

## BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

**Sermon: “Disappointed Expectations” (from the Advent sermon series)**

**Scripture: Matthew 11:2-11**

### Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Matthew, we find Jesus wrapping up His instruction to the twelve disciples and going to preach in Galilee.
- In verses 2-3, John the Baptist, who had been imprisoned during this part of Jesus’ ministry, is now out and tells the disciples to ask Jesus “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Biblical scholars believe that John had been imprisoned by King Herod Antipas in his Perea fortress Machaerus (See Luke 4:12; 14:1-12).
- Jesus responds in verses 4-6, by telling the disciples to report back to John His acts of healing and restoration to the poor and afflicted. In the ancient world, receiving treatment for healing was reserved for the royal, the wealthy and the prestigious. Having these afflictions was also a sign of uncleanness and impure/unholy living to the ancient Israelites. The acts of healing being reported to John harken to several verses in Isaiah, which speak of healing, wholeness and restoration as a new reality in God’s kingdom (See Isaiah 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:7; 61:1).
  - Keep in mind that these events were occurring during the brutality of Roman occupation, and Jesus (who is enacting what we see in these verses of Isaiah) is helping to show a new world and new reality of wholeness and healing in the midst of a broken and oppressive system.
- In verses 7-10, Jesus shares a testimony about John the Baptist. By asking the crowd if they expected to go into the wilderness and see both a reed swaying in the wind or a “man dressed in fine clothes,” Jesus is supporting the legitimacy of John and his ministry. In verse 10, Jesus says, “This is the one about whom it is written; “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you”” (in reference to the Prophet Elijah, whom Jesus identifies John as). We see this promise in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 as well.
- In verse 11, Jesus says that “...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” (see also Luke 7:28).

### Key take-aways from the Sermon

- We have been discussing the ministry of John the Baptist, and his role in the early church. He is the forerunner to Jesus whose ministry had an air of expectation. He did not point us to an institution but to the incarnation...to Jesus.
- Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Why is this? Early in Jesus' ministry, He is taking on the role as *mediator*. He is coming to baptism on behalf of all of us who won't come to the water to acknowledge our sin and to take our place.
- In Matthew 11, we find hope to be in short supply. John is imprisoned by King Herod. We must remember that the journey of faith does not circumvent doubt and wavering.
- John sends two of his friends to ask Jesus if He is the *One* they were expecting (i.e., if you are the *One*, why am I in prison?). We can see the pain and despair in John. It is not wrong to question things that challenge our faith. John is suffering from "disappointed expectations." John was not certain if Jesus is the *One*.
- The path to righteousness does not bypass suffering and sacrifice. It comes with a cross.
- Jesus responds to John not with judgement but with witness!
- If Jesus is the One, what does that mean for me (who is imprisoned)? Who are we to be as followers of Jesus? Even the saints endured disappointed expectations.
  - "Expectation is the root of all heartache." -Shakespeare
- An important book to highlight today's reading is *Letters and Papers from Prison* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was imprisoned by the Third Reich in Nazi Germany for speaking out against the evils of the Nazi power. Bonhoeffer's captivity and martyrdom is similar to that of John and others that suffered for their faith.
- "A prison cell, in which one waits, hopes, does various unessential things, and is completely dependent on the fact that the door of freedom has to be opened *from the outside*, is not a bad picture of Advent." -Dietrich Bonhoeffer from *Letters and Papers from Prison*
- Isaiah 61:3: "He gave me beauty for ashes, the oil of *joy* for mourning. He put a song of praise in place of sorrow." The text does not say that we won't suffer but there is a promise that joy is coming!
- Life has its share of disappointments with expectations unfulfilled. However, in an unexpected way even in the seasons of "detainment" and "captivity" the Prophet Nehemiah was right...the joy of the Lord is our strength!

### Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- Why was Jesus baptized by John the Baptist? What is the significance of this?
- Reflect on times of challenge and uncertainty. How did these moments impact your faith? How did you respond?
- What is the significance of the signs of the Messianic Kingdom to come that we read in Isaiah with today's reading in Matthew 11:2-11? (See Isaiah 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 42:7; 61:1). Why was there no mention of freeing captives in these signs in Isaiah?
- Why does Jesus ask the six questions to the crowd in verses 7-9? What is the significance of these questions?
- Read Matthew 3:4 and Matthew 7-11. Why is it significant that John the Baptist looks and acts the way that he does?
- If Jesus is the One, what does that mean for me? Who are we to be as followers of Jesus?
- Reflect on a time when you experienced disappointment from a situation or result that did not live up to your expectation. How can you view the experience differently in light of Rev. Dr. Chappell's message?

