

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ <sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Back when I was a kid, the line, “Wait til your father gets home” always brought one thing to mind: punishment – harsh punishment. I do not recall that my mother ever used that line on my siblings and me but when I grew up fathers were noted for discipline. Spankings were in – “time outs” had not yet been invented. A father’s arrival always carried the possibility of justice being carried out – painful justice.

John the Baptizer thought about God like that. John had been sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord. John announced that this one sent by the Lord will be gathering the wheat into his granary but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. Even now the ax is at the root of the trees, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Punishment is what John expected when the one sent by the Lord would come - cutting burning punishment. At the moment Jesus came to John to be baptized John was sure Jesus was the one. John said to Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?” But now John was not so sure.

Jesus had brought no destroying fire – no punishment of the wicked. The very things that John expected to be the marks of the chosen one of God were missing in Jesus. Instead where Jesus went the blind received their sight,

the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, and the poor were having good news brought to them. John had sent disciples asking Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?” We are never told whether John was able to adjust his thinking to celebrate Jesus or whether John was always disappointed in him. Jesus said, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” But many did. Jesus is not the kind of messiah they were looking for.

Some objected to Jesus’ choice of dinner companions – tax collectors, sinners. Like John many could not imagine God being able to tolerate those who were not righteous. Had not God written the Ten Commandments on stone. These were not the ten suggestions but commandments. Yet when the woman was caught in adultery and surrounded by a crowd ready to stone her to death Jesus did not condemn her - he said, “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.” The crowd dispersed.

When Jesus’ disciples flagrantly broke the third commandment by picking some grain as they walked along on the Sabbath Jesus defended them. Instead of calling down fire from heaven Jesus stood up for sinners.

And for the blind and the lame and lepers and even the dead - not punishment but blessing and life he brought.

There is a story you all have heard about the man who is caught in a flood. A canoe comes by to rescue him but he waves them off with the words, “God will save me.” The flood waters rise and a boat comes by and again he refuses the rescue with the words, “God will save me.” The next time it is a helicopter that hovers overhead, a ladder is lowered but the man refuses to climb declaring, “God will save me.” The waters continue to rise and he drowns. Encountering God in heaven his first words are, “God, why didn’t you save me?” God replied, “I sent a canoe, a boat and a helicopter, what more did you want me to do?”

John’s idea about how God would act did not fit with what God was doing in Jesus. The promised one came and John was busy looking for another.

You and I are here because we know Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one of God. And yet like John we can be so sure of what Jesus will or will not do in our lives that we may miss what he is actually doing.

Where have you seen God at work this week? Do you think of God as confined to this place or is God in the supermarket and the school, in the office and in your home? Is God at work watching over our soldiers or over the soldiers of the opposition as well? What about civilians caught in the cross fire? Is God at work in the carpenter who remodels your home or only in those men and women who build houses for Habitat? Has God been at work in the volunteers for Family Promise or in the company that has been constructing new apartments? Is God at work in school teachers and garbage collectors and preachers? Is God at work in piling the wealth of the wealthy higher and higher – at work blessing America more than Haiti? Is God at work in storms and sunshine?

How could we know where God is at work?

We can keep our eyes and ears on Jesus. What does he say about wealth and love and forgiving? What does he say about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? What does he do when a sinner is judged by a person who is considered righteous?

John knew what John hoped for and expected but he may have missed out on what God was doing. Jesus said that John was the greatest man ever born of woman but that the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John.

Learn to see yourself and your neighbor with the eyes of Jesus. God is at work in Jesus even now – at work in Jesus alive in you. Amen.