

Advent 3 / December 12, 2021

Luke 7:22

“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.”

What do you do when Jesus doesn't do what you expect Him to do? John the Baptizer sent two disciples to ask *“Are you the One who is to come or should we expect another?”* John the Baptizer was set apart before birth to prepare for the coming of the Lord. He told his followers, *“He who comes after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to untie the thongs of His sandals. I baptize you with water, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”* When Jesus came for baptism, John saw the heavens open, heard the divine voice, saw the Spirit descend as a dove and rest on Jesus. He pointed to Jesus and publicly declared, *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”* Now at the end of his service, imprisoned by Herod, he sends two of his disciples to ask, *“Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?”* After the things he had seen, heard and said, why does he need assurance?

People have been censured by their church bodies and accused of teaching falsely, for suggesting that John had a crisis of faith and really wondered if Jesus was the Christ. Instead, it is said that this was merely a teaching exercise, to convince his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah. Nevertheless, John wouldn't have been the first prophet to have been assailed by doubt. Jeremiah turned away and stopped speaking the word of the Lord. Even after the Lord restored him, he lamented that he had been born to experience such hardship, to suffer reproach from his family and friends and to be scorned by his countrymen. The prophet Habakkuk complained, *“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?”* When God doesn't act as we expect and answer as we want, even the strongest faith can falter.

God doesn't always do what we expect, or want Him to do. In life we do not always receive a reward in keeping with our service. John certainly didn't! He was arrested by King Herod at the instigation of his wife, who hated him for publicly decrying their adulterous relationship. He would eventually be executed at her request, his head delivered to her on a platter. *“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?”* What kind of reward was that for a person set apart before birth to prepare Israel for the Lord's Messiah? John would receive an eternal reward in the heavens, but this was his reward in time as the Lord' servant. It's not uncommon for faithful Christians to feel they are being mistreated by God, because the Lord didn't prevent a tragedy in our family, an illness or injury in our bodies. Things are not rosy when our time on earth is winding down, or when a loved one's life has come to a close.

What can we do when Jesus doesn't do what we want Him to do? We can remember the gospel of His love. We can look to the signs of His kingdom; the gospel preached to the poor in spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of faith in our lives and in the lives of countless others over the ages. The most important thing we can do is look to Jesus and the sign of His cross. It was on His cross that He atoned for our sins. It is through His cross that He brings us to the Father in peace. Our hope in suffering, grief and death is the cross of His love. For on cross He won the reward of eternal life, which He gives as a gift to all who believe.

Jesus didn't do what people expected, including John the baptizer. Jesus fulfilled all the signs of the Messiah. He gave sight to the blind. He made the deaf hear. He raised the dead. But that wasn't all people expected Him to do. They expected Him to judge their enemies. They expected Him to free them from the tyranny of people like King Herod. Despite the divine revelations he received, John's personal expectations and circumstances got the best of him. King Herod was doing fine and John was in prison. It's not surprising he began to wonder if Jesus really was the Messiah.

Jesus said, *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”* It's music to our ears, but because of their false expectations, it wasn't music to those who heard it first. It wasn't what they expected. They didn't understand, because they expected a worldly king. Jesus had not come as worldly king, but as a servant who would give His life as a ransom for many. Like John, Jesus would not receive a reward in keeping with His service. John was executed with a sword. Jesus was executed with a cross. Unfair according to human judgement. Incomprehensible to those who expected a worldly kingdom. Yet this is the gospel of God's kingdom: That on the cross Jesus suffered and died to redeem us from the greatest enemies; sin, the devil and death; and rose to give eternal salvation to all who believe Him.

What was the problem? The problem was neither John nor Israel understood the scriptures that said the Son of Man must suffer these things to redeem His people, before He entered His kingdom. Consider how often Jesus challenged the disciples' expectations and chastised them, saying, "*You are not thinking the thoughts of God, but the thoughts of humans.*" What's the problem? The problem is that our human thoughts and earthly expectations can become an obstacle to faith and a cause for stumbling.

Jesus never promised John or his disciples they would not face hardship, experience violence, or suffer death. Just the opposite! He said if people did those things to Him, they would certainly do the same to them. Jesus never promised that we would not experience illness, suffer grief, injury or death because we follow Him. Just the opposite! When he saw people following because of the healings, He said, "*Whoever does not hate his own life, cannot be my disciple.*" He said "*Whoever would come after me must deny himself daily, take up his cross and follow me.*" He said, whoever loves his life in this world will lose it, but whoever follows Him and endures to the end, will have eternal life. Jesus doesn't promise us a rose garden. He promises us paradise, which we receive for the sake of His suffering death, as we pass through the same things.

John would know Jesus is the Messiah in the same way as us; by the scriptures and the signs which He gave in accordance with the scriptures. The blind received their sight. Lepers were cleansed. The dead were raised. The poor in spirit had the gospel of forgiveness preached to them. When our faith is assailed by the injustices, trials and tribulations of life, we know Jesus is our Saviour, because He suffered the same things and more. He endured the greatest and most unjust suffering for our sins on the cross. We know He is the Christ, our Saviour, because He rose on the third day. We know He is our Saviour because of the signs He gave in accordance with the scriptures; the greatest being His dying and rising for our eternal life.

Jesus doesn't promise we won't suffer, receive poor treatment, grieve, become ill and die. He promises that He will never leave or forsake us. He promises to make His power perfect in our weakness. He promises to comfort us in grief and give us hope in the face of death with His promise of resurrection and eternal life. He promises nothing will separate us from His love. He promises that in and through all things, He will accomplish His eternal good in our lives in our share of His resurrection in a world in which evil, sin and death are forever gone.

When we are assailed by doubt, because God doesn't do what we want or expect Him to do, remember Jesus' words to John, "*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.*" Remember the gospel of forgiveness. Remember the sign of the cross on which He died for our sins and the empty grave from which He rose. God keep our faith firm until He fulfills it in eternal life! In Jesus' Name. Amen