

"Jesus Is Who Isaiah Said He Would Be" Matthew 11:2-10 Gaudete 2023

I feel bad when I read about John the Baptist. Not sorry for myself, but sorry for what John went through. At first, everything was going according to plan. People were repenting of their sins and coming into the wilderness to be baptized. Yet only after a year or two into Jesus' ministry, things took a turn for the worse. Herod Antipas had taken his stepbrother Philip's wife as his own, and John publicly condemned him for it. Herod didn't like it, so he had John arrested. John had to spend Advent in prison. This was his reward for telling the truth. He was no longer allowed to preach or baptize as he was doing before.

John had been warning people that the ax was at the root of the tree. He spoke of repentance and judgment to come. And what was Jesus doing? He wasn't chopping anything down. Jesus was going to weddings and eating with tax collectors. He was healing people and telling people they were forgiven. This wasn't what John, or his disciples seemed to be expecting. This led John to ask, "Are you the One?" John was either asking for himself, his disciples, or both. They asked this right in front of the entire crowd! It might seem to be a public confrontation in a sense. It could have been embarrassing to Jesus.

Have you had those moments, when a prayer wasn't answered? When life didn't turn out like you had planned? It reminds me of Job's moments of anguish when he was suffering. In a moment of weakness

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and anger, you blurt it out. "What's going on?!? I wonder if God really does hate me. Is this for real?!? Are YOU for real?!?" You're so angry that you don't care who hears it. You said it. You meant it. You wanted some answers.

And what does Jesus do? Does He call them to the side and say in a whispered tone, "Whoa! Calm down there. How dare you question my authenticity in front of everyone! You better back off right now or I'll condemn every last one of you!" That's what under confident people do when they are questioned. They get angry and defensive. "What are you saying?!?" But when you know who you are and you know you're doing the right thing, you simply answer the challenge in a cool and calm way.

So what does Jesus do? He doesn't say a THING, not at first. If you read this story in Luke 7, Luke writes, "At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind." Imagine the procession of people coming before Jesus. Some bent over. Others holding their stomachs or their heads or their backs. Some being carried in on stretchers, barely breathing. People shrieking and yelling and foaming at the mouth. One by one, Jesus has them brought before Him and He heals son and daughter, young and old, immediately. Nobody is sent away. Imagine the

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aftermath of the healing, people smiling and jumping and crying for joy. John's disciples would be watching this whole scene unfold before them.

Then Jesus simply said to John's disciples, "Go, report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me."

I love that last statement. "Who would be offended at such a thing?" Why would you be angry at deaf being able to hear, dead people being raised, and poor people receiving forgiveness? Well, you might be offended if all these people were getting freed from their sicknesses and diseases, but YOU weren't getting freed from prison. You might be offended if you thought these people were only USING Jesus for a quick fix, if they weren't real dedicated followers, if they'd just come for the healing and nothing more. You might be offended if you saw how for years, they had ignored God and His Word their whole lives. And now they were seemingly getting a free pass?

Perhaps John's question is coming from a Jonah perspective. He's tired of the world. He's tired of all this happy talk about Jesus while he's languishing in prison. What's the use? Ring a bell? Little jealous of the

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couple with the happy marriage? The well-adjusted children? The nice job? The good health? Must be nice! Get a little irritated at the so-called Christian who only manages to come to church when something is going wrong? He wants a quick fix. Is that it? How about the Christian talks about praying and strength and faith when in reality all they have are hangnails? But that doesn't seem to bother Jesus. He doesn't yell at a few people or condemn them to make John and His disciples happy. He keeps on being gracious and giving. It doesn't stop Jesus from doing what He does, just because John doesn't seem to like it.

Finally, Jesus showed a heart that genuinely wanted people to have relief from their suffering and fear. Yes, their motivations may have not been the purest. Maybe they were just temporarily using Jesus. But nonetheless, Jesus relieved them of their pain and suffering anyway, in hope that they would come to Him for more: for salvation from their sins and from hell. And how many times does God do that with US as well? If God decides someone needs a moment of healing and grace, He knows what He's doing. Jesus just does what He does and says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." He's not bringing the ax down yet, but He is doing miraculous things, just like Isaiah prophesied. So why get angry about it?

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Here's another thing. I love Jesus' response. Jesus doesn't attack John. He doesn't bemoan how John has changed or act as if John sold out on Him. He understands John's frustrations, and He praises John! After John's disciples had left the scene, Jesus reminded the crowd of who John was. He simply called people to repentance, pointed people to Jesus. He also put his life on the line when he publicly called out Herod, and he never backed down from his stance. He didn't grovel for pardon. Jesus said of John that he was "much more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

We get to hear about everything that Jesus did for us and see all of the prophecies fulfilled. We get to see the greatest sacrifice of all, as Jesus is abandoned by the Father on the cross for the sins of the world. We get to hear Jesus' cry, "It is finished." We get to hear Peter proclaim, "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) We get to live after the fact, and that's more than John ever got to see.

Jesus was NOT who John's disciples thought He would be. He wasn't swinging the ax. Not yet. They were bothered by that. They aren't the only ones. Yet what did Jesus say? I am who Isaiah said I would be.

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The glory for John wouldn't be on this side of heaven. He would never see Jesus swing the ax as he thought he would do. Yet Jesus was doing exactly what Isaiah said He would do. After John died, Jesus would also do what He was called to do in Isaiah 53, when the ax came down on HIM instead of us, giving the world the greatest gift of all, on the cross. Eventually, Jesus will do what John said He would do. Some Day, Jesus will finally bring down the final ax. Then by God's grace we will be harvested to heaven, and justice will be served in God's own time. Why? Because Jesus is the One who is exactly who Isaiah said He would be, and John as well. Thank God for that. Just wait. Give Him time. Trust Him to be who He is. The One who Came and the One who is Coming, just as the prophets have said. Amen.