

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Matthew 11:1-11 (NT page 976)

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Background to the reading

Our reading is quite complex for a number of reasons.

Again Matthew just fires off without explaining anything about John the Baptist's imprisonment. It is only in Matthew chapter 14 that we learn more of John's imprisonment. He was imprisoned by Herod Antipas who imprisoned him because John spoke out against his relationship with his half brother's wife, Herodias. ACCORDING to Matthew he wanted to kill John but was afraid of the people who "thought of him as a prophet". Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and Perea, which of course corresponds with the whereabouts of Jesus during this time according to verse 1.

2. Matthew speaks of Jesus as the "Christ" or in other words the Messiah. The word "Christ" means anointed, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word rendered "Messiah". To believe that "Jesus is the Christ" is to believe that he is the Anointed, the Messiah of the prophets, the Saviour sent of God, that he was, in a word, what he claimed to be.

But ALTHOUGH Matthew speaks of the Jesus as the Messiah John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the One who was promised?

It seems odd that although Matthew addresses Jesus as the Christ for John the Baptist to ask such a question?

But I do not think John was doubting if Jesus was the Messiah or not. I think what he asked was a much more hidden question as to when Jesus will reveal His power and free him from prison. And Jesus' answer was also not as straight forward. He knew that John the Baptist would know the

Old Testament's references to the Messiah and I am sure He knew that it was not what John was asking.

So in similar fashion Jesus' answer is coded. His power will not be violent and in military fashion. His power will be in love, humility, peace and reconciliation. He came to serve, to heal and recover the relationship that was tarnished and broken through sin. He is the Shepherd king. He came so that sinners could follow Him and find refuge.

After this, I am sure that John had no more doubt to who Jesus was and what His mission was to be all about.

But I must admit there is also another element to John's question. The time that he was in prison must have had an impact on him. I am sure he was starting to think, Was what I did the right thing? Was the man I promoted really the Messiah? If He is, when are things going to change?

I am saying this because of Jesus' words to the bystanders, explaining John's actions. Jesus said the people did not go to John because of his *persona* but because of his message from the Old Testament that he is the messenger who will prepare the way for the Messiah.

Calling John the "greatest" was a typically Jewish form of praise, which could be applied to more than one person at a time; rabbis, for instance, could in the same breath speak of both Joseph and Moses as the greatest figures of Israel's history. Those "born of women" was a familiar Old Testament and Jewish expression for humans.

The message of Mathew is clear: John is the messenger who prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. In our passage Jesus explained the details of the nature of His mission, something John was doubtful about.

Amen

MP 393

Joy to the world

Sermon

Our reading is to me is the summary of Christmas. Jesus did not come for those who think their faith is perfect. He did not come to those who are healed but to heal all those who are in need of his comfort.

The fact that John the Baptist, a man of great honour and conviction was doubtful about the way Jesus was going to reveal Himself, is a humbling experience. And to think what he was going through, just because he was faithful, is also such a witness.

As you all know during this time of year I attend quite a lot of nativity play's at the schools. Last week at one of the nativities they asked the older children of the school to reflect on what Christmas means to them...

Their answers made me doubt just like John the Baptist. Is it still worth to keep on preaching the Gospel? Am I wasting my time trying to tell the children about the real meaning of Christmas?

None of the answers were referring to Jesus at all and what He came to do. In fact most answers dwindled upon what type of gifts they are going to receive? Two answers were about loved ones who is no longer with them and one was all about family members coming to celebrate with them from a far off place.

As I progress on the journey of advent to Christmas I am beginning to think that we have created a god Santa, that is actually becoming a bigger hit than Jesus Christ.

And please I have nothing against the idea of a Santa who "rewards the children with good gifts" because of their good behaviour. Although I think in the end we end up giving presents also to those who do not deserve it at all. And I also want to say that I am just as guilty.

I think what we need to do is to get the balance right again. We must tell the children that Santa maybe someone who brings presents but we must remember that this presents is only human presents which cannot give us

peace. Why? Because other children will fight with you to play with it as well.

This presents will not make you feel safe when you are alone crying in your bed.

The presents will make you happy but it will not make you happy forever. Soon you will start playing with something else.

The presents will not give you love, you will have to love them.

But in comparison to this God gave us all the biggest and best gift namely His only Son Jesus Christ.

- He can make us happy and joyful, always and ever when we live in a relationship with him.
- He loves us like no one else can. He was prepared to die the death of a sinner in our places just so that we can live.
- He gives us peace and promised all who has faith His kingdom with the everlasting peace.
- He gave us His Holy Spirit who is with us in good and bad times helping and leading us through life. Jesus Christ is God's gift of love to us. May He be part of all our celebrations because humans or the Santa we have created - just cannot match what He has given us! Amen