

The Pressing Problem

by Hyman Appelman

The sermon addresses the pressing problem of doubt and uncertainty in the face of adversity, and offers hope and assurance through the power and provision of JESUS.

Scripture: Isaiah 51:1, Luke 7:19, Luke 12:32, John 14:6, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:32

Topics: "Doubt And Faith", "Jesus Christ"

Description

Hyman Appelman preaches on the story of John the Baptist sending his disciples to Jesus to inquire if He is the Messiah. Just like John, we often face temptations and doubts about the person, passion, power, and program of Jesus Christ, which can undermine our faith and vitality. Despite our failures, insufficiencies, inactivity, and impatience, we are encouraged to turn to Jesus, the Rock of Ages, who offers help, stability, and assurance in times of trouble and doubt. Through examining Jesus' credentials, including His atonement, resurrection, and the testimony of believers, we find the answer to our doubts and the power to overcome challenges.

Transcript

"And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to JESUS, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then JESUS answering said unto them, go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." (Luke 7:19-23).

THIS is the present, persistent problem for us, as it was the personal, pressing problem for John.

We, too, are beset by the temptations of Satan to doubt the person, the passion, the power, the program of the Lord JESUS CHRIST. That is and always has been one of the devil's tricks for undermining the vigor, the virtue, the vitality, the vision of GOD's people. May we also find in this interchange hope and help in this day and time.

John had done his very best. JESUS said so: "For I say unto you, among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." John had failed, seemingly.

He had given himself unstintedly, abandonedly, sacrificially. He had refused complaint or compromise. He had faced the mighty with the same unswerving condemnation, and challenge to repentance that he had pressed upon the hearts of the soldiers and the common folks. His very truthfulness, his very faithfulness, his very sincerity, had gotten him in trouble. He was imprisoned, out of the running. Immured in the danksome dungeon, his faith began to fail. Now he had heard of the preaching, of the works, of the claims of JESUS. Perhaps day by day he had expected the help of this Man Who said He was the Messiah. The help did not materialize. He questioned in his own heart until finally, almost in desperation, he sent his disciples to JESUS. Doubt is no sin. We are so constituted psychologically, physically, mentally, spiritually that we do not seem to be able to command a hundred per cent faith. There are many causes for our doubtings. Insufficiency is one of them. We face the mighty task of building up our own life in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We confront the stupendous undertakings of building up the church, advancing the kingdom, winning the lost. We lack wisdom, physical strength, financial support, most of all spiritual power. Our very insufficiency creates within us questions and problems, doubts and misgivings. Inactivity is another fertile ground from which spring the demons of unbelief, of lack of faith.

Shunted aside by illness or by some other untoward incident so prevalently common in everyone of our lives, stretched out on our backs, or in some other way incapacitated from the drive of the duties devolving upon us, doubt perches upon our hearts like Poe's raven, croaking to us the bitter accents, "Nevermore, nevermore." Impatience is also a thriving plant growing the fruit of uncertainty and hesitation concerning the word and way of GOD. We are so anxious for things to

come to pass. We are so upset by delay of any kind. We are not ready to bide GOD's time.

Because we do not see what GOD sees, as GOD sees, Satan comes along to use delay to becloud our minds, bedim our hearts, benumb our souls.

We, too, in our humbler sphere of activities face John's condition. We, too, find ourselves imprisoned by forces over which we have no control. In our personal lives, in our homes, in our churches, in the busy work-a-day world, pressed on every hand, disturbed, discouraged, distraught, conflicting emotions, uncertainties, questionings, decisions, beset us from every direction. With the world in a turbulent, tumultuous uproar, the like of which no generation has ever had to face, with distractions, depressions, desolations upon every hand, with the tumultuous cacophony of conflicting suggestions bringing increasing disillusionment, we must have somewhere to turn, some rock upon which to stand.

In these verses of Scripture we have the key to the solution of the problems we face, the key that John found for the difficulties that confronted him. We have, first, the Appeal of Perplexity; second, the Answer by Power; third, the Application to the Present.

1. THE APPEAL OF PERPLEXITY

We have failed miserably, abysmally, horribly, in every avenue of life. Education has come to an impasse. Legislation has all but thrown up its hands over the crashed ruins at its feet. Science has gone into the war business, with the scientists of the nations recklessly competing with each other as to which can invent the most murderous weapons. Even the church has failed, with its many modernistic vaporizing, CHRIST-denying, Bible-destroying, Jew-baiting, hate-provoking preachers and teachers.

In so many of its branches the supposed church of the living GOD has joined the danse macabre of the devil's piping. Scores of pseudo religions have sprung up like poisonous mushrooms over all our land. From one end of this country to the other, gullible men and women are misled for profit by blind leaders of the blind, whose only purpose is to aggrandize self. The vast multitude is totally indifferent to the claims of CHRIST, to the things of the SPIRIT, to the will of GOD, to the problem of eternity. A tidal wave of infidelity, followed by intemperance, producing

impurity, is deluging America.

We need help, instant help, imminent help to compose our souls, to conquer our circumstances, to control our selves. We need this help as desperately as England needs men, machines, munitions to stave off the Hun. We need help, greater, wiser, more effective, more efficient than that so brazenly offered to us by our psychologists, philosophers, scientists, statesmen, diplomats, warmongers. We need help from a source that is unchanging and unchangeable, without variance or fluctuation, a source over which neither Satan nor men have any control. We need help that is sure and secure, steadfast and satisfying. To whom shall we go?

We, too, together with John, look up into the face of CHRIST and cry, "Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?" Is JESUS the Rock of Ages? Can we find in Him the stability that we so sadly need? Has He today, as He claims to have had 1900 years ago all power in Heaven and in earth? Can we trust Him with our selves, our souls, our services? Will He fail us, as all others and all else have so dreadfully failed?

2. THE ANSWER BY POWER

Let us go to this JESUS. Let us once more examine His claims and His credentials. What do we find? The cross is still there, rearing its gory glory splendor above the weaknesses, the hatreds, the brutality, the curse of man's inhumanity to man. We still have the blood-red, blood-written, blood-proved demonstration of GOD's love for all this sinning, dying, torn world. The atonement is finished. The debt has been paid. The way has been opened to the Throne of GOD's mercy. The resurrection is still a fact, a fact of history, a fact of experience. Joseph's tomb is still empty. The testimony of the disciples, above five hundred of them, is still "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." The myriads of Christians who have gone on before us bear witness with the myriads of Christians about us that JESUS CHRIST ever liveth to make intercession for us.

The blood still cleanses from sin. The HOLY SPIRIT still regenerates souls. There is pardon, and power, and peace to be found by accepting CHRIST as personal SAVIOUR. The peace of GOD which passeth all understanding is still GOD's bountiful gift to those who come to Him through the Lord JESUS CHRIST. Multitudes about us shoutingly verify this.

An incident happened in my seminary days that will illustrate most fortunately my point. We had a professor there, an old man, a brilliant man, a loyal man, a loving and lovable man, a Christian gentleman. One of his daughters married the son of a great Western layman. One afternoon this professor came to class. He sat down very heavily in his chair by his desk, placed his Bible and textbook before him, bowed his head in his hands, and led us to the throne of grace in the opening prayer of the session. Pronouncing the amen, he kept on sitting quietly, head bowed for long minutes. When he did lift his face, his eyes were suffused with unshed tears.

"Young gentlemen, young ladies," said this man of GOD, "my heart is very heavy this day. I have received some dreadful news. I do not feel quite up to lecturing to you, but I should like to read you a letter. It comes from the father of the man who married my daughter."

The doctor took the letter out of his breast pocket, opened it, and began to read. I do not remember all of it, but a portion of it will remain with me as long as there is a beating heart in my breast and a thinking mind in my head. It said something like this:

"J-, I have some dreadful news to pass on to you. I need your prayer help. You know I had two sons in the Naval Air Corps, both of them lieutenants. The day before yesterday they took off in one ship. Something happened. The ship crashed. They were both killed. The naval authorities wired to my son in Lower California. Without a moment's delay, this son picked up my daughter, and putting her in his own car, started as rapidly as he could to the San Diego Naval Base. As they were hurrying down the highway, a drunken driver swerved to pass a speeding car. He lost control of the wheel and crashed head on into the automobile of my children. Both of them were instantly killed.

J-, that is a dreadful double tragedy, aye, a quadruple tragedy, to happen to any man, but I want you to know it is still all right. The eighth chapter of Romans is still in the Bible."

By the time our teacher had finished the letter, we were all weeping.

Brethren and sisters, with all my heart that is what I am trying to tell you.

"JESUS is a Rock in a weary land,

And a shelter in the time of storm!"

Anchor your souls in the haven of rest. JESUS said, "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of GOD or whether I speak of myself." Step out upon the person of CHRIST. Close with the promises of GOD. Anchor your life on the Rock of Ages. The storms may come, the tempests may sweep, the rains may fall, the winds may lash; but he that builds his life on Calvary's Rock shall never perish.

Even in the hour of death we may have the assurance of the presence of CHRIST, the Son of GOD. We need it then. Some of us may never have personal acquaintanceship with very many of the sorrows, the heartaches, the sufferings of this life, but all of us must face the last enemy, death. Some of us may never bear many of the burdens, much of the heat, of the travail of earth below; but all of us will have to cross chilly Jordan. It is good to know that JESUS is the CHRIST, the Son of GOD, that He has walked before us, that He has come out victorious over death and the grave.

Some months ago this preacher preached one of the sermons at the great Southern Baptist Convention in Baltimore, Maryland. One early morning the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary group had its breakfast in one of the hotels. Dr. Scarborough, the great president of the seminary, addressed the gathered group at the end of the breakfast. He reminded us of the blessings of GOD upon our alma mater. He told us how it was entwined in the very fiber of his heart, blazoned on the burning anxiety of his soul. He told us of some of his sacrifices, of his hopes, of his aspirations for the school. Standing before us, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he bade us recall his own age, his own fatigue, and how soon he would have to drop the great load. He said:

"I am almost seventy. I believe I have done my part. By day and by night, at home and abroad, I have prayed, I have toiled, I have given of my heart's blood to the Baptists and to the school.

Perhaps very soon I shall have to lay my burden down. I shall have to go on up to be with JESUS. Before I go, I should like to know that the seminary is secure. I know reasonably well that I must go very soon."

He paused, bowed his head in silent meditation and prayer. When he looked up at us, the great heavy tears were chasing each other down his cheeks. "I do not want you to misunderstand, brethren and sisters," he said, "I am not talking about my death, primarily. I am not much concerned about it. I am not afraid to die. I have a through ticket." Again he grew silent, as with lowered head he stood before us. Once more he raised his eyes, and said, "I am not afraid to die, I have got a through ticket."

Each word dropped like fire into our souls. We thought of Calvary. We thought of CHRIST's torn body. We thought of His indescribable agony. We thanked GOD that we, too, had a "through ticket," written and signed in the Blood of the Lamb."

Beloved, whenever the devil assails us, whenever temptations beset us, whenever doubts torment us, let us hasten to the rock that is higher than we. Let us remember the cry of the prophet: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you." Let us go to the Book and to the testimony of Christian history. Let us once more meditate upon the works of JESUS through the ages that has passed. A thousand times over He has proved Himself to be He that should come, so that we need look for no other. But that is not all. We must bring it nearer to home, apply it to ourselves. Let us then finish with

3. THE APPLICATION TO THE PRESENT

There is, first, the application to our own personal lives. "Be not afraid, only believe," is GOD's word to us. "All things must work together for good to them that love GOD, to them who are the called according to His purpose." The tempest may lash us. Our cockleshell boats may be driven to and fro by the storms of life. The way may be dark, the hills high, the crosses heavy, the nights long; but "he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how

shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

There is the application to our church. It is the church of GOD, the church of CHRIST, the church of the Book, the church for the world, the church for men. It is the only bulwark against aggression. It is the only standard against unrighteousness. It is the only barrier against Satan. Today the church appears as though relegated to the back of things.

Every other institution and organization seems to have precedence over it, but there is another day coming. Of all the world, the church will survive the onslaught of time to share in the triumph of the Lord JESUS CHRIST. We may sacrifice for it. We may suffer for it. We may bleed for it. We may die for it, but the Word of GOD is secure. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

There is, last, the application to the whole world. If JESUS is the CHRIST, the Son of GOD, if we need look for no other, let us receive Him as our personal SAVIOUR and His blood and SPIRIT for the salvation of our souls. Let us be loyal to His kingdom, to His church, to His cause, to His commission. Let us, with all the passion of our living souls, before all men live the life that He would live were He in our shoes, in our places, in our homes, in our activities. Let us lift Him before the dying, judgment-bound, needy, troubled, shaken, hesitating, doubting, questioning, disturbed, disillusioned hearts, minds, souls, lives of men. We must and we shall. By receiving Him, by loving Him, by living Him, by lifting Him, we shall come to the full assurance of the fact that He is the One who was to come, and that neither now nor ever need we look for any other. GOD give us the grace to cast our all upon JESUS and to surrender our all to His holy will. Amen.

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