

The Third Sunday in Advent  
Gaudete  
Matthew 11:2-11

*[John is one of a kind and still doubted!]*

The current population is 7.8 billion, give or take a few! A conservative count puts the cumulative population of the earth at right over 100 Billion! Of these 100 billion people who have lived or are living now on the earth, God chose one man to be the forerunner of Jesus! He chose one man to prepare the way for Christ by preaching “a baptism of repentance and for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4) He chose one man to baptize Christ and initiate His ministry. He chose one man to point to Christ and say, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John confessed that he must decrease and Jesus must increase. (John 3:30) He knew exactly what he was to do. He recognized Mary’s voice, the voice of the mother of His Lord, in his mother’s womb. He lived an ascetic life that would put any other ascetic to shame. He preached the coming judgment and the coming of Christ boldly. He preached so boldly, he was thrown into prison. And this very special man. This man who knew what he was about. This man who baptized Jesus and pointed Him out. He doubted:

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (vv. 2-3)

*[Doubt is sin.]*

I don’t know about you, but that makes me feel much better about myself when I am attacked by doubt!

Yet make no mistake. Doubt is a sin. Doubt is really the root of all sin.

Eve sinned when she doubted the Word of God in the garden when she was tempted by Satan.

Abraham sinned and doubted the Word of God when he pretended Sarah was his sister, not once, but twice! Once in Egypt and once in Gerar!

The children of Israel sinned when they doubted that Moses was God's chosen instrument to lead them out of slavery and into freedom.

The unforgivable sin is disbelieving the testimony of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is God! This really stems from doubt!

The testimony of Jesus is pretty incredible! He claimed to be the Son of God! He performed many mighty miracles! He rose from the dead and appeared to many people. He claims that His resurrection gives us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Even though we see our bodies decaying and we see decay all around us, He promises us that we have eternal life now!

You are tempted to doubt these things.

When your body betrays you and shows the sign of age, you are tempted to doubt whether you actually have eternal life now!

When you desire forbidden flesh outside God's good gift of marriage, you doubt God's Word that this will harm you and harm others.

When the desire of your eyes causes you to covet material wealth, you doubt God's Word that material things are meant to serve your neighbor.

When the desire of your eyes causes you to covet status, you doubt God's Word that the least in the kingdom of the world is the greatest in the kingdom of God.

When you suffer persecution, you're tempted to believe that God isn't your dear Father and that you're not His dear child!

When you are inundated by false ideas and philosophies of this world, you are tempted to doubt the one true Faith handed down by the apostles.

When you see “good” people outside of the faith die, you are tempted to doubt that Jesus is the one and only way to salvation.

Doubt is sin. If left festering, it will cause all manner of destruction in your life. Imagine life with your spouse if you doubted their love for you!

John doubted whether Jesus was truly the Messiah sent by God the Father to save His people.

John doesn't let his doubt fester. He sends two of his disciples to question Jesus about his doubt. He knows where to get the answer to his doubt. Jesus!

*[What does Jesus point John to?]*

What does Jesus point to soothe John's doubt?

Does Jesus point John to his own emotions?

I'm sure John's emotions were all over the place. He was God's chosen instrument to point to Jesus and he's rotting away in prison. And he's rotting in prison because he shamelessly preaches God's Law. Herod reacts not with repentance but by trying to get rid of the voice of the Law. John hears what Jesus is doing and doesn't seem to understand that if the kingdom of God is here, why is he in prison? Rotting in prison sure doesn't seem like the victorious Christian life, does it?

Your emotions aren't reliable. Many times you can't trust them. They can be unduly influenced by external circumstances and internal body chemistry. They need to be trained. The Psalms are actually a great training tool to shape the emotions in a God pleasing way.

You're feeling insecure, recite Psalm 23: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (vv. 4, 6)

When you're feeling guilty, recite Psalm 51: "Have mercy on my, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." (v. 1)

When you're feeling excited, recite Psalm 89: "I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord forever; with my mouth I will make known Your faithfulness to all generations." (v. 1)

But even well trained emotions aren't reliable. Jesus doesn't point John or you to your emotions when doubt strikes you.

Does Jesus point John to his experiences or works?

John has many great experiences and works. We don't have many of his words but he's considered by many to be one of the greatest preachers ever. Jesus has a high opinion of John: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has been no one greater than John the Baptist." (v. 11) Think about that! Greater than Abraham! Greater than Moses! Greater than Isaiah! Unlike Abraham and Moses and Isaiah who point us to Christ through their writings, John pointed to Christ with his very own finger. He had a greater revelation of Christ than those prophets who came before him. But Jesus doesn't point John to his works to reassure him.

We have a high view of our own works and experiences. We love to revel in what we have done and experienced in life. Jesus has quite a different view. He says in Luke: "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, says, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" (v. 17:10)

It's not that works are bad. They are what God uses to serve our neighbor and to serve us through our neighbor. When you honor your spouse or bind the wounds of a stranger or protect the reputation of your neighbor, God is pleased with you. Consider all the commandments. You can fill a lifetime with good works that barely scratch the surface of one of the commandments. These, however, aren't the cause of your faith but the result of your faith working itself out in love. So Jesus doesn't point John or you to your works or experiences to soothe doubt.

Does Jesus point John to some internal confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah?

Most definitely not.

Mormons point to a burning in the bosom. Pietists point to a burning in the heart. Pentacostals and Charismatics point to a gut check. Calvinists point to an inner confirmation of being one of God's elect. These are all ways of using your heart to confirm God's Word. The problem is that the heart is deceitful as God clearly states in His Word: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

That's why the Epistles in the New Testament constantly tell us to "test the spirits" as John put it. (1 John 4:1) We must test what we hear and feel against the once-for-all, handed down, apostolic faith.

This is actually what Jesus points John to!

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (v. 4-5)

These are signs that Jesus is the Messiah:

Isaiah 29:18 - "In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see."

That's actually a great description of God converting us from unbelievers to believers, isn't it?

Isaiah 26:19 - "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead."

What a great description of the future glory that awaits us who trust in the Lord.

Isaiah 61:1 - “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

Another great description of our conversion by our Lord!

Eyewitness accounts of these very things are what Jesus sends to John in prison to soothe his doubt and bolster his faith.

It’s the same thing God sends to you.

Listen to Peter: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of His majesty!” (2 Peter 1:16)

Listen to John: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life... that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1, 3)

As you know, “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

*[The Word is our confidence and gives us hope.]*

The Word is the eyewitness accounts of Jesus. His mighty works in the Pentateuch and the Writings and in the Gospels and Acts. His mighty promises in Psalm, Prophets, Gospels, and Epistles. The Word is the source of our salvation because it gives to us Jesus Himself.

The Scriptures are not some mantra that you can chant and gain enlightenment although they do give you understanding.

The Scriptures are not some handbook to success although they do impart wisdom.

We must remember Jesus' warning to the Pharisees: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:39)

The Scriptures are the testimony of Jesus Himself and the Holy Spirit delivers Jesus to us through them through faith.

*[Gaudete!]*

And since we are given such a wonderful testimony, we can *gaudete*, which means to rejoice or to have joy! That is the Latin word for today's service and why we light the rose candle today. We have joy because we have Jesus through His Word.

Joy can exist in the midst of sorrow and pain. Joy can exist in the midst of happiness and pleasure. Joy is the certainty that Jesus is God's Messiah. Joy is the certainty that Jesus is your Messiah.

You have that joy because you have His Word. Thanks be to God for the wonderful testimony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Amen!