



## **Matthew 11:1–6**

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. 2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” 4 Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind

receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

## **Reflection**

(Today's talk is given by Justin Moffatt)

My passage today is Matthew 11:1-6. I don't mind saying that this is one of my favourite passages.

What's happening here in today's text? An exchange between two figures in the gospels: John the Baptist and Jesus. One was charged to be the “prophet of the Most High”. The other was an enigma to many,

even to John. A puzzle. But in today's passage, Matthew begins to unravel the enigma of the identity of Jesus through this extraordinary exchange.

Two men. At a distance. Exchanging notes that show us something beautiful. Just to help you remember and digest, today I will speak about A. Jews. B. John and C. Jesus: The Jews, and what they hoped for. John, and some doubts he had. And Jesus, and how he revealed his identity.

First: The Jews. They expected 'one to come'. They didn't think that the salvation of the world lay in politics, education, government programs, and the like. As good as those things are, the ancient Jews were a people who had seen God do big things, and promise big things: he had turned up

to save them, like with Moses and the Exodus. He had sent his rulers, who would rescue them, like David and others. So they believed in the promised pattern of 'one to come', and looked for *the* 'one to come', the Messiah. They didn't quite know how he would come, but they believed that God would come in that one, ushering in his kingdom of peace to be spread over all the earth.

An example of this – but there are many more - would be in Isaiah 35:3:

Strengthen the feeble hands.  
Steady the knees that give way;  
say to those with fearful hearts,  
'Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come,  
... he will come to save you.'

So when you get to Jesus' time, you have a people ripe with expectation.

Second, let's talk about John. John had thought that Jesus was the one. But he didn't quite get it. He had rallied so many to the cause. He had baptised Jesus. He had heard the voice. But now, things weren't looking that good. Evil appeared to be winning, for Herod had placed him in prison merely for challenging the legitimacy of his marriage. There, in his dank cell, he is asking himself questions.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked himself questions when Hitler put him in prison. He writes:

'Who am I? They often tell me I step from my cell's confinement calmly,

cheerfully, firmly, like a Squire from his country house. [...] Who am I? Am I then really that which other men tell of? Or am I only what I myself know of myself? Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat...'

Prison hurts a person's soul. And John hadn't quite understood Jesus' style. Remember Matthew 9:14? So there he is in prison, wondering if all his hopes had come to naught; he sends a message via his disciples.

'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'

Third: Jesus. Jesus could have just sent

the simple message back: Yes! You tell John, Yes! But he wants John – and the reader – to dig deeper.

You see Jesus knew that John knew his Scripture. For example Isaiah 35:

Strengthen the feeble hands. [Your God] will come to save you.'

5 Then [when the one to come comes] will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.

When God comes, you'll see God open eyes and ears. You'll see the lame jump and the mute tongue sing!

He also knew that John knew Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He also knew that John knew Isaiah 29:

But your dead will live, Lord;  
their bodies will rise –  
let those who dwell in the dust  
wake up and shout for joy –

John, rest easy mate. Everything is in place. Can you see it? John had momentary lapse of reason. Jesus set his mind at rest.



When I was at University, I was invited on a blind date. It only happened once. I was to wear a white rose, and she was to wear a red rose, and we were to meet in a public space and then head to a particular party. When I got to the park, there were hundreds of women, but only one wearing a red rose. When I saw the red rose, I realised that this is my 'date', the 'one'.

What was the 'red rose', so that we would know who the Messiah was?

4 Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see:  
5 the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

This is good news, but there is a warning for us:

6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.'

You see, you may be like John. You suspect something good in Jesus. You can see the miracles. But there in a dark place – perhaps in your heart – you may not be sure. Jesus says: You are blessed if you stay the course, trusting in him.

## **Think & Pray**

A couple of things to do: first, read the Isaiah texts: Isaiah 29, 35, 61.

Second: Pray for healing. God the Father,

through God the Son, by the Holy Spirit hears you and cares and heals.

Third: Pray that you can piece together the puzzle to know Jesus. Pray that he opens your eyes to see. Pray that he opens your ears to hear. Pray that he allows your legs to follow. Pray that your mute tongue would begin again to sing for joy.