

# Matthew 11:3

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] And I want us to think really about that question in verse 3, where John the Baptist asks Jesus through his messengers, are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

Do you ever feel disappointed with your minister? Do you ever feel disappointed with the church? Do you ever say to yourself, this is just not what I hope for?

Well, perhaps there's some of you this morning and you might say, well I never ever feel disappointed and my quiet times are always a joy and you live your Christian life on the heights. And I congratulate you and I'm also very worried about you. Because most of us have down times, don't we? Times when we're disappointed, when we're disappointed most of all with ourselves. And we easily get disappointed with other Christians and sometimes we get disappointed with God. And we're almost afraid to say it, but there's a little voice inside of us that says, is this it? Is this all there is?

[ 1 : 28 ] And if you feel like that, you're not the first. For John the Baptizer was a disappointed man in this passage. Of course he's in prison. Almost certainly he's in that grim fortress of Mahiras on the east of the Dead Sea.

It's one of the most desolate spots on earth. The scholars tell us he'd probably be in prison by this time of about a year. He's been in a dark dungeon. He's on death row, though he doesn't know it. He's never coming out. He's going to be decapitated. And not enough to depress anyone. But there's something deeper troubling John. There's a darkness in his spirit.

His faith is growing weak. There's an aspect of doubt about how he feels. And there's a fear that's troubling him. And he's asking himself questions on his life and his ministry.

And he wonders this. Have I made a terrible mistake? Have I been wrong from the first? We might never ever get as low as John the Baptist.

[ 2 : 31 ] But I suspect we all have known times of discouragement. And maybe this week. Times when we're uncomfortably aware that what the Christian life is supposed to be like.

And what in our case it is like. And I think John can really help us here. He'd been so excited. Do you remember at the start of the gospel when John had been, when Christ had been revealed. He'd preached in the desert.

And he was wonderfully Christ honouring. Saying Christ must increase. I must decrease. He says after one will come one who is mightier than I.

And he'll baptise you with the Holy Spirit. And he pointed away from himself to the Saviour. He said to me again and again in John's gospel. I am not the Christ. I am not the Christ. He is.

I'm not even worthy to tie his shoelaces. And then there was that great day at the Jordan River.

When he saw, as it were, coming down from heaven. And he heard a voice. This is my son.

[ 3 : 31 ] With whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. What a moment that was. And speaking later to the disciples. He sees Jesus coming towards him. And John points and shouts. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He was totally wrapped up in holy joy. And excitement. He must increase. I must decrease. He is the bride and I'm just the best man. But as the months pass.

John begins to feel disappointed. Disappointment with Jesus. He was a wonderful person. Yes. He was doing great miracles.

He was impressive. But you see John had been expecting so much more. And it was all very well to heal a few individuals here and there. But God had promised, hadn't he, that when the Messiah came, he would heal the whole world.

That the Messiah, the Lord, would renew the cosmos. John would think back to Isaiah 35 in the wilderness. Where it says that the wilderness and the dry land will be glad.

[ 4 : 39 ] The wilderness will rejoice and it will blossom. And it will break forth. There's going to be streams in the desert. But it wasn't happening. Or Isaiah 65 where Isaiah prophesies, behold, I'm going to make a new heavens and a new earth.

And that wasn't happening. And I think what especially nagged at John was what about the destruction of the wicked. That is what he preached.

He preached that when the Messiah comes, the Lord Jesus, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And there will be a winnowing fork in his hand. And he will clear his thrashing floor. He will gather the wheat into the barn. But the chaff, he will burn with unquenchable fire. And so where was the chaff burning? Where were those who opposed God's people?

What was happening to them? You didn't see it. Why were the Romans still sitting in Caesarea in Jerusalem? Why was Herod still on the throne of Galilee?

[ 5 : 40 ] Why was John still in prison? It's too low key. It's undramatic. And so from prison he sends Jesus these poignant, haunting questions. You can imagine, can't you, the lonely months wrestling with this question.

Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another? I wonder how you'd answer that. Supposing an adult Sunday school this morning, had someone put up their hand to a chaffer, is anybody going to need questions?

And they said, well, the question I've got is this, I'm not sure that Jesus is the Son of God. What would the reaction be? Gasp. Horror. Out of darkness.

Immediately. It wouldn't be. But our Lord could have said, couldn't he? He could have said, John, how dare you ask that question? Who do you think you are, John?

Our Lord could have said, John, I'm disappointed in you. I'd have thought better than you. I thought your faith was stronger than that. But our Lord doesn't do that, does he? He is kind and he is gentle as me.

[ 6 : 48 ] And yet he persuasively points out that John is making two basic mistakes. Here are my headings. First of all, John is expecting too much. John is expecting too much. His answer to John is a really firm answer.

Are you the one or should we look for another? Are you the Messiah? And Jesus' answer is a yes. It is an unqualified yes. I am the one who is to come. Should we look for another?

No, you should not. Look at what he says. He says, you go and tell John what you see and what you hear. He refers to categories. He says, the blind receive sight. The lame walk.

The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the poor have the good news preached to them. The blinds, the lame, the deaf, the poor. They are actually messianic words.

It is digging back into the Old Testament that John would know so well from Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. What will happen when the Messiah comes? Well, one of the things that will happen is the eyes of the blind will be opened.

[ 7 : 56 ] And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. And the lame man will leap like a deer. And the spirit of the Lord God is upon me. Because the Lord has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. When Messiah comes, the blind will see.

The lame will walk. The deaf will hear. And the poor will have the good news preached to them. And so John says, John is being told, isn't he, that is coming true.

That is being fulfilled in me and my ministry. Jesus is saying, I am the anointed one. I am the Messiah. I am the promised deliverer. What the scriptures have said is now happening.

And you have seen it happen. And I am the bringer of salvation. And because John knew his Bible, he would also know that those passages in Isaiah also spoke of vengeance.

And of judgment. In Isaiah 34, the prophet continues, your God will come with vengeance. With the recompense of God. But tellingly, our Lord doesn't quote that, does he?

[ 9 : 02 ] And what John is to understand is that all of this is not happening at once. John is being told that his presuppositions, his view of the Messiah, needs to be adjusted.

That there is suffering. And there is apparent weakness. And there is humiliation. That he's coming not just as a king, but as a suffering servant.

The despised and the rejected. And that was why he was preaching. When he was preaching in Nazareth, it failed so significantly and spectacularly. Do you remember when he goes into the synagogue?

And in Luke chapter 4, he picks up the scroll. And he's sitting there with the teachers, isn't he? And he gets up and he reads from the scroll on a Sabbath morning. And he reads from Isaiah 61. But so the shock of his hearers, he never finishes the quote, the passage. Do you remember what he says? He says, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[10:10] He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed. And to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. And he rolled up the scroll. And he gave it back to the attendant.

And he sat down. And they would look at each other and say he didn't finish the reading. It would be like me quoting John 3.16. He would say this, for God so loved the world that whosoever believes in him.

And you would say, well, finish the verse. You've got to finish the verse. And our Lord didn't finish the verse. He said to proclaim the day of the Lord's favour and the day of the vengeance of our God.

But Jesus didn't read that. He couldn't read it. He couldn't say it. It wouldn't have been true.

Because he wouldn't be able to say, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

So he pauses. And the pause is deliberate. And he's saying something to the people and to us.

That he's come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. But not yet the day of the vengeance of our God.

[11:18] Because the day of vengeance of our God is still, it's a come, it's still in the future. And when he comes again, John's expectations need to be adjusted.

John had thought that the first coming of the Messiah would all be triumph. And he'd forgotten the suffering servant. He'd forgotten the rejection of the sin bearer.

He's thinking only of the triumphant King. And Jesus is saying, instead of being disillusioned, John, you need to recognise that. You need to bring your expectations of what life is like now into line with who I am and what I've come to do.

You should accept the not yet of the kingdom. You're expecting too much. And that's why there's a gentle warning in verse 6 of chapter 11 in Matthew's Gospel, isn't it?

Blessed is the one who's not offended by me. He's expecting too much. But he's also making another mistake. The second heading, he's overlooking too much.

[12:20] He's overlooking too much. The blind receive sight. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor of the good news preached to them. What is happening?

They are miracles, of course, aren't they? But they are more than miracles. They are eschatological events. They are the new creation breaking in to today.

They're the signs of the great end time. They are the blessings of the last days. It's in microchasm. Blessings of the last days.

The renewal of the world. This is the fullness of salvation. Jesus is demonstrating what heaven will be like. A mighty power has come into the world and is reversing the effects of sin and the fall.

The kingdom has come. It doesn't come as John thought it would come. It doesn't come as we would expect it to come. But the dead are being raised.

[13:21] The blind are receiving sight. The lame are walking. And God's salvation has come. And he says, John, you need to look at where you're at in history. You need to look at it in the light of the Bible.

That's why, when we get to Matthew chapter 13 and Matthew chapter 11 and 12, you're going to find the kingdom parables. There's great opposition to Jesus.

We're going to see that. And rejection of him. And hostility from scribes and Pharisees. They're going to accuse him of being demon possessed. And you can imagine, can't you, the followers of Jesus getting more and more depressed.

Here is the king of kings, the son of God. He's come to redeem the world. And everyone's laughing at him. And so in Matthew chapter 13, he starts to tell parables.

And the parables are all about what is the kingdom of God like? The kingdom of heaven like?

What's it like? If we'd ask the disciples, what's the kingdom of heaven like?

[14:19] They would have said, well, it's like earthquake and thunder and fire. And the whole universe being shaken. And God appearing in glory. And the wicked being dealt with. And

destroyed. That's what the kingdom of God is like.

Jesus says, the kingdom of heaven is like a man going out to sow seed in a field. And after he's finished, the field looks exactly the same as it did before he started. Big deal.

Nothing has happened. Everything is the same. No, it's not. Everything has changed, hasn't it? And the farmer knows that. The whole field has been radically different.

Something irreversible has come. It doesn't look like that to the eyes of sight. But to those who know, we know it's different. Or the woman.

The woman mixing the yeast in the dough. That is what the kingdom of heaven is like. And the dough doesn't look any different. But it is different. And Jesus has come to earth.

[ 15 : 24 ] And nothing seems to change. And you're so disappointed. And you're asking, is that a mistake? But John, everything has changed. Because I'm the seed in the soil.

I'm the yeast in the dough. And everything has changed if only you've got eyes to see it. Do you see this paradox? Two truths which seem to be contradicting each other.

And yet, they match. On the one hand, John is expecting too much. And on the other hand, he's disappointed. Because he's overlooking the wonder of the fact of what has already happened.

That only the eyes of faith can see. Now, like John, I think we can feel let down in our Christian lives.

Things are not what we hoped for. Perhaps your experience of God. You've read about figures in history.

[ 16 : 24 ] Great people of God. And the experience they had of his love and of his grace. And you think, well, my knowledge of God isn't like that. Perhaps when you were a young Christian, you thought that you would grow in holiness much more quickly and easily than you have.

And yet, it's been a struggle. And perhaps sometimes you come to worship at IPC. And sometimes the sermon is a bit flat. And the singing isn't terribly enthusiastic.

And you think, is this it? Is this the worship of God in his presence with all the holy angels and the glorified saints in heaven?

And sometimes life in the church disappoints us. People seem eccentric. And weird. And petty. And annoying.

Shall I go on? And we look at the failures of the professing Christians. We look at the Christian church as a whole. You think about ministry and evangelism and how hard it is to get people interested.

[ 17 : 40 ] And we're tempted, aren't we? I'm tempted to become cynical and apathetic. Or to ask, well, look at others. Look at what they're doing.

Shall we look for another? And I would say to you, that is what is happening in the church today. There's a frenetic restlessness in the church.

People looking here and there and everywhere for the secret and for the answer. For the thing that's going to take away all the disappointments in church life. I think that is a lot of what is behind much of the charismatic worship movement.

It's also exactly what is behind the move to high ritual. And people going to churches where there's enormous amounts of mystery into Eastern Orthodoxy.

And so people say to me, if we get worship right, music needs to be more contemporary and really excellent quality. It'll lift us to another level. Maybe it's a new building.

[ 18 : 42 ] Maybe it's a new experience. Maybe it's a new minister. Should we look for another? Is this it? Is this it?

Is this all there is? There are many, many possible reasons, aren't there, why you and I get disappointed in our Christian lives. Our unbelief and our sin.

Our neglect of the means of grace. But I think often we're like John. Sometimes we expect too much. There's a false idealism. I'm sorry to say that's fed by irresponsible Christian teachers.

The idea that you can always live on a high. That you can kind of live on a Christian mountaintop. It's a particular temptation, isn't it? I think for first generation Christians. That's what some of you are.

You've been dramatically changed by God. There's been a great transformation in your life. And you really are a new man or a new woman in Christ. And it's obvious for everyone what has happened to you.

[ 19 : 44 ] And your expectations are high. And in a sense we cannot expect too much from God. There are no limits with God. We should have great expectation.

But you've got to realise that in the Christian life there is a not yet. And the word of God is clear. That we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.

And we have to struggle with imperfection. And we will suffer with opposition. And we wrestle, don't we, against sin that's within us. And Paul says, now is a time of groaning and longing for what is yet to come.

And if you expect more than what the word of God gives you warrants to expect. You will be disappointed. And justifiably disappointed. I'm not a prophet.

And I'm not the son of a prophet. And I don't work for a prophet making organisation. But I will make a prophecy that I think in the next 20 years we will see many disappointed Christians coming to us.

[ 20 : 47 ] Because they've been taught what isn't true. And they've been presented with expectations which are unwarranted from the Bible. And they will discover for themselves.

And we have to lovingly welcome them. To expect more than what the Bible warrants is to set yourself up for depression and sin. And then there's the opposite danger.

Which really is the danger of IPC I think. It's the danger of a second and third generation Christian. And it's the settling for a tame and bland, unexciting view of Christian living.

And it's the settle for mediocrity. No thrill. No vision. No daring expectations. No real risk. No great prayers for God.

And no high endeavour. And it's the danger of overlooking too much. And perhaps that's us this morning. We are overlooking too much. And we need to look at ourselves and our lives and those around us with the eyes of faith.

[ 21 : 56 ] It is a remarkable thing that you are sitting here this morning. To worship God regardless of the thing. That you have given up a day of your weekends to come and worship the living God.

That is not natural. That is not normal. And that is not predictable. And you and I are here this morning as a result of God's supernatural working.

The working of the power of the house. You are this morning a walking, living, breathing miracle. Remember that.

That is not how you are by nature. That is not the sort of person you are naturally. But God has transformed you. And you are surrounded by people in this building who love you and pray for you and esteem you.

And that is not natural. If you came up after the morning service and you said, I have a great financial need or a personal need.

[ 23 : 06 ] Let me tell you something. You say, my heart is breaking. I am in trouble. I can promise you that in a minute there would be a dozen people around you. Hugging you and loving you and praying for you.

And giving to you. That is not natural. That is wonderful. Those of us in families, we sit in family worship every day with our children.

We gather them around us. And we struggle to come. And we come to the God who has promised that I will be your God and the God of your descendants. And we lay hold of that promise and we say, oh Lord, do what you have said.

Our children join us in praising and praying to God. And that is a wonderful thing. There are places in the world today out there where the kingdom of God is advancing and leaping in bounds.

And thousands and thousands and thousands are coming into the kingdom. And the church is growing and it is wonderful. We have this word. And every one of us has the living and true word of God that speaks to you and me.

[ 24 : 15 ] And we can open it up at any time. And it addresses us individually in our hearts and in our lives like a voice from heaven. And it's wonderful. And God the Holy Spirit indwells you this morning if you've trusted in Christ.

Never to leave you. And he is working all the time to make you more like Jesus Christ. And that is a glorious thing. And John is confronted by the Son of God.

But he doesn't look like the Son of God. He looks like the carpenter from Nazareth. And he's engaged in an itinerant ministry in the corner of a remote province with a handful of nobodies as his followers.

And he says, John, blessed is the one who's not offended by me. In other words, there's something about Jesus which is offensive.

There's something about the Lord Jesus that challenges your faith that would make people stumble. He doesn't look like a king, does he? He doesn't look like the Son of God. He doesn't look like the Savior of the world.

[ 25 : 18 ] But he is. And faith sees that. Is this it? Is this it? Well, for the present it is.

It's not all we might want, is it? And we should want more. It's not all we will one day receive. But it's more than what you once had.

And that is the texture of an authentic Christian life on this earth. This is its warmth and warmth.

This is the reality. This is the challenge to our faith. It's what the writer in Hebrews 11 said.

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for. And the evidence of things not seen. Don't stumble.

Don't stumble over the offense of Christ. The offense of the cross. The offense of faith.

Don't go looking for some will-o'-the-wisp experience of perfect joy. An unbroken perfection on this earth. Don't throw it all away for a dream. This evening, God willing, we will meet again to worship in this place.

[ 26 : 23 ] What will the service be like this evening? I don't know what the hymns are and what the sermon is going to be like. Would I be wrong in saying that as we gather to worship tonight, it's not going to be overwhelmingly impressive?

I doubt a visitor would come in and say, wow, what wonderful singing. What amazing people. What a sermon.

I've never heard such a sermon in all my life before. They won't. It'll be pretty ordinary. Is this it?

What's really happening?

What is really happening? We're on the surface of this bent and broken and fallen planet. The people of God will be lifting up their voices in worship.

And what will happen among us this evening is far, far more important than all the prime ministers and all the presidents and all the great ones. The angels in heaven will stop what they're doing and take note of it.

[ 27 : 28 ] And our prayers and our praises will rise into God's very presence and the great God of heaven and earth will be pleased. And God's word will come to us.

And it will touch some aspect of our lives that the preacher won't know about and couldn't understand. And we will say, God is speaking to me. And we will be joined with the saints in heaven and the angels and the redeemed.

And we will be part of this great worldwide fellowship throughout the earth. And you will be sitting by tonight, people who will love you and know you and love you to all eternity. Forever and ever and ever.

Throughout the ages. And we'll be together. And there there'll be nothing in our midst apart from affection and goodwill. And most of all the presence of him who loved us and gave himself for us.

Is that not a wonderful place to be? Is our experience not glorious? Is our saviour not glorious? Is the Christian life well exceedingly excellent?

[ 28 : 30 ] And joyful? And this statement of verse 6 should really stab us in the heart, shouldn't it? Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

He could be offended with us, couldn't he? But he isn't. And so how could we be offended with Jesus? Lord, to whom shall we go?

We have believed. And we have come to know. That you are the Holy One of God. Let's pray. Let's pray.