

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 11, 2016
3rd Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 35: 1-10; James 5:7-11

Hymns: 70; 63; 66; 73:5

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:2-11

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

⁴Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵*The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

⁷As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. ⁹But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰For this is *he* of whom it is written:

‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.’

¹¹“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Powerful Preaching!

When I think of John the Baptist that is what comes to my mind. He was bold and powerful in the message he presented to the people. He confronted people's sin in direct terms, not only in abstract generalizations. He called on people not only to repent with words, but that they should bring forth fruits of repentance. True repentance is seen in changed lives proceeding from changed hearts. John was so bold and so courageous in fulfilling his God-given mission that John even confronted Herod the king regarding his sin of adultery.

John preached repentance, and repentance was primary to his ministry of preparing the way of the Lord. John pointed people to Jesus. God had called John to prepare the way for Jesus and direct others to Jesus. John did this in all of his preaching and baptism. He directed others to that One who was to come after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And so as the opportunity presented itself John boldly pointed at Jesus and declared, "**Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). John not only did this while preaching. We see from our text how --

THEME: John the Baptist Also Taught by Example.

In our text we see how --

I. John Shows Where to Turn in Tribulation.

As mentioned, John the Baptist did not back down from pointing out people's sin, including the sin of King Herod and his sister-in-law who lived together in open adultery. That got John thrown into prison; but even then John was not silenced. Herod called John before him, and listened to him, but would not release him, and Herod would not repent. At this point our text reports:

Matthew 11:2-3 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

Some are troubled by the fact that John sent these disciples to Jesus asking the question they did. Some wonder if John was shaken in his faith and conviction that Jesus was in fact the Christ who was come into the world, if Jesus was in fact the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). It may indeed be true that John wondered about how things were proceeding. Maybe he expected things to move along at a quicker pace. Maybe John was wondering when Jesus would reveal His Kingdom and Himself as King. However, all these thoughts are mere speculation. This man, John the Baptist, was enduring a great trial, as did the prophets of old. In times of tribulation the Old Testament prophets turned to the Lord for help and assurance. John the Baptist turned to Jesus in John’s time of suffering tribulation. With the question posed John would receive the assurance of the gospel when his disciples returned to him with Jesus’ response.

John’s example sends us a clear message. When times of trouble arise in our lives John by example gives us direction. Turn to Jesus. Jesus is the One who has come into the world. We need not look for another. We turn to Jesus knowing that our Father in heaven sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Jesus is the way to God. Jesus is the **only** way for us to approach our heavenly Father and “find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

II. John Received the Comfort Found in Jesus

Matthew 11:4-6 “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’”

Jesus sent the message to John that John needed to hear while enduring the fires of tribulation. He received the message from his disciples that Jesus was all that John had said He was. Jesus was that One who was to come into the world, and the evidence was the

miraculous works performed by Jesus, just as the Scriptures had foretold. And in this way the Lord Jesus bore our infirmities. He had compassion on those who suffered the ill effects of sin, all the ill effects of sin in body and spirit, in time and eternity. So Jesus also had compassion on John the Baptist and surely John was comforted by the message he received from the Lord. Yes, John already knew all that about Jesus. In fact John knew it from childhood, as he was surely told by his parents about all the wondrous events surrounding his own birth. However, John needed to hear it all again. John was comforted by hearing it again because this was sweet music to John's ears, and the good news that calmed his troubled heart.

Here again we learn from John's example. The good news of Christ Jesus, that He is indeed the Christ the Son of the living God, is news we need to hear again and again throughout our lives. We need to hear it not because we don't know it, but because it sustains us while we endure the trials and tribulations, the temptations and enticements of this world. We are comforted by knowing that we have put our trust in that One Redeemer whom God sent into this world. He who came into this world to save sinners has compassion upon us in our troubles and cares for us. He would have us cast our cares and burdens upon Him for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We should never grow tired of hearing of the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is sweet music to our ears also and brings joy to our hearts as well.

Each and every Advent season we crave those same sweet gospel treats that the Lord brings us in the announcements of the Savior's coming, and in the fulfillment of His promise found in the Savior's birth. Our hearts are lifted up by the message of the angels proclaiming "**good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people**" (Luke 2:10).

So it was that John would find comfort and assurance from Jesus as he faced the most difficult trial of his life that would end with the executioner's sword. It would be easy for many to write off John's life with its short ministry as being a failure. Jesus said that --

III. John Exemplifies Greatness in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 11:7-11 “As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?’⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses.⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

¹⁰ For this is *he* of whom it is written:

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.”

¹¹ “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Jesus makes a point of John’s significance. He challenged the multitude that was gathered around Him. They had walked out to the wilderness area surrounding the Jordan River to see John. They had turned out by the hundreds and perhaps even thousands. The crowd included common people, but also soldiers, and even a representation of the elite of society. What drew them out from Jerusalem to the Jordan? Was it something insignificant like a reed blowing in the wind? No one would have bothered! Was it someone that was rich and powerful who was impressive in appearance? We know enough about John to know that was not the case. He was anything but a TV evangelist preaching a positive mental attitude while wearing thousand dollar suits and sporting a fancy haircut! No, even by the standards of the day, John was dressed in a lowly manner and lived a humble life of subsistence.

His appeal was not found in appearance or form, but in the substance of his message. It was the power of the gospel that lay at the heart of all John said as he prepared the way for the Lord. The Spirit enriched and empowered message which John presented led many to turn away from sin, and be baptized for the remission of their sins.

Greatness as the Lord sees it is far different from greatness by the world’s standards. Jesus declared John to be “more than a prophet” as the forerunner of the Lord. Jesus declared John to be greatest of any born of a woman; a truly great man who selflessly served his Lord in life and ultimately in death.

This isn't the kind of greatness the world pursues. This isn't the kind of greatness that appeals to our human nature either. Nor is it achieved by human nature. It is the kind of greatness that comes to us by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. It is a greatness that comes with faithfulness to the calling of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of Christ.

Jesus holds John up as an example for us, an example of greatness to which we should aspire. It is not a greatness that will get us listed among the fortune 500, or get us into the history books. It is the greatness that glorifies our God and Savior in this life as we would strive to lead others to repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. May the Spirit so bless us with His presence in our hearts and lives!

Jesus leaves us with one caveat; **“He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”** What does that tell us? It reminds us of the greatness with which the Lord blesses us as children of God and heirs of everlasting life. The glory that awaits us in heaven is so great that nothing on earth can compare. This is not only a greatness within our reach, this is the greatness which Christ secured for us by His death and resurrection. This is the greatness which comes to us by grace alone, the greatness that will be ours in heaven for all eternity.

For us this makes the lesson of our text all the more important. Learn from the example of John the Baptist. Turn to Jesus when facing the trials and tribulations and temptations of life. Know, as did John, that comfort and assurance will be found in Jesus and His gospel. Strive for the greatness John had with his close connection to Jesus, possessing a life that glorifies our Lord by directing others to Jesus.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)