

Jesus Sent Words of Encouragement to John the Baptist

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand fully what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We also saw that Jesus promised rewards to all who are faithful in their service for Him. In this topic, we will see that Jesus sent a message of encouragement to John the Baptist.

In our last four topics, we see that Jesus gave the disciples several very important instructions before He sent them out in teams of two to preach. Matthew 11:1 says, “Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.” Jesus had finished giving those instructions to His disciples. Mark 6:12-13 says, “So they went out and preached that *people* should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed *them*.” The message of the disciples, as they went out, was that people should repent. Throughout the Gospels, we see that the message of John the Baptist, Jesus and now the disciples, was to repent. That is the same message that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost. Paul also summarized his message in Acts 20:21, by saying, “Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” In fact, that is the message throughout the New Testament as various individuals shared the news of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

After sending out the disciples to preach, we see that Jesus then left that area to teach and preach in the cities of Galilee. Meanwhile, John the Baptist had been thrown into prison by Herod. Luke 3:19-20 says, “But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.” John the Baptist rebuked Herod for living in adultery with the wife of his brother. Herod did not like the rebuke and so he gave the order for John the Baptist to be thrown into prison. As a result, John had now been in prison for a period of time. While in prison, John began to hear about the miracles that Jesus was doing.

Matthew 11:2-6 says, “And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’” Here, we see that John sent two of his disciples to talk to Jesus. Matthew tells us that the two asked Jesus the question, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Instead of answering the two, Luke 7:21 tells us what happened immediately after the two asked this question to Jesus. That verse says, “And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.” Here, we see that the two were able to see what Jesus was doing and see how He had power over sickness, demons and even blindness. Then, we see what He told the disciples after they had observed these miracles.

Jesus told the two disciples to go and tell John the things that they had heard and seen. Jesus had performed many miracles during the time that the two observed Jesus. The details of these miracles are not given. Instead, we just have a summary of the various kinds of miracles that Jesus did during the time the two were visiting Jesus. First, we see that Jesus gave sight to some who were blind. At a different time, one who had been blind was told that Jesus was a sinner by the Pharisees. We see his answer in John 9:25, where we read, “He answered and said, ‘Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.’” This blind man knew that his life had been changed.

Second, we see that Jesus caused the lame to walk. Jesus healed many who could not walk. In John 5:8-9, we read, “Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.” In the case of this man, he had been lame and could not walk for a period of thirty-eight years. Third, we read that lepers were cleansed. At another time, a leper had come to Jesus. Mark 1:40-42 says, “Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” Leprosy is a disease for which there is no cure, but Jesus could heal this terrible disease with just a touch of His hand.

Fourth, we read that the deaf could now hear. After Jesus healed a man that was deaf and had an impediment of speech, Mark 7:37 says, “And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’” Fifth, we read that Jesus raised the dead. Luke 7:14-15 says, “Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.” Sixth, we read that the poor had the Gospel preached to them. Jesus introduced His public ministry by saying in Luke 4:18-19, “‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’”

During the time that the disciples of John the Baptist were with Jesus, they saw the miracles He did and heard the message He preached. Then, Jesus told them to tell John, “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Jesus wanted John to be encouraged even though he was in prison. That is why Jesus had the disciples of John spend some time with Him. That way they saw what Jesus did and they heard what He taught. Then, they were told to encourage John by telling him not to be offended even though he had been put in prison. Jesus knew exactly what was happening in his life and wanted him to have peace during the time he was in prison. Jesus knew that when John heard what Jesus was preaching and heard about the miracles that Jesus was doing, John would have great joy because God was working in the lives of people.

Matthew 11:7-10 says, “As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John:

‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is *he* of whom it is written: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.”” Here, we see that Jesus began to talk about John the Baptist after his disciples left to return to tell John what they had heard and seen while they were with Jesus.

Jesus turned to the people who were gathered around Him and asked them what they had gone out into the wilderness to see. A reed was a stick or a branch of a bush. When the wind is blowing in a wilderness area, all of the branches of the bushes will be shaking because of the wind. As a result, no one goes out to the wilderness to see the branches of a bush shake. Jesus answered His own question with two additional questions, “But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?” Clothing made from soft material, in that day, was more expensive than the cheaper materials from which much clothing was made. Jesus said that if they were looking for that kind of clothing they would have looked in the houses of kings or other rulers.

Then, Jesus explained the real reason why the people had gone out into the wilderness. They had gone out into the wilderness to see a prophet of God. It had been about 400 hundred years since Malachi had written the last book of the Old Testament. The people had been looking for the Messiah to come. As a result, Mark 1:4-5 says, “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” John 1:19-21 adds, “Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’” Jesus then explained that John was more than a prophet; he was the one who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of Malachi.

Malachi 3:1 says, “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.” By quoting part of this verse, Jesus made it clear that the ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ (the Anointed One or the Messiah). The disciples of John had asked Jesus if He was the Coming One. We saw that Jesus did a variety of different miracles as signs to prove that He was the Coming One instead of answering their question directly. However, by this statement, Jesus made it clear that John was the messenger who was preparing the way for the coming of the Christ. This caused the people there that day to have to make a choice to either believe or reject Jesus. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to present this same choice to others. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.