

Matthew 11:2-11

Dear friends in Christ:

He has a decent job. He's kind to my cat. He enjoys my parents' company. He even knows the difference between baking powder and baking soda. Is he the one?

She's intelligent. She makes me laugh. She likes to go camping. She even buys her clothes at Walmart. Is she the one?

Boy, am I glad I'm done with that phase of my life, you know, the phase during which you had to figure out who was "the one" to spend the rest of your life with in marriage. It seems to me that cultures that practice arranged marriages have a good thing going. Single people in those cultures don't have to waste time and money on dates. They just have to sit back and relax while their parents find them "the one" they are to marry.

John the Baptist too was eagerly looking for "the one." No, he wasn't looking for Mrs. Baptist. He was looking for the **"Coming One"**, the promised Messiah who would save the world from sin and punish God's enemies. At one time John had been so certain he had found "the one" that he boldly pointed towards a carpenter from Nazareth and said: **"Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29)

But months later John wasn't so sure anymore that Jesus was "the one." Hadn't John's God-given message about the Messiah been, **"His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"** (Matthew 3:12), as we heard in last week's sermon? If Jesus was "the one," where were the fireworks of judgment? Why did the wicked like King Herod continue to prosper while the righteous like John himself languished behind bars? A prophet was supposed to be in a pulpit not a prison.

As we move closer to hearing the Christmas story again this year, we too may share the same doubts John the Baptist had. Is Jesus really "the one"? Is he really the Son of God who became man to win our salvation? Does he really care about our lowly circumstances? Is he really able to help me with all the troubles I am going through? Today, we'll see that **Jesus Is Indeed the One**. We'll be assured of this by looking at his works and listening to his words.

It shouldn't surprise us that even a strong believer like John the Baptist would have doubts about Jesus. I can't think of a single character in the Bible (besides Jesus) who never questioned God's timing or his way of doing things. At one time the prophet Elijah too wondered why God didn't deal more forcefully with the wicked of his day: King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. So, if you have some doubts about Jesus, you're not alone. But now how should you handle those doubts? John didn't ask others what they thought about Jesus. Instead, he went back to Jesus himself for clarification and strengthening. Likewise, don't look for answers to your doubts about Jesus on Wikipedia. Go to Jesus himself.

Although John was not able to go to Jesus since he had been put in prison for pointing out King Herod's sin of marrying his sister-in-law, he did send two of his disciples. When the disciples relayed John's doubts, Jesus didn't shake his head and "tut-tut" as if John was a big disappointment. On the contrary, he defended John before the crowd and asked them: **"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?...[No.] A prophet? Yes, I tell you! And he is 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.'...he is the Elijah who was to come"** (Matthew 11:7, 9, 10, 14b).

According to Jesus, John was greater than all the Old Testament prophets. While they had announced Jesus' coming like a ring master announcing the next boxing card, John actually prepared the way for Jesus like a trainer clearing the way for the prize fighter as he makes his way into the ring. If even someone so close to the Messiah could have doubts and not be scolded by him, we should not be shy about taking our doubts to Jesus.

And what was the answer Jesus gave to John's question? Jesus said: **"Go, report to John what you hear and see: 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. Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me."** (Matthew 11:4-6). Jesus replied in the words of our First Lesson from Isaiah 35 that foretold the things the

Messiah would do when he came. In fact, shortly before the events of our text, Jesus had raised to life the widow's dead son in the town of Nain proving that he indeed was the promised Messiah.

Don't you wish you could have seen some of those miracles? Would that put all your doubts about Jesus to rest? But if that was the case, wouldn't Jesus himself have gone to John and performed a few miracles for him while he watched from prison? He didn't. Instead, he simply told John's disciples to describe what he was doing and told John to match those reports with the Old Testament prophecies. In other words, Jesus dealt with John's doubts the same way he deals with ours: not by appearing in dazzling glory but by pointing us to his Word. It's through the Bible that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to convince us of the truth of Jesus. Get to Bible class and let Jesus answer your doubts about him through his Word.

Of course, studying God's Word doesn't mean that your life will become any easier. It didn't become easier for John. He remained in prison and would eventually die there when he was beheaded. From the world's perspective John's life didn't amount to much. He didn't discover any medicines. He didn't build any cities. He didn't make a lot of money. What did he do? He simply pointed people to Jesus. It was his life's work. The world may not think that's so special but listen to what Jesus thought of John: **"Amen I tell you: Among those born of women there has not appeared anyone greater than John the Baptist."** (Matthew 11:11a). What made John so great was his close connection with Jesus. That's what makes you great despite appearances. Jesus' death and resurrection have forgiven all your sins. All those sins of yours and all your guilt has been taken away by Jesus, as he died on the cross for you. He has opened the doors of heaven to you where you will enjoy a life that not even the richest billionaire can begin to comprehend.

"But I'm not like John," you cry. "I don't dedicate my life to serving Jesus as John did. There is no way that God would think I'm great." We may not be John the Baptist but we're still great in God's eyes. In fact, we're even greater than John was. Listen to what Jesus said: **"Amen I tell you: Among those born of women there has not appeared anyone greater than John the Baptist. Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."** (Matthew 11:11). Me? You? Our Sunday School kids? Greater than John the Baptist? How can that be? While John had the privilege of announcing Jesus to the world, he never got to see Jesus fulfill his mission of dying on the cross and coming back to life again. But we have the full record. That makes us even greater, or more privileged than John the Baptist. Remember that when you're shopping for the latest gadgets to buy your kids for Christmas trying to keep up with the other parents. That's not what makes you great. What makes you great is your faith in Jesus, a faith you are to share with your children. What makes you great is teaching your children about Jesus and bringing them to church.

It's clear to me that John was pretty bummed that he had ended up in prison especially since Jesus wasn't doing anything about it. John's problem of course was that he had his own expectations for Jesus, expectations that didn't match Scripture. It's the same for us. When we get disappointed with Jesus it's because our worldly expectations don't match what Scripture says about our Savior. But Jesus is "the one." He is the Messiah who came to save us from our sins. That doesn't mean he's going to save you from financial ruin or even from cancer. He may allow you to suffer those things because he wants to draw you closer to him. He even invites the question: "Are you the one?" because he's eager to answer it through his Word and reassure you that your eternal future is secure with him. So, keep looking at his works and keep listening to his Word. Remain convinced that Jesus is "the one." He is your loving Savior. He came to this world that first Christmas for you. Amen.