

## SM019 – The Doubtful Prophet

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, The Prophet, and it is taken from Matthew 11 and Luke 7:18-35. I hope you will follow along in your own Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, The Doubtful Prophet

### Part 1

High on the Judean plateau, to the east of the Dead Sea was a great hill over 3000 feet high. On this hill was a palace with many rooms, a lovely courtyard, a bath, and beautiful mosaic floors. The palace was protected by walls over 300 feet in length, 200 feet in width. It was built to protect the area from invaders from the south and east and it was also built to keep people inside its walls. This was the palace of Herod Antipas and inside his palace was a prison. Inside the prison, a well known man, sat. His name, John the prophet.

For months, John had been inside the prison of this palace-fortress complex known as Machaerus. He had plenty of time to think. He thought on the days of his preaching in Israel. He thought about how he had preached repentance and baptized thousands in preparation for the great day of the coming of the Messiah who would establish his kingdom and pour out his Spirit upon people.

God had revealed to John that a day would come would a man would be baptized and John would see the Spirit of God coming upon that man. When John saw that, he would know that that man was the Messiah. One day, Jesus of Nazareth approached John and asked to be baptized. Jesus was John's cousin and was a righteous man. John had heard stories about Jesus from his mother and knew that Jesus was special. When Jesus approached John, John felt a sense of unworthiness come over him and he asked Jesus to baptize him. But Jesus refused and said that it was necessary for John to baptize him. And when John did, the heavens opened, the Spirit of God came upon Jesus and John knew that this man was the Messiah.

But that seemed so long ago. After John saw the Spirit coming upon Jesus, John never spoke to him again. Jesus went away for weeks into the wilderness and when he returned John called out to him, "there is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." But Jesus did not come to him but

walked past him to some unknown destination. The next day Jesus walked by again and this time when he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God," two of his followers ran after Jesus and John never saw them again either.

But that was the way it was supposed to be. John had come to prepare the people for him. One day, one of John's followers came to him and said, "John, Teacher, the one that you baptized, the one that you said was Messiah he is now preaching and the multitudes are going away from you and to him." But John didn't mind that. He knew that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. He would faithfully preach as long as God gave him strength but he knew that the future lay with Jesus. Jesus would pour out his Spirit upon the people and would bring in the kingdom of God.

But now John was in prison, in the fortress of Herod Antipas, high on the hill of Machaerus. Herod had arrested John because John had called out Herod for his many sins. Herod would sometimes call John into his palace and speak with him. Herod knew that John was a righteous and holy man and he enjoyed speaking with him. But Herod would never release him and John languished in prison.

Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months. And still John sat in prison. Where was Jesus? What was he doing? Had not God told John that the one upon whom the Spirit rested would be the one who would pour out the Spirit upon his people? But where was this pouring out of the Spirit?

From time to time, some of John's followers would come to visit him in prison. They would tell him what they had heard about Jesus and the things he was doing. This would encourage John, but as time passed nothing seemed to change and John began to wonder.

"If Jesus is the Messiah then he would establish the kingdom of God. But if he came to establish the kingdom of God, then why was Herod still in charge and why was he still in prison?" And as the days passed, and as Herod Antipas seemed just as secure as ever in his palace, John continued to wonder.

One day, John was visited by two of his followers and John said, "I have a mission for you. I want you to go find Jesus and I want you to ask him this question, 'Are you the one we have been expecting, the one we have been waiting for? Or should we look for someone else?'"

John had to know. And although John had seen the heavens opened and had seen the Spirit coming upon Jesus and had heard the voice of God saying that Jesus was the king, he was now beginning to doubt those experiences and wonder about Jesus. Prisons can do funny things with the minds of people, and even with the minds of prophets. And as John sat in his cell for those long days and nights, doubt crept even into the mind of this great man.

And so the two men made the long trip, from the desert region to the south and east of Judea by the Dead Sea to the north of Judea and Samaria, to Galilee with its abundant rain and good crops. As they approached Galilee they started asking people where they could find Jesus. It seems everyone was asking about Jesus in those days and thousands were flocking to him to hear him teach and to be touched by his healing hand.

“Just follow the crowds and you’ll find him,” people said. One day, the two men followed a group of people who said they were going to see Jesus. They rounded a hill and their eyes were astonished. They saw hundreds, maybe thousands of people gathered and everyone seemed to be focused in one direction, in the direction of a man to whom sick people were brought. They had found Jesus and now they could deliver the message from John to him.

They worked their way through the crowd. It was not easy to get to him as so many wanted to see Jesus. The two looked around at the assortment of people vying for Jesus’ attention, and what a group of people they saw – these seemed to be the cast offs of society – the poor, the blind, the lame, lepers, deaf people, people with strange behavior as if they were possessed by evil spirits, and others who seemed beyond life and hope.

Finally, they reached Jesus and said, “Jesus, we are followers of John. John is in prison in Machaerus, in the fortress of Herod Antipas. Shortly after he baptized you and after people began to follow you, Herod arrested him because he preached against Herod’s sins. John has now been there for months, and, he is beginning to wonder. Are you the Expected One? Are you the one we have all been waiting for? Or shall we look for someone else?”

Jesus said nothing. He looked with compassion upon the two men and he thought about the day that John had baptized him and how John wanted Jesus to do the baptizing. John was a humble man. He was a great prophet. He was even greater than a prophet. Jesus was sorrowful that John was in prison, but had he not said that “in this way, the way of humility, the kingdom of God would be established in the world.”

Jesus turned away from John’s disciples. He did not send them away. He did not rebuke them, nor did he rebuke John for his moment of doubt in prison. Just at that moment someone else came up to Jesus, “Jesus, have mercy upon us. This is my brother and he is blind. Will you heal him so that he may see?”

And Jesus said, “I will,” and he placed his hands upon the man’s eyes and in the next moment the man backed up and opened wide his eyes and said, “I can see! I can see!” and the crowd around them roared their approval.

Then two men came up to Jesus. One of them said, “Jesus, will you have mercy upon us? I have not been able to walk very well since an accident that took away the strength in my legs many years ago.” Jesus turned to the other man and asked, “And what about you?” And the man who was dressed in rags, opened the folds of some of the rags and showed skin that had been ravaged by disease. The man said, “I want to be clean. I want to be healed of my skin disease.”

Jesus said, “I am willing to heal you both,” and with that word the men felt a surge of power go through them. The lame man could now walk correctly and the man with leprosy had new skin that was fresh and clean.

Then a scream rose up from the crowd several feet away. “He is gone! He is gone! My child is gone.” A mother with her sick child had been travelling to see Jesus but as she worked her way through the

crowd to get to Jesus she noticed that her child became weaker. She had stopped just a few yards and took one last look at him and when she realized that he was dead, she began to wail loudly with great grief.

Jesus looked at the John's two disciples who had come with their question. He nodded for them to follow and the crowd parted as the three of them walked to the weeping woman. Jesus knelt down beside the woman and gently took the child from her arms. He whispered something into the child's ears, and the child took a deep breath and opened his eyes. The child was alive again! Jesus had raised the child from the dead! The crowd began to shout its praise and a huge roar could be heard as news spread from person to person that Jesus had raised someone from the dead.

And then Jesus stood and preached. He preached about the kingdom of God. He told how the kingdom was not coming with a sword to kill but with seed to plant in the hearts of people. The kingdom was not coming to topple kingdoms with the weapons of men but to transform kingdoms with the weapons of God's Spirit, the kingdom was not coming to destroy enemies but it was coming to reconcile enemies and make new friends. The kingdom was coming to heal, and to forgive, and to restore.

When he finished his sermon, Jesus turned to John's followers and with a smile on his face said, "Now, go and report to John what you have heard and seen. The blind receive sight. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and these poor have the good news of God's kingdom preached to them. And tell John one more thing, "How blessed are those who do not stumble over me and how I bring in the kingdom of God."

The two men were astonished at what they had seen and heard and they went away with their hearts full of joy to tell John the good news. Jesus was the Expected One, and they need not look for anyone else.

## **Interlude**

Hello everyone, this is Jonathan Williams, the creator of Stories of the Master where we are retelling the story of Jesus and the stories he told.

Today's story, "The Doubtful Prophet" has troubled people. John the prophet was a great and mighty prophet, and as we shall see in the rest of the story Jesus said that he was greater even than a prophet. But if John was so great, why did he doubt, especially when he had seen the Spirit of God coming upon Jesus and heard the voice from heaven.

But I believe this story is important because it shows that even the best of us can go through struggles in life that are so deep and so dark that we lose sight of all that God has done for us and we doubt. But Jesus knows our doubts and our struggles and our fears and our confusion and he patiently works with our hearts to strengthen us in our weakness.

He showed the disciples of John that he was indeed the One that all should follow and that we need not look for anyone else.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak where we teach about life change, how to build a biblical worldview, and how to connect your story to the story of God's love for the world. Stories of the Master is a retelling of the life of Christ and the stories he told. We believe the world needs to hear it all again and we hope you will tell your friends about this ministry, that you will pray for us, and that you will even consider a gift to help us take his stories all over the world.

You can write to us at PO Box 90047 in San Antonio, TX 78209 in the U.S. That's Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in San Antonio, TX 78209. We would love to hear from you and learn how this ministry is blessing your life. You can also email us at this address: [stories@storiesofthemaster.com](mailto:stories@storiesofthemaster.com) and we will respond to you.

Our website, [storiesofthemaster.com](http://storiesofthemaster.com) has many other resources available for you – books, studies, and recordings of past broadcasts. We hope you will look us up on the web at [storiesofthemaster.com](http://storiesofthemaster.com).

Jesus has clearly shown the followers of John that he is the king of Israel and the Savior of the world. He has healed the sick, raised the dead, and preached good news to the poor. They have been sent away with indisputable proof and now Jesus is going to speak to the crowds about John the Prophet. Let's get back to our story and hear what he said.

## **Part 2**

As John's disciples made their way back through the crowd, Jesus began to preach again. He said,

"I want to talk with you about John the prophet. When you went out into the wilderness to see him, what did you go out to see? Did you think he would be like a weak reed, like the ones growing besides the banks of the Jordan River? You know what they are like. They bend to the force of the slightest breeze and clatter among themselves. Is that what you expected – someone just making noise and someone bending to the wind without strength?"

"When you went out into the wilderness to hear John preach what did you expect to see? Did you expect to see a man dressed in soft clothes? Those who wear soft clothes live in king's palaces."

"When you went out into the wilderness what did you expect to see? A prophet? Yes, and I tell you he is even more than a prophet. John is the one who fulfills the prophecy that says, "Behold, I send My messenger ahead of you who will prepare the way of the Lord."

"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer!"

All the crowd nodded in agreement and were saying, "Yes! John was God's prophet."

But then Jesus stunned the crowd with his next statement. He placed his hand upon the shoulder of an old man that he knew and loved and looked upon him and said, "And yet, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John!"

Jesus was silent and let that sink in and it is something that we should let sink into our hearts. Greater than John? John was the greatest prophet and even more than a prophet. He was the one commissioned by God to prepare the way for the Messiah and his kingdom. Yet, as great as John's ministry was, those who experienced the blessings of the kingdom, of being in the king's presence, of hearing him teach, of feeling his healing touch were even greater than John – and that includes you and me!

If you and I have entered into the kingdom of God – if we have received the touch of his forgiveness and the restoration into the family of God, no matter how small we are, even if we are the least, then we are the greatest, even greater than John, not because of who we are and what we do but because of who he is and what he does for us.

Some of you today who are listening may feel discouraged, insignificant, and worthless. Stop! Let Jesus speak to you and encourage your heart. You are not insignificant! You are not worthless! Jesus can change your life and what makes you special is not who you are but who he is and the fact that he loves you and wishes to reign as king in your life. John may have been the greatest prophet but even if you are the least in God's family you are greater than John!

Jesus resumed his message about John. He had to explain why he was letting John remain in prison. Jesus explained it this way:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force.”

The kingdom of heaven suffers violence? How could that be true? The kingdom of heaven was all-powerful! When the kingdom would come it would crush all opposing forces! How could it suffer violence? How could violent men take it by force like an army laying siege to a city and then taking it? How could the kingdom of heaven be weak?

But that was the mystery of the kingdom that Jesus brought! The kingdom of heaven did not come like a mighty warrior. The kingdom of heaven did not come like a giant boulder crushing everything in its way for if it did then what would be the result of the kingdom of heaven? Nothing would be the result – everyone would be crushed and everyone would be killed.

The kingdom of heaven, instead, came as a farmer sowing seed. It came as a servant washing feet. It came as a healer binding wounds. The kingdom of heaven came this way because people needed healing, washing, and restoration of their hearts. The kingdom of heaven came to save and in that process, evil, violent men stood opposed to it – like Herod Antipas who lived in luxury in his palace wearing his soft clothes. They might arrest the prophets of God like they did with John and like they would do with Jesus in the future. They might do their worst and kill the ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven, but in spite of the violence done to the kingdom, the kingdom would stand and the kingdom would prevail because it came to start a revolution like no other revolution – a revolution of the heart that would spill over into all relationships with friends and families and communities and nations and in this way the world would be transformed by the kingdom of heaven.

This was the vision of Jesus and this is what he set out to do. Jesus then said, “All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John,” meaning that the prophets and the law of Moses had pointed to his coming and the coming of the kingdom. This was now the priority of God – to get the message of the kingdom out into the world for all to hear.

But before Jesus went on to say more about the kingdom he had one more thing to say about John, “If you are willing to accept it, John the Baptizer, John the prophet in the wilderness is Elijah that the prophets said would come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

John was Elijah? How could that be? Jesus was not saying that John was literally Elijah. They were two different people, but John was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah. The Old Testament prophets had said that before the Lord returned to restore the kingdom to the earth he would send Elijah to prepare the way, and John, prepared the way for the Lord who was now bringing the kingdom of God into the world.

But Jesus knew that many would not believe him. He knew that they needed spiritual ears and so few had them. And so Jesus said to them:

“To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*,<sup>17</sup> and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’<sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent.<sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you.<sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you.”

These were hard words but they were words that so many of the people needed to hear for in spite of all that he did, most would not believe him. They loved the miracles but they did not like the kind of kingdom he brought. But some did!

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.<sup>26</sup> Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.<sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.

<sup>28</sup> “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

And what Jesus said to that crowd on that day, a word of severe warning if they did not repent, yet a renewed offer to come to him and lay down their burdens at his feet, is the same message he has for us. If we do not repent, we face the judgment of God. But if we do repent, if we come to Jesus, we can find rest and healing for our souls.

It was an eventful time for Jesus. He had been approached by the followers of John who came with a question – was he really the Messiah? And he sent them away with indisputable proof. They returned to John, still sitting in the prison of the Herod Antipas who was dressed in his fine clothes in his palace.

“Well,” John asked. “What did he say? Did we get it right?” And with great joy the followers of John told him everything that Jesus said and did on that day and John was at peace again. Jesus was indeed the One and they did not need to look for anyone else.

## **Ending**

Hello everyone, this is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have enjoyed today’s story about John, the great prophet, yet, a normal person like you and me and one who even had doubts at times. Yet isn’t it interesting how on this day when John’s friends came to Jesus with this question, on this day, Jesus said such great things about John. He was a prophet, he was greater than a prophet because he prepared the way of the Lord, and he was the fulfillment of the prophecy of the coming of Elijah.

What great words about John and if John’s followers, as they made their way back through the crowd heard Jesus say these things, then they could report them to John. What an encouragement that would have been!

Yet Jesus also said that even the least of us are greater than John because of the blessing of Jesus the Messiah that come to us. And he invites all, “come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. I hope you will come to Jesus and let him bless your life with forgiveness and peace and life.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God Speak where we teach the truth of God’s word for life change, a biblical worldview and to connect your story with the story of Christ’s love for you. Our desire to is help people all over the world connect their personal stories to the story of Christ’s love for them. Please pray for us and help us with your financial gifts to take these stories to a world that needs to hear about the Savior of mankind.

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My name is Jonathan Williams and I hope you have been blessed today and I look forward to you joining us next week for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master himself richly bless you.