

JESUS IS THE ONE YOU ARE LOOKING FOR MATT 11:2-15
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT DEC 11, 2016

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you."

¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

This is a season when shoppers wonder as they wander.

Some shop for gifts unsure what they are looking for
and are hoping something will strike them.

Others have the ideal thing in mind but still wonder
is this the one I want, best deal, right size, color
or should I keep looking for another more perfect.

Once the gifts are bought, wrapped under tree, is other's turn
to wonder does that package hold what I am hoping for?
or should I be waiting for another?

It is not just this time of year that people ask such questions.

Should I be looking for a different car or house?

Is job I am offered what I want, or even one I have?

Is the boyfriend I have the one I really want?

I should be no surprise people also go church shopping.

Does the church I am in have the preaching or music
or programs or kind of people I like best?

And what about the message that is preached?

Is that the kind of God I really want to believe in?

Text affirms that it can be hard to know for sure
but also points to the one we are looking for.

CONFINEMENTS LIMIT WHAT WE CAN SEE
COMFORTS CAN'T PROVIDE WHAT SEEK
JESUS' COMING SHOWS GOD'S COMPASSION

CONFINEMENTS LIMIT WHAT WE CAN SEE

² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Jesus says he is on right track: ¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.'

¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

We are not confined in prison, seeing only 4 walls in darkness,
but there are limits to what we can see.

We can't see future. Can't look into hearts.

It is no wonder it is hard to find what you want for sure.

Even if you have unlimited selection, you have limited time.

John had reason to expect something great.

Before even born, he jumped as Jesus first came near.

Surely he heard as a child of his own amazing birth,
more miraculous birth of cousin Jesus, father's prophecy.

So John proclaimed the coming of God's own kingdom.

when Jesus will pour out the Holy Spirit and fire.

Huge crowds responded to his ministry.

Others expected something great, such as the final judgment
or at least independence from the gentile Romans.

But as Jesus points out, kingdom of heaven suffers violence,

So John, who calls all to righteousness and justice,

including the king, is unjustly thrown in to prison.

If John is God's true messenger, why is his voice muffled?

God's kingdom does not look that great and powerful

when God allows his kingdom & message to be resisted.

It may appear to John that his message was off target,

or maybe it was just disciples he sent who needed

reassurance they were not being misled.

John was the greatest of the prophets because he points

not just to dim future but directly at Christ in the flesh.

but even he does not get to see what we can see in Bible,
how Jesus finishes God's plan with death & resurrection.
We, who have a greater view of God's work than John,
also don't see personal salvation fulfilled before we die.
As long as we are confined in this flesh and this world,
we have a limited perspective. We don't see everything.
We may expect God's blessings because of his love
but experience very disappointing results.
It may not look like God really cares for us or can help us.
Like John, we who are in God's kingdom, the church,
also point to Jesus as the savior.
But the limited results of this message may not look to us
or to others we talk to, like they validate our claims.
It is easy to wonder if we are on the right track.
Is there something else we should be doing?
Do seemingly powerful get something right that we don't?
We should not think we are such great believers
that we will never struggle with faith.
Satan never leaves us alone. We also suffer violent attacks.
Even Paul knew that, having preached faith to others
he should be careful he did not lose his own.
So Jesus reassures, he who has ears, let him hear.
Yes, that's it, just speak God's word & listen to God's word.
That is what will do it.
Jesus also warns not to misled by appearances
as he turns to crowd and asks, what about you?
What are you looking for?

COMFORTS CAN'T PROVIDE WHAT SEEK

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?" ⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Why would crowds of people leave their homes
to go out into the wilderness just to hear a preacher?
Maybe because it was all so different.
It seems people are always looking for something different.
It is so hard to be sure, no matter what we have
that there isn't something better or at least different.

But what do those looking for something different find?
Is it just a reed swaying in the wind?
You can always find this kind of messenger.
 one what that is always leaning in way the wind blows,
 saying what seems popular and people like to hear.
We are tempted to go the way the wind is blowing.
Conformity may seem like the easiest or best way to go.
 But will conformity & popularity lead
 to where we want to end up? Don't count on it.
They are like a weak reed that breaks when you lean on it.
 They have no power to stand up to pressure.
So what does have power? those in king's houses
Who are different because they stand out in a crowd?
 They wear soft clothing and live in luxury.
You can always find this kind of messenger too,
 the kind that says God wants you to be rich & happy
 just like they appear to be.
This is an attractive message too. If God truly loves me,
 why shouldn't the Christian life always be wonderful?
But the word Jesus uses for soft clothing implies
 that it is what is worn by soft people.
God is not as interested in making me satisfied and happy
 as in making me strong and healthy.
Following him doesn't lead to life in kings houses where
 we can take it easy while making life hard for others.
You can't expect the message of God's kingdom
 to be the most popular or to promise popularity
 because you can't expect conformity or comforts
 to bring you what you are really looking for in the end.
So what does the real kingdom of God look like?

JESUS' COMING SHOWS GOD'S COMPASSION

⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵
the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and
the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news
preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Jesus does different amazing things, has great power to bless
 But, he cautions, be careful not to misunderstand him.
This list of miracles is in order leading up to something.
 Just as Jesus didn't miraculously release John from prison,
 he didn't heal every sick person.

but miracles he did do were for a special purpose
they were all pointing to who he was as God.
and leading from the miracle of the incarnation,
to the miracle of his our redemption from sin.

The purpose of all that Jesus came to do
was not just taking away all our suffering in his life
but to suffer with us in order to give us new lives.

The first miracle Jesus points out is blind receiving sight,
He begins his ministry by doing what is even harder,
opening eyes to who he is.

Jesus makes the lame walk and just as miraculously
causes disciples to get up and follow him.

Jesus cleanses lepers while also cleansing with forgiveness
and bringing outcasts back to the presence of God

Jesus makes some the deaf hear
while causing all people to hear God's word.

Jesus even raises some who were dead, not as amazing
as his own resurrection which gives new life to us.

And what is the climax? Good news is preached to the poor
and gospel continues to be preached to whole world.

Power of good news to transform lives is greatest miracle.

What brings us to faith and keeps us in faith
is not just seeing amazing miracles but hearing Gospel.

Many who saw miracles in person still refused to believe
because they were so offended by Jesus' pointing out
that they themselves were blind, handicapped,
weak, poor, unclean, deaf and dead.

But these miracles do serve to demonstrate the truth
of what is true for John in prison and all of us.

Jesus is God, the promised messiah.

God does truly love us. He does have power to help us.

He has come to reverse the consequences of sin.

There are many today who are offended at Jesus
because despite his many miracles for others
much suffering still exists, maybe including ours.

There is so much it seems God could do but doesn't.

Jesus was indeed the coming one, and he still is coming.
he is not finished yet with our lives and our world.

As James reminds we need to continue to patiently trust
but we can because we have seen that
God is compassionate and merciful.

We can see that Jesus is the one we are looking for
when we go by not only by what we see with our eyes,
but when our ears hear what Jesus says
to go and tell John.

CONFINEMENTS LIMIT WHAT WE CAN SEE

and can make it hard for us to have faith in Jesus.

COMFORTS CAN'T PROVIDE WHAT SEEK

popularity & prosperity are not what we need to see

JESUS' COMING SHOWS GOD'S COMPASSION

The good news is that he will help us in the ways we need

when his word causes us to look to him in faith

as the one who has come and is coming again for us.