

Pastor Don Nelson

April 28, 2013
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THE ONE”
Luke 7:18-23; 9:1-6

- {Lk 7:19} **Are you the one,** Jesus?

Are you the Messiah, the {Mt 1:16} Christ, {Ps 2:2}

God's Anointed?

Are you {Jn 8:12} **“the light of the world,”** {Jn 6:35}

“the bread of life,” {Jn 14:6} **“the way and the truth and the life”?**

Are you God's {Jn 3:16} **“one and only Son,”** {Jn 8:58}

the eternal **“I Am,”** {Jn 10:30} he who is One with the Father?

! {Lk 7:19} **“Are you the one who was to come?”** Are

you the promised Savior? *Are you the one we need?*

- Please turn to Luke 7. In verses 18-20 the disciples

of John the Baptizer tell him about the miracles of Jesus.

In response he sends two of them to the Lord to ask, **“Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”**

This is John, of whom the prophets of old {Mal 3:1} foretold: **“I will send my messenger ahead of [Messiah], who will prepare the way before [him].”**

This is John who, {Jn 1:29} when he **“saw Jesus,”** announced to the crowd: **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

This is John who, {Mt 3:16-17} when he baptized Jesus, saw **“the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him”** and heard **“a voice from heaven**

[saying], **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**

This is John {Lk 7:11-17, 1-10} who has just been informed by his disciples that not only has Jesus healed the dying slave of a Roman centurion, he has raised a widow's son from death to life.

- This is John, of whom Christ Jesus will say in verse 28: **“I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater.”**

This is John the Baptizer asking, **“Are you the one who was to come...?”!**

John has at least two reasons for asking this.

- ⊖ 1st, John is in prison for speaking the truth.

Shortly after he baptized Jesus, John {Lk 3:19-20} **“rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and...all the other evil things he [has] done.”** Herod retaliated by locking **“John up in prison.”**

John is a free spirit. He has lived in the sun and the wind and the wide-open spaces. Now he is shut up in a dank and windowless dungeon.

{Lk 3:4} John is the **“voice... crying: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.’** God put a fire in his bones to speak the Word, but now he is forcibly silenced.

John has no delusions about where this is headed. He knows his only hope for survival is for his cousin Jesus to break him out of jail by starting a revolution or, better yet, working a miracle. But it has been months since his arrest, and Jesus has done...nothing, at least not for *him*.

Jesus has just helped that widow from Nain, of all places, by raising her dead son. For Heaven's sakes, he has just helped a *Roman centurion* by healing his slave!

What about *John*, the man with a mission, God's devoted servant?

{Lk 3:17} Has not the LORD God himself promised that the Messiah has come to “**clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**”? John is not chaff, he is wheat. Surely the Messiah will “**gather**” him safely “**into his barn**” by rescuing him from danger!

☼ Faith collides with suffering and John finds himself in a crisis of uncertainty.

This is one reason why John sends his disciples to ask, “**Are you the one...?**”

† It is difficult to accept that Jesus sometimes releases us from suffering, but more often he releases us through suffering. He does so, not *despite* the truth that he is “**the one who was to come**” but *because* of it. When Christ permits us to be afflicted it is because affliction is the best means to accomplish his purpose as Messiah.

{Lk 9:23} If this comes as a shock, hear the basic condition of following Jesus: “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.**”

↗ When undeserved hardship intrudes, we can either: lean into Jesus and bear it as a redemptive (albeit painful) participation in his mission; or we can push away from Jesus and suffer it as a pointless (and ruinous) exercise in futility.

■ Faithful suffering is not easy. Often, we cannot see how it serves any positive purpose. It does not preclude sorrow and frustration and crying out to God with tears. But as Jesus declares in Luke 7:23: “**Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.**”

☹ 2nd, John asks because he is disenchanted by Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God.

John expects the Messiah to establish a kingdom that embodies supernatural power (revealed in holiness and miracles) *and* earthly strength (revealed in military and economic might).

He anticipates that Christ will cleanse God's people of sin and enforce biblical law. To make this happen he will liberate Israel from Rome, eliminate the Herodians, restore the line of David, and set up a visible realm complete with invincible armies and inestimable riches.

Jesus does not seem to be moving in that direction.

{Mk 1:14-15} He *is* “**proclaiming... The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!**” {Lk 6:27; Mt 5:47} But he also says: “**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,**” and “**If [a Roman soldier] forces you to [carry his load] one mile, go with [him] two miles.**”

{Jn 8:11; Lk 3:8} He *is* calling sinners to “**leave [their lives] of sin.**” But he spends a lot of time “[eating] **and [drinking] with tax collectors and sinners**” who are not yet “[Producing] **fruit in keeping with repentance.**”

He *is* exercising supernatural power when he performs miracles. But he allows Israel's enemies to steal and kill and destroy as they always have.

{Lk 3:9} The LORD has revealed to John that **“The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire”!** Are not Caesar and Herod fruitless trees?

☛ Faith collides with disappointment and John finds himself in a crisis of uncertainty.

This is one reason why John sends his disciples to ask, **“Are you the one...?”**

† It is hard to grasp that Jesus is not interested in improving the world by putting us in charge so we can use political, economic, and military power to enforce morality and faith. His goal is to replace the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of God, which is manifested in love, humility, mercy, generosity, truth, holiness, and self-sacrificing service.

{Lk 6:44} If this sounds naïve, remember that **“People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.”** You get what you plant. We cannot grow the city of God with worldly seed. It has been tried, with horrific results: the Crusades, the Inquisition, Wars of Religion, religious dictatorship, and so on.

✎ When the Jesus Way seems impractical we can either: bow to Christ's Lordship and leave the results to him; or we can assert ourselves and insist on doing his work on our terms.

■ Embracing his vision is not easy. {Is 55:8} God's **“thoughts are not [our] thoughts,” “neither are [his]**

ways [our] ways.” But as Jesus says in **verse 23: “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”**

“Are you the one who was to come?” John's disciples ask. **“Or should we expect someone else?”**

■ In verses 21-22 Jesus answers with actions and words: **“At that very time,”** when they are with him,

Jesus [cures] many who [have] had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and [gives] sight to many who were blind. So he [replies] to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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.”

Christ relieves the suffering of these people; but not of John. He uses miraculous power to liberate them; but not John. Each decision accomplishes God's purpose and manifests his kingdom.

(If this seems unfair to John, keep in mind that Jesus will not relieve his own suffering in his time of trial. He will not liberate himself from the cross.)

“Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of” him!

❓ *But how can we avoid stumbling when our faith collides with suffering or disappointment?*

Allow me to suggest three action steps.

① We can lean into Jesus in prayer, in worship, in study. Fellowship with him refreshes our faith. The tighter we cling to him, the less likely we are to fall.

② We can renew our submission to Christ's Lordship. Choosing to say: "'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,' not mine!" empowers us for active obedience in the hard times. And,

③ We can invest ourselves in the ministry of God's Kingdom.

■ In Luke 9:1-6 Jesus gives the Twelve "**power and authority to drive out...demons and...cure diseases, and he [sends] them out to proclaim the kingdom...and to heal the sick,**" and so they do.

Not only does their ministry draw others to Christ, it confirms and fortifies their own faith in him. Our kingdom ministry has the same impact on us.

Our faith *will* collide with suffering, and with disappointment with God.

It's OK to ask, "**Are you the one,**" Jesus? John the Baptizer did.

But remember what the Messiah has said:
"Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."