

*When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples<sup>3</sup> to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”*

*<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy<sup>[b]</sup> are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. <sup>6</sup> Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”*

*<sup>7</sup> As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. <sup>9</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written:*

*“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.”<sup>[c]</sup>*

*<sup>11</sup> Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.  
(Matthew 11:2-11)*

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So, there he was, sitting in prison. He had done what God had called him to do. He had preached the truth with confidence and boldness calling to repentance the people along with their religious and political leaders. But the ruler Herod didn’t like being told what he was doing was wrong so he had John thrown into prison. So there John the Baptizer sits, waiting and wondering what was going to happen next.

While there, John hears news about the Christ. Dead are raised, blind see, deaf hear, and the mute speak. The lame get up and walk. Skin disease is cured. The Good News of the kingdom of heaven is being taught. Yet, something evidently is bothering either John, his followers, or both. It’s bothering them so much that John sends two of his followers to Jesus to get to the bottom of all this: **“Are you the Coming One or should we expect another?”**

It’s a very different John that we see here in prison. Where once was bold confidence, now we see questions. God’s people had been waiting for this “Coming One” since he was promised in the Garden of Eden after Adam first plunged this world into sin. John the Baptizer had been sent to be the forerunner, the one who would prepare the people for the Coming One’s arrival. John thought he knew that Jesus was “the guy.” In fact, he had been absolutely sure of it. But now, as he sits in prison, sees, and hears what Jesus is doing, he’s not sure. We don’t know exactly what John was looking for or expecting, but something triggered his question.

It really shouldn't be too shocking to see John having questions and doubts. This is our experience too as God's people who wait for Christ to return. You know as well as I do how what we see and hear can lead to similar questions in our own minds. You see continued fighting and wars in Europe and North Korea increasing their arms and missile capability. Depending on the day and what experts you listen to, we are inching ever closer to nuclear war. We hear of Christian martyrs whose life and living are in danger for the faith they profess. And we might wonder, "Are you the Coming One Jesus? Aren't you going to something about this?"

2-year-old babies are diagnosed with brain cancer and not responding to treatments. A 57-year-old faithful pastor dies unexpectedly. The old shut-in continues to worsen and still she keeps living and continues to be miserable and in pain. "Are you the one we should expect Jesus?" Every week more pastors and more teachers resign and retire leaving vacant positions that are taking longer and longer to fill. (I heard the average wait time on pastor vacancies is 1.5 years...) "Are you the Coming One, Jesus? Or should we expect someone else who will manage this?"

And while all of that and other shocking news leads us to wonder, there's the slow drip of the same problem day after day that can really get to us. The same temptation wears down your resolve. Life wears you down and you feel close to burnt out where you know you care but you're having a tough time with it. You want to do your best but you can't, no matter how hard you try, and it just eats away at you as you just feel like you can never do enough. Life feels like a dull movie you want to get out of, you're told it's going to get better, but you don't see it. Are you the Coming One who will help me, Jesus?

It's the daily grind that has ground you down so you just feel stuck. What is the best for you and for your loved ones? You've tried to help but they don't seem to care or want to listen. There's trouble at home: why doesn't he hear me? Why does it seem like he is too busy for his family? Why is she checked out? Why don't the kids just listen and do what they are told? You've reached out to them, invited, encouraged, you've told what they need, they've even agreed, but they still won't come back to church. "Are you the Coming One, Jesus? Are you the Jesus we really need and should expect?" You may have different questions about God and Jesus that you are wrestling with and trying to figure out.

But why is it that we struggle with this? Sometimes, it's because we are trying to wrap our minds around a situation and we are wrestling with it. Other times it's because Jesus isn't doing what you think he should. It might be because Jesus isn't doing what others have claimed he would. In other words, you heard all those cute sayings that sounded nice but they may not have been actually true. It might be a struggle because the situation reveals your heart that is more afraid of this than fearing the one true God. It shows your heart that claimed to have love God but is quite obviously loving something else more than God who is love. It might be showing how instead of trusting God's promises, you've placed your

trust in the wrong person, thing, or place. And it's a struggle because my sinful nature hates being shown where it is wrong.

Having questions is not necessarily wrong. It's good for you to ask questions. When you have doubts, it doesn't help for you to keep them inside. But we need to remember to go to the right place for the answers.

That's what John did. He sent some followers to Jesus to ask him: let's see some ID, Jesus. And Jesus responds: Go tell John what you see and hear: **The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy<sup>1</sup> are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.** (v.5-6). Jesus is telling John: "I am doing exactly what I am supposed to be doing. I am fulfilling the expectations that God laid down for me and what he promised through the Old Testament prophets. Here's my ID."

As you face and struggle your doubts and questions, do what John did. Go to Jesus and ask him for some identification. He's ready and willing to show it to you; it's right here in the Word. There you see God's promised one, the Christ, who came not to be served but to serve as he gave sight to the blind, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, and the deaf hear. There you see one who is deeply concerned about your physical well-being! There you see God's promised one with power even over death as the dead are raised up. There we see the one promised to bind-up the broken-hearted and to lift up the down-trodden with the Good News of the Gospel preached into their hearts and ears. His miracles show us who he is: True God from eternity. His message assures us what he came to do: bring us Good News that sins are forgiven in His name. Here's his ID promised in the Garden of Eden, prophesied by Isaiah, proclaimed by angels in the fields outside of Bethlehem, his way prepared by John the Baptizer: the one who comes to take away the sins of the world. This is the one promised to crush Satan's head. Here's the promised one who would be pierced, punished, and crushed for your sins and mine. Here's the one whose wounds heal you and bring you peace with God so that we have certain hope as we face every trial and struggle while we are in this world. Here's the one whose death paid your debt of sin and whose rising from the dead flings open heaven's gates to bring you home to him. This is who Christ; go to his word where he shows you his ID.

Now, who are you? "And blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." Jesus says. He knows how it is. Many see Jesus and he's not what they expect. He doesn't fit what they want. They want him to be something else. Many allow their doubts and their questions to get the best of them looking to their reason or other people or this world to try and answer them. So, they stumble, they reject Jesus, what he does, and what he gives.

But for you who believe, you are blessed. That's what your ID says. As John's disciples went back to report what they had seen and heard Jesus asks the crowd: "**What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in**

**kings' palaces.** <sup>9</sup> **Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.** <sup>10</sup> **This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you'** (v.7-10). They didn't go out to see someone who was easily blown one way or the other depending people's opinions or what they would say. You can't trust someone like that. They didn't go out to someone who lived a life of luxury and wore nice clothes. You found that in kings' palaces. They came out to hear a prophet, one who spoke with the authority of God and his messenger who would prepare the way for the Lord. That's who John was. That's his ID. It didn't change because of his doubts and his questions. It wasn't rooted in John the Baptizer; but what God declared him to be.

As great as John the Baptizer was, Jesus says: "Whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (v.11). There's your identity. Even the least is greater than John because she and he have been brought into God's kingdom. When people see you do they see reeds blown back and forth by whatever is the teaching of the day, swaying depending on the troubling winds of the world, and the struggles they face? Or do they see someone whose foundation is Jesus Christ? Do they see someone whose concern is chasing after everything this world has to offer? Or, do they see someone whose eyes are on things above thanking God for the many blessings he gives while using them to be a blessing to both their church and their neighbor? Do they see someone who lives, serves, and loves and has been set free by Jesus wearing his robes of righteousness? When people see you, do they see a prophet? Maybe not a prophet like in the Old Testament, but you are God's mouthpiece who he sends with the Good News of Jesus. You are his light in this dark world so that by your good deeds even the unbelievers might glorify God because of the good work that he carries out within you. Because this is your ID. Jesus brought you into his kingdom through water and spoken word. Who you are is not defined by your status in society or place amongst your friends. It's not determined by your success or accomplishments. It's all in Jesus and what he declares you: God's child.

When doubts attack you and questions fill your head, run to the Word who took on flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. Run to the Supper where we receive his body and blood to strengthen our faith and forgives our sins. Run to the baptismal font where Jesus shows you are. It's good to wrestle; it forces us to grow. It's good to ask questions, how else are we supposed to learn? God does not want you to have any doubts so he gives you the sure promises of his word that you might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and believing you have life in his name. Amen.