

Go and Tell

Isaiah 35:1-10, Matthew 11:1-19

“Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” John the Baptist, who had told the people of Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I,” John the Baptist now asks Jesus, whom he baptized, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

We continue to ask Jesus: Are you the one in whom we are to believe, or shall we look for another? Are you the one whom we are to trust, or shall we look for another? Are you the one whom we are to obey and to follow, or shall we look for another? Are you the one on whom we are to stake our lives, all that we are and all that we have or shall we look for another? Are you the one?

Jesus answers John’s disciples: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.” He points us to what he has been teaching and doing, to what can be heard and what can be seen. He supplies the information we need, but he insists that we answer our own question. More than enough information is given here to establish that Jesus is the Christ. That is true whether we know it or not, whether we believe it or not, whether we like it or not, whether we obey him or not. But we have to answer our question for ourselves. This has to do with our faith, our belief, our decision, our commitment with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. “Are you he who is to come?” “Go and tell . . . what you hear and see.”

Jesus points us to what he does: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. Why these? These fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of what would happen when God came to rescue his people and to establish his kingdom. And it was all coming true in Jesus. The kingdom of God, for which the people had yearned for centuries, was coming into being before their very eyes. The sick were healed. The outcasts were made clean and brought into the community. Those who had never heard anything could hear Jesus teaching. The dead were raised. And most remarkable of all, more than the healings and even the raising of the dead, the poor had good news preached to them. The poor, whom everyone was sure that God despised, were told the good news of God’s love, forgiveness, and

salvation. The poor of this world are welcomed into the kingdom of God. The poor, who seem too count for nothing, count dearly in the eyes of Jesus. They are the recipients of his good news.

We, too, have heard and seen what Jesus has said and done. We have listened to his teachings and learned his parables. We have known the mystery of prayer answered, of people healed. We have known the joy of forgiveness, and we have seen people reconciled to each other by the grace of God. We do not get to see the ministry of Jesus first hand, but we have heard and seen enough of the teaching and healing of the resurrected and living Jesus Christ, to make up our minds. Do we believe in Jesus as the Christ or not?

There is always the possibility that we will fail to believe. John asks that question: "Shall we look for another?" But if we despaired of God in Christ, for whom would we look? Would we turn to the stars and to fate if we tired of the will of God? Would we trust our wits instead of the grace of Jesus Christ? Would we put our confidence in money and success instead of the Savior who joins us in our suffering? Upon whom do we depend? In whom do we trust? Upon what do we base meaning, purpose, value, and direction in our lives? Who are we, and Whose are we? To whom do we belong?

It would help us to avoid altogether the temptation to look for someone else if we would realize the deeper question about salvation and the deeper answer about salvation in this passage. John was in prison. For all the good news to the sick and the dead and the poor, there is not a word here about release to the captives. John never got out of prison alive. His head was cut off, at the request of a dancing girl who had pleased king Herod. So what good news did Jesus have for John? John's being in prison does not invalidate Christ's identity or undo who Jesus is. In fact, John's being in prison does not put him beyond the reach of God's gospel. But this is not at all obvious.

John was called to that high and difficult faith of believing in Jesus as his Savior, even when Jesus did not save him from prison. Sometimes we pray for a healing that does not come, or for a release that is not granted. Then we are called to that high and difficult faith of believing in Jesus as the Savior, as our Savior, even when we are not saved in the way we want to be from whatever afflicts us.

How does John do this? Think about the deeper answer Jesus gives him. Jesus follows John in everything he does. John comes preaching, Jesus comes preaching. John is arrested, Jesus is arrested. John is executed, and by then we know that Jesus is going to be executed. When John sends his disciples to question Jesus, it is a cry of desperation. If you are he who is to come, get me out of here! Save me! I cannot take it much longer! I want to be out there with you, not sitting in here, dying, all alone! And Jesus told him, No, I am not getting you out! But move

over, I am coming in with you! He did not join John in the same prison cell. John was executed before Jesus was arrested. But across the course of his life and death, Jesus joined John in arrest and in execution. Jesus did not avoid the suffering, the pain, the loneliness, the abandonment, or the death that John experienced. Jesus went through it all. It may appear that he abandoned John to prison, but on a deeper level he did not abandon John. He joined John in prison, and so he joins us in all the depths of human suffering. On some days we have a hard time finding Jesus in our lives. But we have a savior who is right here with us in the middle of this mess we call our lives. I am reminded of a powerful spiritual: "I asked the Lord to take away my troubles, instead he gave me strength; I asked the Lord to move the mountain, instead he gave me faith." Even when we are not rescued out of all our problems, we have a salvation that is more than rescue, a salvation that includes the presence of God with us in Jesus Christ, a salvation that extends beyond this life and into the life that is to come. Thanks be to God!

Given this salvation, consider the command in the answer Jesus gave to John's disciples: "*Go and tell* John what you hear and see: 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. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." Here is the evidence. *Go and tell* what you hear and see. Here is the work of the Christ. *Go and tell*. This is part of who we are. This is part of what it means to be Christian. We do not keep Jesus to ourselves. We do not keep the gospel a secret. We go and tell. Tell the world. Tell the children. Tell your next door neighbor. Tell the children. Tell your husband or wife. And tell the children what we hear and see. It is God who made us, so we belong to God. It is God who saved us, so we belong to God. It is God who sent Jesus Christ to us, so we belong to God. It is God to whom we go, so we will always belong to God. Go and tell all who will listen, and bring them to church to hear the gospel preached and to worship God.

As we come to believe in Jesus as the Christ of God, and as we go and tell what we hear and see, we will also be led to follow, to obey, to imitate, and to extend the ministry of Jesus Christ today as far as we are able. That is why we build hospitals around the world, and feed the hungry, and give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the naked, and house the homeless, and visit those who are sick, and befriend the friendless. That is why members of this church will spend their nights here for a week, hosting CARITAS guests who have no where else to come in out of the cold. That is why we receive the Two-Cents-Per-Meal offering, to feed the hungry in Richmond and around the world. That is why members of this church will help build a Habitat for Humanity house this spring. That is why we give money to go farther around the world than we can go ourselves, helping others. We do this in the name

of Jesus Christ, because he has first done it for us. We do it in the name of Jesus Christ, so that others might hear and see. We do it in the name of Jesus Christ, so that the mercy of God in his gospel might be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. And sometimes, when we cannot rescue people, when we cannot help them, when we cannot heal them, when we cannot get them out of prison, when we cannot save them, all we can say and do is, Move over, we are coming in with you, in the name of Jesus Christ. God help us.

“Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Are you the one in whom we are to believe, or shall we look for another? Are you the one whom we are to trust, or shall we look for another? Are you the one whom we are to obey and to follow, or shall we look for another? Are you the one on whom we are to stake our lives, all that we are and all that we have or shall we look for another? Are you the one? Jesus says, “Go and tell . . . what you hear and see.”

To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.

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