

Is he the one?

In this passage, we encounter a surprising moment in John the Baptist's life. From the darkness of a prison cell, the one who paved the way for Jesus begins to wonder if he got it all wrong. This study explores how Jesus responds to those who are distressed in their life and distressed in their faith. Many people today who follow Jesus will find themselves, sooner or later, facing a similar crisis of faith. While the journey following Jesus often starts off with great zeal and passion, frustrated expectations and suffering of all kinds can turn a roaring flame into a smoldering wick.



When did you first hear about Jesus?

read **Matthew 11:1-11 (NIV)**

¹ After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is 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 cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble 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 wilderness 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 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

John the Baptist is currently in prison for speaking truth to power against Herod Antipas. Having preached about a Messiah who would come with "unquenchable fire" and immediate judgment ([Matthew 3:12](#)), John is disoriented by the reports he hears of Jesus healing the marginalized and befriending sinners. This discrepancy between his expectations and Jesus' ministry creates a profound spiritual crisis.

doubt arising from disappointment

John's doubt stems from two primary sources: his painful circumstances (imprisonment) and his dashed expectations. He expected a judge; he found a friend of tax collectors. We learn here that "saints do doubt" — even those uniquely set apart by God can experience seasons of profound spiritual disorientation when God doesn't move the way they expected.

"If he [John the Baptist] can have doubts, anybody can have spiritual doubts about Jesus. That means it's not necessarily a sign of moral or spiritual defect to have doubts. It's especially not, according to the Bible, when you're suffering and struggling with terrible troubles that have come into your life."

—Timothy Keller

discuss

1. How do frustrated expectations or unanswered prayers often lead to a crisis of faith in our own lives?

2. John sends his doubts to Jesus rather than turning away from him. How does bringing our honest questions to God actually function as an act of faith?

Jesus is the "The One" we seek

Jesus responds not by defending his style of ministry, but by pointing to the "deeds of the Messiah" foretold in Isaiah. He reminds John that the true work of God is found in the restoration of the broken: the blind see, the lame walk, and the poor hear good news. Everyone looks to someone for identity and meaning; Jesus invites us to see that he is the only One who truly satisfies.

discuss

3. Jesus quotes Isaiah but leaves out the parts about "vengeance." What does this tell us about how Jesus prioritizes grace and healing in his first coming?
4. Why is it so easy for us to "stumble on account of Jesus" (v. 6) when his timing or methods don't match our personal blueprints for how life should go?
5. Keller notes that everyone "messiah-fies" something (career, romance, etc.). What is the danger of making anything other than Jesus "The One" that gives your life meaning?

the greatness of the Doubter

After John's disciples leave, Jesus speaks to the crowd and gives John the highest possible commendation. This is the "splatter of the gospel": Jesus praises John on John's most doubt-filled day. We see that it is the object of our faith (Jesus), not the strength of our faith, that saves us.

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

—Jesus

discuss

6. What does it tell us about Jesus' character that he calls John "the greatest" immediately after John expressed doubt about him?
7. How does the phrase "the least in the kingdom is greater than he" illustrate the radical nature of the grace we have received through Christ's finished work?

upcoming

- Sunday, March 8 | **Global Mission Partnership Gathering, 1:15-2:15 pm**
RWS is partnering with Mexico City Hub to support church planting and renewal in Mexico City. Come meet their director, Victor Cruz, and hear about the exciting ministry there!
redeemerws.com/globalmission
- Monday, March 9 | **Members' Connect, 7-9 pm**
All church members are invited to attend this quarter's fellowship time. A guest pastor will share on his hope for our PCA denomination for a portion of our evening.
RSVP via your email invite
- Friday, April 24 & Saturday, April 25 | **RWS Conference: Redeeming Anxiety**
Explore the unique resources Christianity offers to help us identify, articulate, and grow in, and through, the big and small things we worry about. Early bird rate through April 6.
redeemerws.com/anxiety