

*<sup>2</sup>While John was in prison, he heard about the things Christ was doing. He sent two of his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, “Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else?”*

*<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, “Go, report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”*

*<sup>7</sup>As these two were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the crowds about John. “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? No, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. <sup>9</sup>So what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you! And he is much more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>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.’ <sup>11</sup>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.*

John the Baptist had proclaimed Jesus boldly. He had shown the people their sins and pointed them to the greater one to come. But even a strong faith can tremble under suffering. Back in the wilderness, John probably didn't imagine that a prison house would be his end. He preached about the coming Messiah, the one whose sandals John was unworthy to carry. But now behind bars, it seems John had nagging doubts. Was this really who John had prepared the people for, or was Jesus just another prophet pointing to one still to come? If this is the way John felt, it does not disqualify him as God's prophet or prove he was without faith in God's promise to save the world from sin. Instead, it shows John's humanity, because we struggle with misplacing Jesus as well.

In his doubts, John sent two of his followers to Jesus to ask this question: “Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else?” What was John's expectation for the Messiah? Well, let's look at the words God gives John to say. John tells us that Jesus would bring judgement with an ax and fire. John no doubt also knew Isaiah's prophecy, that Jesus would free the captives from their prison. It seems John expected Jesus to change the world visibly.

We see it throughout Jesus' ministry. He goes into a village, healing the sick and feeding the poor. And what do they want Jesus to do? They want him to stay with them to keep feeding and keep healing. But Jesus never agrees to that gig. Why? Is it because he doesn't love them? Of course not! But as he makes clear time and time again, he must go to Jerusalem. The same is true with the Jewish leaders. At first, they saw Jesus as a potential religious revolutionary. He could overthrow the Romans. He could reclaim David's throne and lead the Jewish state to

heights that the Roman Empire only wished it could reach. But Jesus is not interested in revolting against Ceasar. In fact, he tells the people that they owe their taxes to their corrupt oppressors. Because Jesus was not the Savior most in his day were looking for, many abandoned him.

What kind of Messiah are you looking for? Are you looking for someone to fix the poor circumstances of your life? Are you looking for someone to heal your pains? To guide you to a successful and vibrant life? To rescue you from earthly trials? You know who Jesus is, but sometimes you don't trust that he's giving you exactly what you need. Sometimes you think you know better than Jesus what fires in your life he ought to turn his hose toward. You think of worldly things. You plan for the here and now. So, you say, "Lord, if you're Savior, why am I still struggling?" "If you are the Great Physician, why is the sickness still here, and worse than ever before?" "Why haven't the stresses lifted? The relationships healed? The finances improved?" We want a Savior shaped around what we think is most urgent. We want relief, but Jesus prioritizes redemption.

Jesus doesn't send John's disciples back with words of scorn and ridicule. Instead, he points again to the promises God had made: "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." Jesus comes to fulfill Messianic prophesy, not political or social expectations.

So, what was the Messiah supposed to do? You can certainly understand how people would hear the promises to give sight to the blind and freedom for the captives and turn their eyes to hospital wards and prisons. And certainly, Jesus cares about earthly needs. But are these our greatest needs? No. We have a need for forgiveness. We have a need for eternity.

If Jesus had remained in the towns and villages healing and feeding, and had abandoned his mission to Jerusalem, wouldn't that have been better for those people in the towns and villages? I want you to think about it a different way. Go back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had sinned. They had brought pain into the world and a broken relationship with God. So, God sent them out the garden, never to eat of the Tree of Life again. You could say that's punishment. God was condemning them to eventual death. But how was cutting them off from a tree that would give them lasting life on earth actually a loving response from God? Continuing to eat from the tree would trap Adam and Eve in this sinful world. There would be no end to pain. Chronic sickness would go on forever. In his wisdom, God knew what Adam and Eve needed better than they did. His main goal was not to make them happy every day. His main goal was to keep them close to him for eternity.

Is this not what Jesus is doing when he tells the women to stop holding onto him in his resurrection? Is this not what he's doing when he spurns the calls of the people to be their bread

king or the encouragement from his own disciples to ascend to the marble throne of David instead of the emerald throne of heaven? Jesus came focused on the kingdom of heaven, not the rotting kingdoms of the earth. He didn't come to be a prison-breaker for John the Baptist. He came to be a grave-breaker for John and the rest of the world. He didn't come to do away with suffering in this land of sin, but to end death's reign through his cross and resurrection.

Jesus is the Savior we need. And yet, Jesus defends John. He sends John's disciples back with praise for John's ministry. Jesus calls John more than a prophet. God is not offended by honest faith wrestling with pain. In fact, it's when we wrestle most with our difficult lots in life that God shows his love the most. But he doesn't come to let us pity ourselves in our suffering. He comes to lift our eyes higher. John prepared the way. He called out sin and showed his hearers their need for repentance. John served the role God had called him to, even if it did not feel fruitful for John. But Jesus is the way. Christ is the Savior we need. Not one who removes every earthly hardship now so we can glory in our sin, but one who conquers sin, death, and hell forever.

So, what kind of Savior are you looking for? As you hear the news stories of moral and religious degradation in our country, are you looking for a political Savior? One who will establish some earthly reign of Christians seated in power? It's been tried. No utopia has come about. Surprisingly, sinners – even those sinner-saints who love Jesus – are still sinners and are unable to rule according to the will of God. As you look around at people going hungry or living with illness in our community, are you looking for a social Savior? Your God cares about governments. He gives them – even the worst ones – to create relative peace in society. God cares about the food on your table and the illness that has infested your body. It's why he gives people the intelligence to work together and form supply lines from the farm all the way to your table. It's why he gives doctors and nurses who are educated in the goings-on of the human body. God cares about these things, but they are not the primary reason Jesus came.

He came to save sinners. He came to suffer and die and rise, for you and for me. He brings us peace with God and the promise that our coffin is not a dead end because of the resurrection. No, he may not remove every sickness, sorrow, or stress now, but he came to carry our cross and promise us the Kingdom. That's what's most important, not bringing a taste of heaven to us here for seventy, eighty, or ninety years, but bringing us to heaven where there is no hunger or strife or sin.

When Jesus doesn't meet expectations, he surpasses them. So, when doubts whispers to you in the dark like it seems to have with John, look at what Jesus has done and what his focus was on. Look where he went – to the cross for you. Look where he is leading you – to eternal life. What kind of a Savior are you looking for? Behold, the one who has come and is coming again. His arrival is imminent. His rescue is eternal. He is our Messiah. Amen.