

Are You the Coming One or Do We Look for Someone Else?

Call to Worship: Psalm 111

1st Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-3; Isaiah 35

2nd Scripture: Matthew 11:1-6

Introduction

Having recorded Jesus's preparatory instructions to His Apostles, Matthew then brings us to an important event that transpires while Jesus, Himself, is traveling about, preaching the Kingdom of God. The assumption of verse 1 is that, immediately after instructing the Apostles, Jesus sends them out, as He Himself travels to their home cities (throughout Galilee) to continue on with His own preaching, as well (also, see Mk. 6:12 & Lke. 9:6). And en route, Jesus is approached by two of John the Baptist's disciples, who have been sent to Jesus, to ask Him a very important question. Jesus's response to this question, as well as His follow-up words, will be the topic of our consideration for these next few sermons. And throughout the course of our study, we will find very relevant and encouraging applications which ought to be helpful and useful to us.

I. Are You the Coming One?

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Vs. 1-3).

Now, before we consider the response which our Lord sends back to John (through his disciples), let us take a closer look at their question, so as, to better help us understand our Lord's response. We are told that John had heard about Jesus's ministerial activities (apparently, he was receiving reports about them from some of his disciples), and this is what provoked him to send his disciples to ask Jesus this question. Now, there are two immediate factors that we must note as we consider John's question:

1) We are told that John was in prison, which is why he had to send disciples to Jesus rather than approach Jesus himself. We know that John was thrown into prison by King Herod, because John had publicly called Herod out for taking his brother's wife, Herodias, to be his own wife. Matthew will explain this later on, in Chapter 14, when he speaks of the death of John the Baptist. And so, while in prison, after having faithfully prepared the way for the Lord by calling people to repentance and providing a baptism of repentance, John had time to ponder the ministry of the Lord going forward. To this end, as he lingered on in prison, apparently, his disciples would provide him with reports, keeping John abreast of the doings of the Christ.

2) It is obvious that John had certain expectations of the Lord, and those expectations were not lining up with the reports that he was receiving. In other words, John had anticipated that Jesus would be accomplishing certain things, but much to the dismay of John, those things were not being accomplished. Simply going from town to town, preaching about a spiritual kingdom while exhibiting signs and wonders, was not what John had expected, especially for any lengthy period of time, and that, while John was rotting away in prison, as it were. So troubled by this was John, that he had even begun to question whether Jesus was actually the Christ. Imagine that? John the Baptist himself had doubts. Now, we will discuss this further shortly, but take note of that for a moment. If anyone knew for sure that Jesus was the Christ, it was John. He had seen the sign at Jesus's baptism. He had gotten the confirmation, and further compelled his disciples to follow Jesus, confessing that he must decrease so that Jesus would increase. He had made that glorious declaration when beholding Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" He was the friend of the Bridegroom, who rejoiced and celebrated the coming of the Bridegroom. And yet, here, John asks, "Are you the coming One, or do we look for another?" "Maybe I was wrong. If not, why aren't you doing what you are supposed to be doing?" You see, John had certain expectations that weren't being met. And so strong were these expectations that they blinded him (at least, for a time) from the truth that he had professed and known so well.

Now, before we get to the Lord's answer, let us seek to answer the important question that is begged here: What was John expecting? What ought the ministry of the Christ, to have looked like, according to John? No doubt, John thought as the Jews generally thought, that the Christ

would quickly set up His Kingdom on earth. John spoke fervently of the coming judgment, as he called all to repent, but he probably didn't understand that the Kingdom of God was to begin in the heart, until after the Christ had absorbed and conquered the curse of sin. Furthermore, he did not understand that there would be a lengthy time period, where sinners would be called into Christ's Kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel unto the building of Christ's church, before Christ would ultimately return in judgment. And so, John was expecting the Christ to conquer and defeat the Romans and to bring judgment upon the wicked, leading Him to take His throne on the seat of David in Israel during the lifetime of John. As time was then wasting away, with John sitting in a cell, his expectations to this end seemed to be dwindling away, bringing him to the point that he was even questioning if Jesus was actually the Christ. Rather than question his own understanding of the circumstances, he considered the possibility that maybe the Christ had still not come. And to this end, he sends two of his disciples to question Jesus in this regard. And brethren, let's be honest, being locked in a cell for a lengthy period of time can easily lead one to wrestle with such questions, especially if your understanding of the work of Christ is incomplete. John was, after all, human, bearing the same sin nature that rests within the heart of all mankind.

And so, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was a skilled spiritual surgeon, then responds in a way that would point John back to the Word of God, so that, he could readjust his expectations in accordance with God's revealed will. Let us then consider our Lord's response at this time.

II. Our Lord's Response

“Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me” (vs. 4-6).

How then does the Lord Jesus Christ respond to John? He removes the cloud of confusion brought about by John's present trial (in prison) and brings his mind back to the place where he is thinking biblically. He corrects *John's* understanding of the ministry of the Christ by pointing to what the Scriptures teach about the Christ. And He does this in a profound way,

which would have compelled John to think back to what he had witnessed at the baptism of Jesus. John would have known those Old Testament, Messianic texts which our Lord was referring to, when He stated, “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” And the two disciples of John would have just witnessed Jesus doing these very things, which would have affirmed that the Lord was, indeed, fulfilling what the Scriptures taught about the Christ. That’s why the Lord says, “Go and tell John the things *which you hear and see...*” [Lke. 7:1-18]

Now, which Old Testament texts did the Lord have in mind when He stated these things? We read them earlier in our first Scripture readings. Let’s read them again now. [Read Isaiah 35:1-6]. Here, Isaiah prophecies about the restoration and future glory of Israel (following the captivity), but he also speaks of miraculous events that would follow, which could only find their literal fulfillment during the time of the Messiah. And it is precisely during the present ministry of Christ, which John’s disciples beheld, that we find the “eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf being unstopped, the lame leaping, and the tongue of the dumb singing.” The Jews would have known this to be a Messianic text, and so, Jesus refers to it as a reference and proof for authenticating His own ministry, to John. But then, secondly, Jesus references another important messianic text, as well, found in Isaiah 61, which speaks of the preaching ministry of the Christ. [Read Isaiah 61:1-3].

Here, we find Isaiah speaking of the Anointed One, the Christ, as One who would preach good tidings (that is, the Gospel) to the poor, and one who would comfort the broken-hearted and console those who mourn...etc. This is why Jesus adds, “and the poor have the gospel preached to them,” in His message to John. He is combining what would have been known as two, very clear messianic texts, to affirm that He was doing exactly what was in keeping with His messianic calling. The very summation of the Lord’s public ministry was preaching the Gospel to the poor, healing the sick, and comforting those who were without hope.

Now, the significance of Isaiah 61, would especially have struck John, enabling him to see what he had presently lost sight of, because of his extenuating circumstances. And you can’t help but believe that this was very intentional on the part of our Lord. Consider verse 1 again. “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach the good*

tidings to the poor...etc”. How would this truth have resonated with John? Remember, John was there when the Spirit of the Lord had come upon and anointed Jesus. At the baptism of Jesus, which John performed, John had seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus like a dove, which was the very sign that John was looking for, to identify who the Christ was. And so, John had witnessed the anointing, spoken about in Isaiah 61. Now, why is this important? Because Jesus is here saying to John, as it were, “John, you were there. You saw the sign. Recall what you saw, and don’t allow your present circumstances, as difficult as they are, to block out that reality. Let what you saw then, which was undeniable, remove any present doubts that you are wrestling with now. And notice as well, John, what the Scriptures teach. That anointing was unto a ministry of preaching the Gospel to the poor and healing the broken hearted...etc. I am doing exactly what the Scriptures define as those accompanying signs that would affirm the ministry of the Christ. Your expectations are off, and have gotten way ahead of my ministry. Come back to Scripture and find comfort there.”

Finally then, our Lord ends His response to John with a gentle rebuke: “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” This is not Jesus being harsh or inconsiderate of John (in fact, He is going to give John the greatest commendation right after this). Rather, this is Jesus exhorting John to keep the faith, in spite of His present circumstances. In essence, the Lord is nudging John forward, in such a way, as to restore his confidence, so that, his doubting does not lead into unbelief. It is a “blessed” statement, that is similar to our Lord’s gentle rebuke of Thomas, following the resurrection of the Lord. Remember, Thomas would not believe that Jesus had rose from the dead, unless he placed his fingers into the wounds of Jesus. And when he did this; upon seeing with his eyes, as it were, Thomas then affirmed his belief. And Jesus then responded, “Blessed are those who believe and don’t see.” And so, there is a blessing that falls upon those who persevere and keep the faith, which Jesus is talking about here. And Jesus sends a gentle caution to John stating that those who remain consistent in their trust in Jesus, without being offended at Him during difficult times of trial, are blessed. You see, it is easy to trust in Jesus when things are going in a direction that is most comfortable and agreeable to us. But, it is hard to remain faithful through the dark times of trial, when you can hardly see one foot in front of you, and everything seems confusing and moving in a direction that you were not

expecting. When the rug gets pulled out from underneath your feet, the real battle begins. But, as we continue to trust in the Lord, leaning not on our own understanding, we can be certain, that although we don't feel like it, we are indeed blessed. Before we close, let us then cross this bridge into some very important, relevant applications for us, brethren.

III. Concluding Applications

1) To get a great appreciation for our first application, brethren, let us consider a brief, summary survey of the life of John the Baptist.

John was chosen to prepare the way for the Christ before he was born. Indeed, he is prophesied about (to this end) in the Old Testament. He had the Holy Spirit, even when in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, such that, he leapt in her womb when Mary had visited Elizabeth, in celebration of Mary's conception with the Christ. He spent the good part of his life on the outskirts of society, out in the wilderness, wearing camel's hair clothing and eating locusts and wild honey. And then, finally, when he was thirty, he had begun his public, prophetic ministry, calling people to repent and to prepare their hearts for the coming Christ. And just as he had gained a large following, once the Christ was revealed to him, he began encouraging all of his followers to start following the Christ, leading him to decrease so that Christ would increase. Then, following this, he was arrested and put in a cell for confronting King Herod with the sin of marrying his brother's wife. And ultimately, never being freed from prison, his head was cut off and taken to Herodias, in keeping with her daughter's request of King Herod, who having been so enamored by her dancing, vowed to give her whatever she wanted. This is a general summary of the life of John the Baptist.

Now, why do I point this out, brethren? Because there is a tremendous application that we can benefit from here, taken from John's wrestling with doubts about Jesus's messianic office. First, when you consider John's biography as a whole, from a secular standpoint, it was very uneventful and seemingly wasteful. And in fact, this was the case with most of the Old Testament prophets for that matter. The life of a prophet was no picnic. They often suffered much, were secluded, did not get to enjoy the daily comforts of life, and committed most of their life to their ministerial work. And it's not like they continually heard from God. Prophecies and

visions were not constant. Indeed, they were often laden with lengthy gaps, leaving them longing to hear from God again. They had no control over God's terms and times of communication.

And John...he only lived into his early thirties, spending his final months in a prison cell, struggling with marred expectations, leading up and into the day of his beheading. He never got out of that prison cell in one piece. And yet, he was a great man of God. Indeed, Jesus called him the greatest of all prophets, a label which we will soon consider from this section. See here then, brethren, that one cannot judge God's favor upon them, on the basis of ease of life or material comforts. If that were the case, all of the prophets (indeed, Jesus Himself) would have been most miserable. But, what kept these men faithful was the constant reminder that they were living unto, and investing in, another life. This life was a bus stop, as it were, only serving to bring them to glory. The Apostle Paul, himself, knowing that he was heading back to Jerusalem (where a mob wanted to murder him) declared that he was only able to do so, without fear, because he didn't consider this life as dear to himself. And he set his mind rather to solemnly testifying to the Gospel of Christ. He thought big picture, didn't he?

Now brethren, here is the first application that I am driving at. We do not know what a day will bring, and our lives may take all kinds of unexpected twists at any moment. And we may have expectations; we may have all kinds of plans, and we may be set in our ways and on our paths, but we must be ready, at any time, if necessary, to embrace God's will, should He pull out the rug from underneath us, completely altering the direction of our lives. We have to be willing to accept God's will, wherever it takes us, entrusting our lives to His sovereign care, and His perfect and pure wisdom. And we must strive to be faithful no matter what! No matter what the course, we must strive to be faithful. Guard your expectations. Guard them carefully and hold onto *your* plans with loose hands. If you don't, you will be prone toward complaining against God, and being offended by Christ (or even questioning Him) because you have taken it upon yourself to write your future in a direction that He has not guaranteed for you. Your future may involve a painful and crippling disease. It may involve the loss of significant assets and personal property. It may involve physical blindness, cancer or some other unexpected affliction. And yes, it may even include death, much sooner than you had anticipated. And from a

providential standpoint, everything may seem to be lining up in just the right direction; and every prayer may be answered right according to the direction you are heading; the writing may seem to be deeply etched on the wall for your life, as you faithfully serve God... but then, God might just pull you into a hard... a very hard left turn. And you have to be ready for that. And you have to be ready to give Him praise, right then and there, as your entire plan; as all that you have invested in, in accordance with your understanding of the will of God, seems to fall apart. And it may never come back together. And it's right there that you have to come back to this text, and remind yourself that John the Baptist never got out of that cell, and was beheaded. And this type of reality is very common for the people of God, brethren. And this then takes us to a second important application, brethren.

2) The only guarantees that we have, are those guarantees which are given to us in the Scriptures. We cannot hang our hats on anything else...no not even providence, which we are prone to misinterpret. Do we plan? Yes. Do we pursue the unfolding of plans? Yes. But, we must limit the certainty of our expectations, solely to what is absolutely promised in God's Word. This is where we need to be, especially during times of suffering and trials. And if we do this, we will be reluctant to say to the Lord, "Are you the coming One, or should we be looking for someone else?" You see, John's expectations went beyond the Scriptures. And if a great and mighty prophet of God can do that, rest assured, we can. Indeed, we are prone to do that! God's Word gives us much to stand on. We have such wonderful, glorious, great and precious, unchangeable promises given therein, and we have the full assurance of where this is all heading. But... but, the road in front of us, which brings us there, is not always so certain. And we can never assume an equal measure of certainty on how the road will look to glory, as we do with the reality of the coming glory itself. God has never, ever guaranteed that. I would love to see all of my children grow up and get married. I would love to see this church flourish and prosper beyond my greatest imaginations. But, I may walk down from this pulpit today and fall over and die from a stroke. And if so, God be praised! I had plans, but His are better, and His Word is still as true, and He is still as faithful, as He has always been. My life is but an ink spot on the pages of eternity. And I know, even as the Apostles had come to know, that whatever cross there is to bear, there will always be a resurrection that follows! God is faithful! His Word, the lamp

to our feet and light to our paths, is sure, and that alone is where we must ultimately rest our souls, to the full! [Present trials can lead us to forget the past, but God's Word will restore us!]

3) I cannot leave this text, brethren, without highlighting a profound encouragement that is revealed herein, as well. It is never a good thing to doubt the Lord, is it? And yet, even John the Baptist struggled with doubt, brethren. This is not an encouragement for us to doubt, but if you have doubted; if you have struggled in this way, know that it doesn't mean that you are a heretic. Think about that for a moment. After all that John had seen and heard, he, for a short time at least, actually wrestled with whether or not Jesus was really the Christ. And so, I say this brethren, to simply note that, at times, even the best of Christians, can struggle with doubt, particularly when going through difficult trials. Is it justifiable? No. But, it can and does happen. And that doesn't mean that you are not a Christian or that God is done with you.

The key is this. Never let such doubts lead you to the place of unbelief. Never let doubts cause you to walk away. That is where the major difference lies, between the sincere believer and the false believer. When doubt becomes unbelief; when doubt leads you to deny Christ and to walk away, then I would be greatly concerned about your salvation. But, if you struggle with doubt, the most important thing is to keep pressing on; to be faithful, no matter what, pleading with God to renew and strengthen your faith. And He will indeed do that, in due time. Stay the course, no matter what. Say with the Apostles, in the midst of great confusion and an apostate multitude, "Lord, where else will we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

4) Finally, for those of you who are not saved, this morning; if you are not a true Christian here, this morning, I plead with you... *I plead with you*, come to Christ, before it is too late. The Gospel!!!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25