

December 12th, 2004
Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Matthew 11:2-15

Matthew 11:2-15 (ESV)

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴ And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ 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. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” ⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, “ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ ¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy, and peace, be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

Have you ever been discouraged? We go through life doing our normal things. Working at our jobs, having a family, following the law, going to church, just going about our daily lives, sometimes we might wonder “What’s the Point?” To quote Jack Nicholson’s character in a recent movie “What if this is as good as it gets?”

This is where we see John the Baptist in our text this morning. Here is John, a prophet of God sitting in King Herod’s jail for rebuking the king. We read in Matthew 14:

³ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, ⁴ because John had been saying to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.”⁵ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. Matt. 14:3-5 (ESV)

John had been doing as God had sent him to, preaching repentance to the people, preparing their hearts for the Messiah, and now he was sitting in jail, with a death sentence hanging over his head, waiting for the king to have the courage to carry it out.

I’m sure that John had a lot of time to think sitting there in his cell. Had he done wrong? Was God punishing him? He was only doing what God had told him to do and his reward was jail?

As John mulled this over in his mind, he might have begun to question his judgment. Maybe the man that I thought was the Christ maybe He was just another prophet, a man of God rather than the Son of God.

After all, John's preaching of repentance often focused on the Messiah, the Savior, as Judge. If we remember from last week's Gospel lesson,

Matthew 3: ⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Matthew 3:7-10 (ESV)

This seemed to be quite a different message than the one Jesus was preaching. Jesus was telling people of God's Grace and Mercy. True, His first preaching recorded in the book of Matthew is a call to repentance as He says: *"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." (MT. 4:17)*

But soon after that Matthew gives us an account of the Beatitudes. In Chapter 5, Jesus tells the people of the many blessings they have through Him as well as telling them that He has come to fulfill the law. Jesus almost seems to take them off of the hook, the same hook that John convicted them of when he called them to repentance.

John may have missed the picture a little bit, but that does not make him wrong either. Jesus was preaching of repentance too

but He was also telling of the blessings of repentance and giving them assurance of salvation through their faith in Him.

John had preached judgment, but that had not taken place yet, Jesus seemed to be doing things different than John expected. So again, we are back with John in prison, sitting, thinking, wondering... "Is this the Savior that I was supposed to prepare the way for or is someone else coming, did I mess up or misunderstand? Where is the ax at the root of the trees? Where is the unquenchable fire that the chaff was going to be thrown into?"

John was a prophet, a man of God and he was having doubts about Jesus as the Messiah. The key word here is man. Yes, John was a prophet, but he was also a man, subject to fears and doubts just like the rest of us. Even the prophet Elijah from the Old Testament thought he had been a failure in his ministry. Has there ever been a person that did not doubt, even a little bit? Would that not be expecting the impossible of anyone with a sinful human nature?

But let's take a look at what John did. He could have continued to sit there as his faith faltered...or he could send some of his followers to the source and find out for sure. He turned to Christ. He didn't go to his fellow inmates to ask their opinion, he didn't read the latest popular author on the human condition, he went straight to the source, to Jesus.

John sent his disciples to ask Jesus directly, "are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" A fair question, I'm sure some that were with Jesus were shocked at the boldness of the question, but John did the right thing by going to the source.

Jesus understood John's questioning and also understood that His answer wouldn't just be going to John's ears but to everyone that heard Him speak it, so He didn't reply with reasoning but rather by pointing to what He was doing and how it fulfilled Scripture.

For example, in our Old Testament lesson from this morning we read:

⁴ *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."* ⁵ *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;* ⁶ *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;*²

Jesus told John's disciples: ⁴ ... "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ 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."³ Jesus was showing them how He was fulfilling the Scripture that pointed to the Messiah.

As John's followers left, Jesus then turned to the crowd to re-assure them that John was a true prophet, to assure them that his questioning did not lessen him in the Kingdom of God. He reminded them of the way his preaching and teaching had drawn people to repentance and to lead a more Godly life.

John was a very special prophet, foretold by Isaiah and Micah in the Old Testament. John the Baptist, a great prophet.

² *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

³ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Again, We hear Jesus' Words: ⁷ *As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"* ⁸ *What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.* ⁹ *What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.* ¹⁰ *This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."*⁴

John did not waver in his message, he didn't do what was politically correct, which is what landed him in jail. No, John preached repentance of sins and salvation through Christ.

We might say "that's all well and good. John doubted and he went to Jesus for reassurance, but what about me? Who do I go to for reassurance?"

We have the same opportunity as John did, when we waver or doubt we can go to the source, just like John did, we can go to the Holy Bible. Through the scriptures we can read the truth and as the Holy Spirit works within us to reassure us through God's Word, we are strengthened.

With our multimedia society we have the greatest access to Scripture that any generation before us. Unfortunately there is a greater opportunity for false prophets to reach us also. But again, we can go to the source, the Bible.

Several places in scripture we are warned that there will be false prophets, that was not just speaking of biblical times, it continues and will continue through the last day.

⁴ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

If someone, no matter how popular they are, no matter how well they speak or write, goes against what is written in the Bible, we should turn away from their teachings. As Paul tells us in Galatians: ⁸ *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.*⁵

John the Baptist was sent to this sinful world to prepare the way for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Jesus was sent to save us from ourselves, He suffered and died for all of our sins, but that was not the end, He rose from the grave to defeat sin, death and the power of the devil. And as the book of Acts tells us, He sent His Holy Spirit to us so that we might believe.

Praise be to God the Father for sending His Son to die for our sins but also for giving us His inerrant Word, the Holy Bible so that we can go to the source of Truth in Jesus Christ, just as John the Baptist did so long ago.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

⁵ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001