

Doubts and Fears over Christmas – *Luke 7:23*

Introduction – It is simply amazing how much power Christmas has over our nation. From the state of the economy to the simple fact of our calendar, Christmas holds reign over the affairs of men. And yet, still puzzling, is how much our nation and the unbelieving world do not understand Christmas. Worse, for all the blessings Christmas still brings to this nation, what a paradox it is to witness the hostility to Christmas. Some things never change.

The Doubts and Fears at the Coming of the Son – Whether it was Zacharias first doubting God when it was announced that Elizabeth would have a son (Luke 1:20), or his son's doubts later as to whether Jesus was the Christ (Luke 7:18-19), faithful, righteous men have still struggled with doubts. Fears immediately arise over the announcement of this coming King as well, from Herod (the Great)'s reaction to slaughter the male children (Matt 2:16) to the imprisonment of John, the forerunner of Christ by Herod the tetrarch (son of Herod the Great) - (Matt 14:3, Luke 7:20). What do we see? People of faith often struggle with their faith in the way Jesus comes (more on that). Those without faith often turn violently in their unbelief seeking to wipe out any knowledge of the coming of Jesus.

Our Embarrassment – I doubt any of us has been in the dire straits that John the Baptist found himself for publicly standing for God's righteousness. Yet, somewhat similar to John (Luke 7:18-23), we find ourselves feeling let down on Jesus' promises not yet fulfilled and doubting Christ's claims or second-guessing our understanding of them.

Jesus' Answer to John's Embarrassment – When Jesus spoke to a prophet of God in response to the prophet's question, He knew His actions and words would bring to mind the words of OT Prophets. John would have seen many passages in Jesus' words (Is 29:17-22, 35:5, 61:1-3) and would understand that this was a true answer. Jesus was the Christ and salvation had come. He just wasn't the Coming One in the way John expected.

The Stumbling Block (Luke 7:23) – Jesus is not surprised at John's consternation and issues this beatitude regarding how men respond to Him and to His ways. Unbelief caused His own townspeople to seek to kill Him (Luke 4:28-30). Some would come, listen to Him, and leave sorrowful (Luke 18:18-27). After one of His sermons, many left Him saying His words were too hard (John 6:60-66). Never does Jesus consider that He might have been too harsh, or too unloving, or that He could have said things better. We are told elsewhere that this is just what was prophesied would happen according to His plan (1 Pet 2:4-8). Without faith, the message of Jesus, the "reason for the season" makes no sense at all (1 Cor 1:21-28).

The Faithful Stumble as Well – But in this passage, we see that John, who is the faithful One, nearly stumbles. And might we not struggle in our prisons of trials and tribulations as well? How come God has not come to judge the wicked and vindicate my life? Why do I struggle due to wicked sinners; and why do I still struggle with my own wicked sin?

Putting This Together During Advent – Advent is the season of preparation; the season of waiting for the Light to come. It is also the time to remember that when that Light came it surprised everyone, even the faithful, in how it came and in what the Light did. He continues to surprise us with His strange ways of spreading His kingdom and building His church. Are we not, like John, tempted to say, "are you the Coming One? Are you really going to, as the hymn says, make your blessings flow far as the curse is found?"

The Twists and Turns of Growing Faith – And like John, Jesus answers us from His Word. The OT prophesies and the story of Jesus' coming in humility, remind us of how crazy this gospel work is. It is as crazy as a man claiming to be the Son of God and going to a cross to be crucified. Why, it appears that we have no control over this gospel work at all. Is that exactly what we need to learn? And so, it is only by faith, and not by sight, that we celebrate Advent, Christmas, and believe "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come."

Jesus has come saying, "*Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*"

Amen, and Merry Christmas.