


July 11, 201

ASKED & ANSWERED

...Shifting our mindset from expectation to revelation



"Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Matthew 11:3-6

Special Music: "The Nazarene" Michael Card

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jok3IsoEdhk>

Question 2

Matthew 11:3 "... Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Answer 2

Matthew 11:4-6 "... Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

THE FLYER SAYS

The flyer says He's coming today!
Riding in the back of a white Cadillac,
Lights ablaze with confetti haze,
Marching bands, spectator stands,
Magic clowns and circus sounds
The flyer says He comes today!

We all await His arrival today!
Surrounded by soldiers and other stake holders
Cannons ablaze as we all watch amazed
We will each of us stand, just as we planned
And as he draws near, we will let out a cheer
We all await His arrival today!

It's all going to be just as foretold!
Uniform pressed, medals on chest
Surrounded by guards, chiseled and hard
Eyes flashing like steel, we will all want to kneel
His shiny sword glistens, as each of us listens
It's all going to be just as foretold!

He comes to redeem us today!
Banish oppression, remove indiscretion
Kill our aggressors, remove the transgressors
Beat back our foes who seek to dispose
Of our lives, our possessions, and faith-based expressions

He comes to redeem us today!

And then came a knock on the door.

He stands there connected, just not as expected.

Clothes that are worn, tattered and torn

Injured and bleeding, His heart is still beating

Crown of thorns on His head, as he stood there and bled

And then came a knock on the door.

This just can't be the one we expected.

No malice, no anger, though born in a manger

He stands here before me, with only love for me

He knows all my past, my sins and my vast

Failures in life. My guilt cuts like a knife.

This just can't be the one we expected.

And yet, here He stands.

I fall to my knees, and without asking Him please

I swallow my pride, touch His feet, hands, and side.

I glimpse of His pain, and His blood quickly stains

And cleanses my soul as He makes me whole.

And yet, here He stands.

The flyer says He's coming today!

I expected a king, it's a curious thing

I feel only grace as he grants me a place

At His table, knowing I am unable

To understand, God's master plan.

The flyer says that He's coming today!

When I played baseball as a kid, I got to be pretty good. I played every position on the field at some point. I hated being a catcher. There was always a constant fear that some batter would forget I was behind him and hit me in the head with a bat. I loved playing second base. I still think it is the most interesting and strategic position on the field. I was okay as a pitcher. Coaches always seem to want the older kids to pitch, probably because they can throw the ball harder. And I threw a pretty good fastball. I eventually learned to throw a curve and a drop ball before I was involved in an accident on the baseball field that ended my young career before it could even begin. I was twelve at the time.

Baseball is a game of expectations. It is the moments when unordinary things occur that make the game interesting. That hit ball that inexplicitly seems to be foul but suddenly curves onto the outfield. That dropped fly ball or the occasional ground ball managing to take a bad hop and passing through an infielder's legs. That wild throw to first allowing the runner to move to second. Those are all types of errors and accidents. But the pitcher is different.

The pitcher intentionally tries to fool the batter into thinking that the ball is going to go one way but ends up going another way. Every pitcher eventually learns that being too sneaky will eventually catch up with you. If you throw an outside curve and the batter is expecting an outside curve, more likely than not, that batter is going to connect with the ball, and it will be headed for the fence. When

I batted, I was always looking for that low and outside pitch. My coaches used to yell at me, “Why are you swinging at that pitch? That was a ball!”, and then they would immediately change their tone with the crack of the bat as the ball sailed over the fence. I just loved finding that sweet spot. And when I was pitching, I did everything I could to keep batters guessing so that they couldn’t find that sweet spot.

So often in life, we are looking for the sweet spot. There seems to be an inherent part of our nature as humans which seeks to know what is going to happen so we can prepare for it and take advantage of it. We certainly don’t like it when we gamble and find out we are wrong. We lean into phrases like “You can’t win if you don’t buy a lottery ticket”, “no pain, no gain”, and “The riskier the venture, the greater the result.” And because of that, people buy into the notion that they will win if they buy a lottery ticket, if we work through the pain there will always be gain on the other side, and the risk is worth it because the potential reward. We convince ourselves failure is not an option and are confused when we do fail. There seems to be a something in our belief system that shouts to us telling us we control our own luck.

Growing up, my most physically painful moments often came after uttering the words, “Hey mom, watch this!” Were any of you like that? Yes, there were actually times that ended up with success and allowed me to keep all my teeth.

But more often, it was cuts, bruises, broken bones, torn toenails and bumps on my head the size of baseballs. The expectations that I had, did not result in profit or pride. Most often they were expensive and humiliating.

We simply cannot cast about some wishes and expect things to work out okay. And we should be humbled by accepting the fact that God doesn't always protect us from our own stupidity. Sometimes, He is going to let us learn our lessons the hard way. When He does that, it often hurts our pride, our pocketbook, our relationships, or our bodies. Believe it or not, most women are smart enough that they are not interested in any kind of long-term relationship with thrill seeker. Mostly because they know that long-term is extremely difficult with someone focused on the short-term.

But what does any of that have to do with our scripture today and the question "... Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Well, it has everything to do with it. The Jews were very devout and through the study of scripture, they had certain expectations with regards to the coming of the Messiah. They were expecting a fast ball and God through them a curve ball, low and outside. God gave them a pitch that was right in the sweet spot, He let them know it was coming. But they read the signs wrong and chose to pass on the pitch and took a ball instead.

The story of John the Baptist hits home with many of us. When we read about how he lived on honey and locust in the middle of the desert, we are inspired. We come to a point of being in awe as he recognizes Jesus for who he is before anyone else can. He understands that he has to decrease as Jesus increases. He shouts to the world that Jesus is the real deal. But that is before Jesus starts doing his ministry.

Jesus walks off after getting baptized by John and starts doing some very strange things. He begins healing people, performing miracles, talking about loving our neighbors and forgiving our enemies. Now, from our stand point, two thousand years later and a couple of millennia of Christian history behind us, we have perspective that John did not have. John had grown up with the stories in the temple concerning what the Messiah would be, how He would interact with man, what the expectations were based on teachings of the religious leaders. The best theologians of the time were telling everyone that the Messiah was going to be much like David, a warrior king. He was going to vanquish the Romans and restore Israel to its proper place in the world. He would mow down the enemy and bring peace through war. And John, like most Jews of the time, heard this constantly from the religious leaders. To them, it was all a foregone conclusion, a statement of fact, no need to ask any questions.

And John shouts out to all Jesus is the Messiah. People listen. And then they listen more closely. And because He has a pretty good following, King Herod starts to take notice. When John calls King Herod on the carpet for Herod's relationship with his sister-in-law, John finds himself on the wrong side of a jail cell.

It had to be pretty discouraging for John being in that jail, waiting for whatever was going to happen to him. He probably didn't think he was going to be executed. After all, he really hadn't done anything that would warrant execution. He had no way of anticipating the actions of Herodias and Salome. Still, I'm sure that he also believed he wasn't going to get out of jail anytime soon.

In the meantime, John has heard rumors about the ministry of Jesus and those rumors don't really line up with what he's been preaching. He has been telling everybody that Jesus is the one, the Messiah, but what Jesus is doing doesn't really line up with his understanding of who the Messiah should be. After all, wasn't the Messiah supposed to rescue the Jews from the Romans. Wasn't the Messiah supposed to take the throne and rule over all the earth and lift the Jewish people to their rightful place?

And all that Jesus seems to be doing is gathering some ragtag, nobody followers, perform some miracles, do some healing, and talk about loving your

neighbor and making peace with your enemies. Of course, John started questioning his own faith. He was looking at a huge difference between what was expected and what was becoming reality. John had to be thinking, “I know I didn’t get it wrong, but what if I did? Maybe He’s not the one. Maybe I’m rotting in this jail cell having wasted my life for nothing. But no, I couldn’t have got it wrong. God used me to prepare the way. I baptized Jesus. I saw spirit of God in the form of a dove land on Him. I know that I got it right.”

John does the only thing that he can do. He sends a few of his followers to Jesus with the question we are looking at today. “... **Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?**” In other words, Jesus, did I mess up? Did I get it wrong? You’re not doing what I expected you to do. This all looked promising, but you seem to be falling way short of expectations. When are you going to raise an army and take care of things?

You see, the problem wasn’t with Jesus or what he was doing. The problem was with the errant expectations that had been handed down for centuries. The people, including John, were expecting salvation from the Romans when, in truth, Jesus was offering an even greater salvation.

And we read Jesus’ response to John’s question in verses 4-6. “... **Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk,**

those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

Jesus is telling John to look at what is going on. What He is doing is exactly what was prophesied. The things that are happening should give him proof that what he has been proclaiming is truth. Who else could accomplish such miracles and blessings other than the Son of God?

Sometimes the NIV version of the Bible throws me for a loop. I don't like the translation of verse 6 in the NIV. I find it confusing. **“Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”** I want to read you several other translations so you can get a better idea about what this verse is actually telling us because it is so important to what we are talking about.

KJV (King James Version –

“And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

ESV (English Standard Version) –

“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

NRV (New Revised Version) –

“And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

RSV (Revised Standard Version) –

“And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.”

The Greek reference here is best translated as “Blessed is the one who does not fall away from me” or “Blessed is the one who does not take offense in me.”

Most Bible scholars agree that Jesus is telling John to hold fast to his faith. That he shouldn't allow his preconceived expectations about the Messiah to cause him to lose faith. He explained to him, “This is what is happening because it is who I am here. Do not lose faith because you expected someone else. Have faith that the promise is true.”

People struggle with the inability to let go of their misconceptions. Like I have said before, there are still people that believe the earth is flat or that the sun revolves around the earth. Social media has augmented this problem because people often believe what they read without fact checking the stories surrounding their lives. There was a time when people believed that the truth lay somewhere between the opposing opinions. But more and more, people are choosing to believe whatever they hear the most and tend to embrace positions at opposite poles. For some reason that eludes me, many of us believe that all we need to be flag waving, card carrying, dues paying, parade marching Christians. But that is because we expect Jesus to be something other than what He is. It is because that message is the one that has been taught to us through generations.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis says, **“I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same.”**

There are those that believe that America is God’s chosen country, and that Americans are God’s chosen people. That has never been and will never be the case. It does not mean He loves us any less than anyone else. It just means He loves us the same as everyone else; Chinese, African, Indian, Russian, French, English, Asian, and the rest of humanity. Believing ourselves to have some special association with God because we are Americans is a lot like James and John arguing over who gets to sit next to Christ. It even sounds a lot like the Jews of the 30 AD. But Jesus did not die just for the Jews. As a matter of fact, the Jews were not expecting the Messiah to die for them. Instead, He was going to be the conquering general.

But Jesus died for everyone, even those that don’t believe. Jesus died so that salvation could be offered to everyone, so that everyone could be welcomed to the table. It is by acceptance of that offer of salvation that we come into a relationship with Jesus who makes us righteous and enables us to stand before our creator. He is both our sacrifice and our defender.

I once had an uncle that only watched CNN News. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Anything he heard on CNN News was absolutely true. Anything that contradicted what he heard on CNN News was absolutely false. When you only listen to one source, you no longer need to decide what it is true. It is a lot less trouble than checking the facts and establishing your own opinion.

John and his fellow Jews faced that same problem. Yes, there was a division among the Jewish leaders and teachers, Sadducee vrs. Pharisee. But that division was based on beliefs regarding the possibility of a resurrection. It had nothing to do with the expectations or qualifications of the Messiah. Shouldn't we find it a little odd that the Jewish leaders believed that it was up to them to determine the qualifications for the Messiah, like it was some kind of job application. It would be like me applying for a position to be Walt.

Jesus wasn't applying for a job. As a matter of fact, He didn't force anyone to follow Him. He was the Son of God, the Messiah. He would have been the Son of God, the Messiah, if no one had believed in Him. He knew that John believed He was the Son of God. But every one of us needs a little boost once in a while to help us keep our faith strong and true, especially when we find contradictions to our beliefs in the world around us. Affirmations can go a long way in strengthening our beliefs as long as those affirmations are based in our relationship with God. And once we fully understand that the world at large does

not shape the boundaries of our belief, we are able to draw closer the source of those beliefs, our Creator.

All of this should give us pause to ask questions regarding what we believe. Who is Jesus to us?

Do we think He is a vending machine? Give a prayer, get a candy bar?

Do we believe that He is the Son of God?

Do we believe that He performed miracles?

Do we believe that He performs miracles today?

Do we believe that He sits in the background, waiting for us to mess up?

Do we believe that He walks beside us and carries us when necessary?

Do we believe that He is active in our lives?

Have we struggled through those moments in our lives where our doubts come to the surface, just like John?

It happens to us all. But mostly because of our own expectations. We believe there should be a particular outcome to our situations, and when we do not see that outcome, we begin to doubt. All the while, God has something better and perfect around the corner that we do not see coming.

God throws a pitch to each of us that is low and outside, the perfect answer to all that matters. Jesus was, is, and always will be our sweet spot and when we connect, nothing can stop us. That connection brings us into a relationship with the Creator of the Universe. That's who Jesus is. He may not be what we were expecting, but He is all we will ever need. Who could ask for anything better?

AMEN

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