

The Third Sunday in Advent - *Gaudete*

Matthew 11:2-11

*“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?’” (v. 2)*

This is a very enigmatic account of John the Baptist, to say the least! Is it really possible that the Baptizer doubted? Is it possible that the same guy who said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” could possibly doubt his own testimony? (John 1:29) Is it possible that the same guy whom Jesus said was the greatest born of woman doubted? (v. 11) I mean doubt is a grave sin. It breaks the first commandment and is akin to the unpardonable sin. The unpardonable sin, as you know, is not believing that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God the Father who is God Himself. Unbelief damns eternally. Yes, doubt is a serious sin. Is it really possible that John the Baptizer doubted?

According to both Luther and C.F.W. Walther, this is impossible.

According to them, he was sending his disciples to Jesus so that they would become followers of Jesus instead of followers of John. There is much merit to this line of thinking. After all, John the Baptizer himself admitted that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. (John 3:30) He never intended to usurp Christ or have a bigger following. He is an exemplar for all pastors as he always pointed to Christ! But, if it's true that John the Baptizer was sending his disciples to Jesus to be His disciples, it would have happened differently.

And I'm not surprised John was attacked by doubt. Doubt is a sin, but I know that every Christian is attacked by doubt from time to time. Part of fighting the good Christian fight is to battle with doubt. I believe it's entirely possible this is what John was doing. He could've wanted confirmation that he was fighting the good fight. He might have wanted confirmation that he had done what he was sent to do even though he was rotting away in prison. We don't know exactly what was going on with John. I'm sure we'll find out it glory what was really going on with John. Today, I want to consider today why you might be tempted to doubt.

### [I. Your Faith Is Attacked by Wrong Expectations]

Unclear or false expectations may tempt you to doubt. This certainly affected the Jews of Jesus' day. Most of them expected the Messiah to set up a military, earthly kingdom. They expected Jesus to overthrow the shackle of the Roman Empire. They expected to possess the Promised Land in even a greater way than their forefathers. This was not a totally unrealistic explanation. God promised David that He would raise up His offspring and "establish the throne of His kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:13) This also follows the pattern of Psalm 2:

*"The LORD said to Me, 'You are My Son;  
today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" (vv. 7-9)*

This is the kingdom the Jews were expecting. They didn't understand that Jesus was setting up a spiritual kingdom until He comes again in glory to reveal His eternal kingdom. We know this spiritual kingdom as the church. Jesus established this kingdom with His blood and rules His kingdom with the Word of forgiveness. You are a member of this spiritual kingdom. You understand that Jesus established the church and not a visible, earthly kingdom. How might you be fooled with false expectations.

One thing that is prominent in the church today in many places is a false view of the victorious Christian life. Many think that a victorious Christian life must mean having a successful temporal life. And I'm not just talking about the crackpots like Joel Osteen. May our Lord bring him to repentance! I'm sure you've heard of the so-called "Protestant work-ethic." This was propagated by the Calvinists and really blossomed in America. Calvinists have a problem. Jesus didn't die for everyone on the cross but only the elect. So then it becomes tricky to know whether you are saved or not. In their system, one of the evidences for salvation is a successful life. If you work hard, God will bless you, which kind of proves that you are one of the elect. One of the major problems is that Jesus and Paul and Peter talk differently.

*Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10)*

*Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."  
(John 15:18-19)*

If you bear the name of Jesus which you obtained in your Baptism, the world will hate you and you will be persecuted. But take heart, for Jesus has overcome the world. It's not insignificant that Jesus overcame the world with His suffering.

*Paul says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)*

What Paul is really saying is that the victorious Christian life is one that clings to Jesus even unto death. To die victoriously is to die in the faith!

*Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12-13)*

It's also not insignificant that your life in Christ is filled with suffering. Jesus and Paul and Peter are warning you so that you might bear it and remain in the Faith. They warn you so that you might not be tempted by doubt. When you are attacked by doubt due to suffering, look to your savior on the cross. He suffered for you and will not abandon you!

[II. Your Faith Is Attacked by Satan and the World]

Attacks by Satan and the world will tempt you to doubt. Satan and the world hate you because you are marked by Christ and belong to Him. Satan and the world will do anything they can to cause you to doubt so that you quit clinging to Christ. There are so many attacks by these nefarious enemies, but I will focus on two.

The first is the idea of evolution. Let me clarify what I mean by evolution. I do not mean what is called "microevolution." This is merely the concept that living beings change over generations. This is the reason we have so many dog breeds. This is why we have so many variants of COVID; three and counting. But things don't change into a different species. Dogs don't become cats and COVID is still COVID regardless of how many variants come to light. This is why all the animals could fit on Noah's ark. He most likely had a pair of wolves on the ark instead of 20 breeds of dogs. We agree with microevolution. It's good science which is based on observing the incredible world God has created.

Macroevolution is a different story. It states that all life on earth developed from a single cell organism. There is very little but conjecture to support this idea. There are no hybrid fossils in the fossil record. There was actually a fossil found in China that still had soft tissue. That's impossible if macroevolution is true. The amount of time required to make macroevolution allegedly work is beyond mathematical probability. It's not surprising that the majority of hard scientists like mathematicians and physicists don't believe in macroevolution. But macroevolution is taught as fact. You're blacklisted in academia if you dare suggest macroevolution can't possibly be true. Why does academia push macroevolution so hard?

Because if macroevolution is true, you don't have the God of the Bible. The world doesn't want God. It wants to be its own god, little 'g.' And the result has been horrendous. How do you convince a little boy you tell is evolved from poo-flinging monkeys not to act like a poo-flinging monkey? You can't! And we have a lot of boys and men acting like poo-flinging monkeys, don't we! As C.S. Lewis brilliantly points out, without God, the Moral Giver, you cannot have morals. May the Lord have mercy on us!

The second, nefarious attack on faith is everything that stems from the sexual revolution. God's good order of marriage and family is discarded for a "do whatever feels good" mentality. You know that anthem of the sexual revolution: "And if you can't be with the one you love honey, love the one you're with." (Stephen Stills) You don't like your spouse? That's okay, we have made no-fault divorce the norm. You don't want to get pregnant? That's okay, we have birth control and abortion. You get a disease from sleeping around? That's okay, we have a pill for that. You can't make it on your own as a single mother? That's okay, we have government programs that will take care of you!

How many lives have been ruined? How many lives have been snuffed out before they even really began? I don't know. God knows! And judgment is coming. Lord have mercy.

The only antidote for lies is the truth. The truth is the Bible. To be sure, there are truths you can find out without the Bible. The Bible doesn't tell me how to change the oil in my car. The Bible doesn't tell me how to perform a squat perfectly. The Bible doesn't tell me how to do math. But the things that really matter are in the Bible. It tells me who God is. God created me and every living thing. In six days.

Our early forefathers in the faith wondered why it took God so long! God became a Man so that He might save me from this veil of tears. It tells me about the promise, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the God Man. The Bible tells me how God delivers to me the gift of life and salvation. God delivers life and salvation through faith in the visible elements of water, bread, and wine. The Bible tells me what the good life is. It is the abundant life found only in Jesus. "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

The Word of God is the only thing that teaches you this. You wouldn't even know you were a sinner unless God revealed it to you in His Word. Stay in the Word of God. It is a sure and certain defense against the false ideas of Satan and the World. The Bible paints a picture in words of "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23-24) Stay grounded in the Word of God!

#### [Your Faith is Attacked by White Noise]

The third attack on your faith is, I believe, something fairly new in the world. It's what I and some others have called white noise. You are unnaturally surrounded by a multitude of voices. And your life is unnaturally busy.

*God says, "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)*

Do we even know what it means to be still? And I am not talking about the stillness of Eastern religions and philosophy.

When God says that the man and woman of God meditates on His Torah night and day, he means something entirely different than the meditation that's so popular these days. Meditation in the Hebrew, and hence Christian sense, has two main components. One component is that it's audible. It's actually part of what we're doing right now. And its also you reciting the Word of God out loud so that it wrings in your ears. The second is best likened to a cow chewing cud. God's Word keeps coming up and keeps being chewed on. How many of us have stopped to think about the Word of God during the day? I daresay too few of us practice this. Maybe if we got rid of the constant barrage of electronic input and talking heads, we might take time to be still and reflect on God's Word.

Jesus went away by Himself at least six times as recorded in the Gospels. We have one of those times depicted on our wall with Jesus at Gethsemane. After all, as Jesus says, "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27) The full meaning of Sabbath is finding rest in Jesus by means of His Word. We were made for times of rest in Jesus. Certainly, Sunday morning in church is one of these times we rest in Jesus. But it also includes the times when you stop what you're doing, and go into your prayer closet, and rest in Jesus there through meditation in His Word and prayer. Lent seems a far way off, but I would encourage you to consider putting away your screens and fast during that time to relearn how to be still and know God.

However you are attacked by doubt, the solution is the same.

*"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 the Good News preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me." (vv. 4-6)*

That is, when you are attacked by doubt, listen to God's Word and see what He has done in Christ. And you will be blessed because you are not offended by Jesus but are being saved by Him. Lord, have mercy on us!

To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.