

## The Reminder (Matthew 11:7-11)

Sometimes in the Christian life, things just do not add up. We cannot work out what God is doing. We may find ourselves asking: “If God loves me, then why is this happening to me?” We can become discouraged and demoralized.

There was a time in the life of John the Baptist when things did not add up, particularly concerning Jesus. In his preaching, John warned Israel that the Messiah was coming in judgment and that he would burn up all the ungodly as we can read in **Matthew 3:12**, “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Yet, it appears that the only one facing death is John himself, languishing in prison (14:1-12). What’s more, he has been hearing reports of Jesus’ ministry, and while there have been wonderful works of mercy, there

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has been no judgment. What happened to the winnowing fork of Matthew 3:12?

**John is confused** we are told in **Matthew 11:2**, “Are you the one who was to come, or would we expect someone else?” So, John had just questioned if Jesus was the true Messiah. The questions had been asked in the presence of all. Some thought John was wavering in his faith, that he was weak and inconsistent.

If people were allowed to think this, they would soon question if John was the real prophet who was to pave the way for the Messiah. Then following upon the heels of this question would be the questioning of Jesus: Was he the true Messiah? If this kind of talk and questions had begun, it would have affected not only the crowd but also those who already believed. It would have been devastating to the

Lord's mission. Note how fickle people really are and how easily

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people forget a prophet's real calling and pick up the news of his weak moments.

So, what Jesus did was to reprimand the crowd. He vindicated John and his mission, reminding the forgetful and fickle that John was the forerunner, and he claimed that he was the true Messiah.

John the Baptist was not a wavering reed but a man firm in his conviction. Questioning does not necessarily mean that a person is wavering in his beliefs or behavior. John was not a vacillator, a reed swaying with the winds of change. He did not sway nor weaken because of the frown and terror of Herod. He was not a man who preached with force when he had the applause of men and weakened when he had the frown of men. He was God's servant, and he knew it. He served God faithfully in

his calling despite having to deal with some questions. Despite his questioning John was still believing in the Messiah, strong in spirit, and consistent in his behavior.

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As stated, John was unwavering in dealing with problems and temptations that arose in his life: the recognition and praise of the crowds, the rage and imprisonment of Herod, the thought that Jesus was perhaps a mistaken Messiah. Despite all, John was unwavering. He held fast to **two** things. **1<sup>st</sup>**, he held firm to his faith in God and in God's Messiah. **2<sup>nd</sup>**, he held firm to his call which we can find in **John 3:28**, "You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him'."

John did not sway with every breeze of change or trial or opposition or crowd. He stood firm in his own calling. Applause, frowns, statements of approval and disapproval, of appreciation, and disagreement—so much affects too many of us and too much of our work. We must learn and learn

quickly that no matter what, we are to go on for Christ and keep on going.

John was not a man of fine clothes but a man of discipline and self-denial. John was dead to the

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world and its fame and power and ease. He was not worldly, not soft, but disciplined and self-denying.

He was not a man who was out to save what he had nor to save himself. He was not crumbling under the weight of opposition as a soft and materialistic-minded person would be. He was not a

compromiser. John was a man sent by God to proclaim the truth, and he proclaimed it no matter the cost. Christ was saying, “When you look at John, you do not see a man of the world with the fine clothes of the world on his mind, but you see an ambassador for God.” What a lesson on self-denial and faithfulness in the face of opposition!

A life of discipline and self-denial better prepares us to stand against all trials. If we live a life for God,

denying ourselves, then trials will work patience and endurance; endurance will work experience; experience will work hope; and hope will not shame us (**Romans 5:3-5**).

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John was a prophet and more. A prophet is a *foreteller*, a proclaimer of God's message. The message may deal with the past, present, or future. Note several things about the prophet: a prophet is chosen by God; he is chosen to proclaim the message of God; he is a man who must be trustworthy—one who will be faithful to his mission and courageous in proclaiming God's Word.

John was such a man. He was a prophet, but note: Jesus said that John was more than a prophet. What does that mean? Very simply, his message included more than the message of the other prophets. His message was the heralding, the actual proclamation that the Messiah had come. In this, John excelled above all the other prophets. The only *foresaw* the Messiah's coming, but John

saw him come. Therefore, it was his responsibility to proclaim Christ's coming.

Note that John's primacy over the other prophets had to do with duty and responsibility and not with

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privilege. Some are called by God to excel and to take the lead in responsibility. And note: it is duty and responsibility, not privilege. What a lesson on the need for humility and fear—fear lest we come short! John was more than a prophet: he was the subject of prophecy as well as the messenger of it.

Which can find in **Isaiah 40:3**, A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God."

John was the Messiah's fore-runner, the herald of the true King. Note this: when God chose a person to run ahead and herald the coming of the Messiah, he did not choose a King or any other person of power or fame. He chose a simple man and called him to preach the coming of the Messiah. This

conveyed a powerful message; God's kingdom is not based on earthly pomp and earthly power. It is based on God's Spirit and God's power. It was not brought about by man's hands, but by the hand of God. Thus, God's

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kingdom is a lasting, eternal kingdom, not a temporary kingdom that eventually will pass away.

Christ applied the prophecy to himself; that is, He claimed to be the Messiah before whom John the Baptist ran and prepared the way. Note **two** things. **First**, He and John were the fulfillment of prophecy. He was the Messiah and John was the forerunner who prepares the way by proclaiming his coming. **Second**, all believers, preachers, and laymen alike, are to be preparing the way of the Lord. How? By proclaiming (1) that he has come, and (2) that he is coming again. Remember: he came the first time, so he will come the second time.



John was the greatest of natural men, yet not as great as the least in the kingdom. John did not have what believers have today. In knowledge, he did not have the full revelation of salvation which God has given believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In experience, he

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did not have the Holy Spirit's indwelling in the sense that New Testament believers do. Man, today has the privilege to know the cross and resurrection of Christ. John did not. He only knew that the Messiah had come. How much more accountable we shall be!

So, looking at the title of today's sermon, what is The Reminder? The Reminder in Matthew 11:7-11 is Jesus' powerful affirmation of John the Baptist's identity as a prophet and more, even while acknowledging the kingdom of heaven's highest-

ranking members are greater than him. Jesus also uses this passage to remind us to accept Jesus as the Messiah, even when it is difficult or confusing. Additionally, we are reminded to learn that greatness is not defined by how people react to you, but by humility and perseverance through doubt.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

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Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and grace, and for sending Jesus to show us the way to your kingdom. Help us to be people of conviction, not easily swayed by worldly option, but by standing firm in your truth, like a prophet in the wilderness. Use us, Lord, to speak your truth boldly, just as John the Baptist did, preparing others to find you.

Help us to remember that while John was great among men, those who are least in your kingdom are greater. We thank you for this promise and for the grace that allows us to be a part of your

kingdom. Help us to be effective witnesses for Jesus, just as John was, and to point others to your Son, the greater prophet and fulfillment of your Word. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**