

The Third Sunday of Advent
Matthew 11:2-10 – The Gospel is preached to the poor

In Nomine Iesu

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." 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.'"

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed, friends for whom Christ came into the world:

Without a doubt John knew that Jesus was the Messiah, who was to come. He had recognized Jesus while still in his mother's womb. He baptized Him. He saw the Holy Spirit as a dove descending on Him. He heard the Father's voice from heaven say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He testified to a huge multitude that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

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So, why did John have his disciples ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Without a doubt, he wanted to be assured again as he awaited his own death, as one who was left with nothing but the promises of God. But he also asked the question for the sake of his disciples, who did not yet fully grasp that Jesus was the promised One, and that he, John, did not come to make disciples for himself, but to prepare the way for the Promised One ... this One.

Jesus answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see." How clear were the Old Testament prophets? Isaiah spoke for the Messiah, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," (Is. 61:1). So, Christ drew their attention to His works, as if saying to them that a tree is known by its fruits. And chief among the promised Messiah's fruits is proclaiming the gospel, the good tidings of forgiveness, to the poor.

The effects of sin were everywhere to be seen in the Israel of Jesus' day. The sick, hungry, lame, blind, deaf, mute, lepers were everywhere. And death ruled all. The law, which Israel could never keep, had worked deep despair and wretchedness in their hearts. Pharisee and Sadducee, together with priest and elder, had nothing to offer except more law, law simply flavored with their own interpretation.

Now the Messiah comes and offers His blessed promises. He obligates Himself to grant mercy and deliver from misery. He promises to bear the sins of the people on His shoulders, and blot them out entirely, just as the prophets had said He would.

All God's promises are built on this One. He promises no one grace except through this One, who was appointed to bring salvation to the world. He clearly has come. And the prophets direct all to believe in Him alone. If anyone expects fulfillment of God's promises without this One, his faith is in vain. Everything is centered in the Messiah, the Christ. Whoever will not hear Him has no promise from God.

Among the works of Christ none is greater than preaching the Gospel to the poor. The divine promise of grace and mercy is preached, offered, and presented to the poor. To everyone who believes this good news, he or she has all that is promised. Sin is forgiven; the law fulfilled; peace with God restored; the conscience quieted, eternal life given. What more joyful tidings could a sorrowful heart that despairs of itself hear than this? How could hearts be made more joyful than by such beautiful, consoling words of promise? Sin, death, hell, the world, the devil, and every evil no longer oppress when a poor heart receives and believes this sure and certain promise of God. To give sight to the blind, even to raise the dead are insignificant compared to preaching the Gospel to the poor. It is by far the greatest and best of Jesus' works, for its fruits and benefits endure forever and ever.

But the poor of whom Jesus speaks are not simply beggars and homeless. They are the spiritually poor, those who do not covet earthly goods. So broken-hearted are they that in the agony of their conscience they desire God's help and consolation first and most. For them nothing has value unless they have a merciful God. They are the poor for whom the Gospel's joyful message is intended. The rich and self-satisfied cannot receive it; indeed, they do not want it. One whose heart is satisfied with what it is and has, whose heart hasn't been crushed by the law, cannot believe the Gospel. Whoever would receive the Gospel must first become poor. As Christ says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matt 9:13)

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Dear friends in Christ, this Advent season may the unchanging demands of God's law impoverish you, crush your heart, and rob you of every hope you see around you. For then He who was born in Bethlehem, who became poor to make you rich, who preached good news to the poor, will give you such eternal wealth, joy, and confidence that your heart will not have room for all that He gives you both now and it eternity. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria