

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples³ to ask him, “Are you the one who was 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 cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.”

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

¹¹ I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (NIV84)

Theme: What do you Expect?

1. Of Jesus
2. Of John

Things are not always as they seem. Things don’t always go as you expect. You thought it was a safe website, but your credit card info was stolen instead. You thought she was your best friend, but she ended up stabbing you in the back. You expected him to turn things around, but all that happened was a bunch of broken promises and shattered dreams—things are worse off than they were before. Things are not always as they seem and they don’t always go as you expect. The same can be said about John the Baptist and Jesus. They seemed small and insignificant, but things aren’t always as they seem. So I ask you: What do you expect: Of Jesus? Of John?

John the Baptist and Jesus were related. When Mary visited her relative Elizabeth John jumped in joy in his mother’s womb because

he heard the voice of the Lord’s mother. Jesus and John may have known each other quite well when they were growing up. When they were around 30 years old Jesus started his ministry and he went to visit John who was baptizing in the Jordan river. When he saw Jesus, John shouted, **Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.** He also said about Jesus, **After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.** When Jesus was baptized by John the voice of God came from heaven. **This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.** John the Baptist knew that Jesus was the Messiah and the Savior of the world. He believed that Jesus was the Son of God for whom they had been waiting. But now John was having his doubts. He did what the Lord wanted him to do. He baptized many. He preached repentance. He didn’t hesitate when he saw someone living in sin. He wasn’t afraid to call anyone out. But that got him in hot water. Eventually Herod had John the Baptist arrested. He was locked up in a dungeon of sorts. And he must have wondered why. Why was he suffering while the wicked seemingly prospered? Where was Jesus? Wasn’t he the Messiah who was supposed to come and destroy the wicked while saving the righteous? If so, why isn’t he doing anything? So he sent his disciples to Jesus to find out for him.

Jesus wasn’t doing what John expected him to do. What about you? What do you expect of Jesus? What do you want him to be? What do you want him to do for you? Do you picture Jesus simply as that little baby born in Bethlehem? Is he simply Mary’s Son? Or also the Son of God? Do you see Jesus as the one with a battered and bruised body hanging on the cross? Do you see him as the one who made himself a sacrifice in your place so that you wouldn’t have to suffer through what your sins deserve? What do you expect of Jesus? What do you want him to be? What do you want him to do? Many people turn Jesus into a great prophet. He was a great man, they say, but nothing more than that. Or he is our example. He is the one who showed us how to love others. To treat others as we want to be treated. Or do you want Jesus simply to be a bread king of sorts? You expect Jesus to watch over you and bless you. That means, in your mind, that he will provide for all your needs. You won’t have to worry

about making ends meet. Because he will provide for you. Or is he simply your protector? The one who will guard you from all harm and danger. The one who will cure all your diseases? What do you expect of Jesus? What you expect of him, will determine if you will be disappointed or not.

Jesus didn't seem all that important. He looked just like you or me. So many people assumed that he is just like you and me. That he was nothing more than a good man. John had his doubts. So Christ put his doubts to rest. He told his disciples to report to John all that he had heard and seen.

Jesus then goes through a list—from the lesser to the greater, to prove that he truly was the promised Messiah, and the son of God. **The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.** Jesus performed many miracles. He did what no human by his own power could accomplish. He proved through those miracles that he is God. And that he has compassion on those needing compassion. But the last two items stand out: The first is that Jesus raised the dead. At this time, Jesus probably only raised the young man outside of Nain from the dead. He would go on to do it two more times plus his own resurrection. He has power over death. As the Lord over all, even death must listen to Jesus. But most importantly, Jesus also preached to the poor. That is, he spread the gospel to those who were spiritually poor. He forgave sinners. He preached the sweet message of the gospel to those who were still dead in their sins.

It is through that gospel that our doubt is removed. If we have doubt about Christ—about who he is and what he has done, all we have to do is turn to the Word. It is in his Word that he tells us that he is true God and true man at the same time. He tells us what he has done to prove who he is. He tell us how he lived a perfect life that we could not. How he suffered and died an innocent death. He took all our sins upon himself. So he was forsaken by the Father and suffered through the pain and torment of hell in our place. It is only in the Word that we learn about Christ's resurrection. And it is in the Word that God promises to take all believers to live with him in heaven when he returns on the last day.

What do you expect of Christ? If it's just a man, a good prophet, an example for us to follow—you are selling him woefully short. Even if you simply expect someone who will provide for you, who will watch over you and protect you—you are still selling him woefully short, and you are setting yourself up for appointment—for what you think is best for you may not always be what Christ knows is best for you. No, in his Word we see that he is our Savior from sin and death. The one who took away the guilt of all our sins and the gift of eternal life. And when that is your expectation of Jesus, he will never let you down.

It is in his Word that we get the proper expectation of Jesus. But not only of Jesus, but also of John the Baptist.

After John the Baptist's disciples left, Jesus asked the crowd about John **What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.** John was weird. He wore clothes made of camels' hair. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. He didn't drink alcohol. And he didn't cut his hair. John the Baptist was sort of like a wild man. People traveled through the wilderness to see him not because he was such an impressive looking man. They didn't do it because he was popular, wore nice clothes, or was powerful. They did it because he was a prophet. That is, he taught God's Word. He spoke God's word to the people. He was like Moses, Elijah, or Isaiah. But he wasn't just an ordinary prophet. He was the greatest of prophets. For all the other prophets were called to prophecy about Christ. But John the Baptists was specifically called to prepare the way for the Lord.

He was chosen by God to prepare the people for Christ's coming. He did this by preaching repentance. As we saw last week, John the Baptist urged people to, **repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.** His purpose was to make people realize their sin, to repent of their sins and then turn to God. He also baptized many with a baptism of repentance. And John was quick not to give credit to himself or keep people for himself. He always pointed others to Christ. He prepared the people's hearts and minds for the coming Savior. He often used

the law to prepare the people for the gospel that Christ would bring. John prepared the way for Christ by preaching repentance. That is why repentance is a major theme of advent. But people have certain expectations. They want Christmas to be nice and cute—singing about angels and babies; with snow on the ground; and relatives visiting. But they don't want controversy. They don't want to hear about sin. They don't want to be reminded of who they are and what they have done. The last things they want to hear about is John's message of repentance. There is a reason why Christmas Eve is one of the most well-attended services of the year, while advent services and especially midweek advent services are far less attended. Many don't want to be confronted with their sins—that's not the Christmas they expect. But when you only expect the cute part of Christmas while skipping out on sin, you miss why Christ came in the first place. And then you expect a different Christ.

Even though John the Baptist didn't look like it, he was quite important. In fact Jesus said, **Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.** John is the greatest man to ever be born because he was born for a specific purpose. He was born to prepare the people's hearts for the coming of Christ. But you may remember that John said that Jesus was greater. And that he wasn't even worthy to untie his sandals. And Jesus was born of a woman. As we learn from Gabriel, he was born of the virgin, Mary. Jesus made himself the least. Even right before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus lowered himself and washed his disciples feet. Paul talks about Jesus lowering himself in Philippians 2. (He) **made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!** He made himself the least in this world. For the almighty and glorious God became like one of us even taking all our sin upon himself. And so the least is the greatest. Jesus is saying, as great as John the Baptist is—and he is far greater than us, Jesus is greater than John. Because he is the Messiah. Once again, John points us to Jesus.

Things aren't always as they seem. Things aren't always what we expect. Jesus didn't look like the Messiah. He didn't act as some expected him to act. Yet, he is the one for whom John the Baptist

prepared the way. He is the one who would go on to defeat sin, death, and the devil. This advent we are expecting the birth of our Savior; and we know that he will exceed all our expectations. Amen.