

## Jesus' Ministry Continues

*When Jesus had finished instructing His twelve disciples,  
He went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.*

*Matthew 11:1*

It's important to understand that once Jesus had sent His men out on their first short-term mission trip, He didn't go on vacation or take a sabbatical. He continued His own work. "You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel," He had just told them, "before the Son of Man comes." He was sending them out into Israel, and He Himself would continue to go through the towns and villages of Israel. Since they were paired up, this multiplied His efforts seven-fold. It also has a greater application to His second coming, which would follow a period of serious persecution of the church.

I also think it's important to listen as Jesus tells us His own priority: teaching and preaching. In His own time the crowds emphasized the healings Jesus performed. In our time many emphasized what is called "worship," which generally means a Sunday-morning music experience, with lyrics that have more in common with modern pop music than with biblical truth.

It's not that healing was unimportant; healing was *very* important. It's just that healing was not Jesus' primary ministry; nor would it be the primary ministry of His apostles. The book of Acts makes hundreds of references to teaching, preaching, proclaiming, declaring, speaking, bearing witness, testifying, hearing, listening, believing, but relatively few references to healing and miracles. Those few references are most common early in Acts, but teaching and preaching continue all the way through. The final sentence in Acts says the apostle Paul lived in Rome "and welcomed all who came to him, *preaching* the Kingdom of God and *teaching* about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."

From Romans to Revelation the New Testament continues as an extension of Jesus' ministry of preaching and teaching, continued through His apostles and others.

## Shall We Look For Another?

*Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ,  
he sent word by his disciples and said to him,  
“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”  
Matthew 11:2-3*

John the Baptist was imprisoned; let me tell you why. When Jesus was born the local king was Herod the First, sometimes called Herod the Great. Herod was a paranoid, violent man, who had some of his own children put to death. When he died, his kingdom was divided into three parts, and ruled by his sons. From Samaria south was ruled by Archelaus. The region west of the Sea of Galilee was ruled by Antipas, and the area east and north of the Sea of Galilee was ruled by Philip. Archelaus didn't last long; Caesar Augustus declared him to be incompetent, and the Romans took direct control of the region. Both Antipas and Philip reigned for decades. Philip was married to Herodias, but Antipas seduced her away from Philip. John the Baptist publicly rebuked Antipas for this sin – it was considered incest. Antipas imprisoned John. Herodias hated John, and wanted him dead, but Antipas was afraid of offending the people, who highly respected John. For the time being, he held John at a fortress east of the Dead Sea, and that's when John sends messengers to Jesus: “Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

John's question should shock us. He was the forerunner to the Messiah; he had unparalleled knowledge of Jesus Christ. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist says that he is not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. He says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He says that Jesus ranks before himself, because Jesus existed before him. John was physically older, and so he is speaking of spiritual existence; He understood the eternal nature of Christ. He says that God had told him that he would know the Messiah because he would see the Holy Spirit descending on Him, which John saw happen with Jesus. John even gives formal testimony: “I have seen and have borne witness that this Man is the Son of God.” (John 1:19-34).

But now John doesn't seem to be sure. “Are You the one who is to come?”, he asks, “or shall we

look for another?” The word “another” indicates another *kind* of Messiah.

What happened?

A few things, perhaps.

**Certainly, tradition happened.** The Jewish culture in which John was raised firmly believed that the Messiah would be a national, militaristic leader from the family line of David. The Messiah would raise up an army and free Israel from oppression. He would make Israel the greatest nation on earth. He would destroy Israel’s enemies. He would forcefully establish God’s righteousness on earth. He would bring peace by destroying the wicked and rewarding the righteous, which meant destroying *Gentiles* and rewarding *Jews*.

It’s clear from the Gospels that Jesus of Nazareth did none of these things. He didn’t seek fame; He avoided it. He didn’t raise up an army as a general, but a handful of disciples as a rabbi. He didn’t destroy; He healed. He didn’t forcefully do anything; He passionately and urgently called sinners to repentance. He blessed and rewarded faith, regardless of the one who believed, Jew or Gentile.

From a traditional point of view, it only makes sense that John was left scratching his head, like most Jews of his time. It’s probably safe to say that *nothing* Jesus did matched up with their expectations.

**But in addition to the expectations of human tradition, John was affected by his own experience of suffering.** He was imprisoned, locked up in a fortified palace called Machaerus, set on a 2,100-foot-high hilltop east of Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is more than 1,000 feet *below* sea level; the fortress was more than a half-mile above the surrounding land. John knows that, apart from some miraculous rescue, he’s not getting out alive. And, so far, there was no indication that Jesus was coming to rescue His forerunner.

Jesus was not who John thought He would be. Jesus did not do what John thought He should do. Those are two reasons that many people continue to reject the Lord.

People reject Jesus because He isn't who their traditions told them He would be. He isn't what they thought He would be, based on what they learned from their family, their church, their culture, the views of academics and atheists and agnostics and skeptics. He doesn't humble Himself before their assumptions; instead, He demands that they bow before Him!

And people reject Jesus because He doesn't do what they want Him to do. He doesn't heal them, make them rich, approve of their sins, make them feel good about themselves. He doesn't follow the culture; He condemns it. Jesus certainly is not woke; He cares nothing for CRT; He put Himself ahead of the poor, and His truth ahead of our opinions. He brings new birth, forgiveness, freedom from sin, freedom from the tyranny of the devil, union with all of His people now and throughout all of history. He didn't come to join us in our sin and rebellion; He came to join us to Him in His holiness and obedience.

Shall we be like John? Shall *we* look for another? Where would you look? Who else has done what Jesus has done? Who else is a perfect Savior and Lord? Who else has died as a substitute for sinners, and risen in victory over death? No one. There is no other Savior. There is no point in looking for one.

## Jesus' Answer

*And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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 ..."*

*Matthew 11:4-5*

John asked "shall we look for another?" Jesus answers, "No, there's no need, and no point, to look for another." They heard Jesus' teaching from His own lips, as He preached good news to the poor. They saw Him give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, cleanse lepers, restore hearing to the deaf, and raise the dead.

If you or I as Gentiles stumbled upon Jesus working among the people, we would have been

utterly astonished. His miracles, apart from anything else, would be enough to astonish us.

But for the Jews there was far more to consider. Everything that Jesus did was a fulfillment of the promises of Scripture. For instance, Isaiah 35 tells us about the miracles the Messiah would perform: giving signs to the blind, opening the ears of the deaf, causing the crippled to walk, and the mute to speak. Isaiah 26:19 says that the dead will live, their bodies will rise. Isaiah 40:1-5 – the same passage that foretells the coming of the forerunner – says that the Messiah will speak tenderly to Jerusalem, bring her peace, and forgive her sins.

John the Baptist was a Jew. He was of the tribe of Levi. He was of the family of Aaron. He knew these Scriptures. The moment that his disciples reported back to him, he understood the significance of Jesus' works and teaching.

But Jesus had one more thing to say to John: “and tell him, blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.”

Why would anyone be offended at Jesus? After all, the blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor hear the Gospel. Why would John be offended?

Well, because Jesus might as well have said to John the Baptist, “the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and *you* are going to die in prison; I'm not going to rescue you.” For all the power that Jesus exercised, He did nothing to free John from the clutches of Herod Antipas. He didn't put an end to John's suffering. Now, Jesus certainly never demeaned John; just a few verses after this He says “among those born among women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” But being the forerunner did not give John any sort of spiritual advantage. Jesus goes on to say, “Yet, the one who is *least* in the Kingdom of Heaven is *greater* than John the Baptist.” Salvation is not by works, even the work of announcing the arrival of the Savior. The question is whether John would believe in Jesus as Savior, or perform his prophesied ministry and then die in unbelief? Would John humbly accept Jesus' answer, or would he sullenly look for another kind of Messiah?

So many people today are convinced that God owes them for some reason. People who have never given a full minute's thought to Jesus Christ or the Gospel believe that He owes them eternal life. All the while, they have their eyes out for a better offer, don't they? They are constantly looking for someone else, or something else. Bizarrely, they really think that if that something else or someone else isn't actually God, the real God will throw the doors of heaven open when they die.

Jesus promises a blessing for those who are not offended by Him as He exercises His authority and power as Savior and Lord. He didn't come to forgive my sins so that I could keep committing them; He came to forgive my sins and free me from their power. He didn't come to make me feel good about the way I am; He came to change me, transform me, make me like Him. He didn't come to rescue me from every unpleasant thing I face; He came to give me eternal life and raise me from the dead, so that my eternity will be with Him, in peace and joy and holy perfection and delight.

## **Bringing it Home**

A few points to make.

First, as we live in Christ, we will find ourselves facing hard circumstances. The mark of Jesus' love is not that He makes those hard circumstances go away, but that He keeps us faithful in the midst of them.

Second, it's easy to interpret suffering and difficulties as some sort of punishment from God, or a sign of His anger. For the Christian, suffering and difficulties are where the Lord reveals His love, as He stands with us in the midst of them.

Third, it's also easy for us to get jealous about what the Lord does for others. He heals others, He blesses others, He gives things to others – why not me? That's a question only Jesus can answer,

and you aren't going to get it answered in this life. Keep trusting Him, keeping following hard after Him, and you can ask Him about His purposes in eternity – although I strongly suspect that once you are with Him, you won't have questions about minor events on earth.

Finally, the hard call of discipleship is the call to pick up our crosses and follow Jesus. It seems that John the Baptist wavered for a moment, but Jesus' answer steadied him. Why do I say that? Because John soon died at Herod's order. He didn't apologize to Herod, and try to make friends with his enemy. He remained faithful to His God and His Messiah; he took up his cross.

Pick up your cross, and trust in Jesus Christ. You won't understand very much about His moment-by-moment purposes, so don't try. Be faithful to Him. Call upon Him. Look to Him. "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself – personally – restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To HIM be the dominion forever and ever - amen!" (First Peter 5:10-11).