

Sermon Outline

“When Someone Doubts”

Jude 22 – C.J. Mahaney – March 13, 2011

The Reality of Doubt

1. In verse 22, Jude writes, “And have mercy on those who doubt.” It is reasonable to ask, who is doubting? And why are they doubting? The answer to these questions is found in the context of the letter, which reflects the three purposes for which it was written:
 - a. Verse 3 states Jude’s first purpose: to contend for the gospel, “for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” False teachers and false teaching was eroding the purity of the truth of the gospel.
 - b. Verses 20-21 state the second purpose: to contend for their hearts, “...build yourself up...pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God...”
 - c. Verses 22-23 lists the third purpose: to contend for others who had been adversely affected and influenced by the false teachers: those who had doubts about the gospel; those who became full participants in the false teaching and those who had been seduced to pursue fleshly desires.
2. The temptation to doubt is a common experience for all Christians. Too often, however, we are surprised and unprepared for this temptation. Why is doubt such a common experience among Christians?
 - a. We live in a fallen world.
 - b. The indwelling sin that remains in our hearts opposes faith and trust.
 - c. In our humanity, we are weak and frail.
 - d. There is an enemy of our soul, Satan, who is serious about attacking our faith. Like he did in the Garden of Eden, he is still whispering, “Did God really say that?”
 - e. In and outside the church, there exist false teaching and false teachers who want to deceive and shipwreck our faith.
 - f. We are not promised a full knowledge of God. Many things about God’s character and his ways in our lives remain a mystery.

“It seems as if doubt were doomed to be the perpetual companion of faith. As dust attends the chariot wheels so do doubts naturally becloud faith. Some men of little faith are perpetually enshrouded with fears; their faith seems only strong enough to

Sermon Outline

enable them to doubt. If they had no faith at all, then they would not doubt, but having that little, and but so little, they are perpetually involved in distressing surmises, suspicions, and fears. Others, who have attained to great strength and stability of faith, are nevertheless, at times, subjects of doubts. He who has colossal faith will sometimes find that the clouds of fear float over the brow of his confidence. It is not possible, I suppose, so long as man is in this world, that he should be perfect in anything; and surely it seems to be quite impossible that he should be perfect in faith ... I think I shall be quite safe in concluding this morning, that there are some here who are full of doubting and fearing. Sure I am that all true Christians have their times of anxious questioning. The heart that hath never doubted has not yet learned to believe ... Yes, there may be timid ones here, those who are always of little faith, and there may be also great hearts, those who are valiant for truth, who are now enduring seasons of despondency and hours of darkness of heart.” —Charles Spurgeon

Our Response to Someone Who Doubts

1. We are to respond to those who doubt with mercy. As the beginning of verse 22 states, *“And have mercy on those who doubt...”* (italics added). Therefore, how can we communicate and extend mercy to those who doubt?
2. *By remembering and acknowledging the mercy we have received:*
 - a. We deserved God’s punishment for our sin. Instead, God has lavished on us the richness of his mercy and saved us by his grace. Once objects of his wrath, we are now objects of his mercy (cf. Ephesians. 2:1-9).
 - b. But mercy isn’t exclusively past. Jude tells us to wait *“for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life”* (verse 21). Mercy awaits us when we enter our Savior’s presence at his throne of grace and mercy.
 - c. Those who are aware that they have received mercy in the past and are waiting for mercy in the future should be those who are eager to show mercy to those who have doubts.
 - d. Those who are not aware of mercy will be tempted to scorn the doubters, act self-righteously toward them and condemn the one who doubts.
3. *Help those who doubt understand the difference between doubt and unbelief:*
 - a. Unbelief is disbelief. It is a refusal to believe and a rejection of God’s Word. Doubt, in contrast, is an uncertainty, a questioning, and a wavering of faith.

Sermon Outline

- b. Those who doubt have weakened their faith but they have not abandoned their faith. They are struggling to trust God in a particular area of their lives. This is decidedly different from the unbelief that rejects God's Word.

"This distinction [between doubt and unbelief] is absolutely vital because it uncovers and deals with the first major misconception of doubt—the idea that we should be ashamed of doubting because doubt is a betrayal of the faith and a surrender to unbelief. No misunderstanding causes more anxiety and brings such bondage to sensitive people in doubt." — Os Guinness

4. Help them discern the nature of their doubts:

- a. In Jude, the doubts of these believers had two components to their doubts: theological (doubting the truth of the gospel) and moral (an appeal to sensuality and the flesh).
- b. In his recommended book *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt*, Os Guinness lists seven families of doubt: the doubts that come from ingratitude, a faulty view of God, weak foundations, lack of commitment, lack of growth, unruly emotions, and hidden conflict. These categories can be useful for helping our fellow believers to understand the root of their doubts.
- c. The most vulnerable to doubt are those who have endured severe and prolonged suffering. They are asking, "Why Lord? How long, oh Lord?" Because there is mystery in the ways of God, there are times when we must suspend judgment of what God is doing and simply trust that God who knows all things does all things with our good in mind. Charles Spurgeon once said, "When we cannot trace his hand, we must trust his heart."

5. Assure them of the gospel:

- a. To express mercy to those who doubt, we must remind them of the truths of the gospel Jude penned in verse 1b: "called" by God to redemption and sonship; "beloved in God the Father" and "kept for Jesus Christ" until that final day.
- b. We are vulnerable to doubt when we have not reminded ourselves of all that Christ has done on our behalf through his incarnation, sinless life, death and resurrection. We are vulnerable to doubt when we haven't been keeping ourselves in the "love of God" (verse 21a).

Sermon Outline

Conclusion

1. The doxology of this letter (verses 24-25) provides rock solid assurance in the midst of doubt. When our grip weakens, his never does! When we are wondering if we will make it, when can rest on the promise that God, in Christ, "is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless" before his throne on that final day.

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a care group to read the letter of Jude.
2. C.J. taught us that temptation to doubt is a common experience for all Christians. In what ways have you experienced doubt?
3. How does Jude 22 instruct us to respond to someone who doubts? How have others responded to doubt in your life? How has their response (either merciful or self-righteous) affected you?
4. C.J. shared that to communicate mercy we must start with our own hearts: by remembering and acknowledging the mercy we have received. How does applying this principle enable us to show mercy to those who doubt?
5. What is the difference between unbelief and doubt? How can helping someone who doubts to understand this difference bring hope and faith?
6. How can the assurance of the gospel convey mercy to those who doubt?

Sermon Outline

Sermon Outline