

CTW: Matthew 1:18-25

Reading: Matthew 11:2-6

Our Scriptural Call to Worship from Matthew 1:18-25 tells the story of how the birth of Jesus was foretold. It came to pass in Joseph and Mary's day, but in the text Matthew refers to in Isaiah came 400 years before. God seems to have a long timeline but He keeps His promises.

One of the promises of God was to send a messenger ahead of the Christ's arrival. That messenger was John the Baptist. It was a supernatural assignment and when Elizabeth who was pregnant with John, and Mary who was pregnant with Jesus met the in utero John leapt in recognition of the presence of the Savior of the world.

Later in his ministry—preaching repentance in the wilderness—John would see the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove and declare, "Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world."

But a lot has changed since then. By the time of our text John is no longer preaching or baptizing. He's imprisoned by Herod the Great. One of the most powerful rulers in ancient Israel. To keep a foolish promise made to his step daughter Herod would later have John's head cut off.

- John once knew that Jesus was the One but winding up in prison, losing what he used to do and having what he expected not come to pass took a toll on his faith.

"Move" TobyMac "Hold on, hold on the Lord ain't finished yet... hold on hold on He'll get you through this."

Now, it seems unlikely any of us will lose our heads for Jesus (we sure don't lose our wallets or get all crazy with the time we give---oh wait---that's a different sermon). It seems unlikely that anyone here is in danger of being executed for following Jesus. Part of it is we live in freedom. Part of it may be that we are just not that radical.

But we may have lost something. We might have lost a dream or a marriage or a child. It might have been that we were once running with God full tilt and then "it" happened. Or maybe it was a slow series of "its." But we wound up like John trying to figure out where we went wrong.

- Why would God allow that to happen to me?
- What am I supposed to do at this point?
- Is there something in me or in my life that God is displeased with and punishing me for?

**Doubts---we all have them.** Times when "reality" so poorly fits with what we believe that we have to reconsider.

- God seems good until I think about children sold into sexual slavery.
- The world seemed safe until the inconceivable happened--Something that I was not prepared for and still don't know what to do with.
- I thought I was doing what God wanted me to do, but then it got changed, and I can't do that anymore.

That was John's situation. He knew how to be a radical religious rebel with a cause. He knew how to level haughty hearts to prepare the way for the Messiah. He was confident in the Lord and bold enough to speak truth to people in power. It was that very Godly activity—speaking against Herod's immorality by marrying his brother's wife that got him put in jail.

And John didn't stop there. He knew Herodias hated him but John kept right on saying, "You are sinning!"

(Maybe that's why none of us are in jail yet. We haven't confronted enough people of influence with their sinfulness)

**John kept right on doing the last thing God called him to do.** You've been there I hope. That place where because you are sure about what God wants, that you are doing it no matter the obstacles. Where being obedient to God matters more than the flack you get. Maybe it cost you friends or family. Maybe your "earning potential" took a hit because God wouldn't let you go along with everyone else. That's a solid feeling of faith to have that clarity.

John had been there. But now. Now, he's starting to wonder if he missed something.

- Maybe the food in prison was bad.
- Maybe the taunting and abuse of the guards started to get to him
- Perhaps the prospect of his own execution started to unravel his faith and God wasn't being as clear as He used to be.
- Mother Teresa complained bitterly to her spiritual supervisor the last decades of her life that she could no longer experience a connection with God. For some of us losing contact with God is no big deal—we live most of our lives without Him anyway. But for someone who is all in. Someone who has been willing to sacrifice career, comfort and community to be with the Lord and serving Him—then loss of contact is a big hit. Most of the time the presence of the Lord is the only perk of doing His will.

John had to be rattled pretty bad to question what he knew about Jesus. Here he is saying: "Are You the One or should we look for another" when just sometime back John said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

John is struggling in his faith. So, he sends others to get a word from the Lord because John can't go himself (have you ever had to have someone send word because you couldn't go for yourself?).

It's interesting to me that Matthew says John heard about what Jesus was doing and sends the question. "Hey Jesus, it's good that you are out there healing people, forgiving sinners and casting out demons but *You know I'm in jail here right?* Do you think you could send a little love my way?"

The Scripture says Jesus went around doing good and delivering all those who were oppressed by the devil. (Acts 10:38). No doubt John would have liked to see a little of that good coming his way.

- "I mean after all I've been "all in" for you Lord."
- "I know I'm not perfect but have I offended you? Is this suffering because I've sinned against You? If so show me. If not then help me."
- I suppose John couldn't have helped himself from comparing what was happening to him with what was happening to others.
  - "Why are You doing good for others and not for me?"

And Jesus seems to rub it in his face.

- He doesn't answer John's question. He tells John's disciples to "go and report what you see and hear"
- So now John in not going to get some hint of a rumor, his own disciples are going to come back with eye witness accounts of the good that Jesus is doing..... for everybody else.
  - "Hey John there was this man who was paralyzed and couldn't move about freely and Jesus released him."
  - "Brother John, there was this woman who was so blind that she couldn't see what was right in front of her and Jesus opened her eyes."
  - "There was this kid who couldn't even hear Jesus speaking but Jesus cured the deafness."
- [John] "But did He say anything about me? Did He say He was going to set me free? Will He give me an explanation of what is going on? Is there any hope I will hear God's voice again?"
  - "No. He didn't say that.... He just said to tell you what we've seen and heard..... Oh! And one more thing: "Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me."

## *[Disposable]*

Have you ever been afraid that God views you as disposable? Like a paper towel. Not useful for a lot of things but one day there's gonna be a problem and you'll be next on the roll so God will grab you and use you. You'll have your moment in the sun, you will have your season of ministry and then God will wad you up and toss you away?

John once knew his purpose—to prepare the way of the Lord!—And he had poured himself into it. Surely, his circumstances would have made him wonder if God was done with him.

If God tossed me aside I would be offended. There are lots of ways God may “offend” us.

- It may seem God doesn't want to hear our prayers (“He's not answering them is He?!?!”)
- God may allow pain or grief in our lives that exceeds our capacity to bear—“How is that loving?”
- We may be tootling along confident we are doing what God wants and then “Boom! Nothing makes sense anymore”

But hear Jesus' words, “Blessed is the one who does not get offended by Me”

- For me to not get offended by God I'm gonna have to realize that **His ways are not my ways** and in spite of what I know and what I can see the fact remains that I cannot see everything. The captain of a interstellar space ship should not take directions from a Passenger Pigeon.
- For me to not get offended when God leaves me to stumble around in the dark I'm gonna have to trust Him For me to live in faith
- When nothing makes sense, when God is silent and nothing changes, I have to trust that God really is good and loving and kind anyway. Regardless of your circumstances or suffering:
  - Jesus knows who you are.
  - You are not disposable. He has not forgotten you
  - God loves you

## **The thing is we struggle to understand what love is (or what it costs)**

- Did you notice the “wreath” on the bulletin cover? A crown of thorns.
- **Overcoming the sin of a fallen world and establishing the Kingdom of God is costly.** Love pays the price of suffering and Jesus knows well the cost. He calls us to fellowship in His suffering against sin.
- “For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake”—Philippians 1:29

CLOSE --John's name means “blessed by God” And he was blessed.

- God knew him before He created him.
- God had a purpose and a ministry for him.
- God never forgot or forsook him.
- Jesus let him die though.
  - As AW Tozer says, “God will crucify without pity those whom He desires to raise without measure!!” [I Talk Back to the Devil
- Jesus will say in the next few verses that John was the greatest prophet of all time

But Jesus would also say that we who are sons and daughters of the Kingdom established by His life, death and resurrection would be even more blessed.

- If you are still alive, you still have a purpose. Don't be offended. Be faithful. God will keep all His promises even if it requires raising the dead..