

# JOHN THE BAPTIST DOUBTED JESUS

Luke 7:18-35; Matthew 11:2-19

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Jesus and John the Baptist

**Key-location:** Region of Capernaum

### Key-repetitions:

- Questions asked: John the Baptist sent two disciples to ask Jesus a question, and they asked the question (Lk 7:19-20); Jesus asked the crowd six questions about John the Baptist (Lk 7:24-27); Jesus asked to what could he compare the people of his generation (Lk 7:31).
- Jesus' actions: he cured, gave sight (Lk 7:21); spoke to John the Baptist's messengers (Lk 7:22); spoke to the crowd about John the Baptist and asked the crowd questions (Lk 7:24-28).
- Comparisons: Jesus asked how he could compare the people of his generation (Lk 7:31); Jesus compared his generation to shouting children who could neither agree to dance nor cry (Lk 7:32); John the Baptist neither ate bread nor drank wine and was accused of having a demon; while Jesus, the Son of Man, came eating and drinking and was accused of eating and drinking too much, and of socializing with tax collectors and sinners (Lk 7:33-34).
- Greatness of John the Baptist: prophet (Lk 7:26); more than a prophet (Lk 7:26); the one Prophet Malachi wrote about (Lk 7:27); greater than any person who has ever lived (Lk 7:28); John the Baptist is the Elijah who was to come (Mat 11:14).

### Key-attitudes:

- John the Baptist's doubts about Jesus.
- Jesus' compassion for the needy.
- Jesus' admiration for John the Baptist.
- Jesus' hostility toward religious leaders.

### Initial-situation:

During the second year of Jesus' ministry, his popularity with the people grew; however, religious leaders began their opposition. Jesus selected twelve disciples and taught them the rules for his Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. They left the mountainside, went to the city of Capernaum, and Jesus continued his ministry.

Jesus healed the sick servant of a Roman centurion without going to the centurion's house. Jesus entered the village Nain and met a funeral procession of a widow's only son. Jesus touched the coffin, and told the dead man to get up. The dead man sat up. Then Jesus gave him back to his mother.

**Initial-problem:**

The disciples of John the Baptist visited John in prison and told him about all the things Jesus was doing. John sent two of his disciples to the Lord to ask the question, "Are you the one we have been expecting or should we expect someone else?"

**Final-situation:**

Jesus told the crowd, "John the Baptist didn't eat bread nor drink wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'This man eats and drinks too much. He's even a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' Opinion polls don't count; wisdom is proved right by what her children do."

**BIBLE STORY**

The disciples of John the Baptist visited him in prison and reported all the things Jesus was doing. John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord the question, "Are you the one we have been expecting or should we expect someone else?"

The messengers went to Jesus and said, "John the Baptist sent us to ask you, 'Are you the one we have been expecting, or should we expect someone else?'"

For the next few hours, Jesus cured many from diseases, sicknesses, evil spirits, and he gave sight to many blind people. Jesus then told John the Baptist's messengers, "Go back and report to John what you saw and heard: the blind are now able to see, the lame can walk, lepers are cured, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life, and the good news is preached to the poor. God will bless the person who doesn't reject me because of what I do."

John the Baptist's messengers left. Jesus spoke to the crowd about John, "Who did you go out into the desert to see? Was he like tall reeds blown about by the wind? Who did you go out to see? Was he a man dressed in fine clothes? No, people who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury live in palaces. But who did you go out to see? Was he a prophet? Yes, I tell you that he was more than a prophet. The prophet wrote about him, 'I'll send my messenger ahead of you, who'll prepare your way before you' (*Mal* 3:1; *Lk* 7:18-27).

"I tell you, John the Baptist is greater than any person who has ever lived; yet the person who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist" (*Lk* 7:28). All the prophets and the Law prophesied up to the time of John the Baptist. And if you're willing to accept it, John the Baptist is the Elijah who was to come. (*See Mal* 4:5.) He who has ears, let him hear" (*Mat* 11:13-14).

The majority of the people had heard John the Baptist's words and had been baptized by him. But the Pharisees and scholars in the Law of Moses had not been baptized by John.

Jesus asked, "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and shouting to one another, 'We played wedding music, but you didn't dance; we sang a funeral song, but you didn't cry.'

“John the Baptist neither ate bread nor drank wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘This man eats and drinks too much. He’s even a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ Opinion polls don’t count; wisdom is proved right by what her children do” (Lk 7:29-35; Mat 11:16-19).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What question did John the Baptist have for Jesus?
2. Why was John confused about who Jesus was?
3. How did Jesus answer John’s question?
4. What questions did Jesus ask the people about John?
5. What people are greater than John the Baptist?
6. What kind of doubts do people today have about God?
7. What can we learn from John’s question and Jesus’ answer that will help us deal with our doubts about God?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Spiritual doubts can be resolved by taking them to Jesus and searching the Bible.** Jesus had compassion for John the Baptist’s doubts (Mat 11:2-19). Jesus answered John’s doubts by pointing to his acts of healing, raising the dead, and preaching good news to the poor. These actions gave evidence to Jesus’ identity. Prophet Isaiah said that the Messiah would do these very acts (Isa 35:5-6; 61:1).
2. **Problems that continue for long periods of time without a solution in sight tend to provoke doubts.** John the Baptist was in prison for almost a year because he told the truth. John didn’t see Jesus freeing the faithful from Roman injustice. John began to have doubts regarding Jesus (Mat 11:3).
3. **Jesus’ followers have greater privileges than any Old Testament hero.** Jesus affirmed that nobody was greater than John the Baptist, but that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he (Lk 7:28). Among the prophets of the Old Testament, no one is greater than John, who was chosen as Christ’s immediate forerunner. John spoke about Jesus and he revealed him to the world. Jesus’ followers, who have all the privileges of being God’s children, are greater than any member of the Old Covenant.

4. **People who refuse to examine their ideas and actions in the light of God's truth will find compelling reasons to do or believe whatever suits their purposes.** The teachings of both John the Baptist and Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The religious leaders criticized John the Baptist because he fasted and drank no wine. They criticized Jesus because he ate heartily and drank wine with tax collectors and social outcasts (Mat 11:18-19), and they accused Jesus of being on the same team with the prince of demons (Mat 9:34; 12:24).

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to talk to God in prayer about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell

God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they have doubts similar or different than John the Baptist.
- Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.
- How the story helps them face personal life-issues.
- How the story helps them to know God better.