

# Jesus Speaks to Anxious Hearts

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT [a]

12/11/16

## MATTHEW 11:2-15

<sup>2</sup> Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup> and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

## IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

John the Baptist is in prison, he’s been removed from the stage, and now all eyes are on Jesus.

Jesus before this had already been baptized by John in the same water where John had washed away the sins of all the sinners who had come out to the Jordan, so that now all the sins belong to Jesus. **Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,** John had said.

John is now in Herod’s prison; Jesus is walking around Galilee, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, casting out demons, and healing; and that’s when John, from his prison cell, sends his disciples to Jesus to ask, **Are you the One who to come, or shall we look for another?”**

Is Jesus the Christ? Is he the One anointed to save all sinners? To bear the sin of the world on his own shoulders? John has already announced him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,

but now John seems not so sure. Or maybe John, himself, is sure, but he poses the question so that his disciples will hear the answer straight from the mouth of Jesus.

To all of this, Jesus tells John's disciples,

**“Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”**

Jesus is proclaiming that he is, indeed, the Christ, the promised Messiah to save sinners.

He is the One promised to Adam and Eve to crush the head of Satan; promised to Job, to be the Redeemer to ransom the sinner with his own sacrifice, bringing the sinner into eternal life; the One promised to David to cleanse all sin and bestow the Holy Spirit—Jesus is the One who destroys the power of sin, death, and the devil, so that as we see him walking around Galilee, sinners are being forgiven and they are also being rescued from the diseases and afflictions of this sinful world. The blind receive sight, the lame have strong legs and walk, the lepers are restored with healthy skin and bodies, even the dead are brought out of the tombs, and all those broken down by their sin, all those made poor of spirit, Jesus releases them, proclaiming to them the Gospel.

So Jesus is the promised One, the only Savior from all sin, but then, in instructing John's disciples to report all that they have seen him do, Jesus ends with that strange remark:

**“[And tell John,] ‘Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.’”**

[Matthew 11:6]

Why would someone be offended by Jesus healing diseases and forgiving sins? Why would anyone be offended by seeing those who have been broken in spirit now restored by the Lord and brought into his kingdom? Jesus is eating with sinners, speaking kindness to them, making it known that he is their brother, and that if you don't come as a sinner, then he's not for you. What is offensive in this?

It is offensive to our sinful flesh. For, while we live as those who belong to Jesus, as those justified by his Word of forgiveness, as those made holy by his blood, even as those who live in the faith breathed into

us by the Holy Spirit, we, at the same time, simultaneously, live in our sinful flesh. And the Old Man of sin, he gets offended easily.

The offense to the Old Man of sin is to tell him he has no worthiness before God and he can create no worthiness for himself, not by his works, by his decisions, by his feelings, or by anything else—for he is a sinner. That offends our sinful flesh.

So when Jesus is going around Galilee forgiving sins and cleansing sinners, the sinful flesh is offended. Because forgiveness means it's not me, it's not my own worthiness, it's not my own efforts, but, rather, it is a freely given gift from outside of me, a gift to me from a Lord who loves the sinner, and who wants to save the sinner, giving a salvation which the sinner could never attain on his own.

So Jesus says, ***“Blessed are those who are not offended by me.”***

Blessed are those who see Jesus not rejecting the sinner as the world would expect, but instead joining with the worst sinners of all in their homes for an evening of dinner and drinking—blessed are those who see him and say, *Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*

Blessed are those who see Jesus not walking away from the lepers, but going up to the sickest and touching the skin to bring health to the body, going up even to corpses in the grave and breathing life into their lungs—blessed are those who see him do this and they say, *this is the Christ promised to Adam and Eve to defeat death and the demons, and he is my Lord.*

Blessed are those who see Jesus binding himself to those who have been rejected for their miserable lives, to those hiding in shame, to those with no peace in their hearts—blessed are they as they say, *This is the Savior promised by Isaiah, the Savior coming in vengeance to crush Satan and his demons, coming with the judgment and recompense of God to save all who bear his Name.*

***Blessed is the one,*** says Jesus, ***who is not offended by me.***

For Jesus came to do the thing which our world finds to be the most offensive of all. He came not to build up those who have already built themselves up in their own worthiness, not to encourage those who have already spoken to themselves the words they wanted to hear, not to confirm any person in his or her own confidence in self, but he came, as Isaiah would said, *to strengthen the weak hands, to make*

*firm the feeble knees, to go to those with an anxious heart and say to them, "Be strengthened; fear not. For behold, your God comes for you with a vengeance, with the recompense of his own atoning blood, and he comes to save you."*

Jesus came for anxious hearts. In the Hebrew it is more vivid than that. It is a racing heart, a hastily pounding heart. It is a heart in trouble. Jesus came for that. To speak to the sinner—for who should have a more pounding heart than a sinner contemplating his own standing before God—Jesus came to speak to the sinner the word of forgiveness, the word calming the heart by setting at peace with his Father; he came to create in us a clean heart, a heart living in faith.

**IN THE NAME OF JESUS.**