

West Valley Church
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Born the King

Finding the Right Messiah

Matthew 11:2-11

I remember very distinctly something that happened to me at Christmas time when I was a child – maybe five or six years old. I had gone shopping with my mom; it might have been at Meier & Franks (those of you who are my age or older from the Northwest might remember those stores). I became distracted with something – either toys or lights or Christmas decorations, I'm not sure, but it was busy and crowded in the store that time of year. So then I wanted to ask my mom a question, and I turned around and saw she had her back to me, so I tugged on her sweater and grabbed her leg and said, "Hey Mom," and she turned around – but to my shock, it was *not* my mother. I was embarrassed, then I was terribly frightened and panicked; not only was this strange woman not my mother, it occurred to me that I didn't know where my mom was. Thankfully, I ran around the next couple aisles and I found her. I don't know why I remember that so vividly, but I still do.

I became distracted, and then the woman I thought was my mom, turned out to be someone else. Thankfully, after making some corrections, I found my real mom. But I tell you I was really nervous that I had picked the wrong mom!

In our Advent Scripture passage for today, we see that John the Baptist was afraid that he might have picked the wrong Messiah. Would you stand with me as I read this passage this morning:

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "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."

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
(Matthew 12:2-11, niv)

Thanks for honoring God’s Word by standing; you can have a seat now.

This passage might seem a little confusing; after all, the Christmas story tells us that John the Baptist was born to prepare the way for the Messiah. I’m sure John’s parents told and retold the miraculous story about the angel announcing to John’s father about John’s birth, and they probably told the story about Mary, a virgin, becoming pregnant with and giving birth to Jesus. Then, just a couple years before the passage we read, John baptized Jesus in the Jordan. John knew about the miracles that Jesus performed. So why at this point would John wonder if Jesus was the Messiah?

Well, John had his own ideas about who the Messiah would be and what he would do. John was anticipating a Messiah that would bring a radical, cataclysmic judgment for those not following God, for the Romans who have oppressed the people of God. We can see this clearly prior in the passage we read last week. Yet here, now, John is in prison. Instead of watching his enemies fall by the hand of God, John now awaits his own death at the hand of Herod. So, he doubts. He wonders, *Have I been wrong? Is Jesus really the Messiah?*

John was the first to recognize the Messiah—while still in the womb—yet here he is, wondering. If the Messiah doesn’t look the way John thought he would, is he the Messiah at all? Maybe you’ve asked, “If Christ isn’t working in my life or in the world the way I want him to, is he even Christ?” Maybe, just maybe, you are looking for the wrong Messiah.

So naturally, ***John wonders***. He heard what Jesus was doing, and it wasn’t what he expected of the Messiah. John expected more judgment from the Messiah. This is consistent with what we know most of the Jewish people believed about the Messiah. You see, there were many awaiting a political king.

We also know from the Christmas story that Herod Antipas was a jealous king who murdered his own family to stay in power. At Jesus’s birth he put out an edict to kill all boys under the age of two in order to get rid of the threat of a new king. Herod also seems to assume that the Messiah is going to come for political rule.

But now John is sitting on death row in prison. This probably led him to some doubt about who Jesus was. If John was a faithful servant and prophet for the Messiah, why was he sitting in prison? He is there because of his outspoken words against Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife. Again, it seems John’s faithfulness led him to prison.

So ***John wonders about Jesus’ works***. John is expecting a political Messiah king who will bring harsh judgment against their enemies, but instead all he hears about are healings. He has heard rumors about the grace-filled works Jesus is performing. Jesus is healing people who don’t deserve to be healed. They are sinners. This is very different from the political uprisings he expected.

Instead of preaching about uprising and overthrowing governments, Jesus’s words are about loving enemies, being meek, humble, generous. Jesus emphasizes that the peacemakers are the children of God and that the persecuted are blessed.

It's also important to note that most of Jesus's preaching in these chapters is not criticism of those in power but words of challenge for those who hear: a reworking of the law and an upside down view of power and a reconceptualizing of how things are in the kingdom of God.

Despite what was believed, the kingdom of God is *not* about political gain but about deep heart change that changes the lives of others in real ways.

It's about loving God fully.

It's about loving your neighbor fully.

John wonders about Jesus' works, so Jesus answers. Jesus' answer points out that while the people are looking for political help, that isn't truly the heart of the matter. Jesus reminds the people there why they went out into the wilderness to see John in the first place – he reminds them that John was a prophet. And prophets speak truth to power, whereas kings benefit from power. Prophets challenge the status quo, whereas kings often create the status quo through control. The entire system is going to be challenged, but not in the way the world does it – by answering power with bigger power.

So finally we see ***John wonders about Jesus' works, so Jesus answers***, and from his answer we see ***that they were looking for the wrong Messiah.***

It begins to dawn on them that Jesus *is* the Messiah, but he isn't going to lead or govern the way they expected him to. I wonder if you and I are looking for the wrong Messiah. We often expect God to move in the ways we want him to. We ask God to bless us in very specific ways: money, fame, homes, etc. What if God's blessings look more like the Beatitudes than they do like material wealth?

We question where God is in the midst of tragedy. What if God is trying to show us that he is in the midst of the tragedy, grieving with us, rather than removing suffering from us?

We often view God as being on our side of a political opinion, as if God is a democrat or a republican. What if, instead, God is asking *us* to completely reframe our thinking—not around a political system but around the kingdom of God?

What if we are looking for political power while God is asking us to change our hearts and care for our neighbors?

Advent is about expectation—but what are we expecting?

We are not that far removed from John's questions. And it's okay to have questions. Jesus didn't reject John's questions, and he doesn't reject ours. But we have to be willing to admit that maybe we've approached the wrong Messiah. Our certainty about who Jesus is sometimes robs us of our ability to learn and embrace who Jesus is trying to show us he is. This Advent, let's take time to acknowledge the ways our expectations about God have let us down. Let's learn to have new expectations—to expect that maybe God is doing a new thing in a way we could never have thought or imagined. May we seek to be open to the questions that lead us to a new openness of trust in who the Messiah is.

When I approached the wrong mom, I could've been upset with the woman for not being the mom I expected. I could have stubbornly stayed with that woman instead of admitting I

was wrong. Instead, I was scared, and sad, realized my error, and immediately looked for my real mom. And I found her! Don't be mad that your Jesus is the wrong one. Don't stubbornly hang on to the wrong Messiah. Instead, let that bit of fear you feel drive you to repent, and start looking for the real Messiah. God said, Jeremiah 29:13 – "**you will seek me and find me** when **you seek me** with all your heart." Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-8 – "Ask and **it will** be given to **you; seek and you will find;** knock and the door **will** be opened to **you**. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks **finds;** and to him who knocks, the door **will** be opened."

Jesus *wants* you to find him, but you must look for him, and in seeking, you must look for the *real* Jesus – not the one you might expect him to be.

Pray