

The Heights Baptist Church

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS • DOUBTING JESUS THE MESSIAH • LUKE 7:18-23 • 1/3/2021

MAIN POINT

We all have to decide for ourselves whether we believe Jesus is the Messiah or not.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever gone through a season of doubt in your relationship with Jesus? What do you think were the motivating factors behind that season?

How did you respond to that season? What did you learn from it?

Almost every man or woman of faith in Scripture went through seasons of doubt. Abraham and Sarah doubted God's ability to fulfill His promise to give them a son. Moses doubted God's provision and power to work through him as a speaker and leader. The disciples doubted Jesus' kingdom when He declared that He would be crucified. In the midst of these people's doubts, however, God continued loving them and working in their lives. As we go through seasons of doubt, we, too, must remember what God has done and continues to do in our lives. Like John the Baptist in Luke 7, we must face our doubts head-on so that God might work in our hearts to strengthen our faith and increase our understanding of who Jesus is and why He came.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 7:18-23.

From Matthew's parallel account of this encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist, we learn that John was in prison when he approached Jesus through messengers (Matt. 11:1-6). Read Matthew 14:1-5. How did John land in prison? Why might prison have raised doubts for John about Jesus' identity?

While Jesus' ministry was unfolding and all of these miracles and teachings were taking place, John the Baptist was in prison. John was the prophet whom God appointed to prepare the way for Jesus' earthly ministry, and he of all people should have known Jesus was the Messiah. However, while in prison, John was dependent on other people to relay Jesus' actions to him, and

the reports he received confused him as to whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah, so he took his question to Jesus.

What kinds of “prisons” tend to bring up doubts for you regarding Jesus? In those periods of discouragement and doubt, what most renews your belief and faith?

In response, Jesus listed six aspects of His ministry (v. 22). How did these aspects point to His role as Messiah?

Jesus never chastised John for asking the question; instead, He held up John as a model prophet and follower. John thus serves as a model for us as we grow in our faith and join in Jesus’ ministry. To ease John’s doubts, Jesus pointed to the work He had done since His ministry began, work that fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy about the coming Messiah.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 4:16-21.

These verses describe the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry. What was the significance of Jesus’ use of this Old Testament prophecy to define His mission?

For whom and what purpose would the Messiah come?

God assigned the Messiah specific functions. First, He came to preach good news to the poor. Second, the Messiah came to proclaim freedom to the captives—those in the prison of sin. Third, recovery of sight to the blind took place through the Messiah. While the healing of physical blindness brings a new perspective on life, the healing of spiritual blindness brings new life altogether. Fourth, the Messiah arrived to set free the oppressed. Fifth, the Messiah came to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (see Lev. 25:10-17). This tradition symbolized the new start in life people can experience as a result of the Messiah’s mission. The heart of the Messiah’s ministry was redemption—righting the wrongs brought on by sin and drawing people back to God.

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 4:31-44.

Spend a few minutes discussing Jesus’ actions in these verses. What did Jesus’ teaching with authority reveal about His role as the Messiah?

Jesus undertook a revolutionary type of ministry. His personal approach aimed to meet people’s various needs. Those needs included release from demonic control and healing from sickness. Foremost was the need to hear the good news of God’s kingdom. Both His teaching and His healing differed noticeably from that of typical synagogue leaders. The people acknowledged

that Jesus commanded unclean spirits with authority and power. They had seen with their own eyes the effects of Jesus' special power that He exercised with divine authority. Jesus exhibited this amazing authority as a way to represent the divine in a personal way.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 5:17-26.

What additional insight did Jesus give into His messiahship through His encounter with the paralyzed man?

How have you seen God's miraculous work of forgiveness in your life?

How might we paralyze ourselves by doubting what Jesus is able to do? What's the cure for that paralysis?

Luke's description of Jesus' restoring a paralyzed man illustrates the relationship of Jesus' spiritual power to His authority in people's lives. Jesus' response to the silent confession of His lordship by the paralytic man's friends demonstrated both His power over the physical as well as His authority in spiritual areas. Through the physical and spiritual healing of the paralyzed man, Jesus established His authority to forgive sins, a power reserved for God alone.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 7:11-17.

Luke gave another account of a miracle that demonstrated Jesus' authority. In this miracle, however, Jesus showed that He had power over death as well as sickness. Because all of them beheld Jesus bring a corpse back to life, no one could ever doubt that He had absolute authority over death. After the miracle, countless eyewitnesses went their ways telling the story about Jesus and His authority over death. The miracle showed them that God had come to help them, and that Jesus truly was the Messiah.

Why do you think Jesus went out of His way to perform this miracle? What did He reveal about Himself?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When did you come to the place in your life where you knew Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God and your Savior? How did you come to this understanding? What difference has it made in your life?

What are some practical ways we can help one another deal honestly with our doubts over Jesus' messiahship and the implications it has on our lives?

PRAYER

Thank God for sending Jesus to die for doubters like us. Pray that as we face seasons of doubt, we would fight the temptation to look inward and isolate ourselves and instead look outward to Christ, Scripture, and the community of faith around us.

COMMENTARY

| LUKE 7:18-23

7:18-20. News about Jesus reached John in his prison cell (see 3:20). Even in prison John maintained loyal disciples who looked to him for spiritual leadership and kept him informed about the outside world. John sent two of these disciples to Jesus. Things had not worked out quite like John expected. Confusion about Jesus began to set in. Was this really the deliverer who came to harvest God's crop and throw away the chaff (see 3:15-17)? Or should they look to someone else to fulfill the role of the Messiah that God had revealed to John? Faithfully John's disciples fulfilled their commission, finding Jesus and posing John's question.

7:21. No immediate answer came from Jesus' lips. Rather, he continued his ministry—healing, exorcising, and giving sight. Evidence of Messiah in action should be more compelling than personal testimony about himself.

7:22. Having acted, Jesus spoke. Picking up snippets of Scripture from Isaiah (26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1), he described his ministry to John's two disciples. Three types of action typify what Jesus did—healing, raising the dead, and preaching good news. Now we are ready for the rest of John's story. How did he react? Did he accept Jesus' testimony? How does one who looks for judgment of the chaff respond to one who cures and brings good news? Luke ignores our questions. He concentrates on Jesus.

7:23. Jesus solidified his case with a beatitude, a statement of blessing on people who act in a certain way (see 6:20-22; Matt. 5:3-11). This beatitude centers on response to Jesus. He called for people not to fall away from God because of how Jesus acts. Do not let their expectations of Messiah lead them to miss God's true Messiah. He may not be what they expected and wanted—a general to lead armies against Rome, a king to rule in a new state of Israel, an end-time prophet to bring final judgment on the world and inaugurate the kingdom of God. Still, he fulfills Scripture and continues God's purpose from creation onwards, to bring good news to all people in need.

Are Jesus' actions and teachings enough to convince us he is the Messiah of God? Will we look for another?

| LUKE 4:16-21

4:16. Sometimes the most difficult audience to address consists of people you know the best (and who know you). Jesus found that to be true when He brought His message to Nazareth—His hometown. Why go to Nazareth at the beginning of His Galilean ministry? It emphasized the critical truth that no one, even those people closest to Jesus, received an exemption from making a decision about Him.

4:17-18. Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The chosen passage highlighted the person and work of the Messiah. Most of this reading came from Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus used this reading to define His mission as it came through the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. As the anointed Messiah, Jesus was the heart and presence of God among His people. God assigned the Messiah specific functions. First, He came to preach good news to the poor. The poor represented people whose survival depended on divine aid. This included the physically poor, such as those who were without even the basics of life. However, the Messiah also addressed the spiritual poor—people without the good news of God's salvation. Even hopeless people have hope because God can meet all needs. Second, the Messiah came to proclaim freedom to the captives. Captives literally referred to prisoners taken in warfare, but the Messiah also came to provide for release or forgiveness of those in the prison house of sin. In fact, the Greek word rendered freedom can also be translated "forgiveness" (see Luke 3:3; 24:47). Third, recovery of sight to the blind took place through the Messiah. The healing of physical blindness brings a new perspective on life. The healing of spiritual blindness brings new life altogether. The Messiah addressed both of these needs. Fourth, the Messiah arrived to set free the oppressed. Here Jesus picked up a phrase from Isaiah 58:6. It stressed the concept of forgiveness parallel to the previously mentioned function of proclaiming freedom to the captives.

4:19. Fifth, the Messiah came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Many see this as reference to the Old Testament concept of the Year of Jubilee (see Lev. 25:10-17). Every fiftieth year, the covenant people were to forgive debts, allow fields to lie fallow, return people to their homes, and free slaves. This tradition, although seldom followed in Israelite history, symbolized the new start in life people can experience as a result of the Messiah's mission.

4:21. What Luke recorded here perhaps was a summary or the key point of Jesus' more extensive comments. The hearers likely expected Jesus to explain the passage as other rabbis

did—that is, by relating the Messiah to the Year of Jubilee. Jesus’ explanation, however, stunned the group. Most Jews saw the Messiah’s coming as a grand future event. In essence Jesus proclaimed, “I am the Promised Messiah. No need to wait any longer.” He sat before them as the Fulfiller of the Scripture He had read.

| LUKE 4:31-44

4:33-36. This is an example of the far-reaching authority Jesus displayed in Capernaum. He cast out an unclean demonic spirit that had possessed a man in the synagogue. Jesus did this simply by the rebuke, Be quiet and come out of him. The crowds wondered about Jesus, His message, and His power over the demonic realm, but the demon knew exactly who Jesus was—the Holy One of God—a title that Simon Peter also used of Jesus (Jn 6:69).

4:38-40. Jesus’ authority also extended to physical illness. As He had done with the demon, Jesus rebuked the fever, and Simon Peter’s mother-in-law was immediately healed. As a result, word of Jesus’ authority over sickness spread through Capernaum. He laid His hands on many people with various diseases, healing all of them.

4:41. As He healed the physical diseases of many people in Capernaum, Jesus also cast out more demons. This leaves the strong impression that demons were able to cause some diseases. As with the demon in the man in the synagogue (vv. 33-36), the demons identified Jesus as divine. Jesus rebuked the demons for revealing that He was the Messiah because they were attempting to assert control over Him by revealing who He was before the appropriate time.

| LUKE 5:17-26

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to return and become one of his father’s hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad’s farm had enough to eat. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the

younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (as he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, and sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves). Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:24. This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes (Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day) displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2). How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. Now he, the precious treasure for which the father hunted, is home. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven. How He does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love He shows. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven's citizens are repentant sinners.