



Week Three: Encountering Jesus in our DOUBT

Luke 7: 16-28

Opening Question: In our study today we are going to meet someone who has a BIG question for Jesus. When you are trying to figure something out, who or where do you go first for help or advice?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: What do you remember from last week about Simeon and Anna? What does it mean that we wait *with God* even while we wait *for God* to work? How might that reality change our seasons of waiting?

Today's Passage: Today we meet John the Baptist- one of the most prominent people in the NT. John is a prophet who was tasked from birth with preparing the way for Jesus, preaching and teaching about the One who was to come who would turn the whole world upside-down. Other gospels tell us that John is the one who baptized Jesus, inaugurating his adult ministry and witnessing as God spoke over Jesus the words, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). John has given his whole life to proclaiming the coming of Jesus, he has witnessed God the Father affirm Jesus' identity and sonship, and yet when we meet him today in the text, there are no proclamations coming from his mouth. John is currently in prison- placed there by the ruler Herod after John dared to speak against Herod's misconduct in having an affair with his sister-in-law. And while he sits in prison, John begins to have questions. Is Jesus really who he says he is? Today we watch how Jesus engages his doubt as we think about what role doubt might have in a life of faith.

CONTENT

Read Luke 7: 16-28 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

Luke 7: 18-23

1. What question does John ask of Jesus through his friends?
2. Look up Luke 3: 4-6 and read it together. These are words that John the Baptist was preaching before he was put in prison. What kinds of images are in this passage? How massive are they? What kind of "messiah" was John perhaps expecting? Does this help you understand at all where his question may have come from?
3. Go back to today's passage. Reflect on Jesus' answer to John's doubt. What does he say? What does His answer reveal about His posture towards doubt?

Luke 7: 24-28

A little context: When Jesus talks about “a reed swayed by the wind”, he is most likely referring to an image used by Herod Antipas on coins in the region. When referenced with the following image of someone dressed in fine robes, he is basically saying, “Did you think John the Baptist was some kind of new king?” after which he affirms again John’s role as the prophet spoken of in the Old Testament.

1. As Jesus talks about John to the crowd, how does he describe him? Is there any hint of disappointment or disapproval following John’s words of doubt?
2. If John is the “greatest of those born among women”, why would the least in the kingdom of heaven be greater than him? Is Jesus criticizing John, or trying to illustrate another truth?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion.

Choose one or several.

- When Jesus answers John’s deep question of doubt with images of the blind gaining sight, the lame walking, etc., he is repeating well-known themes from Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. In essence, Jesus is saying to John- as a way to maintain faith in the midst of doubt- “Look *BACK* and remember what I have done and look *AROUND* to see what I am doing.”

Looking BACK: Is there a time in your own past when it was clear to you that God was at work, or that you had a clear sense of God’s presence in a way that was important to you?

Looking AROUND: The “everyday miracles” we see around us may not look as profound as the ones listed in this passage, but Scripture tells us that anything that is good, lovely, right or beautiful is a gift of God and a sign of His presence in this world. Is there anything you have seen or experienced in the past few days that has helped you see the face of God or experience His presence?

- One of the reasons John may have asked his question is because he was expecting the kingdom of Jesus to look different than it actually looked. In what ways do our expectations of God sometimes make us miss Him?
- Have you ever had a time where your honest questions about Jesus or about faith were met with judgment instead of kindness and curiosity? How did that feel? What did it teach you about how to interact with others in their seasons of doubt?
- Jesus does not seem disappointed or surprised by John’s doubt. What does his response teach you about doubt in a life of faith? How have the faith communities you have been a part of talked about doubt? How might doubt play a role in drawing you closer to Jesus?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this prayer excerpt from Kate Bowler’s *The Lives We Actually Have*:

Blessed are we who come to You in the discomfort of our doubt, for we trust that our honest unknowing is a truer and better prayer than bootstrapping efforts at certainty.

Blessed are we, remembering that You God, hold all things together. You are the invisible scaffolding that supports us, the canopy of love that protects us in the present, the stable pillars, sunk deep into our past, and the Dove that flies confidently toward the future bearing for us the peace we could never have attained for ourselves.

Blessed are we, settling into the truth that there are things that we can’t know, settling into the humility that knows this one thing — that we are of the earth, while you bear up the universe.