

## ***Am I Who God Calls Me to Be?***

John the Baptist asks a vital question. He sends his disciples to Jesus to ask – “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” As we walk through Jesus’ answer to John – there’s a question that we need to be asking ourselves – “Am I the one that God has called me to be?”

We know who God has called John to be – he is the one who is to prepare the way of the Lord. He is the one who has gone out preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So, why would John even ask such a question?

Many, including Luther and most of the church fathers, hold that John could not have entertained doubts about the identify of Jesus. They say that John sends his disciples to Jesus with this question so that they will learn who Jesus is – that it is for their benefit.

And yet, as God sets His Word before us today, there’s no compelling reason to hear it in any other way – that John is sincere in the question He asks of Jesus. And St. Matthew tips us off right from the beginning – telling us that John is in prison.

You may recall that John had preached against King Herod – calling him to repentance – for the sin of taking his brother’s wife as his own. John had been thrown in prison – and, as it plays out – John will eventually be beheaded by the order of Herod.

John is not in a good spot. Prison was not a good place to be. Death is certainly a distinct possibility. John knows what it’s like to be the Elijah who would come before the Lord – like Elijah who despaired that he was the only one left – who despaired that his faithful preaching only got him suffering and persecution.

“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus knows the doubt and despair that has darkened John’s life. He sends the Baptist’s disciples back to tell John what they “hear and see.” From his prison cell – John is deaf and blind to what Jesus is saying and doing – but the Lord sends him a Word to hold onto – a Word of God to believe – a life giving Word, to lighten his darkness.

And the words themselves are enlightening – ‘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 ...’

These are not unfamiliar words to John – he knows right away that they are the words of Isaiah the prophet – words that describe what happens when the Promised Messiah comes. In other words, Jesus – in no uncertain terms, is telling John – YES, I AM the One – I am the Messiah!

You know what it’s like to be in John’s shoes. No, you are not in Herod’s prison – but you have your own prisons – your own doubt and despair – the struggles that darken your life. And like John – you look to the Messiah – you call upon Him in the day of trouble – trusting that He will deliver you.

With the words that Jesus has sent back to be preached into John’s ears – He has John sitting on the edge of his seat. As I said earlier – he knows these words from Isaiah – and I imagine that he is giddy with excitement!

No doubt he thinks he is going to hear Jesus quote Isaiah 61 – “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news 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!”

But those words never come. John is left in prison. John will be beheaded. Jesus is the Messiah – but He doesn’t come to bust John out of prison.

I go back to what I said at the beginning – it’s not just the question of whether Jesus is “the one to come or shall we look for another” – but, am I the one that God has called me to be?

Rather than the good news of opening the prison to those who are bound – Jesus speaks another word – “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Will John be offended that Jesus doesn’t come to his rescue?

The word “offended” is sometimes translated as “scandalized” – and it has to do with stumbling and falling away from saving faith in Jesus.

What about you, are you “offended” when Jesus doesn’t solve your family disputes – when He doesn’t cure your cancer or fix your finances. That’s the great paradox of the Kingdom of God – Jesus is the Messiah – who comes to release creation from the bondage of sin – but that doesn’t mean He opens the prison door for us, or brings our current struggles to an end.

John is indeed blessed – if he continues to trust in Jesus for his life and salvation – even when Jesus doesn’t burst open his prison doors. Yes, he remains in prison, and yes, he will die a horrible death – but the Lord will deliver him from all evil and take him to his heavenly home.

So also with you. God does not promise that He will come and remove every source of suffering from your life – but He does promise that Jesus is the Messiah – the One who comes to redeem you, and to deliver you once and for all from this sin-suffering world to live eternally in the bliss of heaven.

That blessedness is not seen in this life – but it is certain and sure – and will be seen and experienced and lived in the life to come. Until then, the Lord sends His life-giving words to us – Word that strengthen and sustain faith, even in the midst of suffering – so that we may be who He has called us to be – one who trusts in Jesus, no matter what.

He comes to us and gives us His own body and blood that also suffered (under Pontius Pilate), was crucified, died and buried – but also was raised to life again, to live eternally. This is the Lord’s preparing His way to come to you – blessing you with His salvation now – until He comes again to deliver you eternally.

And so we pray – Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.