

A Question from John the Baptist

Matt. 11:1-19

John the Baptist was the herald of Jesus' ministry announcing to the crowds that came to him that he was not the Christ but came to bear witness to the Christ. After he had baptized Jesus and when the Father spoke from heaven and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Jesus, John knew that Jesus was the one. He announced this to the 2 disciples as recorded in John 1 and no doubt, to any who seemed open to what he would say. John may not have specifically announced to the crowds who came to him that Jesus was the Christ for the very reasons that Jesus did not self-identify as the Christ when before the same group. Messiah was a loaded term and Jesus needed to define Himself for the people rather than allow the people to define him for themselves. Obviously, John had identified Jesus as the Christ for his own disciples in order to send them to Jesus with his question, "Are You the Coming One or do we look for another?" The question also expressed some doubt. John had already testified that Jesus was the Christ so why did He need to ask, after the fact? Clearly, John also had some preconceived notions of what the Messiah would look like when He came and he had heard some things about Jesus that to him, did not fit. Jesus answered with a reference to Isaiah's prophesy, "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." Jesus turned the question back to prophetic expectation rather than to contemporary or cultural expectation. Certainty is rooted in the word of God and not in the opinions of men.

The question from John was asked publicly and so Jesus spoke then to the ministry of John. He asked the people what they had gone to see when they went to John in the desert. They had gone to see a prophet and they had hoped - more than a prophet. Though John was not the Christ, as they might have wished, He was sent to prepare the way for the Christ. John was to be admired, "Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist..."

But John represented the past rather than the future, "but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." John was violently cast into prison and no doubt, Jesus knew as He spoke of violence the fate that John would soon suffer. He also knew His own fate and the suffering that He would endure, "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence." Jesus stated, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." This places John in terms of function, on the same level as the Old Testament prophets. They and John anticipated the ministry of the Messiah. John also fulfilled prophecy in his function as the Elijah who was to come.

But, what of the response to John? Jesus gave a riddle, "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; We mourned to you, and you did not lament.'" Then, Jesus explained the riddle, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." In other words, the people were bent on rejecting God's message no matter how it was brought to them. Jesus said that the truth is the truth no matter how it is presented.

Jesus then advanced His thought by speaking to the spiritual responsibility of those who had heard both John and Jesus proclaim the kingdom of God. He warned the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum for they had seen the mighty works of God done in them through the ministry of Jesus but the people had not believed. They did not commit to Jesus. Jesus compared them to the cities known to have been judged by God; Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. They did not have near the opportunity of the cities of His day and their judgment would reflect that. The principle is valid. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility. Think of what that means to America.

From judgment, Jesus' thoughts turned to thanksgiving. "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father for so it seemed good

in Your sight." It was the spiritual pride of Israel that blinded the nation to the appearance of their own Messiah. "He came unto His own but His own received Him not." The spiritual breakthroughs recorded in the life of Jesus came in the lives of ignorant fishermen, Samaritans, tax collectors, and sinners. The leaders of the Jews sometimes came to Him for help but in the end, none stood with Him. This was God's plan. Jesus did not come to establish the kingdom but to die for our sins. Each soul that rejected Jesus was responsible for what they did. They were also forgiven by Jesus as He hung on the cross and preached to by Peter on Pentecost as he strove to persuade them to choose Jesus since it was still not too late.

From this place of understanding, knowing all that was to come His way, Jesus called the burdened and the weary and the disheartened to come to Him. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." If anyone should have been discouraged, surely that would be Jesus. He saw clearly that the crowds who adored Him would soon turn on Him. He knew that the disciples who were now ready to follow Him anywhere would soon abandon and deny Him. He knew one of the 12 would betray Him. Still, He stands before the people seeking to persuade them to

bring their burdens to Him. Receive His rest. Accept His assurance. These are to be the blessings known by those who share in His life. His is a life where there is suffering, where disappointments are real, where losses are deeply felt. But God's hand is seen in all things. His purpose and will is held high. Obedience is the highest priority. And the greatest good the sure outcome of all that is known and unknown. Trust in Jesus.