

“Are You the One?”
December 11, 2022
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Good morning, Church! I want to read a passage of scripture that comes from the book of Matthew, chapter 11, beginning with verse 2. You're going to notice a common theme.

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you have heard and seen: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

From a Western perspective, John could only be described as a weird dude. We know a good deal about John, if you put everything together. We know that his mother and Mary were relatives. We know that John is a few months older than Jesus. We know that his parents, when he was born, took a Nazirite vow, which meant that a razor was never to touch his hair. In other words, he never got a haircut and never trimmed his beard. He would have been what we call in the South, “a woolly booger.” We know that he intentionally lived a very ascetic lifestyle. He lived out in the desert by himself. He ate grasshoppers and wild honey. And honey sounds great until you know that Palestinian honeybees often build their nests in the desiccated carcasses of dead animals. His clothing was of the old fashion of Old Testament prophets. His clothing was exactly what Elijah wore. And, having been a Baptist pastor, I can tell you definitively that John was not a Baptist. He was John the Baptizer, not John the Baptist. But what John was, more than anything else, was a prophet. And he wasn't just a prophet. Jesus said that among those born, there has never arisen a greater prophet than John the Baptist. He was extremely effective. People came from all the surrounding areas to go out and hear him speak and be baptized by him in the Jordan River. And this is absolutely amazing, because the Jewish people did not believe they needed to be baptized. They believed that if a Gentile converted to Judaism, they needed to be baptized, to symbolize the washing away of their old Gentile life. But they believed, because they were Abraham's descendants, they did not need to be baptized. But John said, “Yes, you do! All of us need to repent of our sins and prepare our hearts for the coming One, the One that is coming.”

John was extremely effective, and he was completely fearless. When he saw evil, he denounced it. That is why he's in prison in our story. You see, King Herod, one of the minor despots of the Roman Empire, had gone to visit his brother, had taken a liking to his brother's wife, had seduced her, snuck her out of town, took her to Palestine, divorced his own wife, and married his brother's wife without his brother's wife divorcing his brother. And John said, "Herod, that's wrong!" And he made an enemy of Herod and especially Herod's new wife. He was thrown into prison. And in that era, there was no such thing as due process. If the despot, if the King, had a bad dream about you one night, you could be beheaded the next morning. John knew that life for him was tenuous at best. And he asked his question. He sent his disciples to Jesus and said, "Are you the one that was to come, or should we expect another?" There's always been theories as to why John asked this question. There are many who believe that he didn't ask the question for himself. But his disciples were having trouble believing Jesus was the one, because he didn't act like they expected Messiah to act. And John said, "Well, I'll tell you what you do. You go see the man yourself and you ask him." There are some who believe that this was a question of impatience. You see, John was a do-er. John was a hellfire and damnation preacher. John wanted a little fire and brimstone, and he wasn't getting it. He said, "Where's the fire and brimstone?" There are others who believe that this is a question of faith and hope. You see, John knew that his life could end at any moment, and he wanted to hear one last time that his life had meaning, and his ministry was a success.

But it's really not John's question that is important. What is important is Jesus's response. He did not say to John's disciples, "Go tell John what I'm preaching. Go tell John what I'm claiming. Go tell John what I'm saying." He said, "Go tell John what I'm doing. Go tell John that the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dead are raised to life. Go tell John what you are beholding. Go tell John what's happening here!" Today Jesus is not saying so much to us, "Listen to what I have to say to you," but rather, "Look what I can do for you." Those who are blind to the truth about themselves, and the truth about others, and truth about God, have their eyes opened. Those who cannot understand the voice of God, or cannot hear the voice of God, have their ears opened. Those that are lacking the courage and the strength to stand for the right in their lives are given courage and strength. And those who are dead to sin are made alive in Christ. Jesus is still in the business of changing hearts and transforming lives. Years ago, I heard a story about a man who was a helpless alcoholic. He had a wife and two small children and, because of his alcoholism, they lived in absolute poverty. There was no furniture in their home, and often there was not enough to eat. Finally, his wife took the kids and left, and she said, "When you get clean and sober, I'll be back." Long story short, he found Christ, and Christ changed his heart and transformed his life. And the fortunes of this little family changed dramatically because of the change Christ brought in this man's life. Sometime later, he came across a couple of his old drinking buddies. And they were making fun of him because he had given up alcohol and found religion. They said, "Do you really believe that this man did these miracles, that He can change water into wine?" And I'll never forget the man's response. He said, "Well, I don't know, I wasn't there. But I'll tell you what I do know: In my home, He changed beer into furniture and food for my family. I don't know what He did do, but I know what He's done in my life."

This is what Jesus did, this is what He does, and this is what He can do for you. And if you believe Jesus is who He showed himself to be, if you believe that Jesus is who He shows Himself to be today, then we have a decision to make. If we believe that, then we are obligated to follow His example. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will obey Me." Disciples are followers of Christ, not just believers in Christ. We are saved by faith, through grace, for good works. Now y'all listen to me very carefully. We are not saved by works. We are not saved by works. We are not saved by works! But if you are saved, you will work. Does that make sense? We are saved by grace, through faith, for good works. Now, I'm spending a good bit of time on this subject, but there's a reason for that. I have three core values that guide my ministry. And the very first core value is: People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. In some circles that saying is a very popular and it's almost trite. But there's a key to that. You must figure out how to communicate you care. Because you can say it all you want, but you've got to figure out how to communicate it, how to make it real. Figure out how to show that you care because, you see, the world does not care what you and I believe. They care what we do. The world sees Christians and the church as being critical, judgmental, callous, self-righteous, and uncaring. That's what the world thinks of us. They think we major on minors, and we criticize. We criticize their hair; we criticize their clothes; we criticize their tattoos; we criticize their piercings; we criticize their language; we criticize their attitude; we criticize their music; we criticize their games; we criticize their habits. We are critical. Now, that wouldn't happen in our church, would it? We wouldn't be critical of what people wear. We wouldn't be critical of people's hair. We wouldn't be critical of their tattoos.

A brief story: At my last church, two young people started attending, and they were hesitant. The fact of the matter is, they stood outside the church wondering if they could come in. And so, I went out to them. And they said, "Can we come in there?" I said, "Of course! This is a church. It's for everybody." They said, "Well, the last church we were at, we got criticized for our tattoos." And, I'll be honest, there wasn't a piece of skin you could see that didn't have ink on it. And I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. If anybody says anything to you about your tattoos, you tell me, and I'm gonna get one." Fortunately, they didn't, because I hate needles. But I mean it. I mean it. The world doesn't care what we believe, but they do care about what we do. You hide these words in your heart. These are not mine; these are Will Rogers' words. How many of you know Will Rogers? A lot of you do. He once said that we should keep most of our opinions behind our own teeth.

This season, we will show what we believe, and who we believe in, by what we do, what we spend our time on, what we spend our money on. Jesus overcame evil with unanswerable love, and He communicated that love not just in His words, but in how He lived and what He did. During this Advent season the world is watching us very closely. You know why? It's our season. The most calloused, the most unbelieving person out there, knows that Jesus is the reason for the season. And they are watching to see if you and I believe that. They're not listening to what you say, but they are watching what we do. We're under a microscope. What are we known for, individually? What are we

known for, collectively? Are we known for being critical, judgmental, callous, self-righteous, and uncaring? Or are we known for following Jesus's example? The world is saying to us, "Don't tell me what you believe. Show me." Let me say that again. The world is saying to us, "Don't tell me what you believe. Show me." Jesus is saying to us, "Follow Me." So, the ball is in our court now. What will we do? When Jesus was asked, he said, "Tell John what I'm doing, not what I'm saying."

Let's pray. We have a wonderful, wonderful opportunity to show the world we care, we love them, we care for them, by how we live our lives and what we do. And I'm challenging you right now, in the quietness of this time, in this holy place, to make that pledge to God: that I will show my world that I love You, by what I do. Let's pray.

Hear our desires, Lord, not just the words of our mouth, but the meditations of our hearts. May we proclaim You by what we do and how we live. In Jesus name, amen.