

## Jesus Really Is the Promised Messiah

### Matthew 11:2-11

Ever have a bad day and wonder, “Where is God in my trials? How come He doesn’t come and fix the situation? Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?” Maybe it was a bad week, or a bad month that made you ask the question. But it happens that if you are like me, you have asked questions like that.

In our Gospel lesson, John is having one of those days. Actually, it has been more than one of those days. John is in prison. Things do not look so good for him, after all, he’s been imprisoned for proclaiming God’s Word. We know that Herod had *seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet.* (Matt. 14:2-5)

John was a prophet. John was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth after Gabriel told his father that Elizabeth would give birth to him. I am sure John knew the story of how Zacharias was made mute when he questioned what Gabriel had told him. John was baptizing in the Jordan. He had pointed to Jesus and called him, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

John was a man of faith, the Holy Spirit was working on him. He knew Jesus personally. How could he come to the point that he sent his disciples to ask Jesus the question he asks in our text? “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

There are some people who proclaim that John actually had strong faith in prison, that there was no doubt in him. After all, he had said that he must decrease and Christ must increase. These people claim that he sent his disciples to ask this question of Jesus so that his disciples would now follow Jesus and not him. Yes, this could be exactly what is happening. John might indeed have had no doubts.

Personally, I find there is nothing in the text that indicates this is true. In fact, Jesus’ reply seems to indicate something different. “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, and 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.” Blessed are those not offended by me – even when I do nothing about their sitting in prison.

So, it is possible that John was having a crisis of faith. He knew that Herod wanted him shut up and dead. He also knew this had not happened because the crowds considered him a prophet.

What was John thinking? Was he flirting with doubts? “Jesus, if you are the One who is to come, if you are Messiah, do your thing and get me out of this mess!”

Those of us who have struggled with problems have thought like that, haven't we? “Where is God in my trials? How come He doesn’t come and fix the situation? Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?” There are times we have crises of faith, where doubt creeps in.

“Go and tell John what you hear and see.” It was these very words of the Lord concerning the poor and needy, His Gospel, that was and is a source of irritation.

John's Disciples – and probably John himself in this particular situation – wanted mighty and glorious things of Jesus. Instead, Jesus simply gives them these words and points them to what they have seen those words accomplish. Jesus doesn’t even go to the prison and visit John himself, or I should say, that we are not informed anywhere in scripture that Jesus did such a thing. Jesus sends the disciples to take His word back to John.

They wanted the power and might of God. They really would have liked Jesus, if He was God’s Christ, to save

John, to break him out of prison. They wanted some miraculous proof that He is in control of the situation. They were a little disappointed that Jesus wasn't doing what they expected. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Is He really the Savior of the World? Yes! His very lowliness, the fact that He descends into the misery of the miserable, into the poverty of the poor, proves this. It's obvious that He doesn't want a scepter, a crown, or glory. He did not come to display great power and might. He had done that before with ten plagues in Egypt, and in parting the Red Sea. They fell away from God even with those signs.

Jesus came to serve, to take care of us. He had His eyes on us, as the Friend and Savior of mankind. He had his eyes upon all mankind through the lens of the cross.

It is with a simple Word that He performs the functions of His office. To the poor that He preaches the Gospel. He loved to speak to poor sinners and publicans about the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven. When Jesus healed, He did it by a simple, brief Word. He did not call angels from heaven to cheer up the sick or the crippled. He did not rain down manna from heaven in order to feed the hungry. When He raised the dead, He did not cause the earth to quake.

Jesus spoke a Word and the sick were made well, the crippled walked, and new life was given to the dead. If Jesus did add anything to the Word, it was something strange and foolish, like the time He rubbed mud and spit into the eyes of the blind man. His Word with water, bread and wine!

As with John's disciples, it is still today. Christ's unpretentious way of helping and healing tends to annoy us. We should see that since He hasn't changed, it should also convince us that He is the One. He does not perform any hocus-pocus for the miserable to see. His help is not some astounding magic that soon vanishes. He does not seek honor, as do false prophets. If He had, He would have performed His miracles altogether differently. If He had wanted to impress, He would have removed mountains and uprooted trees.

Jesus came to seek only the salvation, the redemption, and the deliverance of the poor. For that reason, He adapted His help to the needs of the poor, not to the wants or expectations of John's disciples or church leaders.

Jesus told John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." He does not bear witness to Himself as being a great Physician and miracle-worker. He points them to what they hear. He did all that He did by the Word. He did things in the most simplistic way so that they did not focus on the miracle, but looked to the greater gift of grace, the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

Today He is no longer performing visible, tangible miracles. Instead, He wants troubled men to seek their welfare solely in His Word, in the Gospel. This Gospel of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is a Word of gentleness and lowliness. It is a Word of His suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus knows our troubles, for He has lived them in our flesh, and His Word is just the right kind of medicine for wounded hearts and consciences.

Christ, the very Word made flesh, is the Word which comes to us and affects souls, our innermost being. In this way, an impression is made on men, on sinners. It is because this Word is spoken through sinful men, that it is all the more readily believed by men. How is this? It is the Spirit who works faith through that Word. It is in this Gospel preaching that Jesus assures us that we do not wait, or hope for Jesus in vain.

My fellow believers, Jesus is the Savior of the poor and the sinner. Nevertheless, want, misery, death, and sin are so deeply mixed up with our human existence that sometimes that is all that we see. And so, sinners are able only by degrees to recover and to be freed from their bonds. Oh, yes, Christ could instantly and completely cure the world of all sin and death. He could in an instant destroy this corrupt nature and create a new, godly generation.

Instead, we must recognize that Jesus is the Savior who wants to save sinners, who seeks the lost and wants to set them right. To do this requires long, patient, labor. Should Jesus all at once eliminate sin and evil, He would have to destroy all sinners along with their sinfulness – including you and me.

Instead, I invite you to look at the results brought about by His Word! Yes, one hears and sees it all the time. The poor sinners, who for so long have been groaning under the weight of their guilt and have nowhere found relief and comfort, finally find their peace in the Gospel. The poor, blind unbeliever comes to know Christ through the Gospel. That those who were spiritually dead, now briskly and nimbly pursue God's Word, the Word that they at first despised. They have become alive, have become God's blessed children. Yes, every sincere Christian concludes from his own experience, from the workings of the Word in his heart, that Jesus is the Savior who heals him and restores him from their sinful condition.

We are and remain poor sinners, weak and feeble Christians. But in our poverty, the Gospel of this Jesus Christ comforts us. It makes us rich and blessed. We go to church, pray and worship as the spiritually sick and dying. Nevertheless, the Gospel always drives away our slothfulness and indifference. Our eyesight is still poor, our thoughts and convictions still foolish and wayward. But through the preaching of the Gospel, the soul is enlightened more and more.

We see the Lord. His grace becomes more and more evident. Just as John had faith, there was that doubt which clung to him. Like him, we may still have our old doubts, and fears in our hearts, but through the Gospel, holy and godly thoughts, joyful hymns and prayers are also planted in those hearts. What is dead becomes warm, it is made alive by the breath of life that comes from the Word of the Gospel. Spiritual life grows even stronger. Faith and the Spirit of the Lord increase and gain control, even though we sigh, longing for final redemption.

Yes, we are now completely sure of it, the Jesus who does such great things to us in His Gospel, through His Word and Sacraments – in what we hear and see – is the One in whom we have everything we need. Even though we live with the pains and sorrows of this world, we rest content since we have Him and know Him.

I pray that the Lord, through His Word and Gospel, grant you such a joyful certainty of faith, a faith that will stand firm in whatever condition of life you may be found, whether in prison, in illness, trial, sorrow, or even under the sword of the executioner! He is faithful and does it, with but a Word. Amen.