
We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 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. And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me."^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

So why did St. John ask Jesus, "**Are You the One who is to come...**?"

Was it because he genuinely was beginning to doubt that Jesus was the Christ?

Yes, he had been there to baptize Jesus and testified that the Holy Spirit pointed Jesus out to him.

But in times of great distress... when your life is on the line for what you are teaching...

and your eternal salvation hinges on it,

it seems only natural to us that one would want confirmation.

Or was it because he wanted his disciples to hear and see Jesus for themselves

so that they might follow Him as St. John's ministry was likely going to be cut short?

I have preached on this text both ways, not dogmatically, as if only one of them could be true,

but reasoning how the text and other portions of Scripture could bear each thought.

But today, will you meditate with me a third possibility?

What if St. John is asking, not because he was doubting,

but because he was fully confident that Jesus is the Christ and was going to do what is said of Him?

What if he is asking, not because he wants his disciples to do something,

but because he wants Jesus to do something?

It's not a new concept. Such a thing has strong precedent in the Psalms.

Take for example the simple question, "**How long, O Lord?**"

It's asked numerous times throughout the Psalms, even in Revelation.

Psalms 6:3-4 - **My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long?**

Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love.

Psalms 90:13-14 - **Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!**

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,

that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Notice that in each of these questions, the main point of the question is not finding out the actual time, as in "when will this be over?"

The main point of the question is more rhetorical in nature.

It is used more as a prompt for God to do what He has promised He would do.

You see that especially with Revelation 6^[10], the martyrs cry— "**O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?**"

The Lord had already promised that He would judge and avenge the blood of His martyrs.

But these saints were already taken from this world's great tribulation, they were already in eternity.

What does time mean to them?

So they are not asking God for a date and time, but prompting Him to act as He said He would.

So consider St. John doing this.

“Are You the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?” =

“Jesus are You going to be doing the things that I was told by the Holy Spirit and faithfully preached when I said, **‘Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.**

Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire....

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor

and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Jesus, You can start Your judgment any time now.”

Such an interpretation would rightly express the steadfast faith, the non-reed-like faith of the martyr, trusting and expecting Jesus, as the Lord, to act as He has said that He will.

But, I suppose, implied in such a rhetorical question of expectation, is a hint of impatience as well.

“Jesus, are you now going to act. You haven’t been. So are you now going to start?

Look at all the injustice in the world... in the nation... in the community...

in my life and in the lives of those I love.

It seems to me that it is time for Your divine judgment to begin.”

For St. John, the injustice was pretty evident,

he was in Herod’s prison on account of faithfully preaching God’s Word.

But I am guessing that you would understand such a question coming from St. John because perhaps the thought crosses your mind every now and then, too.

It is easy for us to desire retribution for the crimes against humanity we hear about on the news.

Our heart aches for those who have suffered so greatly, so unjustly,

and yet those guilty of the heinous crimes do not always face justice, or true justice.

We can cry out with the Psalmist, **“How long, O Lord?”** And it is proper to do so.

But remember as you do, you are not only acknowledging that He will do it,

but also acknowledging that He knows exactly when He should do it.

It will be done... at the appointed and most gracious time.

...

But let us not only consider St. John’s question, but also Jesus’ response.

If it was that St. John was asking Jesus to act as St. John had been prophesying,

then Jesus’ response is also valid: **“Go and tell John what you hear and see:**

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.”

Jesus would in turn be telling St. John,

“I am acting... also as I said I would. I am gathering My wheat into the barn.

Now is the time for Me to act in mercy and grace.

Remember those other passages from Isaiah’s prophecy...

that speak about these signs and wonders?

Remember how I will call all people to Myself?

These, too, I must and desire to fulfill... and must do this first.”

And we can thank God that He did do this first, so that we ourselves are called to Him, washed in His blood through Holy Baptism...

fed and nourished by His body and blood in Holy Communion...

and comforted by His Holy Absolution, the pronouncement of the forgiveness of our sins.

If Jesus had come to exercise His judgment at the time of St. John, where would we be?

Who would have been left on the earth?

For Jesus had not yet been crucified.

He had not yet atoned for the sins of the world.

He had not yet fulfilled His atoning mission of mercy, so that He might, as the Psalmist asks,

deliver my life; save me for the sake of Your steadfast love. Psalm 6:4

And without His death at the hands of the unjust chief priests and Pontius Pilate,

He would not be able to **Have pity on [His] servants...**

that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Psalm 90: 13-14

Thank God for His patience, and that He does not give in to our impatience and short-sightedness, but in His steadfast love works His gracious will at the proper time.

...

And then Jesus spoke a blessing upon St. John, and all others who are **not offended by** [Him], who will allow Him to do His divine work of redemption and salvation at His appointed time, so that He may have mercy on ALL whom He has and will call and all those elected to salvation, whether His judgment be fulfilled in the next 30 minutes or the next 3,000 years.

That is why these question-to-action questions are so helpful for the Christian to use.

They express the complaint of our souls, the bitterness of our present distresses,

while still expressing faith in the Lord's promises to act.

These questions, like "**How long, O Lord?**", also make allowance for a time and way for Him to act,

They do not demand a certain timeline according to our impatience and limited knowledge.

They allow Him to be even more gracious to even more people throughout the world and time.

And they express our willingness to participate in His work salvation,

inviting Him to work through us for the benefit of our neighbors,

whether those neighbors would be members of our own household or our own communities,

or recipients of our offerings through the work of home or foreign missionaries.

Blessed, indeed, is the one who is not offended by [Jesus],

but jealously looks for the fulfillment of His mercy upon all men, that more may be saved.

And then, when Jesus does *come to judge the living and the dead*, Apostles' Creed

you may both **lift up your heads for your redemption is near**, Luke 21:28

and stand before His righteous judgment throne without fear and in great joy.

...

For St. John the Baptist, Jesus' judgment did come quickly.

Herod had him beheaded in prison soon enough, and what a comfort Jesus' blessing would be to St. John as He bowed before that cold, yet merciful sword.

I wonder if Psalm 40^[1-4] was going through his mind...

I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined to me and heard my cry.

He drew me up from the pit of destruction ... and set my feet upon a rock....

Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.

Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust...

Blessed are those who are not offended because of Jesus, nor His timing, nor His grace and mercy, but wait upon Him.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria