

## Sermon for Gaudete (Advent 3) – Matthew 11:2-10

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

John the Baptizer was in prison. He knew the end of His life was imminent. It seemed as though the Kingdom of God had failed and that Herod would win. So what does John do? He sends his disciples to get one final word from Jesus.

John is looking for assurance and he puts it rather bluntly: “Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?”

Typical of Jesus, He knows better than John what John needs. Christ is patient with His impatient children. So what does Jesus say? How does He answer the question? Is Jesus the One?

Notice Jesus doesn't give a simple “yes” here. He doesn't say, “It will be well with you, John. You go to your prophetic reward. Fear not, for I know what I am doing.” Jesus doesn't say these things. So what does He say? “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.”

Jesus directs John to the Scriptures. If John wants assurance that Jesus is the Coming One, the Messiah, then he needs to look to the promises. It's the same for us. “Man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” In particular, Jesus is directing John to Isaiah 35: “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.”

The prophet Isaiah said it: “Your God will come and save you” and then “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” John should look and see what is happening! Are not all these miracles taking place through the work of Jesus earthly ministry?!? The blind receive their sight, lepers are cleansed, and even the dead raised. But at the same time, John should not take comfort in the signs themselves, but in the Word and promises of God that said it would be so. In other words, the key thing is this: “Your God will come and save you.” The sighted blind and cleansed lepers merely point to your salvation's certainty. The key thing is that God keeps His Word and the faithful wait, in faith, for the day when there will be no blind or deaf, no lame or leprous, no poor or dead.

So, too, then John should look to his own office. Today's Old Testament reading, again from Isaiah, gives John his duties: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is

pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

The Coming One is the Lord Himself. John doesn't prepare the way for another fallen and fallible man in office, for a fleeting prophet, a temporal priesthood, or a perishing kingly crown. He prepares the way for the Lord Himself, for our eternal God. What he prepares is the hearts of men. What he prepares them for is the Lord – the same Lord who led His people out of Egypt, brought them back from Babylon, and walked in the garden seeking Adam and Eve. He prepares the hearts of men for the Lord with tender words of comfort and a declaration of peace, even though it hits the itchy ears of men as a harsh call to repentance: "Listen up, O people of God: Your warfare with God is ended! Your rebellion and self-destruction are finished. Your guilt is pardoned. Your sins are forgiven. The Lord has taken it upon Himself to stand in your place and face the accusations against you and endure the tortures of hell that were earned by you in order to spare you and to welcome you back to Himself."

That's the Lord's glory. It's revealed to those with eyes of faith to see it, not in shows of might or power nor in the healing of the lame and raising the dead, but in the fact that Christ died for sinners. His glory is revealed most fully when He is lifted up from the earth on a cross. And if John, who is greatest of the prophets, must constantly be reminded that the Lamb comes to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, how much more must we be reminded of this!?!

In a sense, we are no different from John. We are languishing in self-made prisons. We are subject to lesser and greater Herods. We have given ourselves over to our own passions and lusts. We have indulged in fleshly desires. We have harbored grudges and jealousies, while casting out mercy and patience. We have secretly hated and openly gossiped. We have lied about nearly everything. Everyone who sins is a prisoner in his own sin. It's true.

But, Dearly Beloved, hear this Word of God for you: "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert." And God baptizes for Himself a people who was no people. He sets prisoners free. He is the Coming One who has come to save you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠