

ARE YOU THE ONE?

The Disciple and Doubt (Matthew 11)

Sermon Overview

In the first year of his ministry, Jesus he is preaching and healing in the cities of Galilee (v.1). Meanwhile, John the Baptist, his cousin, is imprisoned by Herod Antipas in a fortress near the Dead Sea for speaking out against Herod's unlawful marriage to his brother's wife (v.2). Receiving reports of what Jesus is saying and doing, John sends his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (v.3) The irony of the question is that John had declared of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world...I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:19, 34) The causes of John's doubt are unknown but three possibilities come to mind. These are common to all people and form a source of doubt when it comes to God's involvement in our lives.

First, John may have been disillusioned. Unmet expectations regarding Jesus' approach to the hypocritical religious leaders who John denounced so strenuously may have given rise to John's uncertainty. John looked for the fire of judgment while Jesus dined and engaged in discourse with them. Of note, John's forerunner, the prophet Elijah, also found himself in a similar state of disillusionment after defeating the prophets of Baal. Second, John could have questioned out of fear. The Herod's were violent, despotic rulers. Not only is John missing Jesus' activity firsthand, his life is in jeopardy. Third, John may have been receiving mixed messages. His disciples may have been giving him an incomplete picture of what Jesus was doing. Remember also that Satan is a master of deceptive propaganda. John may have sought clarification.

In response (v.4-5), Jesus points to the prophecy of Scripture, especially that found in Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1, where the very things that were predicted hundreds of years before were being accomplished by Jesus. The evidence speaks for itself. Jesus then pronounces a beatitude for the benefit of both John and the crowds that followed him, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (v.6) The word "offended" means to trip up or cause to stumble. John's circumstances were causing him to stumble in his faith; he was unable to hear Jesus' words or see his power on display. But the crowds that followed Jesus and witnessed his work were another story.

Jesus addresses the "his generation", and by extension, ours, and criticizes them for their lack of discernment and childishness (v.16ff). Spiritual immaturity and prejudice

made them unable to perceive the identity and nature of both John, the Elijah who is to come, and the Son of Man. As such, they were in danger of missing the kingdom of heaven—which is violently opposed but forcefully advancing. He goes on to address the consequences of doubt (v.20-24) by speaking out against three cities in which he performed his miracles. These he compared to three idolatrous cities who did not have the benefit of witnessing the authentication of his being. He pronounces woe on their miserable standing before a holy God, and points out that the Galilean cities, i.e. the residents of those cities, will suffer greater punishment than the pagan ones because they received greater revelation. The consequences of doubt are both temporal (lack of wisdom, discernment, stability, and assurance in this life) and eternal (judgment).

For those with ears to hear, Jesus then presents a cure for doubt (v.25-30). For this cure to be effective, one must possess an attitude of childlikeness as opposed to childishness. Jesus lauds the one with childlike faith over the “wise and understanding” (25-26). A synonym for faith is assurance. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for. Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes from the word of Christ. Assurance, therefore comes from the word of Christ. Jesus’ word to us can be summarized in two foundational principles: He is absolutely sovereign (v.27) and he is absolutely welcoming (v.28-30). In Jesus, we see the fulness of deity. He exists in intimate unity with the Father. He is the gate to the kingdom of heaven and the gatekeeper. In his sovereignty over salvation, however, he is infinitely welcoming, inviting all people to come to him. His invitation is not unto freedom from the challenges of our temporal lives, but from the burden of the law and the labor we undertake to make ourselves acceptable to a holy God, an effort that is utterly impossible.

Jesus came to fulfill the law and the Prophets, to release sinners living in captivity to the law of do’s and don’t’s, a law that points out our sin but can do nothing about it but condemn us. His yoke is easy and his burden light not because he makes our lives easy and light, but because the weight of the law is removed. But to achieve this he had to take on the burden himself and be yoked himself to sin, the collective rot of all humanity. One way or the other we are all yoked. Either to the law we can’t help but break, or the grace of God we don’t deserve. The one who is yoked to Jesus can be assured that he is the One, and that he will safeguard our passage through this world unto the next. Of that, we can have no doubt.

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