

## ***“Blessed that You are Not Offended”***

What’s up with John the Baptist? It’s been reported to him all the things that Jesus has been doing – and he sends some of his disciples back to Jesus with this question – “Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Is he serious? Is John the Baptist really questioning who Jesus is? You may (or may not) be surprised to hear that there is a lot of debate over this question.

On the one hand you have this argument, that John is a relative of Jesus, and so certainly he has to know who Jesus is. No doubt he has been told over and over again about the angelic announcements to his own father Zechariah, as well as to his relatives Mary and Joseph.

John is the forerunner of the Christ – he has been set apart from birth to prepare the way of the Lord. He pointed the crowds to Jesus and said – “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” He baptized Jesus!

And so, some say that John the Baptist is just asking this question of Jesus for the sake of his own disciples – because they are the ones who are unsure – John does this for their understanding and their peace of mind.

On the other hand, there is an argument that says John sincerely is asking this question of Jesus. After all, he’s in prison – and death lurks in the darkness. IS Jesus the One?

Others, including many respected religious leaders of his day have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He doesn’t seem to want to drive the Romans out, they argue. He’s shown glimpses of great glory, but then He withdraws into the background.

John himself is, no doubt, familiar with all the things Jesus is doing and saying to everyone else – but you can almost hear him ask, “What about me, Jesus?” As he sits there in prison – can John trust Jesus with his imprisonment, with his life? Is there another way? Sounds like Jesus who asks the same question when under great duress.

And to top it all off, John is a sinner like you and I who is constantly a target of the evil one. He has much to be anxious about. So, we can understand why he might ask such a question of Jesus.

Regardless of all the debate – the question still stands. Whether the answer to this question is for John the Baptist, or his disciples – it is most certainly “for you.” Jesus, “are you the One who is to come” – who HAS come, and WILL COME again – “or shall we look for another?”

You can identify with John the Baptist and his situation. You have your own dark days, things that cause you anxiety, leave you puzzled because God isn’t working in the way you expect (or want). You have your own questions. You’re in good company.

So, how does Jesus respond to John the Baptist, and to you? Let’s start with John. Jesus sends John’s disciples back saying – “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”

They report to John – not only those things they saw and heard Jesus do “in that hour” – but the very things that Isaiah prophesied about, that the Messiah would do when He came. Jesus even preaches from these messianic promises with His first sermon in Nazareth. Except there is something missing in all of these words.

The report from Jesus doesn’t include Isaiah’s words of promise that the Messiah will “bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” Nothing is said about proclaiming liberty to the captives, “to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” Nothing about the “day of vengeance of our God” – or “the ruthless shall come to nothing.”

Is John expecting Jesus to come and set him free from his prison cell? And what about Herod and Herodias, will they get what is coming to them because of their evil deeds?

Rather than focus on what Jesus has not said to him – John has been given a Word of the Lord to hold onto. Jesus is clearly telling him that He is the One – that there is no other way – this is the cup that John must drink – “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me, Jesus says to him.

By the way, did you notice how John asked his question in the first place? Jesus, he asks, “are you the One who is to come, or shall WE look for another?” – not, “shall I look for another?” Jesus’ response is for John and his disciples and all people – including you. “When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John.” Jesus is speaking to you. What are YOU looking for? What did you go out to see?

Jesus confronts our expectations, what we determine to be reasonable, how we think things ought to be. Did you go out to see a prophet? Yes? Then listen to him! Just as I told John to listen to the prophet Isaiah – so I’m telling you to listen to the prophet John.

He’s MY messenger – the one “who will prepare your way before you” – so that you may see that I am the One your heavenly Father has sent to bring you out of your darkness, release you from the prison-house of sin, chase away your doubts and anxiety – and give you peace.

Folks, don’t look elsewhere. Even if you are imprisoned – or others suggest to you more “reasonable” ways of deliverance – there is no other. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God – the Promised Messiah – the Anointed One who comes to redeem YOU.

His forgiveness surpasses your sin. His promise to resurrect your body on the Last Day and give you eternal life – guards your hearts and minds. Jesus is the One – the very peace of God – the One who has come to you, and for you.

Dearly beloved – “The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything” – for Jesus is your Savior. Amen.

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