts today with a Bible-sized bully club, trying to brow-beat your faith into submission. Judgment, condemnation, and shame are not the answer for real doubts and questions about the goodness and greatness of God when you are suffering.

The way you quiet doubts, and resist their temptations to unbelief or bitterness, is just by seeing Jesus for who He really is.

So from the posture of your own trouble, bring all your doubts about Jesus' care and Jesus' control... and begin to,

Focus on what you already **know** about Jesus (2-6)

Jesus

Focus on what you already **know** to be true about Jesus.

In **verse 2** we discover John the Baptist is in prison. He's in a heap of trouble. He knows his days are numbered. Unless a miracle happens, he's going to die in this filthy prison.

And John keeps hearing about all the miracles that Jesus is doing – and honestly, it's making him a little bitter. Jesus was his own cousin⁵...and He hasn't once come to visit, or set him free! Didn't Jesus care? Didn't Jesus appreciate how John's wilderness preaching had set up His earthly ministry?

And speaking of Jesus' earthly ministry – Jesus was not following John's script! Back in **Matthew 3 verses 11-12** John had told the crowds that the coming Messiah was going to bring the fire and winnowing fork of judgment! The Messiah was supposed to inaugurate the final harvest at the end of time – eternally casting off all Gentile oppression, and establishing the Millennial Kingdom on earth for the Jews. But now all John kept

hearing was how Jesus was healing everyone and showing compassion to sinners. Was Jesus really the Messiah in fulfillment of all the prophecies, or should the Jews keep looking for a Messiah still to come?⁶

Now it's easy enough to relate to John's questions, right? After all, just like John, we too often "flatten God's promises."

To flatten God's promises is to ignore their already-but-not-yet fulfillment. To reject mystery, and impatiently demand fulfillment today. Or to flatten God's promises is to apply them personally to your own life without regard to their original biblical context. So we claim **Jeremiah 29:11** that says God has plans of welfare for us, to give us future and hope, but we fail to recognize that **Jeremiah 29:11** was given to comfort God's people as He was sending them off into 70 years of brutal exile and horrific judgment! To flatten God's promises is simply to force God's Word to conform to my own self-dimensional desires or understanding.

Whenever our experience doesn't match our expectations, we will start to doubt whether God's promises can truly be trusted.

But we must accept the reality of mystery and things we can't understand in God's Word.⁷ To walk by faith requires that we remain convinced of what we cannot yet see.⁸

You must look at mystery through the lens of what you can already see clearly. So learn from Jesus' response

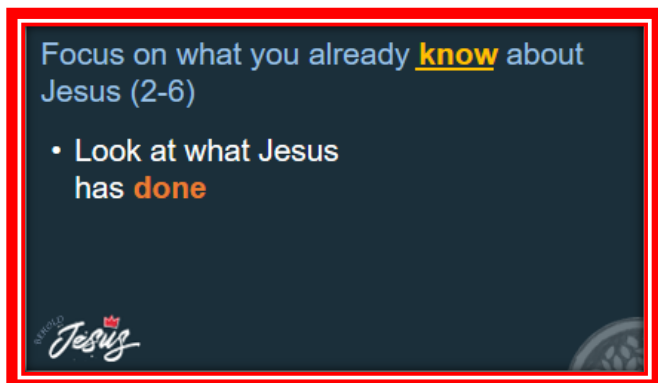
⁵ Luke 1:36

⁶ Matthew 11:3

⁷ Deuteronomy 29:29; c.f. 2 Peter 3:16

⁸ Hebrews 11:1; c.f. 2 Corinthians 5:7

to John's disciples in **verse 4**, and when you begin to doubt whether you can trust God's promises,



Look at what Jesus has already done

He says, *Go and tell John what you hear and see*. And then **verse 5** gives a laundry list of supernatural works that prove He in fact is an all-powerful God who cares.

Loved ones, if you turn doubt over to examine its underbelly, you will find that doubt is powered by lies. Lies questioning God's goodness, and lies questioning God's greatness.

Since Jesus hasn't visited me in prison, He doesn't care about me. Since Jesus is showing compassion on the wicked, He won't ever judge them.

Or since God has allowed me to lose my job, God isn't going to provide for my financial needs. Or since I don't feel loved, Jesus' blood isn't enough for my forgiveness.

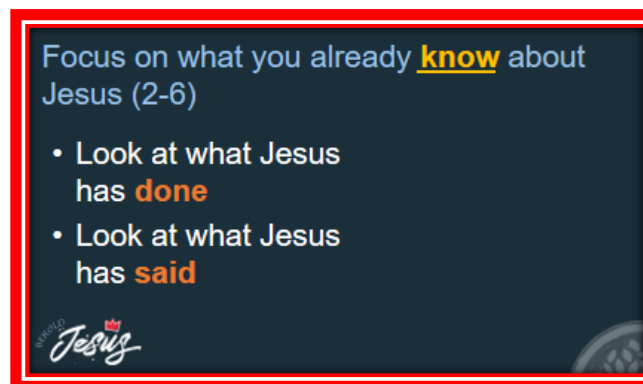
Dear child of God – even when you don't understand all that God is doing in your life... live by the faith you do

have. Focus on what you do know about Jesus. Look back at what Jesus has done in your past.

Do you remember when God's Spirit caused you to be born again and set free from slavery to sin? Can you remember when the power of God's resurrection showed up and changed those sin habits that had controlled you for so long? Look back at how God has answered your prayers and provided so faithfully for your past needs!

Maybe you can't honestly look at what Jesus has done, because you haven't yet humbled yourself, and surrendered to believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of your sins? Friend – today's the day for your salvation! Repent of your sins. Receive God's cleansing and the forgiveness by believing that Jesus died to pay for your sins and rose again to give you newness of life! Look and see what Jesus has done!

See what Jesus has already done for you, and also,



Look at what Jesus has said to you!

It's not a coincidence that **verse 5** is a quote from **Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61**.⁹ Jesus is effectively reminding John that even though His ministry doesn't line up with all of John's expectations and timetable... Jesus' ministry does in fact line up with the prophets! His ministry is fulfilling God's Words – so stop having more confidence in your doubt than you do in God's Word!

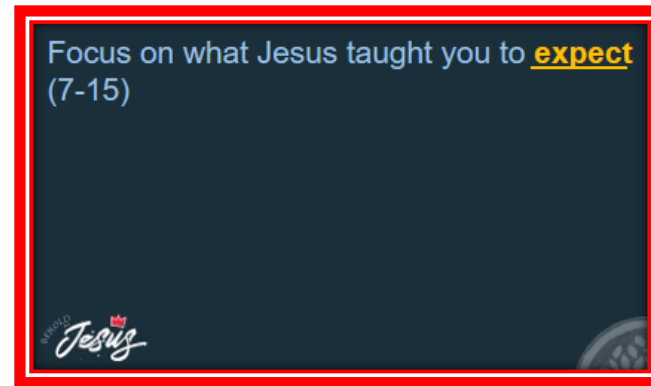
Then look at Jesus' final exhortation to his suffering cousin in **verse 6** – *And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*

God will secure joyful blessings for everyone who isn't tripped up when Jesus runs His kingdom differently than we think He should. Jesus is King. He is not the president of a democracy!

O how happy is the One who is willing to follow King Jesus even when we don't understand or appreciate all His works and His words in a particular moment.

Church – our present suffering from COVID-19 is exposing our worldliness, and giving rise to doubts. We must not allow our doubts to rule our responses right now. God blesses those who accept the reality of mystery, and live according to the weak faith that we do have. Answers your doubts by focusing on what you already know to be true about our good and all-powerful Lord.

Next, **verses 7-15** teach us to,



Focus on what Jesus taught you to expect.

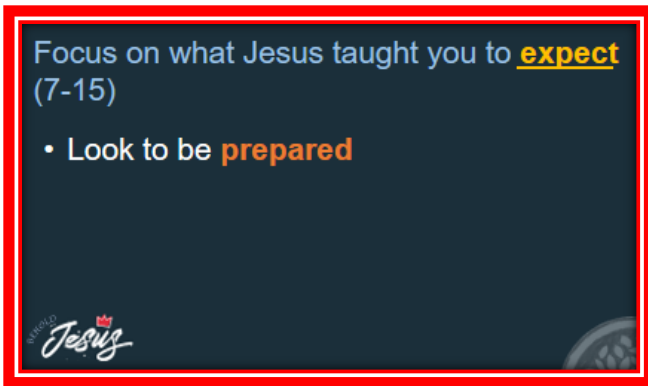
When you go through times of trouble or testing, you must recalibrate your expectations. Refocus on what Jesus has taught you, rather than what others are saying around you.

I suppose the crowds in **verse 7** may have started to judge and condemn John...has he lost his faith?

So now listen carefully if you commonly wrestle with doubt. **Verses 7-15** reveal Jesus' highest commendation for John the Baptist. Jesus didn't judge him for his doubts. John ran to Jesus with His doubts, which is exactly what you and I should do as well.

So first, Jesus wants to remind the crowds that following Jesus always means that we should,

⁹ Isaiah 35:5-7; 61:1



Look to be prepared in this life for the eternal life which is to come. Our expectation for this life is not to win now. Instead we look to be tested, matured, refined, purified, sanctified,namely, prepared for the glory which awaits us in the eternal dwelling place of God Himself forever.¹⁰

Jesus repeats the same question three times in **verses 7-9**. *What did you go out into the wilderness to see?* In other words, what justified all the time, expense, and commitment to your traveling out into the hot and barren wilderness to see John's ministry?

Did you go just to hear fickle opinions of men... shaking like reeds in the wind? No. You were drawn to John's ministry of the firm and reliable truths of God Himself!

Verse 8 - Did you go to listen to John just to hear how to live in worldly comfort and prosperity, like king's children? No. You were drawn to John's ministry of repentance from sin.

You see, suffering brings doubts which tempt you listen to ear-ticklers who preach a gospel of prosperity and self-

actualization. But focus now... why were you all drawn to John the Baptist's ministry?

Verse 9 – because He was a prophet – a spokesman for God...and even more, he was the long-promised messenger of **Malachi 3:1**, who was preparing you to receive the Messiah!

You were drawn to John's ministry because you see that the purpose of your earthly life is to prepare for your eternal life! So listen friend – you were not created for this world! Allow suffering to recalibrate your expectations, and loosen your grip on having to win here and now.

The crowds may have thought John's ministry ended in failure... for now he was diminished to the place of weakness, ineffectiveness, and doubt in a political prison.

But listen to the glorious truths of **verse 11**,

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

John was the most privileged Old Testament prophet – for he actually saw the Messiah Himself!

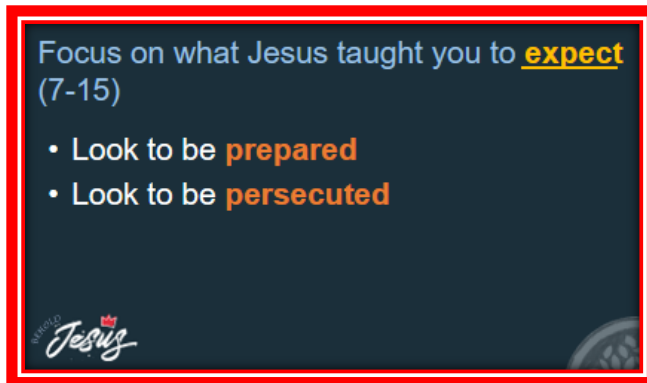
Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

Christian – you and I have more than John ever had. For you have the revelation of the cross and the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord. By faith in Jesus, you have received the Holy Spirit who dwells in you and empowers your perseverance through your trial. You

¹⁰ James 1:2-4; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

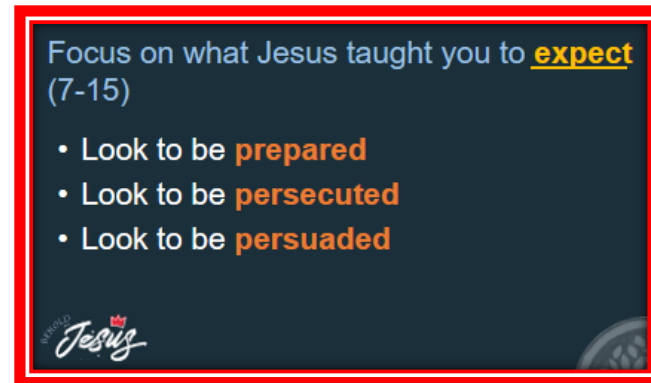
and I have more than John the Baptist ever had... so look to be prepared in this life for eternity!

And then in **verse 12**,



Look to be persecuted

Don't expect that everything you touch will turn to gold, don't expect you'll always be healthy, don't expect that your business will never fail, don't expect that you'll always be well-liked and respected in the community. Even though **verse 12** is a bit difficult to translate...the point is clear enough. God's kingdom has always been opposed in this world. So don't expect rose petals and trophies from this planet... you should expect opposition. Look to be persecuted, and then in **verses 13-15**,



Look to be persuaded that Jesus is worth it all *only after* you have continued to accept His words, and obeyed His commands through the duration of your suffering.

For the crowds in this text, Jesus is telling them that if they would heed John's message and receive Jesus as their Messiah, then John himself would be the fulfillment of the Elijah prophesy from **Malachi 4:5-6**. However, we know of course that Israel did not receive Jesus as God's promised King...and so the arrival of Elijah to usher in the Millennial Kingdom is still future for us today.¹¹

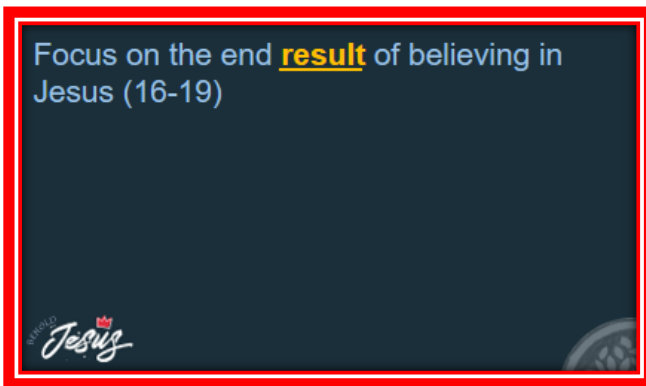
He who has ears to hear, let him hear. It's a strong word to the wise – listen carefully to the word of God. You overcome doubt by renewing your mind with Scripture. Reading, and obeying God's words – no matter how you feel – is the cure for your doubts. Look to be persuaded on the other side of obedience... never let doubt begin to rule your life now by waiting to understand before you obey. Read and obey God's words now...and trust your

¹¹ The angel's prophecy to Zechariah in Luke 1:17 makes it clear that John the Baptist was not literally Elijah, but rather that he would go as a forerunner before Christ in "the spirit and power of Elijah." John clearly denied that he was actually Elijah in John 1:21. So the full fulfillment of

Malachi 4:5-6 now awaits the days of Revelation 11:1-19 when Elijah will come as a forerunner for the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

doubt will be persuaded of God's goodness on the other side of your obedience.

You overcome your doubts by seeing Jesus for who He really is...not who you want Him to be. So focus on what you already know about Jesus' works and words. Focus on what Jesus taught you to expect from following Him in this world. And then in **verses 16-19**,



Focus on the end result of your beliefs in Jesus.

After His exhortation to obey Scripture in **verse 15**, Jesus provides a sad illustration of Israel's rejection using two common children's games.

Now kids... have you ever played a wedding game? Where you act out a wedding...and someone's the bride, and someone's the groom, and someone's the preacher, and you play music and dance?

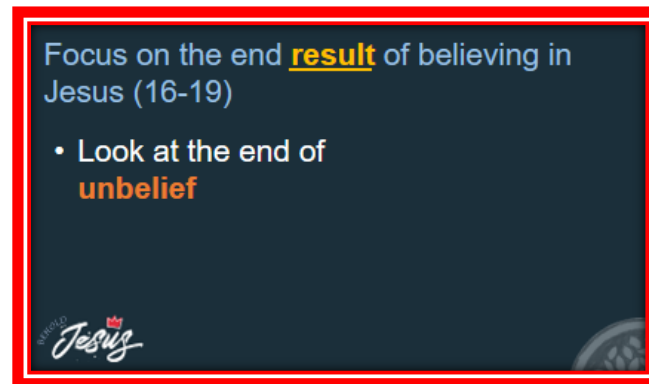
Or how about a funeral? I remember one time my pet fish died when I was a little boy, and I acted out an entire funeral service...and you guessed it...I was the preacher!

That's what Jesus is referring to here in **verses 17-19**. His point is that the Jews were like spoiled brats who rejected every messenger God sent them. If the nation of Israel wanted to play a wedding game...with happy flute music, and dancing...they rejected John the Baptist's message of repentance and self-denial. Even condemned his ministry as demonic because it didn't suit their fancy.

But then, Israel was also like fickle children who wanted to play a funeral game...singing sad songs and mourning... rejecting Jesus who came eating and drinking and comparing the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. Israel also identified Jesus as sinner to reject as well.

Here's Jesus' point – the end result of all of Israel's doubts was that they rejected both John and the Baptist the Jesus - the two people God had sent to fulfill their hopes!

So don't miss the point – whenever you let doubt control your life, the end result will be unbelief.

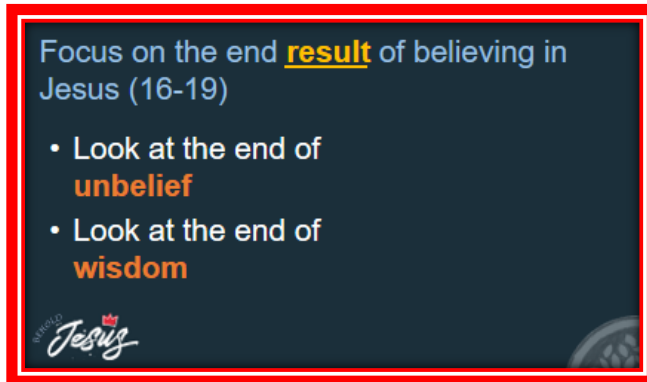


As you enter troubling times, **Look at the end of unbelief.**

Christian, please listen carefully, your doubts are not unbelief until they start controlling our lives so that we start living like an unbeliever.

Wisdom is justified by her deeds. In other words, the fruit or the outcomes of your life will determine whether you saw Jesus for who He really is, or believed some kind of lies about who you thought He should be.

The conclusion of Israel's doubt was their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah.

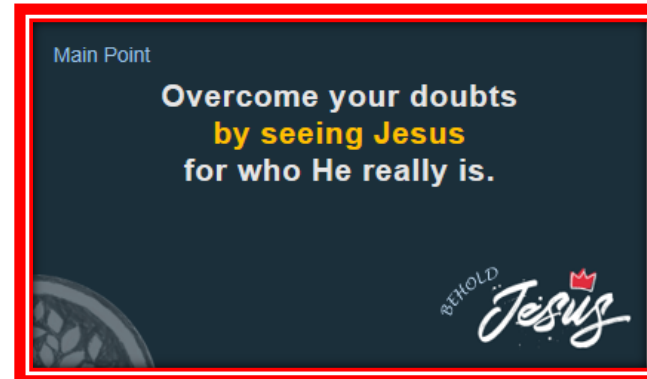


But Look at the end of wisdom.

If you bring your doubts to Jesus, and focus upon what you already know to be true about Jesus, and you refocus your thoughts on what Jesus taught you to expect in this world... then you will see that it is wisest for you to live in this world for another world.

James 1 verses 5-8 contrast the wise man with the doubting man... for the doubting man is unstable in all his ways.

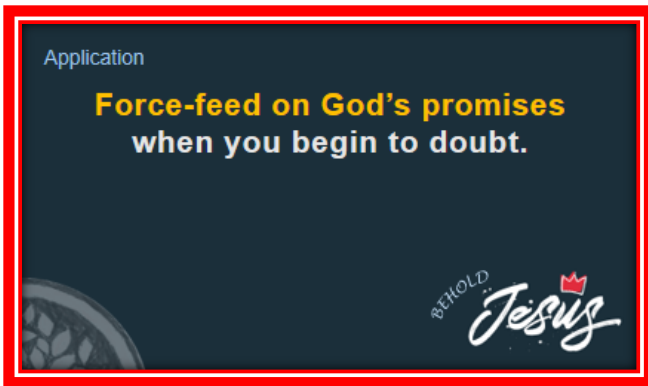
Only seeing Jesus for who He really is unites all your questions, and gives you the assurance that Jesus is indeed still good and great while you suffer on earth.



So the point of this text for us is that we must **Overcome our doubts by seeing Jesus for who He really is.**

Do you see Jesus as the resurrected King of Glory who has ascended to the Father's right hand as your advocate, Savior, Lord, and Priest? Do you see Jesus as your Sovereign Master who is in control of your health, and your finances, and your employment, and your very life? Do you see Jesus as the infinite reality of goodness, mercy, grace, and love?

You fight doubt by feeding your faith with biblical truth.



Or to say it a bit differently, you must **force-feed on God's promises when you begin to doubt.**

Doubt has a way of turning up its own volume in our heads, and diminishing our desire for the live-saving promises of God. So when you start to doubt and wonder if God is good, or if God is still in control... start force-feeding on God's promises. Connect the IV! You can't wait until you have an appetite for God's Word. You must force feed.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing the words of Christ, **Romans 10:17** proclaims. So read from the Psalms. Read the New Testament. Read the Gospel accounts of Jesus.

Ask God to give you wisdom. Refuse to allow the spirit of unbelief to control your actions or your attitudes or your speech. For just like John the Baptist, who eventually died believing that Jesus was the Messiah – for he sent his disciples to join up with Jesus after his death,¹² you will overcome your doubts when you truly see Jesus for who He really is.

¹² Matthew 14:12
Page **12a** of 13

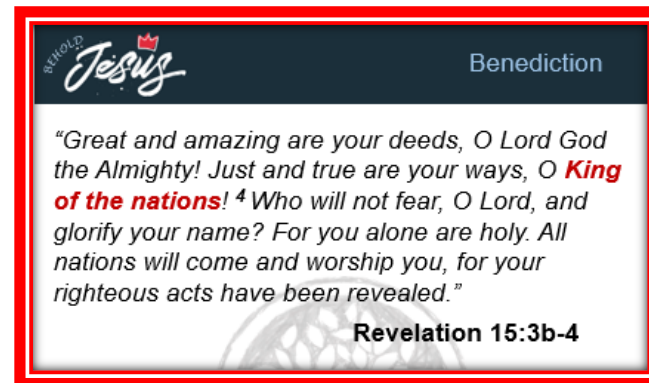


Let's pray.

<<Yet not I but Through Christ in Me>>

[Remember to take advantage of the Sermon-Stretcher Downloads links!](#)

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Seeing through Doubt:

- Proverbs 3:5-6
- Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1-3
- Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6
- Matthew 14:31
- Mark 9:24
- Luke 1:17; 7:18-35
- John 1:21; 20:25-29
- Romans 5:3-11; 8:15-17; 10:17
- 1 Timothy 2:8
- 2 Timothy 2:13
- Hebrews 11:1
- James 1:5-8
- 1 John 3:19-24
- Jude 22

- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/7-ways-to-deal-with-doubt/>
- <https://www.ccef.org/spiritual-doubts-and-what-do-about-them/>
- <https://www.ccef.org/no-doubting/>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-bad-reasons-to-go-to-church>

- *Doubt*, Elyse Fitzpatrick
- *Not by Sight*, Jon Bloom
- *Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Review Matthew 11:3. How was Jesus different from John's expectations? (C.f. 3:11-12) When you suffer deeply, how do you typically experience doubt? Do you tend to question God's greatness or goodness more?
2. Read Matthew 14:1-12. How is John an illustration of Jesus' teachings from Matthew 10? What do the final actions of John's disciples tell us about John's victory over doubt at the end of his life?
3. Read James 1:5-8. What is the connection between wisdom and doubt? (C.f. Proverbs 1:7; James 4:8) When does doubt become unbelief, and when does doubt become the seedbed for greater faith?
4. Read Romans 10:17. How do you "force-feed" yourself God's promises when you feel overwhelmed by doubt? What portions of Scripture do you find most helpful for strengthening your faith in times of testing?
5. Review Matthew 11:11. In what ways was John the Baptist the greatest Old Testament prophet? In what ways are we "greater" than John the Baptist today?
6. Review Matthew 11:12. Do you expect to experience persecution and hatred from God's enemies as you live for God's kingdom on earth? Does persecution for Christ's sake ever cause you to doubt?