

THE ASSURANCE: GIVEN TO A QUESTIONING DISCIPLE, JOHN THE BAPTIST MATHEW 11:01–06

Introduction

John heard about the works of Christ. He had predicted the coming of the Messiah just as the prophets of old had predicted. In his mind, the Messiah was coming to baptise people with the Spirit of God and with fire. Christ had appeared upon the scene and was baptising people with the Spirit of God, and the people were flocking around Him as though He were the Messiah. But He was doing nothing about baptising people with fire, the messianic fire of Judgment. To John's mind, Christ was fulfilling only half of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. (See *Christ, Messiah*, Mt. 1:18.) John was confused. Was Jesus really the Messiah? He had to know. His whole life had been given over to the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. He sent two disciples to ask, and Jesus used the opportunity to vindicate His Messiahship.

- I. Jesus' task: ended the commissioning of His disciples (v. 1).
- II. John's perplexity: pictured a stern Messiah (vv. 2-3).
- III. Jesus' assurance: He was, beyond question, the Messiah (vv. 4-6).

MATHEW 01: 18 CHRIST (CHRISTOS)

The words Christ (Christos) and Messiah are the same word. Messiah is the Hebrew word and Christ is the Greek word. Both words refer to the same person and mean the same thing: *the Anointed One*. The Messiah is the *Anointed One of God*. Mathew says Jesus "is called Christ" (Mt. 1:16); that is, He is recognized as the Anointed One of God, the Messiah Himself.

In the day of Jesus Christ, people feverishly panted for the coming of the long-promised Messiah. The weight of life was harsh, hard, and impoverishing. Under the Romans, the people felt that God could not wait much longer to fulfil His promise. Such longings for deliverance left the people gullible. Many arose who claimed to be the Messiah and led the trusting followers into rebellion against the Roman State. The insurrectionist Barabbas, who was set free in the place of Jesus at Jesus' trial, is an example (Mk. 15:60f)

The Messiah was thought to be several things.

1. *Nationally*, He was to be the leader from David's line who would free the Jewish state as an independent nation and lead it to be the greatest nation the world had ever known.

2. *Militarily*, He was to be a great military leader who would lead Jewish armies victoriously over all the world.
3. *Religiously*, He was to be a supernatural figure straight from God who would bring righteousness over all the earth.
4. *Personally*, He was to be the One who would bring peace to the whole world.

Jesus Christ accepted the title of Messiah on three different occasions (Mt. 16:17; Mk. 14:61; Jn. 4:26). The name “Jesus” shows Him to be man. The name “Christ” shows Him to be God’s Anointed One, God’s very own Son. Christ is Jesus’ official title. It identifies Him officially as Prophet (Deu. 18:15-19), Priest (Psa. 110:4), and King (2 Sam. 7:12-13). These three officials were always anointed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit who was to perfectly anoint the Christ, the Messiah (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10-11; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-33). □

I. *Mathew 11:01 Ministry of Jesus Christ*

Jesus ended the commissioning of His disciples. The idea is that Jesus sent them out alone without His going along. They were to learn to minister, and the way they were to learn was through practical experience. They were to learn while they were actually out ministering. Jesus began to minister again all alone. The present event happened to Him while He was alone.

II. *Mathew 11:02–03 Doubts of John the Baptist*

John’s perplexity was caused by his picture of a stern Messiah. John was in prison, and he heard about the works of Christ. Two significant points are:

1. What John had heard was that the works of Christ were works of love. He knew that the Messiah was to baptize with both the Spirit and fire — the Messianic fire of judgment. He had heard that Jesus was doing the loving works of the Spirit and that people were mobilizing around Him in huge throngs, but he had heard nothing about the fire of Messianic judgment. It seemed that Jesus was fulfilling only half of the Messianic prophecies. He was perplexed and questioning, so he sent two emissaries to Jesus. Despite John’s puzzlement and questioning, he still believed in the truth.
 - He believed in the promises of Scripture concerning the Messiah: “Are you the one?” (see Psa. 118:26).
 - He was committed to seek after God’s Messiah: “Should we expect someone else?”
 - He was willing to have his faith confirmed in Jesus as the true Messiah. The fact that he asked the questions shows this.
2. John was questioning Jesus’ Messiahship. John was the one who sent two of his disciples to question Jesus (v. 2), and it was *to John* that Jesus sent His answer (v. 4).

John wondered if Jesus were the true Messiah. There were several reasons for his questioning Jesus.

- a. John was perplexed. His idea of the Messiah did not match what Jesus was doing. Jesus was not mobilizing people into a great army to free Israel from Roman domination (See *Christ, Messiah*, Mt. 1:18). He was not the stern Messiah pictured by the prophets.
- b. John was in prison. He expected to be involved in the overthrow of the Roman conquerors and in the establishment of Israel as a free nation, yet he was languishing in prison. He could not understand why the Messiah did not free him. Had he not been the prominent forerunner for the Messiah?
- c. John needed assurance. He needed his faith strengthened. The saints of the Scriptures were mere men with passions like we experience. They too, needed the Lord to occasionally confirm their faith. Even the strongest sometimes need the word and presence of the Lord in a special way. Picture John's concept of the Messiah and his languishing in prison, and his need is clearly understood.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Heb 4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Thought 1. There are several significant points.

- 1) John did not fully understand Jesus, and to be honest, we all lack understanding; yet what is needed is for us to do what John did:
 - He trusted Christ anyway.
 - He committed his life to proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah and continued to proclaim the message even though he did not fully understand.
 - He sought answers to what he did not understand.
 - He did not let his questions destroy his faith.
- 2) John believed the Scripture and looked for the Messiah's first coming. We are to believe the Scriptures: He has come and He is coming again (Jn. 14:2-3; 1 Th. 4:13f; Tit. 2:12-13).
- 3) We should not fear nor be ashamed because we may not understand or have questions about Jesus. In fact, it is good to make absolutely sure in all matters concerning our salvation. We should seek and ask unashamedly (Jas. 1:5).

- 4) A critical fact: John was not weary in looking for the Messiah. He said he would keep on looking if Jesus were not the Messiah. We must not become weary and doubting because He has not yet returned (see 2 Pet. 3:3-4, 8-18).
- 5) John's questioning began when he was in prison facing great trouble and trial. It is sometimes difficult to understand why we have to go through so much trouble, especially some of us. We need to approach Christ in those times, coming to Him in His Word and in prayer (1 Pet. 4:11-12; Jas. 1:5; Isa. 1:18).
- 6) John had questions to arise in his mind. Even the strongest are not always strong no matter who they are (Mt. 26:36-46, 69-75; Gal. 2:11f). Severe trials are often a great strain upon our faith. In such times, we need a very special presence of the Lord; we need His strength and assurance.

1 Pet 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Pet 5:7, 10 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you....And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

2 Cor 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Tim 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Heb 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

III. Mathew 11:04–06 The Messiahship of Jesus Christ

Jesus' assurance to John was that He was beyond question the Messiah. Jesus gave five assurances to John.

1. Jesus spoke as the Messiah. His words and the power of His message were evidences that Jesus was the Messiah. There were no greater words and no greater lessons than the words and the lessons Christ taught. He is recognized as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, teacher of all times. This is one of the proofs that He is beyond question the Messiah.

Mark 13:31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

Luke 4:32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

John 3:34 "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit."

John 6:63 *“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.”*

John 6:68 *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”*^v

John 7:16 *Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.”*

John 8:51 *“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”*

John 12:48 *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”*

Thought 1. Jesus spoke as one having authority: He spoke, taught, and preached as the Messiah. No one has ever taught like Jesus. In fact, He was such a strong teacher that many who deny His deity still commit their lives to the ministry of His teaching. Few deny the strength of His ability as a teacher and the strength of His ethics. In addition to these, there are those who believe that Jesus is truly the Son of God. To these, there is no one who compares to Jesus as a person or teacher.

Jesus preached and taught, no matter who the audience was. He reached out to everyone who would listen. The impact of Jesus’ teaching is forcibly stated, *“The people were amazed.”* that is, astonished.

The multitudes of people were amazed. Those amazed were not the religionists, the wealthy, and the ruling class, but the common people. Too often, those with wealth and those with position feel threatened by Christ. They fear that discipleship might cost them something. And it will, for Jesus Christ demands *all that a person is and has.*

2. Jesus demonstrated the power and works of the Messiah. Jesus was saying that His works and concern (love) were the works and concern predicted for the Messiah, and both are unlimited.
 - a. He gave sight to the blind. The blind saw physically and spiritually. They not only knew the truth of the world but of God as well.
 - b. He made the lame to walk. He caused men to walk physically and spiritually. They moved strongly about, serving both God and man.
 - c. He cleansed the lepers. He made them pure physically and spiritually. They were accepted both by men and God.
 - d. He opened the ears of the deaf. He caused the deaf to hear physically and spiritually. They could hear both the voice of men and of God.
 - e. He raised the dead to life. They were given life again physically and spiritually. Whereas they had been dead, they now walked as new creatures before men and God.
 - f. He preached the gospel to the poor. They who had been so neglected and possessed so little were now receiving the good news of salvation from God Himself.

John 5:36 *“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”*

John 10:25 *Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me.”*

John 10:38 *“But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”*

John 14:11 *“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”*

John 15:24 *“If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.”*

Acts 2:22 *“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”*

Thought 1. Christ did not just profess to be the Messiah, He proved it (Jn.14:10-11). He proved it by ministering to people *in the power of God*. He showed that God had sent Him to demonstrate two things:

- 1) That God is (exists) and that He is sovereign. He is above and beyond all, and He has the power to override the laws of nature.
- 2) That God loves man and has provided a way for man to be saved and to live forever.

Every time Jesus ministered and healed a person, He demonstrated both things: the sovereign power and the great love of God.

Thought 2. Christ’s miracles are the seal of God: He is God’s Son, the Messiah, just who He claims to be. His works are beyond question the works of God (Jn.5:36; 10:25f, 32, 37-38; 14:11).

3. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah (see *Prophecy Fulfilled*, Mt. 11:05)

Thought 1. The works of Christ agree with the works predicted for the Messiah. No man has to wait any longer for his Saviour and Deliverer.

4. Jesus preached the gospel of the Messiah. There is a much needed lesson here. Jesus went to the poor. He neither avoided nor neglected anyone, no matter their social status.
 - a. This is a sign of the enormous compassion and mercy of God: that His Son would go to those so often overlooked, neglected and despised as lazy and shiftless.
 - b. The poor have need. The person who senses need turns to Christ much sooner than the person who senses no need. Being self-sufficient and independent can be good in achieving goals, but when facing God, they are damning and lead to eternal doom.

Only those who confess their need for God's care can expect to have God care for them and save them.

- c. This is a fulfilment of prophecy: that the Messiah would minister especially to the poor (Psa.72:2, 4, 12-13; Zech. 11:11).

Mat 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Mat 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Thought 1. Christ preached the gospel to everyone who would listen, no matter what their social status or position.

5. Jesus promised both the blessing and judgment of the Messiah (see *Messiah and Judgement*, Mt. 11:06). Note the two facts that Jesus promised — the two areas of work predicted about the Messiah.
- a. The area of blessing, of the Spirit, of salvation, of God's care and love for people. This is the area Christ covered in this passage. Today is the day of blessing and of salvation (Mt. 11:4-5).

2 Cor 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour; now is the day of salvation.

Isa 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

Isa 55:1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

- b. The area of fire, of wrath, of judgment. The Messiah is to fulfil His judgment of fire when He returns.

Rom 9:31-32 But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone."

1 Cor 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

1 Pet 2:8 And, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.

2 Pet 2:9 If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Thought 1. Three significant facts.

- 1) Jesus encouraged John not to be offended by Him. He encourages all of us not to be offended by Him but to believe and trust that He is “of a truth, the Son of God,” the Messiah.
- 2) Many are offended by Christ:
 - by the idea and belief of miracles
 - by His death, the shedding of His blood
 - by His incarnation and virgin birth
 - by His demand for self-denial and strict behaviour

Many are unable to understand the demands of Christ and they question just as John did, but they fail to follow through like John did. They fail to make a total commitment despite questions.

- 3) Christ says one of two judgments awaits us. (a) The judgment of blessing, or (b) The judgment of being offended. He is the true Messiah who is to execute both. Right now is the day of blessing and of the Spirit. When He returns, that will be the day of fire and judgment. ■

MATHEW 11:05 PROPHECY FULFILLED

Jesus was referring to Scripture here. He was telling John that He was fulfilling the predictions of the prophets (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1-2; see Psa. 72:2; 146:8; Zech. 11:11). Note, however, that Jesus stressed the personal ministry *and not the political*. He omitted the phrases of Isa. 61:1 that could be interpreted that He was a political leader: “proclaiming freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” He needed to get John’s attention away from the wrong concept of the Messiah to the true concept. He was reaching out in the power of the Spirit to individuals, saving and restoring them, not reaching out to mobilize people for the deliverance of Israel from Roman enslavement. □

MATHEW 11:06 MESSIAH AND JUDGMENT

Jesus was saying that the Messianic blessing and judgment were coming. Today is the day of salvation, the day of Messianic blessing. Tomorrow will be the day of Messianic fire, the day of judgment against all those who are offended in Christ. The Messianic fire of judgment was John’s concern. He did not see Christ’s judging the world. But Christ assured John: “Blessing is coming; and *judgment is coming*. Do not be offended because you do not understand everything about me.” □