

## Recognition Mathew 11: 1-15

As we prepare for the coming of Christ this Advent season, there are many things we can be thankful for. We are thankful for God's gifts of grace, mercy, and love. We are thankful for the gift of faith, and the promise of new life in Christ in the kingdom of heaven. We are also thankful that we need not ask Jesus that pointed question that puzzled John the Baptist... "are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

As we have seen the past few weeks, there are many "R" words that help us to understand why Advent is such an important part of the church calendar. Readiness, repentance, relationship, restoration, resurrection, and revelation are just a few. This morning we will add recognition to the list. Advent is a time for us to recognize Jesus, a time to recognize the signs of His return, and a time to recognize the things that cause us to have doubts about who He truly is.

We begin with John the Baptist. He was the last in a long series of prophets to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. He learned the Scriptures from his father, a temple priest, who was certainly familiar with the 300 + prophecies in the OT about the coming of Christ. He knew of Isaiah 9, where it was revealed that He would come in the form of a child, in whom the Gentiles would find light in the darkness of their world. He knew from Isaiah chapter 7 that the child would be born to a virgin, and from Micah 5:2 that the city in which He was to be born would be Bethlehem. He knew from Psalm 22 and Zechariah 12 that He would be crucified. The prophets described the graphic details even though the Romans had not even devised that cruel method of punishment yet. He knew from 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 16:33 that His mission was one of judgment and salvation, the one who would rescue God's people from the enemy.

He believed Jesus was the One the Scriptures promised would come to save His people from their sins. **Advent is a time for recognizing Jesus** and we know from Matthew 3 that John did not have any trouble doing that. When Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized, John initially refused. He told Jesus Lord, I need to be baptized by you, not the other way around. Jesus had other plans.

After some discussion or perhaps some holy persuasion, John agreed to baptize Jesus, and a few moments later he heard the booming voice of God say: “this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”. Matthew 3:16-17 It was a wonderful and amazing affirmation of that which John had already believed to be true. John certainly recognized Jesus, but even after recognizing all of those signs **he still had some doubts**. A lot had changed since the day John baptized Jesus.

John was no longer preaching in the wilderness, but in prison for the crime of calling out King Herod for violating God’s rules for marriage. He had expected the Messiah to come to judge the unrighteous, and instead he had heard that Jesus was doing just the opposite- he was teaching and healing them! Perhaps he may have even expected Jesus to deliver judgment to Herod and rescue him from that forsaken prison. He recognized Jesus, he recognized the signs of his coming, but yet hadn’t recognized what was causing him to have doubts. He was **faithful yet confused**, so He sent two of his followers to ask Jesus a simple question. “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

Jesus understood his plight and sent a message back. His answer came in the form of even more signs. **Advent is a time to recognize the signs of Jesus coming**. Several are found in 11:5. *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. Perhaps the last was the most significant for John. No miracles there, just equality. Social standing and the number of possessions one had meant nothing to Jesus. His preaching was not for a privileged few.

Even today, we have much in common with John the Baptist. We recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. We might even recognize the signs of His return in glory. What we often fail to recognize is why we have doubts. Doubt is a weapon of Satan that he uses for one purpose- to separate people from the love of Jesus Christ. Doubt weakens the faith of the body of Christ and blinds unbelievers to the truth. It is our faith in Jesus Christ that secures our place in eternity with Him, and Satan would like nothing more than to take that assurance away.

One commentator puts it this way- repentance and faith prepare people for the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ gives and the devil's primary goal is to take our faith away from us. Faith is the devil's enemy, and **Advent is a season for us to recognize our doubts about God and overcome them.**

Fear, disappointment, and discouragement are behind some of them. Doubt may also be caused by a lack of understanding, a PC way of describing ignorance. For example, someone who has little knowledge of computers and technology might doubt that they could send a document the size of the Bible clear across the world and have it personally received by their intended recipient in less than 2 seconds- without leaving home or spending one cent for postage. But once they see it done, their doubts soon turn to amazement.

Doubt may be caused by failure, or even fear of failure. When I was trying to learn to water-ski, I had doubts that I would ever learn. (My instructor probably had bigger doubts). All I could do was drink half of the lake and threaten to quit in frustration. But when I finally got up on skis for the first time and went for 50 yards without falling, my doubt was replaced with confidence. I knew that if I could go for 50 yards, 100 yards was now possible. The causes of doubt are many but the end result is always the same- a missed blessing or opportunity.

It is necessary to make a distinction between doubt and unbelief. Henry Drummond, a preacher from the late 1800's, explained the differences between the two like this. He said doubt is honest, while unbelief is obstinacy- in other words stubbornness or closed mindedness. He said doubt is looking for light, while unbelief is contentment with the darkness. His description is still fitting today.

Doubt is part of our search for the truth, while unbelief says that there is no absolute truth- truth is only a concept in our mind. Why look for something that does not exist? The Bible says that only a fool refuses to acknowledge God, and we have no time this morning to dwell on foolishness. God has revealed many things to us that allow our faith in Christ to mature. Unlike John the Baptist, who only understood part of the mission of Christ, we have the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say.

John knew nothing of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. We know of the meaning and importance of both. We have the OT prophecies and the knowledge of how they are fulfilled in the NT. We have reliable eyewitness accounts of Christ's birth, his many miracles, and the revealed plan of salvation accomplished by his death and resurrection. What more can we ask for? How about the testimonies of those whose lives were changed forever by their relationship with Christ, including some here in this church?

Jesus gives us a graphic reminder in 11:12 that this season of peace and goodwill will also be a season of violence and unrest as Satan seeks to destroy our relationship with God. He does that by planting seeds of doubt in the hearts and minds of those who love Jesus. It is our faith that will shield us against those attacks. Eph 6:16. Our faith empowers us to force our way past those doubts that are meant to destroy us. For John, it might have been long days in that miserable prison that caused him to have doubts. The Christ that came to earth is not the one John envisioned. He expected a conquering warrior that would bring judgment and punishment, not a teacher and healer. Today, some still desire to meet that teacher and healer, but often find themselves face to face with a Jesus that requires repentance and righteousness. Our prisons might be a bit different than John the Baptist's or the apostle Paul's, but they are no less troubling.

My prayer this morning is for those whose doubts still overshadow their faith. If you are in that number, I invite you this morning to recognize the many things that God has given us so that you might know that Jesus Christ loves you and wants you to know Him. Jesus loves you-there is no doubt about it. As we come closer to the day in which we celebrate His birth while anticipating His return, I pray that all people will come to recognize and believe that truth. Let us continue to worship and thank God for our faith in the one that He has sent. Amen.