

Matthew 11:2-11

Advent 3; December 11 & 12, 2022

All he wanted was an old-fashioned family Christmas. He started by going out into the woods to find the perfect tree. As he got the tree home, it was too big for the living room. But that didn't stop him from trying to have his perfect Christmas. He continued to move forward even after the squirrel jumped out of the tree. He wanted the best and biggest light display in the neighborhood. Eventually, the lights came on after his wife flipped the switch in the garage. He would get stuck in the attic. He had big plans for his end of the year bonus from his Scrooge-like boss. He was going to have a pool installed at the house with that bonus, instead he got the jelly of the month club subscription. His brother would kidnap his boss. The SWAT team would have to rescue his boss. Clark Griswold's expectations for a perfect Christmas were far from perfect. We can laugh at all the scenes in the movie *Christmas Vacation*. Yet, expectations can often not meet reality, don't they?

We have plans, we have dreams, we have hopes and reality seems to fall so short at times. You know the feeling. You get to the stadium for the first time to see a great game, and all you can see are the players who are little bitty people running around the field. You knew the seats were going to be high up, but you expected to see more of the players that you can. Expectations vs. reality. You get a new car. It has everything you wanted, at least you thought so. After driving it for six months, the ride is bumpy, the handling is kind of sloppy and the back seat is tight and uncomfortable. The TV ads show the stylish and fun car to drive, but in reality it isn't as great as you thought. Expectations vs. reality. Ever been disappointed with your expectations? Expectations don't always match up with reality.

I think we can all understand how John felt in our text. John the Baptist was a fiery preacher. He wasn't like anyone else in his day. He wore camel hair clothes and ate grasshoppers and honey. He knew that he was the one who would get people ready to meet and hear their Savior speak. John had called the Jewish leaders: **"You brood of vipers!"** He spoke about **"the coming wrath."** **"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."** Jesus was coming to **"gather his wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."** He knew he was the very forerunner of the Savior, the one promised by God who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. But now he asks, **"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect another?"** Why was John so full of weary and doubt? John was faithful in carrying out the task that he had been given. He was even willing to take on the leaders of his day. He rebuked Herod, the ruler of Galilee, for his wicked adulterous lifestyle.

What did it get him? A trip to prison. While he sat in that dark prison, a kind of darkness came over the soul of John. What was God's plan for him now? Perhaps, he was even wondering about the worth of his ministry? He knew that once Jesus came on the scene that he was going to decrease from the public scene. He just hadn't expected it to stop so suddenly. John would never get out of that prison. From the reports that he heard from others as he rotted in prison, Jesus didn't seem to be doing what he expected. He's not cutting down the trees. He didn't seem him burn up the chaff. Instead, he hears about how Jesus is loving people. He's healing the sick. He's feeding the hungry. He telling people to love their enemies. He's teaching people how to pray. He telling people to not worry. Jesus doesn't seem to be meeting his expectations. What he saw and heard didn't match up with what he expected. John would never see Jesus go to the cross for him. He would never hear the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

Ever felt like John? Ever felt like asking Jesus that same question: **"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"** I think we understand how John felt more than we might want to admit. We have those moments of doubt and anger. We have those moments of hurt. We have those moments that we feel like God has abandoned us. Maybe, we have even had those times that we wonder: *Are we betting our entire future for eternity on the right person?* We might not be sitting inside a jail cell, but we all have our moments of doubt. We have all had expectations that don't seem to meet up with reality.

How does Jesus help us? How did Jesus help John? Look at his answer to John's question. **"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."** Jesus' answer to John the Baptist told John to expect the right things. Jesus' answer is more than just some kind of "pep talk." Notice that Jesus' comfort and John's blessing does not consist in Jesus handing over to John

the secret kingdom of God playbook that would outline the Messiah's every move between his first coming and his second. Instead, Jesus says this to his troubled forerunner: *"John, you are right to put your hope in me as the coming One. Do not stumble over what you cannot yet understand – no matter how difficult and painful it may be. Instead, cling to what you know about me. There, even in Herod's prison, you find the eternal blessings of my kingdom. John, no earthly king with his sword can ever take that from you."*

He wants John to see that every one of these actions that Jesus is doing were prophecies being fulfilled. Jesus' response is more than just saying: *"Look at my power."* He is saying to John that he is everything that the entire Old Testament spoke about. He is the one who all creation has been waiting for. He fulfills every promise that God has made. Not one is missed. With his promises, he drove the darkness from John's heart even though John never left that dungeon. There was no reason for John to doubt who Jesus was and why he came.

There is no need for us to doubt who Jesus is and why he came. Jesus comes and drives the darkness from our hearts. No matter the doubt, no matter the sin, Jesus came to bring a message of peace and joy. There is no need to stumble through life. Instead he holds us in his nailed pierced hands. He comes to take away all our doubts. We don't need a different Savior. He is exactly the Savior we need. You see that's what Jesus will do on the cross. He will fix everything that is so wrong in this world. He fixes everything so wrong with us. For it is Jesus who comes to us and says to us that we will live happily ever after. In Jesus, that's an ending we can count on. It's an ending that will always turn out alright. Amen.