

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 11, 2022

TEXT: MATTHEW 11:2-6

THEME: CERTAINTY

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" **4** And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** 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. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

In the name of Jesus:

Both Sir James Jeans and Dr. Robert Millikan were physicists who lived in the early 20th century. Both had theories as to what was happening in the physical universe, but they differed radically as to what was happening as a whole. Jeans thought that it was dispersing at such a great rate that it might be said to be blowing up, while Millikan thought that it was being inwardly recreated so that it might be said to be building up. When Millikan, discussed the differences between Jeans and himself, wrote: "The one thing upon which we can both agree is that neither of us knows anything about it."

Similarly physicists differ about how light can be defined. One group of scientists say that light can be defined as particles, another

group of scientists say that light can be defined as waves. When considering measurement equipment such as spectro[radio]meters, which measure light in wavelengths, one scientist remarked: Dr. Millikan remarked that they use one theory on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; and they use the other theory on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Another scientist, a Dr. Robert Oppenheimer is quoted to have said: "We guess tonight, and we correct our guesses in the morning." So, in light of all of this (no pun intended) is there anything that can be taken for certain?

Certainty is something that John the Baptist was looking for near the end of his life. Placed in prison, life became difficult for him, like all prisoners, the rations were meager and the beds were hard. The only reason why John was in prison was that he criticized the king for stealing his own brother's wife, Herodias. Herodias wanted John killed, but Herod Antipas was reluctant because he knew that John was popular with the people.

John's ministry was an austere one. You wouldn't even recognize it today, for if he was alive today he wouldn't have been on television, no

three piece suits, no weekly pleas for money. He dressed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. His message was simple: Repent, for the Savior is coming. So get ready and bear the fruits of repentance, act and treat people fairly, share what you have. But sharing your brother's wife wicked and evil, sinful in God's sight, it was a line crossed and that behavior needed to change.

During that same time Jesus, John's cousin, was in the beginning of His own ministry, a ministry that had begun at the time when John had baptized Him in the Jordan River. When John had baptized Jesus, John was certain that Jesus was the Promised One, for of Jesus John said that "One came after him whom he, John was not worthy to untie His sandals." And then, when John had baptized Jesus, John heard the Father Himself say that "this is My beloved Son" and the Holy Spirit came down as a dove and landed on Jesus' shoulder. Proof positive that Jesus was the Christ, the One who was to come to take away the sins of the world.

But now, months later, here is John in prison and having his doubts, so he sent two of his own disciples to ask Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" John was asking how he could be

certain about Jesus? In fact, how can anyone of us be certain about Jesus?

Admit it, you have your doubts, times when you wonder about God and about your life. And why is that? It is because the life we are living is in the midst of death. Martin Franzman was a Lutheran theologian and the author of many hymns in our hymnal. In one such hymn, hymn 834 titled: "O God O Lord of heaven and earth" Franzman writes this line of Jesus: "Thous came to our hall of death." What a description of our own existence! We live in a hall of death, a life filled with long and narrow halls that lead to rooms of anxiety, fear, despair, desperation and eventually death. In these times we worry and are afraid of the known and even the unknown. We fear for our own lives, the lives of those we love, we wonder if God knows what is going on, if He really cares. How can we be certain about God, about Jesus, about our relationship with God and what the future holds?

Jesus answers you and your uncertainty just like He answers John the Baptist. In the midst of your uncertainty Jesus doesn't point you to your emotions, He doesn't point you to your circumstances, He doesn't

point you to your inadequacies and failures. He doesn't chide and He doesn't scold. Instead, He does what He did with John, He points us to His Word.

That is the meaning of Jesus' response when He says to John: "'Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** 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. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.'" What Jesus does is that He reminds John of what was written about Jesus predicting what it would be like when Jesus came. Jesus reminds John, and you and me, what was written of Him in the book of Isaiah the prophet in chapter 35: Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."**5** Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; **6** then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy." Jesus responds by reminding John was the Word says about Him and what was written about Him, that Jesus

would come to change things so that sinners can be certain of God's love for them.

For this is the reason why Jesus came, to save sinners such as John, you, and me. Sinners who walk in the hall of death, sinners who face doubts and uncertainty with the Good News of the certainty of God's love in Jesus. For Jesus came to walk in this hall of death, born as we are born yet without sin, Jesus came to be born, to live, to suffer and die for your sins and mine so that you and I might know the certainty of God's love for us in Jesus. This is what moved Paul to write: "The saying is certain, that Christ came to save sinners!"

The temptation to doubt God and His love meets all of us. John met it as he sat in prison. There, it seemed as if the enemies of God triumphed. John might have thought: "Why is this bad thing happening to me?" And we face those very same questions. And we wonder if God is so powerful, why doesn't He show His power to help me in the way that I want?

But note in the Word how God uses His power in Jesus Christ: He becomes powerless. Jesus became a helpless baby. He let Himself be bound and led to the cross. He was mocked by those at the foot of His cross: "If you are the Son of God,, come down from the cross and save yourself." But instead, Jesus stayed on the cross to save us!

And that is how John was certain, how the disciples were certain, and how you can be certain as well. If only we would hear and see what Jesus has done for us in His Word, will we be certain. And so Jesus comes to you today, to tell you that He loves you in and by His Word. He reminds you that you have been baptized and that you belong to Him. He comes to you in, with, and under the bread and wine to forgive you all of your sins and to strengthen your faith. You can be certain of God's love for you, for He sent Jesus. And Jesus makes you certain that He is God's Son. Amen.