

Title: Faithful in Doubt: Trusting Christ When He Does Not Meet Our Expectations

Sermon Summary: Drawing from Matthew 11, this sermon examines the moment when John the Baptist, imprisoned and facing death, sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether he truly is the promised Messiah. Using this account as a lens, the pastor explores how even the most faithful and Spirit-filled believers can experience doubt, disappointment, and unmet expectations of God. The sermon challenges the congregation to examine the preconceived ideas they bring to their understanding of Jesus, warning against measuring Christ by personal standards rather than by scripture. Through the contrast between John's austere, separated lifestyle and Jesus's engagement with sinners and outcasts, the pastor illustrates how our own standards and hurts can distort our perception of who Christ is and how he works. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to a faith that holds fast to God's goodness even when circumstances are painful, confusing, or seemingly unfair, trusting that God is working all things toward his purposes.

Key Points:

- Believers often approach Jesus with preconceived ideas shaped by upbringing, culture, and personal experience, which can create barriers to truly knowing him
- John the Baptist, though filled with the Holy Spirit from birth and the forerunner of Christ, experienced genuine doubt about Jesus while imprisoned, demonstrating that doubt does not disqualify faithful people
- Jesus responded to John's doubt not with condemnation but by pointing to his works and by publicly honoring John before the crowd
- The contrast between John's lifestyle of separation and Jesus's engagement with sinners reflects a real tension in how people define holiness, and believers must be careful not to impose their personal standards of godliness onto others
- Disappointment with God often arises when Christ does not perform according to our expectations, whether in answered prayer, personal protection, or how he treats those we care about

- Satan uses unmet expectations, hurt feelings, and personal loss to spin our thinking away from trust and toward bitterness or abandonment of faith
- The antidote to doubt and disappointment is a posture of praise, thanksgiving, and prayer, continually returning to what God has promised rather than what we have assumed
- True kingdom living requires actively seeking the kingdom rather than passively waiting for God to make life comfortable
- Believers are called to see others through God's eyes rather than through the lens of personal expectation or judgment
- John the Baptist remained faithful unto death, even amid his questions, and his story encourages believers to wrestle honestly with doubt while ultimately surrendering to God's sovereignty

Scripture Reference:

- Matthew 11:1-19, which records Jesus sending out the twelve, John the Baptist's inquiry from prison about whether Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus's response pointing to his works, and his discourse honoring John while rebuking the unresponsiveness of that generation
- Hebrews, referenced in relation to Christ taking on flesh and experiencing every human temptation and trial so that he can fully identify with human suffering
- 1 Thessalonians 5, referenced regarding the call to rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances as God's will for believers in Christ Jesus
- Romans 8, referenced in the teaching that God works all things together for good for those who love him
- 1 John, referenced regarding the spirit of antichrist denying that Jesus came in the flesh
- Mark 6, referenced for the account of John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution at the request of Herodias through her daughter

Stories:

- John the Baptist's miraculous birth to the elderly Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, and the moment when Mary visited Elizabeth and the unborn John leaped in the womb at the presence of Mary and the unborn Jesus
- John the Baptist's ministry in the wilderness, his call to repentance and

baptism, his confrontation of the Pharisees, and his baptism of Jesus at which the Spirit descended like a dove

- John the Baptist's imprisonment by Herod Antipas after John publicly rebuked Herod for taking his brother's wife Herodias, and John's eventual beheading when Herodias used her daughter's dance and Herod's rash promise to demand John's head on a platter
- The account of Peter's miraculous release from prison by an angel in the book of Acts, used to illustrate that Jesus had the power to free John but chose not to
- A personal illustration about growing up not being allowed to go to Shakey's Pizza because it served alcohol, used to illustrate how rules of upbringing shape our judgments of others
- A personal reflection on applying the golden rule in marriage and discovering that treating a spouse the way one wants to be treated does not always meet the spouse's actual needs, used to illustrate the limits of expectation-based relationships
- A description of Amish community life and values, used to help the congregation picture the kind of separated, humble, plain lifestyle that John the Baptist embodied