



WHAT DID YOU GO OUT TO SEE?

~ MATTHEW 11.7-10 ~

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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? 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. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Brad just gotten his first summer job as a landscaper for a local company. He got the recommended steel toed boots, the old T-shirts and jeans, and even a shiny new lunch box. He set his alarm at 6am for his first day of work and was up fifteen minutes before because he was so excited. That was on Monday. The end of the week came about, and the mood was decidedly different. Brad went to talk with his dad about how tough the work was, how many cuts he had gotten, how much his back hurt, and how hard it was getting up early in the morning. His dad just had one thing to say, "WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING, that you would be sipping drinks all day and get paid?"

That has probably happened to us on an occasion or two in our lives, when something just wasn't what we were expecting. You get that brand new toy, and it doesn't work quite as well as advertised in the commercial. You start working in your dream job, and it isn't as dreamy as you thought it would be. You get married or have a kid, and it's not what you expected. Now sometimes, you truly don't know what to expect and you could legitimately say you weren't expecting it. But there are other times where the "warning signs" are there of what we should expect, and we just don't pay attention to them.

This is what happened to John the Baptist's disciples. Somehow, things didn't work out quite like they expected. John's preaching landed him in prison, so they go to the one John pointed to for answers. It was Jesus asking the crowd surrounding him about John the Baptist: "**What did you go out in the wilderness to see?**" Jesus was leading them back to John to show them that they should have expected everything that happened, or at least it would not have taken them by surprise. We can do the same thing in our Christian lives, especially when things don't go the way we want them to. Jesus just asks us, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

1. A smooth talker and a smooth life or
2. A prophet with God's Word

The question “WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?” could very well have been the question that Jesus asked John’s disciples. If you remember John the Baptist, you know that he had a special mission from God. He had the mission to announce the Messiah’s long anticipated coming. He didn’t announce this message in the temple or churches, but he preached in the wilderness, not too unlike our Sonoran Desert. He wore clothes made out of scratchy camel’s hair, he ate locusts and wild honey that he could find. He lived a very ascetic lifestyle. But his mission was important. It was a mission of repentance, his lifestyle portrayed a great example of this (remember when the Ninevites from Jonah’s day donned sackcloth in repentance). But the repentance John spoke of was a genuine sorrow over sins. He baptized many people who came out to see him, even Jesus himself.

Those were the good ol’ days for John. He was eventually thrown in prison for telling the king it was wrong to steal his brother’s wife. And now here you have John, in prison for what he preached, while Jesus is going around the countryside forgiving everybody and hanging out with the worst of sinners. I can see how John’s disciples wouldn’t think this is very fair, and I can even imagine John the Baptist, wondering in prison if what he said about Jesus was really accurate. It seemed like two completely contradictory messages that John and Jesus brought to the table.

But Jesus asks, “WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?” or his exact words, “**What did you go out to see?**” Jesus wasn’t saying this in a mocking way, as if Jesus just used people to get his power and position, but he wanted the people to remember what John preached about, remember who he pointed towards. He even gave John the highest compliment, that of all people born, John was the greatest. Why was this? Because he is the only prophet whom the Old Testament prophesied about.

To be sure, John’s job was not an easy one. He had to wake people from their slumber of apathy over sins, from the idea that they were good enough, from the idea that since God is loving he would never harm a fly. Jesus asked if the people went out to see “**a reed swayed by the wind?**” Now, what might a reed swayed by the wind have to do with John? A reed has no control over which direction it leans, it bends in whatever way the wind pushed it. Maybe you’ve heard about the passage in the Bible that says in the last days people will gather around them teachers who will tell them what their itching ears want to hear. This is the very similar comparison to a reed swayed by the wind. Certainly a smooth talker would have been able to draw the people out into the desert.

A smooth talker is able insert just enough truth to sound convincing and true, but their primary purpose is to not offend, while speaking the whole truth is relegated to a secondary role. I was intrigued by a quote that I read this last week. “In a bestselling novel from 1925, Bruce Barton described Jesus as *The Man Nobody Knows*. Today he is the man nobody hates.” Isn’t that true today, Jesus is the man nobody hates? What a different opinion people of his day had of him. Many wanted to kill him. So, are we as a society and culture so much more advanced than the people of Jesus’ day? Or have we been convinced by smooth talkers?

John’s disciples wondered if John was doing the mission of God, why he ended up in prison. People today wonder why those who follow God face ridicule, face churches struggling, face failures. There are only two human explanations to this conundrum – either you’re not really following God, or

your faith isn't strong enough to make it succeed. This is what the smooth talkers have convinced us of. Do you see the problem there? The focus is all on self. The focus is on what *you* need to do or change.

It certainly is tempting to listen to smooth talkers, maybe even the smooth talker inside of each one of us who approaches the Bible with preconceived notions of what he wants to find. Certainly, we can find a passage or distort its meaning to validate our presuppositions. Jesus has a warning, **"Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."**

(2)

This is what the Bible clearly teaches. Jesus made very clear it was not that John the Baptist was a smooth talker, which drew the crowds out to him. It was the message he carried. A message about repentance, a message about turning back to God. Jesus called John a prophet. Normally we think of prophets as people who can predict the future, whether with God's help or without. But that isn't the primary role of a prophet. The primary role of a prophet is someone who speaks God's Word. I am a prophet to you today as I preach. You are prophets to your family and friends when you share your faith.

A natural thought is that if a prophet speaks God's word, then people should listen, people should pay attention. That's what our logic and reason tell us. But that was not the case in the Old Testament or in Jesus' day. As Jesus approached Jerusalem one time he said these words, **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you."** This was the unfortunate fate of many of the prophets including John, even though they carried God's Word. It is because God's Word is offensive to sinful man.

How has God's Word offended you? How has God offended you? It isn't happy to know what you've done is wrong, it isn't nice being told that you deserve to go to the same place for *your* sins as the murderers and child molesters, it isn't nice being told there is nothing you can do to positively effect your relationship with God. It isn't nice to hear that we must submit to others – wives to husbands, citizens to government. Even God's gospel is offensive to some. How can forgiveness be present in baptism? – isn't it just committing your life to Christ? My sins weren't so bad that Jesus had to go to the cross. It's unloving to tell someone what they believe about the Bible is wrong. It's no wonder that people reject these Biblical doctrines, and condemn those who teach them.

But WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING, for them to roll out the red carpet for proclaiming what the Bible says? This is all revealed in God's Word. **"For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."** Jesus tells us what to expect in the future: people will oppose God and his people, there will be disrespect for God's Word and his ways, evil of all kinds will be on display and things will get worse before the end. This should not surprise us! But neither should we forget the promises God has given us in his Word – there will be ways out of temptation for us, that he will provide all we need, that the angels will come with him at The End to take us to heaven.

We will not be surprised by what is coming if we pay attention to God's Word, God's Word as brought by prophets and not smooth talkers. So listen up and pay attention! Yes, the world is not a perfect place, but we know why – because of sin, including our sin. But this should not come as a surprise to us. For God's Word predicted this would happen, it is not unexpected. What a wonderful promise this is, much greater than anything this world has to offer. Riches can be taken away, health can be lost,

friends can disappear, but God's grip on you does not change. This gives us the encouragement to go out and live our lives with our feet firmly planted in God's Word. This is what we are to expect. Amen.