

"Jesus, Are You The One?"

I was listening to a podcast that had been recommended to me. It's actually called the Brant and Sherri Oddcast, but it's a podcast. I liked it, and it was interesting that in the one I listened to, Brant talked about a friend who said his mom says she is an atheist. She said the reason she's an atheist is that she prays all the time, but God never gives her what she wants – so, she thinks, *what's the point?* So he was wondering, hmm, is she really an atheist if she is praying all the time? Brant said, well, I don't know – good question, though!

I had been studying this passage, and it seemed to me that this woman's issue was similar to that of John the Baptist here in **Matthew 11**. Jesus wasn't doing for John what John hoped for and expected. While we see John struggle with it, he deals with it in a different way. He takes his uncertainty, maybe disappointment, and instead of walking away from Christ, he takes it to Christ in the form of a question. The question comes in **verse 3**. John asks, "*Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?*" I believe we can all relate to John's struggle. If God is at work in the world and if Jesus has come into my life, why are things so messed up?

There is a backdrop to the story that is important and interesting. Back in the earliest portions of the Bible, God had promised that one day He would visit this world to bring redemption. He foretold, through prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, that he would send a Redeemer or Savior. God said that the Redeemer would not just show up without warning; there would be a prophet who would go before him and prepare the people for him. That's who John the Baptist was. John talked a lot about God's judgment and the need to change our lives, and when people said: "*Look, I want to be right with God, I want to listen to him and follow his ways and be ready for the Savior,*" they would be baptized by John. John was especially big on warning people about the judgment of God, and so he got in trouble when he started pointing out the sins of the king. The king, Herod, was sleeping with his brother's wife. As if that isn't enough, he is attracted to her teenage daughter, who is, of course, also his niece, but apparently knows how to dance, and he likes that. John the Baptist is full of devotion to God, and he calls it as he sees it. So he gets thrown into prison. Meanwhile, Jesus is just going on with his life.

The words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are covered in **Matthew 5-7**. In **Matthew 8-9**, the deeds of Jesus are emphasized as he continues to teach and heal in Galilee. In **Matthew 10**, His focus is on training the disciples. Beginning in **Matthew 11**, Jesus provokes different responses from various people and groups – mostly misunderstanding. In **Matthew, 13**, Jesus explains this in parables. More examples of responses to Jesus are given in **Matthew 14-16**. Until the true response is found in Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God in **Matthew 16**. So here, in the first example of the different responses to Jesus, you have John the Baptist and his uncertainty. In **Matthew 11:1-3**, Jesus is continuing to teach and preach in Galilee. **Verse 2-3** says: *When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

It seems one very helpful lesson to learn from this is that...

I. THE TRUE MESSIAH CAN STIR UP TROUBLING QUESTIONS.

Why? Well...

A. Jesus stirs up questions because he does not fix our problems like we think he should.

In **verse 2**, the significance of John's imprisonment is that the issue isn't just the philosophical *idea* of injustice. It was personal. John was this wild man who lived in the desert, ate wild honey, wore camel skins, drank water from the river, and slept under the stars. The historian Josephus says John was imprisoned in the desert at Machaerus, which means the black fortress. It was there the young daughter of Herod's brother's former wife, who is now with Herod, a girl named Salome, danced for him so seductively he told her he would give her whatever she wanted. She said: *Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter*. He did it. So obviously, we are reading the story before that, but we can see that for John, this issue of expectation is personal. He's in prison. This isn't going to end well. He feels it in his bones. Why doesn't Jesus do something? Have you ever had questions because Jesus did not solve some problems the way you expected or wanted him to? John's question goes to the heart of the issue: *Are you who I thought you were – hoped you were, or do I keep looking?*

B. The real Jesus is loving and amazing, but he can be disturbing and demanding all at the same time.

We'll look at the response Jesus gives in a moment, but one thing he does not do is condemn John for the question. If you read on to the end of **Matthew 11**, you would see that after the disciples of John left, Jesus defended John. He said when you went out to see him, what was it you went to see a reed shaken by the wind? No! He is saying, don't think because of this question that John is a weak man like a reed blown by every wind of adversity. John was a strong and true man of God, but the kind of faith that Jesus sometimes requires of us does not come easily to any of us. So it is okay to have and to ask hard questions. Jesus is someone who challenges all our expectations. And that raises hard questions we need to know that.

Thomas Kuhn was an influential philosopher of science, and his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is one of the most cited academic books of all time. In it, he says a lot of people think science just steadily moves forward one step at a time, but that is not really how it works. He says everyone, even scientist have an expectation of what's happening and how things work. It's your working model of reality. You tend to look at everything from within that mindset - that view of the world. He says, but sometimes you start to get input that conflicts with that. You try to make it fit, but it just doesn't. He says eventually, if you get enough new data and it doesn't fit your previous working model, you reach a tipping point that pushes you to accept a completely new working model. That's when you have people suddenly willing to say, wow, maybe the sun isn't orbiting the earth. Maybe the earth is orbiting the sun! You have a revolution of thinking - a new working model.

We need to let Jesus replace our imperfect working models, our paradigms with the truth. Doesn't it make sense that if we are sinful and he is the Savior, and we are human, and He is divine, our expectations would reflect our imperfect knowledge and self-centered wishes and therefore, when we encountered the real Jesus, his divine reality would not be likely to fit into our faulty expectations and when that happened our expectation would have to be the thing that changed? I think we could put this down as a rule for the Christian faith: *If you don't get your ideas of Jesus from Jesus, you will either end up confused by Jesus or at odds with Jesus.*

John goes to Jesus, and he asks the right question. He doesn't say, "Are you going to fulfill my expectations?" He asks: *Are you the one who was to come?* If the answer to that question is "Yes", then all the other questions are not really essential.

Think about that. If Jesus is the one, he's the Lord, and every other question is not all that crucial. People today ask questions like this: "Look if I believe in Jesus, is he going to affirm me in my sexual preferences?" And the implication is, "I won't believe in Him if he won't affirm me." People ask: "If I believe in Jesus, do I have to believe in hell, judgment, or Jesus as the only way because I can't believe in a God like that?" But if those are our questions in the sense that the answer determines whether we will believe, we're trying to make Jesus fit *our* expectations. The one question which, if answered, changes all the others. Is John's question: *Are you the one who was to come?* If the answer to that question is "Yes", then all the other questions, however important to me personally, have to be seen in the light of the reality of His supremacy. Because if he is the one, the Savior, the Lord, the Redeemer, the one sent from God that the whole story is about, then even if he doesn't seem to fit my expectations or solve my problems, I'm going to follow him submit to him and conform to Him.

Look at **Matthew 11:4-6** *Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 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. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."*

What we see in the response of Jesus is that....

II. THE REAL JESUS REQUIRES A THOUGHTFUL, PERSONAL RESPONSE.

It is interesting the question of John is very direct: *Are you the one?*

A. The answer of Jesus is indirect.

He doesn't just say, *Yes, I am the one who was to come. There is no need to look for another.* One older writer F.B. Meyer wrote about this incident. Listen to what he said:

Had he done so (that is had he simply said, *Yes I am the one.*) He might have answered John's intellect, but not his heart. After a few hours, the assurance would have waxed dim, and he would have questioned again.... One question always leads to another as long as the heart is unsatisfied.

God might, had he so willed, have written in starry characters across the sky the divine words: "I am Jehovah, and

ye shall have no other gods before me" This might have awed the intellect, but it would not have convinced the heart.

The evidence of the unseen and eternal must be given, not to the startled physical sense but to the soul. Some other deeper method must be adopted; the heart must be taught to wait, trust, and accept those deep intuitions and revelations, which establish the being of God.¹

Sometimes God seems to say you need to work this out, so it becomes a conviction. Only then will you take it to heart so that it has the power to change you from the inside and comfort you in the hard times.

B. The answer of Jesus calls you to respond personally.

He mentions four things.

1st. His miracles. Matthew 11:4-5 *Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 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.* There is no evidence John actually saw miracles with his own eyes. John is like us in this and like John, what we are given today is a report of what other people saw and heard that Jesus did. What we have to do is to wrestle with whether that report of how Jesus lived and worked miracles is more believable than our doubts and fears.

If you want to look at that in more depth, I recommend the book *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller. In it, he tells about Anne Rice, the famous author who wrote *Interview with a Vampire* and many other novels. She had been an atheist ever since college but several years ago, she decided to actually study the life of Jesus and she ended up believing that the Scriptures give a reliable, believable historical account of a truly miraculous life. She ended up believing in Jesus, and she wrote:... *that whole picture that had floated around in liberal circles I frequented as an atheist for thirty years-- (what she means by that whole picture is the idea of Jesus as just a radical teacher of love but not a supernatural worker of miracles) that case was not made. Not only was it not made, but I also discovered in this field some of the worst and most biased scholarships I'd ever read.* ² (

2nd. His prophecies. When Jesus answers John's question, he does so in what would have been, for John, "familiar phrases from the prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 35:5-6a** *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man*

leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. Isaiah 61:1
The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has
anointed (That's the word from which Messiah and Christ come,
Messiah mean the anointed one) me to bring good news (the gospel)
to the poor he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim
liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are
bound; Seven hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah in particular
said when the Messiah came all these miracles would be performed.
So Jesus is not only doing miracles, but by the nature of the miracles,
he is fulfilling the prophecies and completing the story of Scripture.

Jesus mentions his miracles and the prophecies and then
3rd. His preaching. Jesus says: *the good news is preached to the*
poor. This was part of the prophecy of Isaiah! The word poor here is
one of those words with two interrelated meanings. It means humility in
terms of disposition, but it also means destitute in terms of resources.
To single out the poor for special mention stresses the compassion of
God for the hurting and the helpless. Jesus has grace and good news
for those who have nothing to offer but their neediness.

We gain insight into what Jesus means by preaching the gospel to the
poor at the end of this same chapter. In **Matthew 11:28**, he says.
"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you
rest. The death and resurrection of Jesus was all about Him paying for
our sins so we could receive his grace and be invited like this to come
to him. There is nothing like the gospel that Jesus preached. It reveals
Jesus as Lord as King of Kings and Jesus as Savior and in that a love
that Paul will later describe as beyond our comprehension. It is the
offer of redemption and relationship with God completely by His grace
for whoever will receive it. It doesn't favor the rich or the well educated.
If anything, it favors the humble poor who know how much they need
God. There is something unique in the gospel Jesus offers us that has
a power in itself to dissolve doubts and change lives.

The last thing Jesus mentions is
4. His strange benediction. Verse 6 *Blessed is the man who does*
not fall away on account of me" I think Jesus is saying this way: John,
you may not understand, you may even be disappointed, but I want
you to trust me. My ways may not fit your understanding, but trust what
you do not understand based on what you do believe about me, and
you will find, in that the blessing of deep spiritual fulfillment. *Blessed*
are those who do not get so locked into their expectations that they
lose faith and go looking elsewhere. I heard someone put it this way:

CONCLUSION

What Jesus offers us is not a watertight argument that resolves every question but a watertight person in whom we can trust.

In the podcast I mentioned earlier, Brant reflected the issue of the woman who felt she never got what she wanted from Jesus, so she was walking away from the faith. He said this, *You know I think this may be more emotional than rational, but what I wish I could tell someone who feels that way is that not getting what you want or what you asked for is a good reason to choose a different restaurant, but God is not a waiter. He is the King of Kings, so my proper relationship with him wouldn't be on that basis of whether or not he gives me what I want. The way he relates to me may not be what I was wanting. But do not rule him out.* He went on, and I thought it was so simple and yet so true that the fact that God doesn't do what I want or think he should do does not invalidate the reality that he is God, and Jesus is not only Savior but Lord and King. He is the king of kings.

Here's where this leaves us. You can't fit Jesus into your expectations, but you can let him lead you into a life of faith-filled expectancy. I once heard someone point out that there is a difference between expectancy and expectation. Expectancy is a faith-filled spark in the soul. It renews hope and the anticipation for God to work in ways that bring life and light. It is the tenacious belief that in spite of what you feel or see or are going through, God can bring redemption and will as you trust in him. But the toxic alternative to a spirit of expectancy is expectations.

Expectancy sours into expectation when we start to dictate terms to God and tell him how we think he ought to act. Expectancy sets us up to be humble and open and patient and to be wonderfully surprised. Expectations set us up to be disappointed, and in our disappointment, to harden into apathy, cynicism, and bitterness. Expectations can be like blinders that so focus our attention on what we want that it blocks out the many good things God is doing, and the ways he is working. And that kills gratitude and hope. You and I have to choose to either live in the hope of expectancy or wither in our hardened and narrow expectations. Choose Jesus. He is the one.

Amen

Prayer of Response

Holy Father our Rock and our Salvation, We thank you that the gospel is preached to the poor. Give us the openness to hear it and the willingness to receive it. When we are filled with troubling questions and even disappointment, draw us to Jesus. May we never walk away from you in frustration but rather come to you with our uncertainties and find in you our hope. Help us to let go of the expectations to which we cling so desperately in order that we might find and experience the deeper joys of expectant but humble faith. In Jesus name, Amen

¹ F.B. Meyer, *John the Baptist*, pp. 116-117

² Quoted by Tim Keller in *The Reason for God*, p. 99