

## Outcasts Part 2

John The Martyr

*Matthew 11:1-19, Mark 6:14-29*

*Memory Verses: Matthew 11:6*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

An outcast is anyone who the majority of society would look upon and reject as “not normal.” The problem is that at any given point any of us can fall out of the majority opinion, and regardless of how it appears on the outside, none of us are “normal.” We are all unique and because of this we are all outcasts in our own way. For instance, I like the rock band Weezer a lot but the Gregory's who are somewhat of a family of music snobs, think Weezer is lame and they make fun of me. I'm an outcast. We get along on most everything else but when it comes to Weezer they think I'm not normal. It's sad.

But in all seriousness, when it comes to this world, there are many things that can divide us; cause us to be outcasts to one another. Music, Sports, Politics; the list is endless. We live in a world more divided than it's possibly ever been. So what could possibly bring all of us outcasts together and find common ground? I can only think of one thing.

It was the same for those in the first century. They were divided by politics, social status, race, and religion. Very few people had anything in common with those they disagreed with. You had people like Peter, Andrew, James, and John who were lowly fishermen. They liked to curse, they liked to gamble; they were the roughnecks of their day. You had people like Levi and Zacchaeus who were hated and despised tax collectors. They were traitors to their own people. People like Simon who were domestic terrorists known as the Zealots. People like Nicodemus and Joseph who were pharisees. People like Mary Magdalen who was a prostitute filled with many demons. People like Mary the Mother of Jesus, who was unmarried and pregnant. Both, who as women, were already considered as second class citizens. And, people like John the Baptist who was nicknamed “crazy John,” because he wore camels hair, ate locusts, and lived in the wilderness. And still, all of these outcasts found a common bond in one thing. Their love for Jesus Christ. Here is the point of this series. We are all outcasts, but we all find a common home in Jesus Christ.

Today we want to continue where we left off last week, talking about John the Baptist. John was different from the world not just in the way he dressed or what he ate, but because he unwaveringly stood for truth and always, in humility, redirected the spotlight back onto Christ where it belonged. God used John, an outcast, to draw Israel to

repentance in preparation for the ministry of Christ. If he can use him, he most certainly can use you.

But that's not where John's story ends. You would think that because John was so special and did such a heroic work for the kingdom, that in this life he would have been blessed beyond measure. Isn't that how it works? If we live unashamedly for Christ and love others sacrificially, all of our personal dreams will come true? Well, John's story shows us different. That's not how God works. John was not rewarded in this life with health and wealth, rather he was imprisoned and killed. Let's read of this account in **Luke 3:15-20**, **Luke 7:18-35**, and finally in **Matthew 14:1-12**.

It's often been said that Stephen was the first Christian Martyr but that's not the case. John the Baptist was. He was killed because of his faith in Christ and His unwillingness to waiver on the truth of the Word of Christ. **And this is where we need to learn a very hard truth this morning. Though one of Christ's plans in creating us and saving us is that we would be satisfied in Him in this life, our greater purpose has very little to do with our satisfaction. As Paul says in Romans 14:8, “for if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.” Our purpose is to live and die for the Lord. It doesn't matter whether you are physically or financially blessed in this life as a Christian, all that matters is whether or not your life and death glorify God. It doesn't really matter in the greater scheme whether or not you can find satisfaction in your hardship. All that matters is whether or not you fulfill your purpose for the kingdom.**

And yet, what a joy to be able to find joy and satisfaction in the hard times. What a joy to be set free from the pain and find a peace that passes all understanding. God will do what he must, but we can still be blessed by learning how to find satisfaction in the hard times. **This is God's desire for you and for me.** I can assure you, John the Baptist fulfilled his purpose, and I hope he found satisfaction in knowing that Jesus was using him for a much greater plan than he could ever understand. The main point this morning is simple, **Blessed are those when hard times come, they are not offended by God who has purpose in their hardship.**

#### Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see this morning is... **The Imprisonment of John Reminds Us That All Believers Will Face Violence For The Sake of Christ.** There are a few questions here that I want us to ask. First, Can we trust Jesus when we suffer? Look with me at **Matthew 11:1-5**.

John is imprisoned and in his frustration he sends word to Jesus and asks a question; are you not the one, are you not the Messiah? Why exactly would John ask this? Just last week in a couple of chapters earlier we saw John proclaiming to everyone that this Jesus was most definitely the Messiah. He even gave testimony that He Jesus had to be the Messiah

because he himself saw the dove of the Holy Spirit rest on him at his baptism.

John may be doubting this now, but I don't think so. I don't think John is actually genuinely asking whether Jesus is the Messiah or not. I think he's asking, "why have you forsaken me here in prison?" "Why would you, if you are the Messiah, leave me, your servant, here to rot behind bars." John is asking the same question we often ask of Jesus. "Jesus, why would you allow bad things to happen to good people." And, as we've discussed before, that question is loaded. In reality there are no good people. We are all sinners deserving of hell. If there is anything good in us it is the Holy Spirit which lives in us through the salvation of Jesus Christ. In short, Jesus doesn't owe us anything because of our righteousness. We aren't righteous.

Perhaps a better question would be why would God allow bad things to happen to those of us who have believed on him? John had put all of his faith in Jesus and yet Jesus, full of all power, allowed John to remain in chains. The question "why do bad things happen to Christians?" is one of the most difficult questions in all of theology. And there are no easy answers. We know that sometimes Jesus allows us to go through trials to strengthen our faith, perseverance and character. I've preached on that many times. We also know that Jesus will allow his followers to go through hardships for the greater good. I've also preached on this many times. Regardless, the bottom line is always the same. We don't know exactly why God allows each hardship in our lives. I'm sure someday those answers will be revealed to us if when we get to Heaven we still desire them. But, for now we must have faith. **Faith is a spiritual determination that God is in control and has a plan and purpose for our pain.**

There are two truths that always help me to put pain and suffering in perspective when asking this question. First, this world is not our reward. Heaven is. We suffer in this world knowing that in the next there will be no more suffering. And, secondly, yes we may suffer in this life, but no one has suffered the way Jesus has. Jesus was betrayed by those he loved, despised by those he came to save, and tortured and crucified as an innocent man. **If God would allow his own son to suffer in such a way, why would we ever think we are above him allowing the same for us.** And yet we can take encouragement knowing that, **Jesus suffered in this life so that our sufferings in this life will be the only sufferings we will know for all of eternity.** So, can we trust Jesus when he allows us to suffer? The answer is, yes.

The second question is found in the next few verses. Can we trust Jesus to know who we are? Look with me at **Matthew 11:7-14**. **Jesus asks them who was John? Was he merely a weak man left to hardship? A reed shaken by the wind? Was he a wealthy man filled with a life of**

**ease? No he was neither. Here Jesus states that John was not a victim of God's negligence or indifference. He truly cared for him. But John was also not given an easy life. One day, as a son of the true king he would wear soft clothing, but not in this life. What he was was a prophet. He was a messenger of God, sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. He was like Elijah who was and will come again in the End times. He had a purpose and though it was great and very important, it did not bear weight on whether he was blessed with a good life or not. He was merely blessed to be a servant of Christ.**

Then Jesus says this, **vs.11**, "John was the greatest human ever born." Jesus obviously thought very highly of John the Baptist. He loved him and more importantly, he knew him thoroughly. Though John was in prison, Jesus still loved him and cared for him. And though it seems odd to think of, Jesus admired him. Jesus was well pleased with John. Here's the point, even though Jesus allowed John to go through his suffering, he never stop caring for him, thinking of him, and loving him.

Now we see **verse 12** in a greater light. Jesus reminds us that all of Christian history is filled with violence. They killed the prophets in the Old Testament, they rejected the message of God during the time of the judges and the kings. Now, they have thrown John in prison. This is par for the course for Israel. Those who proclaim the kingdom of God will be met with violence in some form or fashion. Some will be met with violence in the form of physical persecution. Many of our brothers and sisters in third world countries have experienced this and continue to experience it on a daily basis. Others will be met with violence in the form of physical, financial, relational, or spiritual trials. Though we often don't think of depression or divorce as a violent act, ask anyone who has been through it. Some would rather be physically beaten. Or what about those who have had cancer of some other disease. It is a violent act of the enemy allowed by our Lord. **Just because there isn't blood, doesn't mean our hardships aren't a form of violence. Whether in physical or spiritual form, every believer will come against the violence of our enemies; the devil and this cursed world.** So, when we face the violence of this world, does Jesus still know us? The answer is yes. He knows us and cares for us more than we could ever imagine.

The last question comes in **vs.15-19**. Can we trust Jesus' plan? Lastly here, Jesus makes a familiar charge to the people. You have ears but you don't hear. We play for you but you don't dance, we sing but you don't mourn. He uses the plight of John the Baptist to reveal to the people of Israel two things. One, John was the prophet who prepared the way. And two, I am the messiah whom he prepared the way for. Open your ears and hear. Instead, they rejected John as an outcast possessed by a demon, and Jesus as an outcast that dared to dine with sinners.

**We like the people here often question Jesus' plan. How does a man**

in the wilderness clothed in camels hair and eating locusts prepare the way for the kingdom of God? How can a man who eats with sinners be the Messiah? How can God be altruistic and benevolent and still allow suffering? Jesus' answer is plain. If you have a faith; a wisdom to see the truth, then your deeds will be the proof of that truth. If your wisdom says, that Jesus is nothing more than a pretender. Then your actions will be against Christ; atheistic and antagonistic towards the faith. If your wisdom says that Jesus is the messiah then your actions will be for Christ and in alignment with his word. The bottom line is this. **We can only be proven faithful to Christ when we choose to trust Him through the hardest times of our life.**

So now let us go back to **verse 6** which we intentionally skipped. Blessed are the ones who are not offended by Christ when he doesn't handle things the way they think he should. John obviously is frustrated with Jesus. Either he has begun to doubt him or he is upset with him because Jesus has not rescued him from jail. He thought that Jesus was not fulfilling his end of the bargain. John was thinking of the Christian life like a contract. But alas, the Christian life isn't a contract, it's a covenant. One in which Jesus has guaranteed us that he will never leave us nor forsake us and that we will spend eternity with him in paradise. Not because of anything we have done, but because of what he has done. And in that we are never told that this will be an easy life. In fact we are told time and time again that it will not be an easy life. We are not living for this world because this world has nothing for us.

And so the last thing Jesus ever tells John in this life is this; "My friend, your pain is required for the kingdom. I will not be setting you free. But you can find satisfaction in knowing that I love you and that I'm in control. I have a plan for your pain. You will be blessed if my plan doesn't offend you."

So, here's the question; "are you offended by God's plan?" Are you offended by Jesus when he doesn't do what you want when you want it. Do you shake a fist at him and take your ball and go home or do you stick with him and trust him in spite of your frustration and doubt? In fact, this may be enlightening to you this morning. **The Christian life is at it's best when you are resolved to not be offended when Jesus doesn't do what you want him to do. Blessed are those when hard times come, they are not offended by God who has purpose in their hardship.**

The second thing we need to see this morning is that... **The Death of John Reassures Us That Many Believers Will Face Martyrdom For The Sake of Christ.** Look with me at **Mark 6:14-29**. John was imprisoned and beheaded because he was unwavering in his message. And what was his message again? Sin demands repentance. Those who refuse to repent of sin cannot enter the kingdom of Jesus. And

Herod was living in sin. John had called Herod out on multiple occasions for his sinful adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. In short, Herod Antipas had divorced his first wife in order to steal and Marry his brother Philip's wife, who also happened to be their niece. It was a sick and twisted Jerry Springer drama and John was not scared to call a spade a spade, even if it was the King. Because of this Herod had him imprisoned and eventually killed. John died because of the Gospel.

Two things here, real quick. First, anyone who is willing to call sinners to repentance is in danger of facing martyrdom just like John. You will receive persecution, that is without a doubt. But if given enough liberty, the government will eventually allow you to be killed for your "hate speech." I know it seems like fear mongering, but look at the state of our world and tell me you can't see it coming around the corner. There are already at least a dozen countries in our world where it is okay to murder Christians. Given enough time, we will get there too.

Secondly, we don't need to be afraid of death. Death for the believer is a release from the sinful bondage of this world. Just as John's death freed from his physical chains, it also freed him from his spiritual chains. We do not need to fear death whether it comes from cancer or whether it comes from the firing squad. If we give our lives for the cause of Christ we will casually walk from this world, through the pearly gates, across the Jordan river, into eternal reward. We should never be offended to be called upon to give our lives for the sake of our savior. If the day ever comes where I'm called upon to do such, I will gladly answer that call. **Blessed are those when hard times come, they are not offended by God who has purpose in their hardship.**

### Application

Are you offended by Christ when he doesn't do what you want him to do when you want him to do it? Are you offended by Christ when he requires your pain for his glory? Are you offended at the prospect of laying down your life for the cause of Christ?

If so, repent of your offense. Jesus hasn't done anything wrong to you and everything right for you. You simple need to have faith! Hold fast to the truth of the Gospel, and keep your hope in the prize of heaven. Christ has not let you down. Christ has not forsaken you. He has suffered for you so that when we suffer we can know that it is for a greater purpose than we can ever imagine. You can find satisfaction even in the midst of suffering knowing that your pain is part of his plan. **Blessed are those when hard times come, they are not offended by God who has purpose in their hardship.**

### Conclusion

We aren't privy to John's last words as the sword came down upon

his neck. But I'm sure they were much like those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Martyr Polycarp who was burned alive when he refused to renounce Christ. "Lord God Almighty, Father of your beloved and blessed Child Jesus Christ. I bless you that you have thought me worthy of this day and this hour, that I may be able to share in the number of the martyrs, to drink from the cup of your Christ, that I may rise and live forever, body and soul, in the incorruption of the Holy Spirit. May I be admitted with those martyrs to your presence this day, as a welcomed and acceptable sacrifice. You have made my life a preparation for this; you let me see that this was to happen, and now you have brought it to pass, for you are the true and faithful God."