

“Are You The Coming One, Or Do We Look For Another?”

Text: Matt 11:2-10

Suggested Hymns:

6, 12, 13, 320, 8

1) The question itself

2) The answer of Jesus

3) Why Did John Tell Two Of His Disciples
To Ask Jesus This Question?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 11:2–10, ² *And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ 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. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*

⁷ *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The final coming of Christ engaged our attention last Sunday. In the Gospel lesson Christ spoke to us of very important things, including the terrifying signs at His coming. We heard from the lips of Christ also that wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom are characteristic of the last days of the world.

Naturally, we think of our war-torn world, the bloodshed in Palestine and Ukraine and other wars also, and wonder if the world will soon be dissolved.¹

Our text speaks of a man whose surroundings were anything but cheerful. John the Baptist was in prison, an innocent victim of a wicked woman's hatred. He had spent his strength in preaching repentance to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of the Saviour. Now he was deprived of his liberty.

Did he succumb to gloom? No! Even in these depressing circumstances he found joy in thinking of his Saviour and in helping others to find their Saviour. From his prison he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: "***Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?***" Let us consider this question. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Question Itself.

We will first of all consider the question itself. It presupposed that someone of great importance would come, someone for whom the people had been waiting.

The messengers who address this question to Jesus make no further explanation; they simply assume that He knew whom they meant. And it was true that the people waited for the coming of someone in particular.

The eyes of God's people in the Old Testament scanned the horizon for the coming of One whom they called Christ. Even Eve waited for Him, and she thought He had come when Cain was born. Lamech looked for Him and thought the child he called Noah was the expected Christ.

Jacob, on his deathbed, spoke of Him and called Him Shiloh. Almost impatiently the people waited throughout the period of the Old Testament. Next Sunday's Gospel tells us that the Jews asked John the Baptist whether he was the Christ. The scribes, too, looked for the Christ. They were not at all at a loss what to say when Herod inquired where Christ would be born.

The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well said: "***I know that Messiah is coming***" (*who is called Christ*). "***When He comes, He will tell us all things.***"² Yes, the people waited for the coming of a Messiah.

And they were justified in their expectations, for God had promised them the Christ. At all times, God's messengers, at His command, had spoken of the coming of the Christ. In accord with God's promises the people waited for their Christ.

The coming of Christ was a very important event, and therefore the question addressed to Jesus was of great importance. The prophets by inspiration had spoken of the purpose of Christ's coming. What was it?

Not what many Jews and their leaders thought. They had become so earthly-minded that they knew no greater troubles than earthly ones. They chafed under the dominion of the Romans and hoped that their Messiah would come to deliver them from the power of the Romans.

They had read of the prosperous times which Israel enjoyed under the rule of David and Solomon and hoped that the Messiah would reign in a similar manner, bringing earthly prosperity to the people.

But God had promised infinitely greater things in the Christ, namely salvation. He would deliver sinners from the power of the devil. He would bring spiritual blessings to men under the curse. He would redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

He would open a fountain of forgiveness for sin and all uncleanness. He would bear the sins of men and take them away. He would be the Lord, their Righteousness. In Christ sinners would find forgiveness of sin and all other blessings for the soul.

And God's children had looked forward to these blessings. Jacob's waiting had been a waiting for God's salvation. David said: ***"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!"***³ The prophetess Anna at Jerusalem, together with others, had ***"looked for redemption in Jerusalem."***⁴ Because the Christ was to save sinners who are unable to save themselves, therefore the question of John's disciples was of the greatest importance.

They addressed it to Jesus. Others had already come to the conviction that Jesus was the promised Christ and Saviour of the world. Andrew had heard Jesus speak and then reported to his brother Simon: ***"We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ.)***⁵

Philip had gained the same conviction and said to Nathanael, ***"We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth."***⁶ And Nathanael confessed later: ***"Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"***⁷

And this conviction became even stronger when they associated with Him. With Peter all the disciples confessed: ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***⁸ But was He? John’s disciples asked Him directly, ***“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”***

That is an important question for all of us. Perhaps not everybody is interested, but all should be. If this Jesus of Nazareth is not the Christ, the Saviour of the world, then Christianity is a fraud. Then we have no Saviour.

Then our going to Bethlehem at Christmas time is a sacrilege. Then our songs and our prayers are idolatrous. Then we will never have a Saviour, for the time is long past that a Saviour would come. Then we will have to take all our sins before God without forgiveness. Your salvation is the great issue. Let us therefore listen to the answer of Jesus.

2. The Answer Of Jesus

Jesus’ answer was an emphatic affirmation. It was, however, not a direct answer, containing the word yes, but an indirect answer. He had answered the same question directly many a time.

When the Samaritan woman had said, ***“I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ),***⁹ He answered her, saying, ***“I who speak to you am He.”***

To the Jews He said repeatedly that He came from above, that the Scripture testified of Him, that Moses had written of Him, that they would perish if they did not believe that He was the Christ, and that Abraham had believed in Him. But on this occasion He answered in another way, still more convincing.

Let us listen to His answer. ***“Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ 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.***

Jesus refers them to the miraculous works which He performed in their presence. At His word the eyes of the blind were opened. At His word the lame, the crippled, began to walk. At His word the deaf could hear, and the lepers were cleansed. Yes, the dead were made alive by Him. Such works had never been done before in their presence.

And not only the works themselves bore witness to His Messiahship, but also the fact that He performed just those works which the prophets had foretold of the promised Christ.

For example, Isaiah had said in chapter 35, ***“Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ... the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.*** These prophecies the disciples of John saw fulfilled right before their eyes. That could mean only one thing: This Jesus of Nazareth is the One who would come, and we do not need to look for another.

And Jesus produced other evidence, ***“The poor have the gospel preached to them.”*** Frightened sinners now heard the Gospel. What does that mean? It means, they heard the glad tidings of sins forgiven, of heaven opened, of sonship with God by faith in the Saviour.

They heard Jesus calling sinners to Himself, offering them peace of heart and eternal life. The poor heard this message, sinners who recognised their poverty before God, their sinfulness, and their inability to atone for their sins. And they heard this from the lips of Jesus.

That could mean only one thing: This Jesus is the promised Christ. By Isaiah the promised Christ had said: ***“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... to comfort all who mourn.”***¹⁰ By calling attention to His preaching, Jesus convinced the disciples of John that He was indeed the Christ.

And finally Jesus presented another proof of His Messiahship. After the disciples of John had left, He began to speak of John the Baptist. ***“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.***

⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is he of whom it is written: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’

John is the promised forerunner of Christ. And that, too, means that Jesus is the Christ, for John directed his hearers to Jesus, saying: ***“Behold, the Lamb of God.”***

Yes, there is no doubt about it, Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world. We know many more proofs of His Saviourship. He died on the cross and rose again according to the Scriptures. We read in Acts 10:43 that ***To Him all the prophets witness.*** He is the Christ, the Saviour. Let us observe the festival of His birth with great rejoicing. Let us not be offended at His lowliness and poverty. If we have Him in our hearts, we have salvation.

3. Why Did John Tell Two Of His Disciples To Ask Jesus This Question?

But let us look once more at our text and ask the question: *Why Did John Tell Two of His Disciples to Ask Jesus This Question?*

Many are of the opinion that John had this question addressed to Jesus for his own sake. They think that John had begun to doubt the Messiahship of Jesus. They say in substance: John could not harmonise the Messiahship of Jesus with the fact of his own imprisonment. Why should Jesus, if He really was the Son of God and the Saviour, permit His faithful forerunner to remain in prison?

That explanation is possible. Even great men in the Church are sometimes assailed by temptations to doubt. But this explanation clearly contradicts Christ’s testimony of John.

Jesus said of John that He is not ***a reed shaken by the wind.*** And when we call to mind the emphatic message of John concerning Jesus and the fact that John at the baptism of Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending on Jesus and heard the voice of God the Father: ***“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”*** — when we think of all this, it is difficult to believe that John had become a doubter of Jesus’ Messiahship.

Rather John sent the disciples to Jesus for their sake. Opposition against Jesus was increasing. The question arose in the hearts of John’s disciples. John knew no better way of strengthening the faltering faith of his disciples than by sending them to Jesus. He would strengthen their faith.

Let us learn from John to be concerned about the faith of those who are near and dear to us. This concern should be found in us in spite of troubled times. The most important thing at all times, whether the sun is shining brightly or the clouds of calamity are hanging low, is salvation in Jesus.

A mother whose son was entering the service of our country said: *“I am not so much concerned about the question whether my son will see action or not, whether he will live or die; my chief concern is that he remain faithful to his Saviour.”* Should we not all feel that way about our children?

John was not related to the disciples; yet he was concerned about them. Are we concerned about those who show signs of weakness? Are we concerned about others who have never learned to know the Saviour? Are we mission-minded? Just because the times are evil, we should be more zealous to enlarge the Kingdom.

John sent his disciples to Jesus. We can do that very thing for our loved ones. We can find Jesus. He is present in the Word and the Sacrament. Let us bring our loved ones and friends to church where Jesus speaks and convinces sinners that He is indeed their Saviour.

Jesus spoke to the disciples of John. He spoke to the multitudes in order to gain them. He does the same today. His purpose in speaking is to save. Let us do the same. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Peter 3:12

² John 4:25

³ Psalm 14:7

⁴ Luke 2:38

⁵ John 1:41

⁶ John 1:45

⁷ John 1:49

⁸ Matthew 16:16

⁹ John 4:25

¹⁰ Isaiah 61:1, 2