

The title for today's message is; **Jesus Is the One**

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

Andy Williams wrote: *"It's the most wonderful time of the year With the kids jingle-belling And everyone telling you 'Be of good cheer.' It's the most wonderful time of the year"*.

Or is it? Yes, this time to celebrate, this time to be with family, this time to remember our Savior's birth is wonderful.

Yet along with it comes stress, disappointed, loneliness and at times even hopelessness.

It seems that John was struggling with some of those same feelings. We met him last week in the wild areas along the Jordan, wearing camel's hair and a leather belt.

He was baptizing and preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near". But now some months later, he's sitting in prison.

Herod the Great, whom the wise men came to see after Jesus' birth, had died almost thirty years earlier.

One of his son, Herod Phillip, married Herodias, who was his own niece.

Herod Philip's half-brother, named Herod Antipas who ruled Galilee, visited the couple in Rome. He and Herodias fell in love.

So Herod Antipas arranged to divorce his first wife and married Herodias, his brother's wife, instead.

John said that this was not right. So Herod Antipas threw him into prison.

Do you think this was what John was expecting for his ministry? He was the forerunner, sent to prepare the way for the Messiah.

He knew and gladly accepted that he would grow less as the Christ came into focus.

We see no arrogance in John. He confesses that he's not fit to carry even the Messiah's sandals. But he had preached that the ax already lay along the root of the trees.

He had preached that the Coming One had the winnowing fork in his hand to separate his grain from the chaff which would be burnt with unquenchable fire.

But where was that justice? Where was God's judgment as he lingers there in prison?

Can you relate to John? How could this be God's plan? Why weren't God's promises working out the way he expected?

How long would his suffering go on? Jesus had to be the One because he saw the Holy Spirit descend and remain on Jesus as God had promised.

But where were those acts of judgment.? Was maybe another one coming to fulfill that?

Do you deal with this same struggle of faith, spiritual questions, even doubts and confusion?

But John knew where to turn for help. He sent two of his followers to go and ask Jesus. Jesus is the One.

What does Jesus do? He points John to the Scriptures, but not in a mechanical way that simply says: "Read the Bible more."

Rather, he draws John and us into the fulfillment of the prophecies: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:

They told John that the blind received sight, the lame walked, those who have leprosy were cured, and the deaf now hear.

Isn't that what the scriptures said; the prophet Isaiah said; "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

Then will the lame leap like a deer . . ." Here Jesus is saying, "Despite your struggle of faith, John, recall the prophecies of old.

See how my ministry fulfills them, and in fact does even more. Yes, even the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor."

Isaiah chapter 61 describes the Messiah preaching good news to the poor in spirit. What a summary of Jesus' saving work!

To the poor, like you and me, who see our spiritual bankruptcy, who feel the weight of the debt of our sin.

Who are nothing but penniless beggars before God -- what good news Jesus as says to you: "Your sins are paid for you. Your debt is forgiven.

God's riches are yours at my expense." What good news for you and me, my dear friends!

"Yes, John, hear and see the prophecies of Scripture fulfilled in Jesus. And as for the justice and judgment you long for, leave that in his hands as well to carry out at the right time. For Jesus is the One."

Now you don't have disciples to send to Jesus to get answers as John did. But God has given you a pastor.

One reason you provide for my family and me rather than having me work a second job is so that I can regularly study God's Word and be ready to apply it for you.

That's one purpose of the sermon each week. Yet a sermon in any given week may not deal with the specific question or problem you have.

My skill has its limits and weaknesses unlike Jesus, yet my prayer is to be able to lead you ever deeper into God's life-giving word.

"You should read your Bible more," and not relying on the gimmicks of this world, but drawing you into God's life-giving word.

Which is the sword of the Spirit, the balm of Gilead that heals our sin-sick souls. He blesses us in his Word, so that we take it to heart.

At times his word is difficult. I don't mean its hard to understand, although some parts are. I mean hard to take to heart.

We expect Jesus to do one thing, but he does the opposite -- sort of like John's struggle.

That's why Jesus adds here, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me".

For you see, doesn't logic dictate that if Jesus is the all-powerful God and if he really loves me, then my life should be at least above average?

But faith accepts whatever my Savior gives me, trusting him and his mercy to work greater good than I could ever plan out myself.

Yet what a temptation to fall away when the heartaches, and failures of life imprison us. How blessed we are to keep on following Jesus! He's the One.

That means to take his word seriously, but do we? Jesus wanted the crowds to think about that.

How seriously did they take to heart the word of God proclaimed by John?

Many of them had gone out to those uninhabited areas along the Jordan. Why had they done that? To see a reed swayed by the wind?

To see someone with his finger in the air so that he could turn toward popular opinion like a weather vane? No, John wasn't that at all.

He stood firm on God's Word, unmoved. Did they go out to see someone dressed in fine, soft clothes, influenced by where the money is?

Such people are found in palaces -- and not in the dungeon part of the palace as John was in his camel's hair.

He stood firm on God's Word, unmoved. Did they go out to see someone dressed in fine, soft clothes, with great wealth?

What did they go out to see? A prophet, a spokesman proclaiming God's Word? Yes, indeed, and even more.

For John was not just another prophet in a long line of prophets. He was the forerunner of the Messiah.

But like many other things, once the novelty wore off, their itching ears wanted something else. We have the word of someone even greater than John.

As Jesus said; "Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

Amen