

This time of year there are many important questions. When you ask your loved one, what do you want for Christmas? If she says, “nothing” or “it doesn’t matter.” Don’t believe it. Men, don’t screw this up. It’s just going to be harder for you to ‘see and hear’ to know what’s just the right gift to put under the tree for her. We have many questions in life. None -more important that the question we’re given today from the greatest man born of human parents, **Are you the One who is to come?** *Are you the Christ or not?* John awaits execution. John doubts. The same reason you doubt.

This Savior allows His prophets, apostles to be rejected, murdered. He permits His Christians to suffer want, trouble, misfortune in the world. He lets John lose his head for the sake of a desperate bed-hopping wife. And Jesus? This Savior said nothing about that. He withdrew into the solitude. The prophet Isaiah was correct when he said: ***Truly, You are a God that hides Yourself...*** And we have so many questions.

John may have been thinking in prison, “If the Christ comes to bring God's righteousness, why is this unrighteous king being permitted to rule unchecked, unpunished? Why am I the one suffering?” You’ve echoed those words, why is this happening to me? How we wonder when things don’t go as we planned or expected. How easily we doubt God’s care and goodness. Question God.

Like a child asking their mother do you love me, John asks, **Are you the One who is to come?** He knows the answer but wants reassurance, wants comfort. Jesus says, **tell John what you see and hear.** He directs John to Scripture. If John needs assurance, then he needs to look to the promise. Jesus points him to Isaiah 35. In all the OT, of all the healing miracles, even resurrection, no one is ever healed of blindness. Healing of the blind is one of many signs foretold the Christ would do. And now, blind can see.

Our Lord also will compare John to Elijah. Perhaps it’s not only because they’re prophets, but you may recall how after Elijah calls down fire from heaven, God destroys the Baal prophets, almost the next verse, Elijah will run scared, hide and despair, even wish himself dead. John, Elijah, disciples, all of us -struggle, despair, so many questions. Are you the One who is working in my life? Are you there for me Lord? Do you hear my prayers? Have you forgotten me Lord? Do you hear my cries? When will I see you work things? Do you see hearts that are broken, families in distress? Do you see your people hurt. Why can’t I see more of your works? **Are you still there for me?** Doubts are not the absence of faith, but rather faith cries out, **I believe, help my unbelief.** Your faith takes hold of -not answers you see or understand, but in promises fulfilled.

And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Still true today. Many offended by a Jesus who suffers and dies on the cross. Many offended, blame God when things don't go right for them or they lose a loved one. Jesus seeks to forgive their sins, preach the Gospel, well, many have better things to do. That's boring, talk of sins and forgiveness but want just to be entertained. Many scandalized by the true Jesus. His preaching too absolute, intolerant, too uncompromising. They prefer a Christ who's a lot like Santa Claus. But if John is not a reed shaken by the winds of human opinion and political correctness, then neither is the One he proclaimed.

Jesus would not get John out of that prison, dies a martyrs death. Why this for someone Jesus declares to be the greatest born of human parents?

Jesus did not come to make you more successful or to make your life easier. He came to raise you from the dead; heal your disease of sin. Preach to you your sins are forgiven. And still tend to you through all of life's moments, more than you realize.

What do you hear and see? Jesus doesn't give you all the things you want. No, He loves you too much for that, He always gives you what you need, and that is a far greater thing. That was His message to John. To you. **Blessed are you who are not offended** that Jesus uses humbles means of preachers, words, water, bread and wine to bring you the greatest gifts of this season.

Perhaps like John, if you're afraid, lonely, depressed, or just wanting a bit of reassurance, strengthen for what is to come. Jesus has come, is coming, comes even now to give you what you truly need in the Sacrament. A God who comes in the flesh to free you from prison of sin and death.

John, in prison soon to die, so is St. Paul for that matter, beaten, in prison as He writes to you that epistle reading. **Rejoice. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything.** You are His. You belong to Him. And that changes everything for you. It's not human optimism, warm fuzzy thoughts or making the best of the situation, or trying to putting a smile on your face.

Rejoice in the Lord. He is taking care of things for you. What do you see and hear? Your reality is declared in His promises to you there in the Scripture. Those fulfilled. Those that will be. Those very promises. His very works in your life right now, every moment. Rejoice, in spite of sins, they are forgiven. Rejoice in spite of brokenness, for has He not promises to work all things for your good. Rejoice in suffering for He is your peace. Rejoice, even as we mourn, for ours is a life that has no end.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Not because things will always be merry and bright, but because they won't and the Lord, your God, is in your midst. Always. **A mighty one to save; He will quiet you with His love. Gather those of you who mourn, for the festival.** Pours out the treasures of His kingdom unto you here that last for eternity. Heals your wounds. Binds you up in His love. See and hear. You are His. Rejoice.