

# 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY IN ADVENT

DECEMBER 15, 2013

## THIS DOESN'T LOOK RIGHT

Pastor Jim Dunn

### Matthew 11:2-15

**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."

**7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
who will prepare your way before you."

**11** Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. **15** He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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Daniel Lewin moved with his family from Denver to Israel when he was fourteen. He did not want to move to Israel. In Israel, he struggled to learn the language and make friends. Instead of rebelling, though, Danny worked hard in school and at the gym. At age 18, he signed up for and joined Israel's most elite counterterrorism unit. For three years he trained for combat. He earned a degree, and then accepted a full scholarship to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT.

Danny was finally back home again in the U.S. Studying computer science at MIT; he believed that traffic on the Internet could be speeded up. In 1998 he created his own company in Boston, a company that still today sells software that delivers information on the Internet quickly and efficiently. It has clients like Facebook and iTunes. Because of Danny's company, on September 11, 2001, almost every major news site on the Internet remained up and running. The picture I have drawn of Danny so far is of a person achieving the American dream. But I have not yet finished Danny's story, so you are not sure about how the final picture will look.

That's how this picture of John the Baptizer looks to us in Matthew 11. We're not sure how it's going to turn out because John is in prison and he is not sure about Jesus. This does not look right. This doesn't look the way we expect John the Baptizer to be.

How can John the Baptizer not be sure about Jesus? By this point, John has already been baptizing and preaching and preparing the way for the Lord. By this point, John has already baptized Jesus and announced that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. By this point, Jesus has already been performing miracles and preaching to the poor and John has heard of these deeds. So, how can John not be sure about Jesus?

This is where we must look at the picture carefully. John had not lost his faith in God's promises. John does not say, "Are You the One who is to come, or shall we give up on God?" Rather, John says, "Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?" It's not that John is unsure about whether the Messiah is coming. It's that John is not sure Jesus is the Messiah.

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So, in response, to reassure John, Jesus listed those promises of God that He was fulfilling. Jesus referred to the promises in Isaiah 35 when He said that the blind are receiving their sight, the lame walk, and the deaf hear. Jesus referred to the promises of God in Isaiah 61 when He said that the poor are having good news preached to them.

The thing is John the Baptizer knew his Bible. So, John knew that Jesus' list does not look right. John the Baptizer knew the promises of God, so he knew that Jesus wasn't painting the whole picture. Jesus was leaving something out. Isaiah 35 does promise that when the Messiah comes the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame man shall leap like a deer. But Isaiah 35 also promised, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance..." Isaiah 61 speaks of the poor having good news preached to them. But in the very next verse it says of the Messiah, "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. To proclaim the day of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance for our God."

Jesus had come and John was still a prisoner. Jesus had come, but where was the day of God's vengeance? Already back at Jesus' Baptism, did John have his doubts about Jesus? John could not see how the Messiah could be baptized with sinners. What was wrong with this picture? The Messiah was Himself supposed to be baptizing with fire and judgment. The Messiah was supposed to be cutting down the trees that did not bear the fruit of repentance and burning up the chaff. He was to be proclaiming the day of God's vengeance. Yeah, Jesus was casting out demons, but He wasn't casting them into hell. Yeah, Jesus was rounding up notorious sinners, but not for judgment. He was rounding them up for dinner. Jesus was not wreaking vengeance on God's enemies and ridding the world of evil. To John, this picture was incomplete.

It does not look right to you, either. Because it means that the kingdom of God on earth does not exactly look like the American Dream.

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Danny Lewin's work kept every Internet news site running on 9/11. But on that same morning of 9/11, Danny kissed his wife and children goodbye, drove to Boston's Logan Airport, and got on a flight headed for Los Angeles. It was Flight 11, which was hijacked and crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. In its final report, the 9/11 Commission stated that Daniel Lewin, former Israeli commando, attempted single-handedly to stop the hijacking of Flight 11 when his throat was slashed from behind by one of the terrorists.

Your own terror is that not all of your prayers get answered. Your sister in the hospital may die in spite of your prayers. The rift between you and your friend may become worse instead of better. How many other parts of the American Dream will you or your loved one never experience... because Jesus left the picture incomplete. He instead, added something else. Though Jesus weaved this beautiful picture from the promises written in Isaiah 35 and 61, He added a promise not found anywhere else in the Bible. He added to the picture a new color. **"Blessed is the one who does not fall away because of Me."** With these words, Jesus was taking John's doubts and uncertainty, yes all of John's sins, and John's imprisonment and even John's beheading, and Jesus was in effect saying: "These are mine now. I will carry them. John will be called great in the kingdom of God. Though imprisoned now, one day John will stand in glory. All will see how blessed John is. That is the end of the story."

How can Jesus get away with saying that? Because already at Jesus' Baptism Jesus was tracing out the picture for how God's vengeance would come. There in the Jordan Jesus identified Himself with John and you and me and every sinner, allowing the waters of the Jordan to be poured out upon Himself, pointing to that day when for sinners Jesus would allow the vengeance of God to be poured out upon Himself at a cross.

Because of that, John was blessed and will stand in glory. **So are you blessed**, and one day you will stand in glory. On that day Jesus will return with judgment and fire, but for you the day of God's vengeance has already passed. For all who believe, these words apply: "Blessed is the one who does not fall away because of Jesus." That means that no matter what terror this life dishes out to you, you will one day stand in glory. That's the complete picture of you.

Here today, at this moment, your picture is incomplete. But with the promise of glory in hand, we are bold to pray, no matter what happens, and we are bold to say, "The Coming One has come, and He has died and He has risen, and He will return."

Amen