

## **“The Strong Are At Times Weak”**

**St Matthew 11:6**

December 13, 2020

SERMON 1956

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Our sermon text is from Matthew 11:6, “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Early on, the four by one-hundred-meter relay team had made a good showing. Moses began the race with a stellar performance. After ten miraculous plagues, he brought the Israelites out of Egypt into the Sinai Peninsula. Moses hand-delivered the Ten Commandments to the people. These commandments were the ultimate law, showing God’s people their sinfulness.

The second runner, the Prophet Isaiah received the baton from Moses. Isaiah continued the relay team’s quick pace by answering every one of the law’s accusations with Gospel absolutions. Due to its content, the book of Isaiah is considered by many to be the fifth Gospel. Isaiah tells us that the Messiah will be born of a virgin. He explains that this Son of David will be a suffering Servant. Many of his prophecies foretell the suffering and death which occurred on Good Friday.

The law of Moses and the gospel of Isaiah is followed by the one who prepares the way of the Lord. The third runner is John the Baptist! John, even while he resides in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, points out Jesus. John is the hinge that connects the Old and New Testaments. With great strength, John wears rough clothing, resides in the wilderness and points out the sins of many. He preaches a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And then finally, comes the fourth runner, who is Jesus, our Lord and Savior. The handoff between John and Jesus was flawless. John directs his hearers and disciples to follow Jesus, saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We expected great things. We knew that Jesus would fulfill the law of Moses perfectly, and fulfill the promises of Isaiah flawlessly. This promised Messiah would finally usher in the kingdom of God.

But then, this final runner appeared to falter. Rather than drive out this foreign government, He let the Roman king arrest John the Baptist and throw him into prison. Rather than take over the leadership of the Israelite nation, Jesus healed the outcasts and preached forgiveness to the poor. The race which had begun as so promising, now looked like it would fail in the final hundred meters.

And then John who was so strong, began to question his own Savior, “Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?” I told them that the axe was already at the root of the trees. Where is the mowing down of the wicked trees? I told them the wicked branches would be burned in the fire. Where is the bonfire for those who disregard God’s Word? I told them that crooked places would become straight and the rough places smooth. Get to it Jesus! Start acting like the Messiah.

It can happen to any of us; at times, even the strongest are weak. We are baptized into Christ and boldly profess the Christian faith. But then, like John we lose our patience while waiting on the Lord. We don't think that God is doing things the way that we think he should. We read how the Christian church will stand against the gates of Hades, and we expect ecclesiastic victories. We expect the Christian church to stand strong, but we watch faithful leaders capitulate to the demands of the hearers. They make stupid decisions, and the church suffers.

Our perseverance is tested and we question the Word or the will of God. Our prayers were bold. We had unwavering hope, but then we lose a loved one, and think God should have done something. How could God's plan include the mistake of a negligent doctor or a freak car wreck? How could God's will allow the harm caused by an immoral pastor or a fraudulent leader? If you rose from the dead, you could surely have prevented that evil! How come you didn't prevent my loved one from leaving the Christian faith?

Jesus' answer to John in today's Holy Gospel is quite telling. Jesus doesn't change His message, nor does He change His actions. Jesus is not swayed from His will or work. It is not Jesus' actions that need correction. It is John's wrong expectation and understanding which has gone astray.

There are times when you are hiking and the trail peters out. You realize that you have left behind the main trail, and you go back until you are sure. Then you figure out where you went wrong.

Jesus sends John back to Moses' words about another great prophet who would have God's Words within Him. Moses had said, "...you must listen to Him." Jesus had fulfilled the law perfectly and John knew that Jesus had never sinned. John knew that the heavens were opened and the Father called Jesus, "the One in Whom I am well pleased."

Jesus sends John back to the message which John himself had preached. Jesus brought John back to Isaiah's prophesy about the Messiah, who would bring sight to the blind and make the lame walk. Isaiah said that the Messiah would raise the dead and preach good news to the poor. In so many words, Jesus tells John, "I am that One."

**There is only one slight rebuke of John.** Jesus says, "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." Whatever it was that made John waver, is to be set aside. Whatever things Jesus did or didn't do, which John questioned, let it not lead him away from the true Messiah. Go back to the main trail and leave behind your own understanding and your own expectations. The main trail of the Word of God is right and sure. God knows what He is doing, and He will work things out for the best.

When we leave behind the Savior to pursue our own side trails, we must return to that which is sure and true. God's ways are not our ways. Though we can see the destination, there are many switchbacks which we do not expect. We need to learn to be patient and trust the Lord who has defeated the devil, our sin and taken away every wage of death.

Who would have thought that God would have His Son born of a Virgin? Who would have determined that suffering should be the defining characteristic of the Savior? Who would have determined that death on a cross would bring us life and release from death? And, yet, when we return to the Word of Moses and Isaiah, we see

that they had foretold it long ago.

In a rather crazy turn of events, **Jesus then boasts and brags about the prophecies of St. John the Baptist.** Though John has momentarily faltered, there is no reason to leave behind his preaching. All his life, John pointed his hearers to Jesus. And even now in His weakness, imprisoned John send his disciples to Jesus for answers. Jesus tells the multitudes, “there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.”

In the face of opposition, John was not a reed telling people whatever they wanted to hear. He was a true prophet. John cried out to the disobedient leaders saying, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” (Luke 3:7-8). Jesus wants the multitude to trust in John’s faithful message.

Jesus’ exhortation to follow the Scriptural message is also for us. Though your family or friends leave behind the faith, you repent and believe the good news. Though your pastor falters in his life, you hold to his message concerning faith in Jesus the Savior. Even if your church body should be dispersed, God has made you his child in your Baptism, so listen to your heavenly Father’s message.

We do not trust in the strength of the prophets or the apostles. Though strong, strong men, they were at times weak. Moses’ patience failed and he couldn’t go into the Promised Land. John’s imprisonment made Him question Jesus’ methods. Nevertheless, the Word is to be believed. St. Paul said, “Let a man consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

Moses, Isaiah, and John the Baptist have all pointed us to Jesus. Jesus is the perfect anchor to the Scriptural relay team. He is the fulfillment to every Old Testament prophecy. He is the perfect fulfillment of the Law. He is the promised fulfillment of the Gospel. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus finished the race and earned the goal of eternal life.

I don’t know what it is that could make you offended at Jesus, but whatever it is, set it aside. Jesus said, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”