

JJ¹

Have you ever found yourself working through a grand plan only to find yourself somewhere you never expected to be in the end? It happens all the time, doesn't it? You tell the family that dinner will be ready at 6:00, but then five interruptions assail you and at 5:55 you realize that you set the timer, but forgot to turn on the oven. Your big essay is due tomorrow. You diligently did your research, gathered your notes, wrote your outline, and now you're two paragraphs from the end of your paper when your computer completely fries and you have no backup. A big project at work has kept you busy for months. A job well done will certainly mean a raise. But a week before you are to present it to the boss, the project is canceled. You've made all kinds of plans and savings for years of retirement, but then huge medical bill deplete your funds or even death takes your spouse away.

Our lives are filled with plans big and small that result in the frustrating and sometimes heartbreaking unexpected end. That's where we find John the Baptist today. Things had been going well. He had begun his ministry, knowing he was preparing the way for the Savior. Thousands were flocking to him. He even had his own disciples who assisted in his

ministry. Then his relative, Jesus, came on the scene. He pointed at him saying, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29) Later, he baptized Jesus in the Jordan, he saw heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove. He heard the Father's voice. Things were good.

John knew that Jesus' fame and following would increase and his would decrease. He confesses: "He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn. 3:30). This was John's response when his own disciples were worried about more people going to Jesus than to him (cf. Jn. 3:22-36). But now it seems John had some concerns of his own. It seems John didn't consider his getting lesser would go this far. John was in prison. He was locked up because he continued to preach against Herod's sinful lifestyle.

Not being what he expected, John asks, "Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else?"

Now this question doesn't come as soon as John is in prison. It comes, Matthew tells us, after "he heard about the things Christ was doing." It seems he thought Jesus would be carrying the same message he did, especially after he was put in prison. Remember, John preached about

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

cutting down fruitless trees and separating the wheat from the chaff. His message was a preaching of repentance because judgment was coming. But when he heard about Jesus, he didn't see it. Perhaps he wondered, "Why do I look like such a failure and the wicked seem to be winning?" It wasn't what he was expecting.

Jesus came preaching the gospel and healing the sick, even raising the dead!

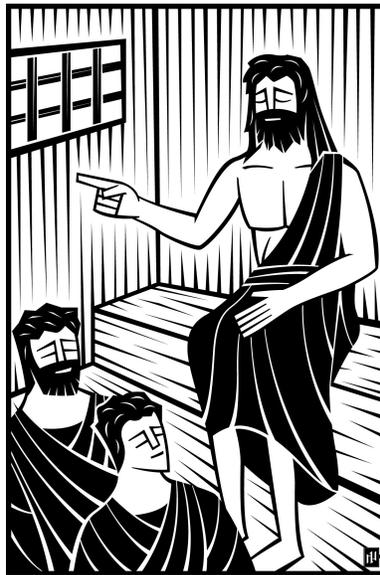
You might wonder, "What's so confusing or bad about that?" Well, remember, you and I have the benefit of looking back and seeing God's plan fulfilled. We have recorded for us all of God's revealed plan. But John needed assurance because what he was seeing wasn't what he expected.

John heard that Jesus' preaching of the gospel and call to repentance was being rejected. He heard the seeming contradiction of how evil angels obeyed Jesus' commands, but many people rejected his message. Instead of being an irresistible message that was coming by force, John heard that the kingdom of heaven was coming gently and was even being attacked! He was proof of it. He faithfully taught God's Word and called people to repentance, and where did he find himself? He was alone in a dark dungeon! One day he'd even be executed!

Others looked at Jesus, and he wasn't what they expected either. Time and again throughout his ministry we hear people wanting Jesus to be a powerful earthly king and restore Israel's glory days. He certainly wasn't what they expected when he was arrested and then crucified. That's not even what Jesus' own disciples expected.

And what about us today? What are our expectations of Jesus? Our false expecta-

tions of Jesus often reveal themselves in questions we ponder or struggle with. Questions like: "If Jesus has saved the world, why doesn't he just force everyone to be a believer?" - or - "If he has undone what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, why doesn't he just restore everything now?" - or - "If Jesus rules over all things, why do his followers suffer pain and persecution in this life?"

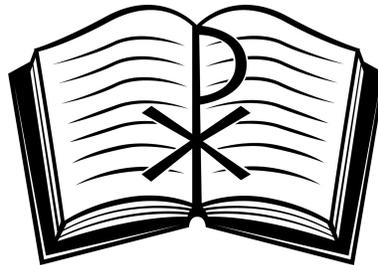


It's been said, "When we know the *why* in life, we can handle any *what*." John's *what* was severe. He was rotting away in prison for preaching God's Word. But he knew the *why* centered on Jesus. If Jesus wasn't the Christ, if he wasn't the One who was coming, then there was no reason for him to be in prison. Then he would have just been another sorry sap who was a victim of a lunatic. But, if Jesus is the Christ, if Jesus is the Son of God, then everything made sense and

everything was worth it! Then his confession was true: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29)

John's disciples go to Jesus with his question, and again we see Jesus act in an unexpected way. You might expect him to chide John for his question. Instead, Jesus responds with the very message John had been hearing while sitting in prison: "Go, report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor."

You can just picture John sitting in that dark dungeon when his soul was illumined with this message from Jesus. A pastor once described the scene this way: His disciples returned and said, "John, you should see the things he does. When he touches lepers, he doesn't catch their disease. They catch perfect healing. Lame men are dancing to the song the blind sing: 'I can see. I can see. Praise God, I can see.' Once-dead sons and daughters breathe and open their eyes and answer those who were crying out their names. Jesus wades into a sea of misery, leaving joy in his wake. He looks into desperate, impoverished eyes, and John, the news is always good. Always." (Paustian, *More Prepared To Answer*, NPH 2004, p. 143)



It was totally expected! Everything that Jesus was doing and teaching was exactly what God said he would do. The prophecies of Isaiah and others come flooding into his mind. Suddenly the *what* didn't matter any more. He knew the *why*. Jesus came to undo sin. His own included!

Friends, that Jesus came as he did is unexpected, but not for the reasons you and I might have even yet today. It's unexpected because who would ever expect a holy God to save the world, all of whom reject him by nature? Who would ever expect a just God to punish his Son for his enemies? Friends, that's exactly what God did through Jesus. That is exactly what God has done for you. He has saved you. He has forgiven you. He has washed you clean. And because of that, he is the one who gives you the strength to endure every *what*. And you know *why*? Because with every frustrating and sometimes heartbreaking unexpected end, Jesus is right there beside you to fill you up with his love and to show you the end. The end that is with him in paradise!

The judgment foretold by John was coming, but just not according to his timetable. Now was the time of salvation. But **JESUS IS COMING...SO EXPECT HIM.** He is coming to judge on the Last Day. You know what to expect. You know that you have been prepared for that day through the work Jesus did the first time he came. You know that you can expect to

hear, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Mt. 25:34). Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.