

Matthew 11:2-11

Advent 3; December 15 & 16, 2019

I have a confession to make this morning. Do you like to watch Christmas movies? Nancy and I have gotten into this year watching Christmas movies. The kind of Christmas movies that you would find on the Hallmark Channel. You know the kind of movie that I am talking about. Right? The kind of Christmas movie that you can tell in the first 10 minutes how it will end. The prince will fall in love and find the perfect princess. Long lost loves will once again be united. Families who have been feuding for decades will make up and be happy with each other again. The girl will find the perfect husband on a Christmas cruise. Why do we like them? You just know that everything will turn out. Everyone will live happily ever after. Everyone's expectations will meet or exceed what they expected.

Wouldn't it be great if that were always true in life? Yet, expectations will often be greater than reality. 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. So, you finally are able to retire after 40 years of working. Someone comes up to you and asks: *"How's retirement treating you?"* You answer: *"Well, to be honest, it's been rather disappointing. We had been looking forward to retirement for a long time, and we were hoping to travel and visit our grandchildren and see the world, but the economy has left us in a position where we have to watch how we spend our money. Plus we've had some health problems, and we've spent a lot more time in the doctor's office than we have traveling. It's not what we expected."* Ever been disappointed with your expectations? Expectations vs. reality. Ever ordered something online and when it comes, it doesn't look like the pictures made it look. Expectations vs. 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. May our expectations 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. 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.