

Advent 3 / December 15, 2024

Luke 7:22

*“The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed...the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”*

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised

John the baptizer sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, *“Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?”* It’s debated whether John sent his disciples for his benefit, or to convince them that Jesus was the expected Messiah. Many who followed John left him to follow Jesus. John’s disciples who remained expressed dismay at their teacher’s waning popularity, saying, *“Look... all are going to Him.”* John told them, *“The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”* John knew he was not the Messiah. Jesus was the Christ. He was the prophet sent to prepare His way, to make people ready to receive Jesus as their Lord, God and Saviour.

Knowing that it seems odd that later John has doubts and sends disciples to question Jesus. John had a better sense of the marks of the Messiah than anyone else. He was enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand the scriptures. He had seen the Holy Spirit anoint Jesus at His baptism. He heard the divine voice address Him as His beloved Son. John testified, *“I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God.’”* But now he seems to have his doubts and he sends disciples to ask, ‘Are you really the One?’

Did John doubt or did he not doubt? You could lay all the opinions offered over the centuries from end to end and still not reach a conclusion. Perhaps John did have his doubts. He wouldn’t be the first prophet to have doubts. The Messiah would set the prisoners free and yet he was being held prisoner in King Herod’s fortress for speaking the truth of God’s word. Not only would he not be set free, he would be executed to satisfy the hatred of Herod’s wife. John’s disciples had expectations that the Messiah would set Israel free from Roman rule. That’s what everyone, including Jesus’ disciples, expected the Messiah to do. Jesus manifested divine power, but He had failed to engage the Romans in anything, let alone lead an army of angels to destroy them. When questioned about paying Roman taxes

He seemed to tacitly support Roman rule saying *“give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and to God the things that belong to God.”* There are many things that could have motivated John to send his disciples to ask, “Are you the One?” We all have expectations and begin to doubt when our expectations are not met.

Despite John’s experience, hearing the divine voice and seeing the Spirit anoint Jesus, he needed to build His faith on something firmer, the bedrock of God’s word. John’s disciples needed to see their expectations through the lense of God’s word. We need to build our faith on the solid rock of scripture. Jesus said, *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”* Jesus shows Himself the Christ, our God and Saviour by fulfilling the words of scripture; healing the sick, raising the dead and most importantly, by forgiving our sins through the sacrifice of His cross. These things are written that we would believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and have life in His Name.

There was an abundance of religious literature at Jesus’ time dealing with the end times, just as there is now. This religious literature was so deeply ingrained in people’s cultural consciousness that most could not distinguish fact from fiction in terms of God’s word. We need to be careful that our expectations of God and the end times are grounded in God’s clear revelation in scripture and not the product of people’s religious imaginations and self-proclaimed revelations. People at Jesus’ time failed to see Him as the Christ, because despite the wonders He gave, He didn’t do what they expected the Messiah to do. Jesus directs John’s disciples to the scriptures, the words of Isaiah, saying, *“the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”* He’s saying look at what He is doing and listen to the word!

During Advent we remember Jesus’ first coming into the world. We prepare for Christmas. We sing about how He came upon a midnight clear. We remember the night of His birth in the little town of Bethlehem. That is well and good, but its easy to forget that the main focus of Advent is preparing ourselves for Christ’s second coming as Lord of all and Saviour of those who believe. It’s important to remember and celebrate His first coming. It’s important that we realize that precious few noticed and acknowledged Jesus first coming. He didn’t come as they expected or act as they thought he should. Even John who went forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare His way, sent disciples to ask, “Are you the One who is to come, or should we expect another.” Their thoughts and expectations were based on the

religious imagination of the previous centuries, not on the clear promises of Moses and the prophets.

It is significant that the gospel writers repeatedly tell us that everything Jesus did was done that the scriptures might be fulfilled. The scriptures were the firm foundation of the faith of ancient Israel. Jesus will come again in the way described in the scriptures and not according to the imaginations of popular writers of religious fiction in our day. In His parables Jesus stressed the importance of watching for His return by listening to the master's voice and fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to us. The greatest responsibility He entrusts to us is to preach the gospel of forgiveness through faith in His name to the poor in spirit. The signs of the Messiah were healings and bringing life to the dead. The work of the Messiah is to give life to the spiritually dead in the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of His cross. The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the firm foundation of God's Israel today, the Church, which Christ purchased with His blood and empowers by His Spirit.

Jesus' first advent was in humble form, mostly kept under wraps until He appeared in the wilderness in His thirtieth year. He announced His presence by healing the sick, raising the dead and preaching the gospel to the poor in spirit. He made Himself known according to the marks of the Messiah given in scripture. People could dismiss Jesus as the Messiah. Many did. People could refuse to believe the signs He gave. Many did. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah comes by the working of the Holy Spirit in the human heart through the word. Many people didn't see Jesus as the Messiah, because of their false expectations. When Jesus returns every eye will see. There will be no doubt that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. However, false expectations of Jesus can affect our faith as we await His return on the clouds. How many people have lost their faith and turned away in disbelief because of the many false prophecies of His return? How many people have stumbled in faith, because their life situation did not match their expectation of what they thought Jesus would do for them? If we base our hopes on false information, and false expectations we also can end up like John the baptizer and his disciples asking, "Are you really the One?"

Jesus said to tell John what they had seen and heard; the blind received sight, the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the dead were raised and the poor heard the gospel. Then He said, "*Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*" In Greek it literally says, "*Blessed is one who does not stumble because of me.*" We may stumble in our faith if Jesus doesn't come at the time we expect. We may stumble

in our faith if we are not prepared for hardship, suffering and affliction, because we thought Jesus would spare us from those things. We stand strong in our faith by remembering the cross upon which Jesus suffered and died and follow Him in faith no matter what our sufferings. Blessed is the one who is not offended by Him. Blessed are those who follow Him in faith and build their faith on the firm foundation of His words. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will endure forever! In Jesus' Name. Amen