



Message: ***Not What I Expected*** | December 14, 2025 | Speaker: Pastor Eddie Eddy

Matthew 11:2-11 New International Version (NIV) Jesus and John the Baptist

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸ If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”^[c]

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

L: This is the word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

“Not What I Expected”

Last week we heard the caller ID message of John the Baptist reminding us to repent. And now...in our gospel lesson this morning...we find John the Baptist in prison, locked away, separated, unable to deliver in his mission to warn people to prepare and repent. In this secluded and deprived environment, even John began questioning if Jesus really was the promised Messiah. So...for reassurance he sent some of his own disciples right to the source, right to Jesus himself so they could ask Jesus directly if he was the one that John was called to proclaimed while in the desert.

And...in typical Jesus fashion, he doesn’t give John’s followers a straight answer. Jesus doesn’t say yes or no to their question...but instead...tells these information hunters to go talk to the people and listen to them. Among the people is where they will find the information that John seeks.

And what did they see and hear?: the lame can walk, the blind can see, the Lepers are healed and even the dead have been raised to life.

Jesus told John's disciples to go back and tell John what has been happening...knowing that then...John could figure out for himself that his work was not in vain and that Jesus...was indeed the Messiah.

We all experience times of seclusion and separation where our thoughts and expectations can lead us down paths of uncertainty and overwhelm us.

I can empathize with John, locked away with just his thoughts...forcefully separated from his mission for Christ...I can see how he was probably having a difficult time understanding who Jesus was.

I think there may have been a point where John might be thinking, "Lord, did I miss something? Did I get something wrong? I did what I thought you called me to do. I said what I thought you wanted me to say. You told me that the Messiah was coming. Did I bet on the wrong horse Lord?"

Where's the fire, the ax, the judgment he's supposed to bring? And why, if he's here, would he let me stay trapped in this place? I've heard the rumors about this one called Jesus. After all, He is my cousin and I thought I knew him pretty well. I remember that day in the Jordan when I baptized him. The sky opened and we heard your voice bless him. What a glorious day that was. I was confident that it had started Lord, that your plan was under way.

But, where is he now? Why isn't he doing what I said he would do? Is he really the one or should I look for another? Lord...**This is not what I expected.**

SP

John wanted to know why Jesus did not come with a fire like he had told the people in the wilderness. Instead, Jesus shows up and loves people. John expected Jesus to bring judgment against the people, but instead he brought forgiveness. This wasn't what John thought the Messiah would do. John expected fire and brimstone, but Jesus showed up with love and understanding...compassion and forgiveness.

Here's the thing...Jesus knows John's struggles, his internal doubt and his sense of confusion, so Jesus honors John and offers his encouragement when he says: Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

PAUSE

Friends...doubt can be contagious. If John is experiencing this, then his disciples and the crowds that follow his lead may feel it too. In love, Jesus reassures the crowd that John deserves the utmost respect, because the message that he brought was right on point: "Repent and get ready because judgement is coming!" John's message was right for that time, but Jesus' message of God's love, mercy and forgiveness is the message that God is delivering. Without John's message to "prepare" we won't be ready to hear Jesus' message.

PAUSE

So today, two weeks before Christmas in this season of anticipation... which message do we expect to hear? What message do we expect when we see the child who comes at Christmas? Do we expect a message of judgment, fire and brimstone, or do we expect a message of peace, love and joy?

SP

As we look forward to Christmas Eve and the celebration of a child born to save us from our sins, what child do you expect to see sleeping on Mary's lap? What are you experiencing right now that will influence your expectations of this Christmas message?

John the Baptist was trapped in a prison with his thoughts, and he started to doubt the expectations he had for this baby's ministry. John questioned his own faith.

Is it a bad thing to wonder, to have doubts, to have these questions? Should we shy away from these twinges of doubt that pop up in our thinking? As Christians, are these feelings of doubt wrong?

Paul Tillich is a Lutheran theologian and he articulated so well what times of uncertainty can do for our faith. He wrote: "God does not stand aloof or apart from our questioning; rather God is in the struggle of doubt, making himself known through it. Doubt therefore is a vital part and element of the faith which justifies."

Tillich is saying that the doubts we have, when we like John the Baptist question if we are doing and expecting the right things, are actually the ways in which God...through the Holy Spirit...is actively revealing himself to us.

Friends, I have had conversation after conversation with people from all walks of life who are wondering where is this Jesus we place our hope in? How much more greed, how much more suffering do we have to endure and witness. Why does it appear that the wicked are thriving while the faithful struggle? How much longer will we be able to strip the world of its resources and be able to survive in our comfort? We see everything that we remember as good and safe and true being turned upside down.

I understand why John asked...and why we ask today: Jesus...are you coming to set this all right...or should we expect someone else?

In our waiting we can wind up doubting our faith. But truth is...faith in itself offers no answers to appease our expectations. Faith is placing your trust in something that has never promised or guaranteed that you will ever get all the answers to your questions and doubts. God never promised life without stress. God promised to always be with us in the times that **cause us** to doubt our faith.

Not faith without doubt, but faith within the doubts. Faith is not so much about the answers we know...as it is about trusting the God who knows us. We may doubt God, but God never doubts us. We may not know God but He, with absolute certainty, knows us. This is the gospel. This is our life. This is the love that will never let us go which leads to the **Joy** we celebrate at Christmas and throughout the year.

Like John the Baptist, our doubts and our faith go hand in hand. He may not be what we expected...but when we look...we can see his message.

The Christ child comes and changes everything about life for us. He makes the weak strong and the strong weak...the dirty clean and the sinful... sinless, the unforgiven, forgiven. Not what we expected.

He is like the baby in the following story:

The story goes that Roaring Camp was supposed to be the meanest, toughest mining town in all of the West. It was reported that there were more murders and thefts there than any other place around. It was a terrible place

inhabited entirely by men, except for one woman who made her living in the only way she knew how. Her name was Cherokee Sal.

She found herself pregnant with no way of being sure exactly who the father could be. She died during the birth of this fatherless child. The men took the baby and put her in a wooden nail box with some old rags under her. But somehow that just didn't seem right, so one of the men rode eighty miles to buy a rosewood cradle. He brought it back, and they put the rags and the baby in the beautiful new rosewood cradle. But the rags didn't look very nice in the beautiful new cradle, so they had another man ride to Sacramento where he bought some beautiful silk and lace blankets. Now they put the baby in the cradle lined with silk and put the new blanket over her. It looked fine until someone happened to notice that the floor was so filthy.

So these hardened miners got down on their hands and knees, and with their calloused hands scrubbed the floor until it was spotless. Of course, now the walls and the ceiling and the dirty windows without curtains looked absolutely terrible. So they washed down the walls and the ceiling, and they put curtains at the windows. Things were beginning to look a lot better. But of course, they had to give up a lot of their fighting, because the baby slept a lot, and we all know that babies can't sleep during a bar room brawl. So the whole nature of Roaring Camp seemed to calm down.

They would take the baby out and set her by the entrance to the mine in her pretty rosewood cradle, with one of the men staying next to her, so the others could see her when they came out of the mine. Then somebody noticed what a dirty place the mine entrance was, so they planted flowers, and they made a garden there. It turned out quite beautiful. The men would bring her shiny little stones that they would find in the mine. But when they would put their hands down next to hers, their hands looked so dirty. Pretty soon the general store was all sold out of soap and shaving gear. This baby was changing everything.

That's also the way it is for those who have placed their faith in the babe of Bethlehem. This baby enters into their lives, and he slips into every crevice of their experience and changes their expectations.

The one who John was wondering about...Jesus...the Christ child...born in a manger...came and changed everything about life as we know it.

It is this child of change that we await for during this advent season. The child in the manger, the child on Mary's lap sleeping that comes now into our lives and changes us from the inside out. He comes with love to challenge...to forgive, to heal and to restore.

I read this story of a pastor whose daughter taught him a lesson he didn't expect: he writes...

One rainy afternoon I was driving along one of the main streets of town, taking those extra precautions necessary when the roads are wet and slick.

Suddenly, my daughter, spoke up from the back seat and said:"Dad, I'm thinking of something."

This announcement usually meant she had been pondering some fact for a while, and was now ready to expound all that her six-year-old mind had discovered. He said: I was eager to hear her wisdom.

"What are you thinking?" he asked. "The rain," she began, "is like sin, and the windshield wipers are like God wiping our sins away."

After the chill bumps raced up my arms I was able to respond. "That's a really good thought."

Then his curiosity broke in. How far would this little girl take this revelation? So he asked: "Do you notice how the rain keeps on coming? What does that tell you?"

She didn't hesitate one moment with her answer, she said: "Well...we keep on sinning...and God...well...he just keeps on forgiving us."

SP

The innocence of a child. She got the message. She had no doubt. Her faith was pure. She hadn't been jaded by the day to day grind that can seclude us, imprisons us, allows that doubt creep in and causes us to question our expectations. But without that doubt...we may not be open to seeking the truth. And when we seek the truth...we may find out "that's not what I expected"

What are our hopes, our beliefs, our expectations for this child, soon to return to us?

What do expect from this child during this Advent and Christmas season? What do you see him doing in the world, in the church, in your heart? Do you see him restoring your sight, opening your ears, guiding you as you walk and healing your brokenness? If you don't...you better ask yourself why. The gifts that bring the most joy are the ones we receive and say, "I didn't expect that."

To God be the glory! Amen

Next Steps:

- I will prepare my heart, so I am ready to hear Jesus's message
- I will be expectant about what Jesus' is doing and invite someone to worship on Christmas Eve
- I will pray for the kids and caretakers of Interhope
- I will pray about a financial gift for Interhope this Christmas