

## The One Deserving of the Buildup by Mark Jarvinen

Have you ever heard of the **Dorito Syndrome**? It's consuming an entire family sized bag of this cheesy goodness, only to discover that when it's all gone, your hunger is still strangely unsatisfied. Similarly, imagine enduring days of enticing buildup for something that in the end, proves to be a tremendous let-down. For example, those of us who are Minnesota sports fans know something about this. How many of you held hope that after a fast start and a league home run record this would finally be our year for a deep playoff run for the Twins? Perhaps even a World Series? It seems that no matter the sport, we taste enough winning to build anticipation for success, only to be let down by season's end.

During this season of **Advent**, some aren't sure that the reality matches the buildup either. Some will open gifts they didn't really want. For others the exhaustion won't seem worth the reward of celebrating with family and friends. Still others are asking if the Christ of Christmas is really worth knowing. In fact, that's what our text for today is about. Listen as I read from **Matthew 11:2-15**, a text in which John the Baptist, "***the voice crying in the wilderness***," sends his disciples to ask Jesus if he's really the promised Messiah –

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

***<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."***

**<sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written:**

***"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."***

**<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.**

**John the Baptist**, the one whose job it was to prepare the way for the Messiah, was now in prison. Some time had passed since John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, signaling the beginning of His earthly ministry. Scripture reveals that initially John the Baptist was extremely popular. People flocked to the wilderness to undergo his baptism of repentance. At that time, Jesus was still relatively unknown. Now the fortunes of John and Jesus had reversed. John, who had been so popular early on was now about to be martyred. On the other hand, Jesus was currently the talk of the town. John the Baptist, writing from behind prison bars sends a curious message to Jesus, ***"Are you the Expected One or shall we look for someone else?"***

Now you might say, **"How can John ask such a question?"** John performed Jesus' baptism when the Spirit came down as a dove and a voice came from heaven saying, ***"This is my beloved Son, in***

***whom I am well pleased?”*** Didn’t John see the dove and hear the voice from heaven? Yes, of course he did. Turning to **John 1:32 – 34**, Scripture says,

***Then John gave this testimony: ‘I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God.***

Why, therefore, would John the Baptist, from his prison cell, send this cryptic message to Jesus asking him if he was the one? The answer lies in the words, ***“When John heard in prison what Christ was doing ...”*** In simple fact, Jesus was not acting like the kind of Messiah John expected. What was Jesus doing sending out his 12 disciples to cast out demons and heal diseases as **Matthew 10** tells us he did? It’s as if John was saying, ***“Why are you trying to win the game with the second string on the field?”*** When was Jesus going to start acting like the Messiah everyone expected? **When would Jesus overthrow Roman tyranny and establish His rule?** John sent his message to Jesus, not out of uncertainty about what he had heard at Jesus’ baptism (or even what he had no doubt heard from his parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, concerning Jesus’ Messiahship), but out of doubt over what Jesus **wasn’t doing** to establish His Kingdom. John was beginning to wonder if the reality was worth the buildup. It seemed to John like false advertising.

After all, Jesus was born not to royalty, but to a peasant woman. He functioned not as a military ruler, but as a servant. He came not as a judge, but as a forgiving redeemer. He did not bring condemnation,

but love. He did not associate with the religious establishment, but seemed to prefer associating with the rubbish heap of humanity. He spent his time and energy with the least and the lost. He was most concerned with the powerless: the blind and the lame, the lepers and the deaf, the poor and the outcast. And Jesus dared to teach that the weak occupied the most important places in the Kingdom of God.

For thousands of years, the Jews had been praying for a Messiah, a deliverer who would conquer their enemies and establish a kingdom of righteousness and might. Their deliverer would be powerful, a warrior and a king, through whose power the Jews would live in peace and prosperity. Then, along comes Jesus, a poor carpenter with questionable friends. He claims to be the long awaited Messiah, but says His kingdom is not of this world. Instead of building up an army, he pours his energies and wisdom into 12 very average looking followers.

And so can we be too hard on John the Baptist when He asks ***“Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?”*** Although, when you stop and think, John the Baptist probably wasn't the people's choice for a prophet either. **They expected another Elijah.** What they got was a man who wandered in the wilderness, wearing camel's hair, and eating locusts and honey – **not exactly a candidate for the cover of Gentleman's Quarterly.**

But John's concern over Jesus was not an idle question. John had risked his life to spread the message of repentance in anticipation of the coming Messiah. Now he was in prison. He had to know he

wasn't the most popular man in the world. He probably sensed he didn't have forever to wait. From his prison cell, John just needed to know that if his ministry cost him his life, it was worth the sacrifice. He needed to know if Jesus was truly **"The One."** Underlying John's question is the real question all of us want to know, **"Jesus, can I stake my life on you?"**

It's interesting to note that Jesus never directly answered John's question about whether he should look for someone else. Jesus never gave a straight yes or no answer. Jesus simply told John's messenger:

***"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see – The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them."***

In other words, Jesus pointed to his compassionate and life-restoring miracles. He did not give promises but rather, clearly observable evidence – evidence spoken of from the prophecy of Isaiah that set forth the kind of ministry the Messiah would have. Jesus didn't just tick off a listing of miracles, but applied them to groups of people whose handicaps or diseases had marginalized them in their society. Jesus didn't come to establish a Kingdom of power and might, but rather of healing and wholeness for those who knew their lives were broken.

**Here's the Good News for us today.** God, through Jesus Christ, is still bringing good news to the poor. He is still bringing those who were dead back to life again! He is still healing those who were broken! What do I mean?

**Peter Cropper (1945-2015)** was a distinguished British violinist whose artistry was so outstanding that the **Royal Academy of Music** in London honored him by lending him a priceless 258-year-old **Stradivarius**. It is a dream of every concert violinist to receive even one opportunity to play a Stradivarius violin. But a terrible thing happened while Cropper was performing in Finland. He tripped and fell on the Stradivarius and broke it. Cropper's pleasant dream was turned into a horrible nightmare. He was inconsolable.

Then a London violin dealer told him of a **master craftsman** who could repair the Stradivarius. To make a long story short, the repairs were so perfect they could not even be seen, and the soaring notes of the instrument were more beautiful than they had ever been before - all because the broken parts were placed in the hands of a master craftsman who then applied his healing touch.

Yes, **Jesus Christ is the One we have been looking for. We can stake not only our lives, but our eternal souls on Him.** Something terrible happens and our lives are broken – even when everything goes our way, there's the brokenness of sin that we're not always aware of. But when we turn the broken pieces of our lives over to Jesus – the Master Craftsman of all time – He takes them and puts them back together again, and we're better than new. **“In Christ we are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come” (II Cor. 5:17).** And so tell anyone who will listen that the works of Jesus, what He is doing for us and others, affirms that he is indeed the One we are looking for. There is no need to look for another. Though Jesus wasn't the kind of Messiah the Jews expected, the reality was worth

the buildup. Jesus is still changing the lives of all who in humility and brokenness, with a deep awareness of their sinful nature and need for a Savior will trust in Him. This is the life-giving touch that Jesus is still bringing to the world today as the gospel is proclaimed to others. Jesus is the One, whom to know is life eternal. **A-men.**