

# 6 Doubt Dismantlers - Rev Donald M Macleod

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Date: 22 March 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back to God's Word and to the chapter we had there, Matthew chapter 11. Matthew 11 and back to the text we had there, looking at the interactions between John the Baptist's disciples and Jesus.

As you see, perhaps you noted the title for today's sermon is Six Principles, Six Ways to Dismantle Doubt. When doubt, brothers and sisters and friends, when doubt comes into our minds, often it's accompanied with shame, isn't it? When you have doubts about what you believe or doubts about some aspect of who God is or what God has done, almost always there's shame mixed in with that doubt. Sometimes we're worried even the very thoughts of doubt themselves are sin. Now, doubts can become sin if we dwell on the doubt, and if we don't try and remedy the doubt, it can become sin. But doubt itself comes and goes. Doubts arise, and we see in our text today in John 11 that doubts often can come even from times of great distress. We'll see that more in a second. Of course, the doubt here today comes from John the Baptist, a servant of God, a beloved servant of God, a beloved prophet, one who saw and knew the Savior, and yet here we see, and we'll see in detail, John the Baptist with his doubts.

Of course, the context here is John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. He's been imprisoned. I won't go through it today, but just for the background, of course, John was calling out the heinous, incestuous, and other various complicated sins, of course, of the leader of Herod, and from that, poor John was cast into prison. That's a whole different sermon for a different day, but John's in prison. John, be in mind, prison then is not a prison we think about. John is in a dungeon, more than likely, and he is suffering in this dungeon. We can be certainly sure of that. And from his prison, John seems to be having the beginnings of some doubt as to the veracity and the reality of Jesus being the Messiah they have been waiting for. Now, there's some here, perhaps, thinking, oh, it doesn't sound good. That doesn't sound right. Surely you can't be saying John the Baptist had doubts. When I first started preaching, I was 17, and funny enough, I don't know if it was in Barvis or in Calanish. I think about being Calanish, I remember preaching on this text, and I preached a very bold sermon, but John the Baptist definitely didn't have doubts. Strong Christians don't have doubts. I didn't say that, but that was the summary of my sermon, and man, I repent quite through that sermon now. Praise the Lord for his growth in our lives, but John the Baptist, I couldn't countenance the fact that John the Baptist could have doubts. When you follow the text and see the text, and some will say, well, no, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to help argue their doubts and solve their doubts. It's not in the text. It's not in the text. Here we see John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, from his prison cell, from his dungeon cell, but his doubts are rising in his mind. There are worries arising in John's mind, and he sends his disciples to Jesus to say, is it you? Are you truly the Messiah we've been waiting for?

Just these six principles then, very simply, to help us when doubts come to us. How does Jesus answer the doubts of John, and how can this help us when doubts come to our minds, brothers and sisters? First of all, first principle we see in verse 2 and verse 3, doubt can be expressed, and doubt can be tackled head on. Okay? Doubt can be expressed, and doubt can be tackled head on. Look what happened. We're told in verse 2 that John has heard from his prison cell about the miracles of Jesus, the deeds of the Christ, verse 2. He heard about the miracles, the work of Jesus, and from that he sends word by his disciples. Why? Why does John hear about the works of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus, and from that he then begins to have doubts? Is John doubting the miracles? No. It's not the miracles John is doubting. The problem John has, we'll see in a second, is that Jesus was doing, you could say, in John's mind, the wrong miracles.

[ 5 : 30 ] Jesus was doing the wrong miracles. The minister from Tulsa has gone very left field until the last we heard him. What do we mean? The wrong miracles. What was John looking for? Or who

was John looking for?

John, of course, we see the question he asks Jesus. He's looking for the Messiah, the one who is to come. And of course, in the teaching of the day and the thought of the day when the Messiah would come, what would the primary miracle of the Messiah be? Healing the blind? Healing the lame? Raising the dead?

No. What was the primary miracle, the primary duty the Messiah would enact? According to the thought of the day, the Messiah would come and would free the people from the oppression of Rome.

He would free them, free his people from the overbearing evil of the empire that had subjugated them for a year. And the teaching of the day was, and we have it there, we know it, the teaching of the day was, the Messiah would come and would rescue his people from their captors.

Jesus has begun his public ministry. And there's no word of this rescue. There's no great rescue from the Romans. Instead, Jesus is travelling town to town, healing, teaching, preaching.

[ 7 : 01 ] In short, John's doubt is stemming from the fact that he is, it seems, disappointed and it seems disillusioned. This is not what was supposed to happen according to the teaching and thinking of the day.

As John then, we see, is slightly worried. The worry begins, the doubt begins. But maybe, just maybe, this is not the Messiah we've been waiting for.

How can John think that way? John, the Baptist, the prophet from God, how can he be wrong? A prophet he might be, but brothers and sisters and friends, John the Baptist was a man.

And all of us, all of us, not one of us escapes the fact we are all swayed and influenced by the day we live in. We think we're not.

We all think we're so different to the generation before us. But generations in the future will look back at us and see how we were influenced by the world we live in.

[ 8 : 04 ] The way we think, the way we act, the way we understand God's word. We are influenced by the day we're in, the age we're in. It's the reality of living in a fallen world.

And John the Baptist, we see his influence having crept into his mind. Are you the one? Are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another?

But John doesn't keep these thoughts to himself, does he? He doesn't keep the doubts to himself and letting the doubts fester. No, John has his doubts. And the first thing he does is he sends out the disciples to go and to ask Jesus.

John, quite simply, expresses his doubt. He takes his doubt straight to Jesus. Quite literally for John. He takes his doubts straight to Jesus. He says, Jesus, I'm having these worries, these thoughts.

Help. Is it you? Can I trust you? Are you the one who is the saviour? Brothers and sisters, doubts can be expressed.

[ 9 : 12 ] The Lord, we'll see in a second, the Lord is able to both hear and receive our doubts, to handle our doubts. And to answer our doubts.

The issue often comes when we keep doubts to ourselves. We think, well, I can't express these doubts because my brothers and sisters will think less of me for having these thoughts. Surely a Christian like me shouldn't be having these worries.

Shouldn't be having these doubts. John the Baptist. John the Baptist can say, I'm John the Baptist. I'm a prophet from God. I can't be doubting. But no. He sends his disciples straight away to Jesus to share bluntly and clearly the doubt he is having.

Are you the one who is to come? Or should we wait for someone else? The first tactic we have is to express our doubts to Jesus like John does.

The second reminder, the second tactic is to remind ourselves that doubts can never be taken at face value.

[ 10 : 16 ] Very briefly, doubts can never be taken at face value. On face value, if you were to hear the disciples of John come to Jesus, you'd think, well, John.

John doesn't believe anymore. John must be struggling. Why is John thinking this way? How can John who baptized Jesus, John who witnessed the triune glory of Jesus' baptism, How can this man now be doubting?

What's happened to John? How can John's faith be so small? And like all things, brothers and sisters and friends, context is needed.

Doubts, genuine doubts, never come just from a vacuum, do they? Doubts don't just arise by themselves. Not always. Hardly ever. Doubts come from situations in our lives, don't they? Things that happen to us, things we go through. There is where the doubts come in. John the Baptist is in prison. About to lose his life. Not long after this.

[ 11 : 23 ] And he's in prison. And he's hearing. Remember, he hasn't seen the miracles. He's hearing about these things. And he is worrying. And he's in prison. And his doubt is growing.

And he's in prison in a dungeon. And his worry is growing. And you see the place where his doubt is coming. Brothers and sisters, the circumstances of our life often, often feed into our doubts and our concerns.

Let's be honest. If we're very honest of ourselves, there's not one of us. Maybe there is. Maybe there's a few brothers and sisters here. And you're strong in these areas. But most of us, when hard times seem to surround us.

And some of us, you've gone through impossible times. I'm not saying you've doubted the reality of Jesus or his love for you. But I'm saying, as then the questions come in, why is this taking place? How can this be happening? What is the Lord's purpose in this? Doubts can be expressed and doubts should be expressed to Jesus. Doubts never take from that face value.

[ 12 : 34 ] Always ask yourself, where is this doubt coming from? What is causing me to have this doubt? Thirdly, in verse 4, we see that doubts do not daunt Jesus.

Our doubts do not daunt Jesus. So look at verse 3. They've come to him. They've asked Jesus a question from John. Is it you? Is it you to come?

Or shall we look for another? Verse 4. And Jesus answered them, go and tell John. What does Jesus say?

Go and tell John. John, you're a useless prophet. What's happened to you, John? You were once so strong. You baptized me.

You heard the fabric. You saw the spirit. You were there. John, you prophesied and you preached and you taught and you called out the lack of true faith in God.

[ 13 : 32 ] How can you now be such a useless prophet? John, I cannot bear these thoughts. I cannot bear these doubts.

John, how dare you? What does Jesus say? Is there anger? Is there wrath? Of course not. How does Jesus respond to the doubts of John?

Jesus answered them, go and tell John what you hear and see and so on. Jesus answers the doubts of John in a way that will truly speak to John's heart.

We'll see that more in a second. Brothers and sisters, our doubts, they eat us up inside sometimes. They assail us. They overpower us sometimes.

I know there are some Christians here and you cannot relate to any of this. Praise the Lord for that. Seriously. We praise the Lord for that. But for the rest of us who have battled doubts and worries all our journey, you know yourself.

[ 14 : 36 ] What it feels like. You're full of them and they hurt. You think, I can't be having these thoughts, these doubts, these worries. I shouldn't be. I can't go to Jesus with this.

I can't pray about this because I should know better. I should be better. And we keep it to ourselves. Brothers and sisters, our doubts do not daunt Jesus.

Look at the care. Look at the gentle nature of the way that Jesus takes the doubts of John and responds to them. Before we see the response of Jesus, I'll jump down very briefly, verses 7 down to verse 11.

Just that section. I won't go through it again. But look how Jesus, after Jesus gives the answer to John's disciples, look how Jesus spends time to speak about John.

To speak so well about John. Jesus doesn't say, don't be like that prophet. That washed up, imprisoned, failed prophet who dare doubt me.

[ 15 : 36 ] Jesus takes the time to remind the people. First of all, the preciousness of who John is. The power of who John was. And the gifting he had.

Jesus does not spend the time to tear John down. Because John's doubts, John's worries, did not begin at once at all.

To cause Jesus problems. To give Jesus worry. Why? Because Jesus, our dear sister, he is able to both hear and handle our doubts.

Sometimes, when doubts come, we can't even share it with one another, can we? We feel we can't. And just a word to our friends here on our line.

This sermon is mostly, of course, to the believers here today. But if you have questions, genuine questions about the Bible, about who Jesus is, you can question us. We're not a cult.

[16:40] Here's what separates cults from ourselves. A cult says, don't ask, don't look, don't touch. We say, ask us. Delve into God's word.

Study it for yourself. Compare it. Contrast it. Do what must be done. Dig into it. Pardon me. God is able to defend himself against the world's doubts and questions.

His word is able. He is able. Jesus does not bring down John. Jesus does not attack John.

Jesus hears John's doubts and begins to answer John's doubts. How does he do so? First of all, Jesus offers John sources of proof, we could say, in verse 4.

Jesus answered him, go and tell John what you see and what you hear. Sometimes, brothers and sisters and friends, sometimes seeing is believing. Quite simply, John is told, Jesus tells the disciples, his John's disciples, first and foremost, go and tell John what you have seen and what you have heard.

[17:49] Of course, John's in prison. He has not seen the miracles. He has not experienced them. He hasn't seen those who have had the miracles done to them. John's just heard second or third hand about this.

Jesus says, go and tell John what you have seen, what you have heard. Brothers and sisters, look to your own life.

You have doubts arising in your hearts and minds. Look to your own history. Look to your own story. See how the Lord has taken you from where you were to where you are now. Think through all the times the Lord has heard your prayers and answered them.

Think through all the ways the Lord has been good to you and shown that goodness to you through his word and through his people. Seeing is believing. Hear and see. Think of other Christians you know, brothers and sisters you know who are close to you, and how the Lord has worked in their lives.

And take your doubt and contrast it to what you see the Lord has done before in you and in others. Think of the Psalms. The psalmist, every time the psalmist are thrown into doubt and into worry, the psalmist again and again always seem, they always seem to look back to how God has acted and how God has worked in the past.

[19:09] One of many, many examples. Psalm 143 verse 5. How is doubt dismantled?

Well, the first way it can be dismantled is by looking at the proof. Look at your life. Look at the story of your salvation. Gradual or quickly as it might be. Look back to your journey with the Lord so far. Look to the journey of other believers and know that God has not left you before. He will not leave you now. But Jesus carries on.

Jesus points out to the, you could say, the real results of his ministry. Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight.

The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor have good news preached to them. The blind are truly now seeing.

[20:16] The lame are truly now walking. Again, brothers and sisters, think back of your life. You once had no care for him, had no love for him, had no time for him.

And something happened to your life. He brought you from there to where you are now. And take your doubt and take it back to that point and say, he was able to do that for me.

And that for others, other brothers and sisters. Therefore, my doubt, whatever it might be, my worry, my concern, whatever it might be, he is able to both to hear it, to handle it, but also to work on removing it from me.

But what's Jesus really saying here? What's Jesus really doing here? Yes, he is telling the factual truth of his ministry. But really, Jesus here is pointing to the ultimate way we can dismantle doubt. Jesus is pointing back to the word. So John's asked the question, how do we know it's you? Should we look for someone else? Jesus has done the one thing, the only thing John needs to see.

[21:34] Jesus, in his answer here, is telling John to go back to the word of God. See, Jesus is not just giving a list of what he's done, his miracles.

Jesus is here quoting scripture. He's quoting two passages joined together, Isaiah 32.3 and Isaiah 35.5, I believe.

Two passages joined together. What do these two passages mean? What's the context of these passages? These are passages that talk about the work of the Messiah when he would come. Do you see now where Jesus is taking this? John's saying, are you him? Are you the Messiah? Are you the one we're waiting for? And Jesus is saying, John, your doubts come from your misunderstanding on who the Messiah is.

What is the work of the Messiah according to the Old Testament? According to Isaiah 32.3, Isaiah 35.5 and other passages. When the Messiah came, he would do what?

[ 22 : 40 ] According to the prophets. He would give sight to the blind. Hearing to the deaf.

He would help those who are lame to walk. He would cleanse the lepers. And he would preach the good news. The ultimate way, the overall final way that Jesus answers the doubt of John is, he takes John back to Scripture.

He says, John, look how the Messiah has been talked about and prophesied about. And see what I have done and compare it to how God said the Messiah would act.

And look for yourself. The full list of the work of the Messiah I have ticked. Action after action.

Evidence after evidence.

See, by quoting Scripture to John, Jesus is doing two things. First of all, Jesus is gently correcting John's mistaken theology.

[ 23 : 51 ] He has reminded John here from Scripture what the Messiah would do. The Messiah's first and primary role is not to conquer the empire, not to rescue his people from political oppression.

His primary role, according to the prophets, would be the healing, the help, the preaching of the good news.

And secondly, by quoting these verses, Jesus quite simply affirms and reaffirms to John that, yes, I am the Messiah.

Jesus uses his word to reaffirm to John that he is the one. John hopes. John thinks he is, but isn't sure anymore. Jesus says, John, I am him.

I am the Messiah. The prophets have told you so. God in his word has reassured you so. Therefore, John, go back to the word.

[ 24 : 50 ] See what the word says. And be assured and reassured by it. The ultimate way. Yes, look to your own lives. Yes, look to the lives of brothers and sisters.

The ultimate way is to spend time back in the word. The sad trick of the enemy is when doubts often come to us, the last thing we want to do is to pray and read his word.

But primarily, when doubts arise, we take the doubts to God's word. We take the doubts to God himself in prayer. Take the doubts to brothers and sisters and sit and pray and read God's word together.

We are family after all. We should be able to do that. And have no worries. But the greatest doubts, brother or dear sister, you can have, God's word is able to hear it, to handle it, to tackle it.

And God, working through his word, is able to remove that doubt from you. John hears the answer of the Lord, and we know that shortly.

[ 26 : 00 ] Maybe that's the only thing that's after this. John, of course, loses his life. But John hears, and John has given an answer for his doubts. You might come to you and say, well, my doubt's too big.

You know, you've no idea. You've no idea how big my doubt is. You have no idea how complicated or worrying my thoughts are, my doubts are. We're not greater than the power of God, I assure you. Dear Christian, if you haven't yet taken it to the Lord, take it to him. If you haven't yet shared it with a fellow brother and sister, share it with a brother or sister. We're family together. The Lord is able to hear, to handle, and to remove your doubt from you.

Just two verses from that. A lovely hymn here to remind us that in doubts we have our Savior.

Christ, the sure and steady anchor in the fury of the storm, when the winds of doubt blow through me, and my sails have all been torn.

In the suffering, in the sorrow, when my sinking hopes are few, I will hold fast to the anchor. It shall never be removed. Christ, the sure and steady anchor, when the tempest rages on, when temptation claims the battle, and it seems the night has won.

[ 27 : 23 ] Deeper still then goes the anchor, though I stand justly accused. I will hold fast to the anchor. It shall never be removed.

