

Good morning!

Last week we looked at some really challenging words from Jesus about what it means to follow him. I guess they needed to be tough since Jesus was about to send his disciples out on the very first mission and they needed to know what to expect.

So he told them:

expect to be challenged, to be unpopular and to even be persecuted because of My (Jesus') claims to be God; expect to have to trust God with everything that you have; but as a result expect to see people's lives changed, transformed, saved.

The reality is that what was true **then** for those disciples, is true for us today.

As a Church God calls us to share the difference that Jesus makes in our life.

And we should expect

to be challenged, to be misunderstood and to be persecuted even, because of Jesus' claims to be God;

to have to trust him with everything that we have; but as a result

to see people's lives changed and saved.

You know one of the joys of being part of this church is that I see that happening all the time.

People are finding God and coming to living, growing relationship with Jesus.

And that's just the best thing to see!

Well, today we come to Matthew Chapter 11v1 where we read that...

After Jesus had finished instructing his 12 disciples.

(after he had finished telling them what to expect, after he had sent them on their way)

He "*went on from there to preach in the towns of Galilee when John heard **in prison** what Christ was doing*"

I just want to stop there

In... prison....

as if to underscore the reality of Jesus' warning,

as if to be a worked example of what happens when someone speaks out for Jesus

We find John the Baptist in prison,

He's in prison for pointing people to Jesus,

He's in prison for being God's man,

He's in prison for standing up for what is right.

And what I want us to see this morning is that he is hanging on to his faith

by his finger tips –

Because in v3 his faith wobbles.

John the Baptist, this outstanding hero of God, this rough and tough and straight speaking prophet from God, wobbles.

And **if his faith** can wobble then so can ours...

So this morning I want to talk about

what happens when doubts arise in our mind as to whether we *really have* made the right choice to follow Jesus;

what happens when we feel disappointed in God, because what is happening to us doesn't make sense

what happens when we need to know what is going on.

Because there will be times in our life when this is true.

when doubts arise,

when disappointments strike,

when we will need direction.

So if you haven't already, it would really help if you would open your Bibles up to Matthew chapter 11 p976 where we see what happens when

- 1) doubts arise,
- 2) disappoint strikes,
- 3) direction is needed

1. Sometimes Doubts will rise in our mind as to whether we have *really* made the right choice to follow Jesus.

This is what happened to John.

John is described by Jesus in

v7 not like your namby-pamby Rector who hates camping but as a tough man – “*coming from the desert*”

v7 Not as “*a reed swayed in the wind*” who keeps changing his mind and says “*the meek shall inherit the earth if that’s OK with you!*”.

v8 Not all puffed up “*dressed in fine clothes*” full of his own impotence.

But, v9 as *a prophet*, a man chosen by God, to speak for God in the world.

v11, as *the greatest of the prophets* – THE ONE called by God to point to Jesus.

This is no wet-behind the ears new disciple

This is a straight talking, hard nosed, cutting edge prophet, who has been God’s man from the day he was born!

Yet by v2, something has happened,

in v2, we see that his certainty has left him,

Suddenly he is having “doubts”.

v2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing,

he sent his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Are you really the Messiah?,

are you really the promised one?

are you really God’s Son Or have I made a terrible mistake!

From the gospel of Mark we know this is what had happened to land him in prison ...

on a visit to Rome, Herod was seduced by his brother’s wife.

So Herod divorced his own wife, left her there, and brought home his sister-in-law instead.

So you can imagine the gossip, the Sun Headlines, the frowns of disapproval.

But here’s the thing,

no one had the courage to say anything,

no one speaks out against Herod,

No one stands up to be counted.

No one, except for John.

He alone has the courage to call it how it is.

He calls it Adultery.

He publically denounces Herod and his mistress Herodias.

Now it’s possible that he could have got away with it.

But Herodias wasn’t about to have her social climbing publicly criticised by this upstart preacher.

So she has her revenge.

She has him thrown into prison.

Now by v2 things are not looking good for John.

the gossip is clear: “*he’s a dead man walking*”

Ladbroke’s have stopped taking bets on whether John was going to be around next week

The writing is on the wall.

In fact what happens a few days later is that
On Herod's Birthday,
Herodias arranges for her daughter to pole dance before the King.
And as he watches his mistresses' daughter tantalise him,
he promises to give her anything that she wants
"Anything" she said,
"Name it" he drools.
"I want..." she says,
"I want", looking to her mother for approval
"I want, the head of John the Baptist".

He is trapped by his own stupidity,
And so the order goes out and with it goes John's life.

Now however we look at this –
this story just reeks of injustice and evil.

A strong man is killed because a weak man cannot control his lust.
A good man is murdered while a devious woman smirks at her revenge; and
A man of deep integrity is wiped away by the whims of a spoilt teenager.
Its not good, its not fair and its not right.

And the question that is on John's lips as he faces this, is
"what is God doing?".
This is the question running through John's mind

Is this how God rewards his faithful?
Is this how he treats his children?
Is this how he helps his people?
With a *dark* dungeon and a *shiny* axe??

The questions fall like rain.
And the doubts well up in his mind.
So v3 *"he sent his disciples to ask Jesus "Are you the one or should we expect another"."*
"Are you really the Messiah?",
"are you really the person I thought you were?", or
"have I just wasted me life?"

And the final word's of John ever recorded in the Bible, (the greatest of Old Testament heroes), are
questions of doubt....

And if it can happen to John then it can happen to me, and it can happen to you.

When situations conspire against us and we can see no justice, no reason, no good in it.
When we do what is right and all we get is wrong in return
When we try to be good and reap only evil
The doubts **will** come.

When the doctor's face says it all and no treatment is possible
The doubts will come

When the one you love betrays the trust that you have given them all your life and they aren't interested in reconciliation ...
The doubts will come

When you try for a family and the tests keep coming back negative...
When your children are in trouble and you can't help them...

When you send off 50 job applications and you get 50 rejections...

The doubts will come

When everybody *else* is getting promoted, or married or just sailing through life

The doubts will come

“Is this how you reward my faith?”

“Is this how you love your children?”

“am I making a terrible mistake to trust you?”

I think for everyone who follows Jesus,
firstly, one day these doubts will rise in our minds.

And they rise

2. secondly, because we are disappointed in God

We are disappointed in God because he doesn't seem to be doing anything about our problem.

Indeed he seems to be completely silent on it!

Isn't this what happened with John?

He is in trouble v3,

He is under sentence of death and everyone knew about it

Jesus knew about it, the whole country knew about it

The gossip would have spread like wild-fire!

but not only does Jesus not seem to be doing anything about it,
but he seems to be going in completely the opposite direction to Jerusalem.

So “*When John heard what Jesus was doing.... he sent his disciples to ask him: “are you the one who was to come”.*”

When John heard that Jesus
was NOT coming to rescue him,
was NOT putting the political heat on Herod,
was NOT even preaching about **him!**
his disappointment was overwhelming.

“*Jesus, we're brothers in arms, we're cousins in flesh, we are family*”.

Are you not the Messiah, the Son of God, to bring Salvation?

Because you're not doing a great job of saving me!...

Disappointment in someone is always connected to our expectations

John was last of the OT prophets

He was looking for the Kingdom of God

He was looking for a Kingdom of Justice and Salvation; and

He was looking for it IN THIS WORLD.

He was looking for the Messiah to establish his Kingdom

and for that Kingdom to be marked

with Justice, with fairness, with salvation for all.

And when it didn't happen in HIS life,

He felt let down by Jesus.

I want to suggest that You and I almost instinctively believe the same.

We are by nature Old Testament creatures

We want Justice and Salvation

When we are in trouble, we want Justice and Salvation to be revealed in this life, IN our life.

And when they aren't
our head doubts and our heart is disappointed
and we ask
"If God is really there ... then why am I here?"
"Where is God when I need him?"
"why does Jesus allow this to happen to me?"

Why did that accident happen?
Why did that disease take him so *early*?
Why did I not get that job?
Why can I not have children?
Why did *that* go wrong?
And 1,000 other *legitimate* questions
"if you're there God then why am I here?"
"where are you when I need you?"
"why are you silent in my darkness?"

Firstly, the head-doubts are born in tough times;
Secondly, the heart-felt disappointment comes from our expectations of Justice and Salvation in this life.

So Thirdly,

3. Where does Jesus direct us to look?

The answer is.. to him.
Always look to him.
When John doubted he went straight to Jesus.

Ray Gaydon once said "you know people believe God for a lot more than he has promised".
The reality is that God has NOT promised that in this life we will be shielded from **all** the brokenness and pain of this world.

I was talking to someone just last week who is going forward for Ordination.
He got married at 20,
at 21 his wife contracted cancer.
*The people in his church reassured him that God could **and would** heal her.*
She died 9 months later.
He said "I felt like I had done something wrong, what did I do to deserve this, I felt let down and angry with God".

The truth is that God has not promised that in this life we will be shielded from **all** the injustice and pain of this world.

The reality is that we live in a broken world that has turned its back on God and the consequences of that are felt in every dimension of our being:
sometimes in every breath we take and
every longing of our heart and
every waking thought
the brokenness hurts.

We live in a world that has turned its back on God
and the pain and injustice of that is evident everywhere and often in our life.

John felt it.
As his hands gripped the prison bars;
As his mind told him there was no chance of escape
As his heart longed to see his friends again
John knew he lived in a broken world.

So what did he do?

3.1 Firstly, He went to Jesus and opened up his soul, and asked the question “Why”?

It is not wrong to ask that question;

And Jesus didn't get angry when he heard it

He didn't throw up his hands in disgust.

He wasn't shocked at John's doubts.

He didn't say “what more proof do you need?”

Underline this fact in your heart:

God has never turned away the questions of a sincere searcher.

Not Job's, Not Abraham's, Not Moses, Not John's, not Thomas', not Mine, and not yours either.

It is not wrong to ask the question, to go to God and speak your mind.

But then listen to the answer.

Because Jesus didn't say “I am the Saviour and I am coming to save you right now”.

He who had the power to break the chains of death didn't break John's chains,

He who cast out demons didn't cast down Herod.

He didn't send back a Battle Plan, or a SWAT team, or a flashing sword –

He just sent back some words, a message – that meant everything.

Take a look at it v4, Jesus replied.

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see.

The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cured.

The deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor”.

The DEAD are raised and GOOD NEWS is preached to the poor.

Jesus said

Here is justice and salvation.

Justice: The blind are seeing, the lame are walking and the lepers are being held.

Salvation: The dead are raised and the poor receive Good News

John do you hunger for justice and salvation?

It is unfolding all around you.

Firstly, ask your question – you have come to one who can give an answer.

Secondly,

3.2 Trust me for the NOW.

Listen, Paul has told us

if God is for you , then who can be against you?

*If God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up, to save you
then will he not graciously give you all things?”*

God can be trusted, even when everything looks bleak.

Paul goes on ...

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine

(these are hard things, you can doubt God BIG TIME in these things) or

nakedness or danger or sword?

Isn't that what John was facing?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

More than conquerors

To be a conqueror is to have our enemies lying subdued at our feet:

distress, famine, nakedness, sword, persecution – to be a conqueror is to have these things at our feet. They are no longer a threat!

But to be More than a conqueror means –
they are not just at our feet, they are serving us.
They are not just defeated, they are serving us.

This is what Paul experienced in his life
And he said my persecutions, my desperate hunger, my nakedness, my loss

as painful, as tearful as they were (and they were) they actually served me!
How? Because we can use them to drive us into the arms of God and
we then discover that God's love in Jesus is all we need.

We road test our faith in the tough times
And we discover that the everlasting arms of Jesus will never let us down.

Listen, God wants us to be happy, to be fulfilled, to know what our life is all about
In this life.

But he doesn't do it through circumstances – he does it through *himself*.

Circumstances are not the foundation for our happiness.
There are plenty of tears in the circumstances.
Circumstances are not the foundation for our happiness, Jesus is.

David echoes it in Psalm 37v4
“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart”.

Trust him for now,
for God can work all things for the good of those who love him
he can rescue you, he can give you justice, he does answer prayer
But if your circumstances don't change then run into the arms of Christ and let his Grace be sufficient for
you...

Because it will be.
Go to him, ask him the question
Trust him for now; and

3.3 Trust him FOREVER.

When John heard Jesus' answer...
“see my Kingdom is dawning wherever you look”.

He knew that he had been listening for an answer to his earthly problems,
when Jesus was busy resolving eternal ones.

That's worth remembering the next time we think God is silent.

My friends, everyday the kingdom of God grows.
Everyday more and more people discover why they were made.
On the 29th of August 2010 perhaps some 45,000 people will encounter Jesus and discover him as Justice
and Saviour in their life.

Those are 45,000 reasons why God allows this broken world to continue before ending it and starting the
eternal world of complete Justice and Salvation that we long for.

If you've asked for healing, but are still hurting... don't think that God isn't listening. He is.
If you've asked for life, but still feel death closing around you... don't think that God isn't listening. He is.

If you've asked for something to look forward to, but still feel you lurch from one crisis to the next... don't think that God isn't listening. He is

And he is answering prayers you are not even asking.

The fact is, that John the Baptist was looking for Jesus to resolve the temporary, while Jesus was busy resolving the eternal.

Listen, Jesus understands what it is like to be punished for something he didn't do and to be treated in a way he didn't deserve.
on the cross he knows better than any of us what pain and injustice and brokenness feels like.

And did he not ask God, the question "my God, my God... why?"

And did he not trust God for both the NOW and the FOREVER

And did not God make all things work together for Good?

Yes.

So ask the question.

Trust him for now

Trust him forever

Trust that circumstances are not the foundation for our happiness. Jesus is.

It is our relationship with him that makes the difference in all things,
come hell or high-water, he makes us more than conquerors.