

I'm sure that for many of us there have been times when our faith in God has been pushed to the limit.

So for example when you've had live through a terrible illness, seen a loved one suffer, or simply watched all the horrible things that go on in the world, and asked yourself why God would allow such awful things to happen.

You may have even doubted if he's there at all; and if he is does, he actually cares about what goes on?

In our Gospel reading we're told that after being arrested by King Herod, John the Baptist goes through his own season of doubt.

You see as God's messenger whose mission was to prepare people to meet Jesus, he now finds himself locked up in prison and awaiting execution because of his fiery preaching.

And it must seem a million miles away from his ministry in the wilderness where he baptised hundreds of people who'd flocked to hear him speak.

Well as result of his desperate situation John starts to doubt.

Verse 2 says: "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

You see John's message was to announce the arrival of God's King who was coming to overthrow his enemies.

So, for example in chapter 3 he says: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

You see Jesus is coming and when he does, he'll bring down everyone who opposes God and his people.

The only trouble is that when Jesus does arrive on the scene, he doesn't appear to be doing much in the axe wielding department.

And so, as John languishes in prison he's confused and wonders if he's made a mistake; because things haven't worked out how he thought they would.

And so, the doubts start to set in.

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

And it's a legitimate question isn't it because the Bible clearly teaches that a time is coming when Jesus will judge his enemies and put everything that's wrong with the world right.

You see the God's Kingdom that was introduced at his birth, will be fully established at his return.

But in the meantime, we wait; and until he does return, pain, suffering, and viruses, will still be a part of our experience.

You see at the moment we live sandwiched between; Christ's first coming as a suffering servant; and his return in the future as the victorious King, who will overthrow everyone and everything that opposes him.

But unfortunately, John doesn't see that, and he can't quite fathom out how Jesus can be *both* a triumphant king *and* a suffering servant who brings healing and forgiveness instead of judgement.

And so, as he languishes in prison, he thinks to himself if Jesus is God's king, why doesn't he just meat out his justice now, establish his Kingdom, and get me out of this prison cell!

And so, he starts to doubt and have question.

Now at this point I just want to say that doubt isn't wrong, and so we shouldn't beat ourselves up if we struggle with it; especially at a time like this.

After all John the Baptist boldly declared Jesus to be the Messiah; but now as he finds himself in this difficult situation he's confused.

And that happens sometimes doesn't it when things are tough, we start to doubt and find it hard to understand why God would allow certain things to happen.

So, listen to this:

Doubt is natural within faith. It comes because of our human weakness and frailty.

The Baptist Minister C.H. Spurgeon even said.

Some of us who have preached the word for years, and have been the means of working faith in others and of establishing them in the knowledge of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, have never the less been the subject of the most fearful and violent doubts as to the truth of the very gospel we have preached.

Now when the Bible talks about doubt it mainly focusses on believers, and that's very important, because you have to believe in something before you can doubt it.

Or as someone's said: You have to be committed to something before you can question it!

Well that's John, but the great thing is that instead of retreating into himself he sends word to Jesus via his disciples and asks the question:

*“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”*

In other words, John seeks reassurance by going straight to Jesus.

And that's always the best thing to do with doubt, don't ignore it, but confront it and try and get it resolved.

So, for example if you experience doubts yourself talk to a Christian friend who you trust, ask them to pray for you, and then ask God to speak to you from his word.

You see doubts often come when we have the wrong idea about God; or misunderstand what he's doing.

And it's the same with John, he thinks that God's going to usher in his kingdom straight away and defeat all his enemies there and then.

He doesn't realise that the first part of Jesus mission is to rescue people from sin by suffering on a cross.

And so, John's misunderstanding causes him to doubt if Jesus really is the messiah or not, because he doesn't fit in with John's idea of a warrior king.

And it can be the same for us can't it; so, for example if God doesn't meet our expectations or do what we think he should; we start to doubt him or become disillusioned.

Not because God isn't there answering our prayers, or working his purposes out for our good; but because our ideas and assumptions about him are wrong

So, for instance I might view God as some benign grandfather figure who just sits on a cloud all day waiting to do exactly what I ask him too.

Instead of realising that he's Sovereign Lord over all creation who I'm told submit too and trust in every situation, even when it's hard and I don't understand what's happening.

Or I might think that a certain lifestyle choice is fine, but then when I realise that God says it's wrong, I start to doubt because I'm not hearing what I want to hear.

But if we want to know what God's like, then we need to meet him in the words of the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ; otherwise we just end up with a god we've made up.

And so, in answer to John's question that's exactly what Jesus does.

He says John read your, Bible especially the bit in Isaiah that talks about God's King and then look at me and the works that I'm doing.

Verse 4 says: "Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Or to put it another way Jesus says:

John, you can see by my ministry, through the preaching and the miracles, that they are the fulfilment of Scripture. Yes, I am the promised Christ you rightly saw when you baptised me in the Jordan River.

You started well cousin, so hang in there because 'blessed is the man who's not offended by me.'

And while it is understandable that you want to see God's justice executed and carried out quickly, as you languish in your prison cell, well that part of the promise is for the future and is yet to be fulfilled, it will come, but just not just yet.

So yes, I can see why you doubt - but hold on, because you were right all along.'

And it's a wonderful reassurance from Jesus who says look at me and read your Bible, to see that God's plan is right on track and being worked out; it's just not quite in the way you expected.

So when life's hard, and the doubts and questions start to come, remember that we live sandwiched between Christ's first and second coming; as a result we won't be immune from all the pain, suffering and loss that life will throw at us now.

And when those times come, hang in there like John the Baptist did, talk to a Christian friends, pray, read your Bible and look to Jesus who will come again, and promises a glorious future where everyone and everything that opposes him will be defeated, and every wrong and injustice in the world, will be put right.