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19 And summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord,
saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"
20 And when the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has
sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for
someone else?'" 21 At that very time He cured many people of diseases
and afflictions and evil spirits; and He granted sight to many who were
blind. 22 And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John
what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame
walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up,
the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 23 "And
blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me."*

Expectations. Is your experience with Christ and the church that is His body in this world what you expect?

We have a unique section of scripture before us this morning. Unlike any other. You know, one of the qualities of this book that affirms that it was written by God is that it doesn't just include the victories. It doesn't gloss over the failures and cover them up.

Peter denies Christ. John the baptizer doubts. Paul and Barnabas get into a giant disagreement and split up. The heroes are human just like us, and just like us, they fail. And the failures don't get swept into a corner and not mentioned. Forgotten and hushed so they don't detract from the cause.

And that makes sense if you think about it, because the book, with 66 authors that spans over 20 centuries is really about one thing. Human failure and God's redemption.

In chapter 3 of the first book, the book of beginnings, Adam fails and his sin drives the entire human family into ruinous separation from the God who we were created to know and worship and glorify and enjoy. Gone.

One massive failure and we're all born into that Adamic family. Ruined. Tainted. Separated. Removed from the presence of God. Destined for destruction.

And it gets worse. Since Adam forfeited the position of rule that God gave him over this planet, this earth, Satan stepped into that void and he rules this world. Violence, chaos, murder, tears, and rebellion against the good God who loves us and created us to know and enjoy Him are the inheritance of the failure of one man, our human father, Adam.

This book from cover to cover is the story of God reaching into that rebellion and redeeming a remnant for Himself out of this world. God selects a people for Himself, He chooses before the foundations of the world, He chooses a select group of fallen people and at great cost, the death of His only son, He purchases a remnant of fallen men to belong to Him.

He purchases them out of the rebellion of this world and separates them to Himself while they still dwell in the midst of a rebellious evil world. Does that sound like a formula where failures might occur. Absolutely.

But there's one person in this story who never fails. Ever. Not once. And that is our loving merciful God who is always faithful and never fails, and who ultimately guards those who belong to Him and delivers them safely to Himself, yet with many failures along the way to report.

Do God's people fail? Yes. Often and in many ways. Does He lose even one that belongs to Him. Not one. We believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Those whom Christ purchased with His blood at great cost are then "kept" by Him. The perseverance of the saints. He owns them. He keeps them. He protects them, and guards them and He doesn't lose any.

Does it get confusing along the way? Oh yeah. The church is a revolving door of people coming and people leaving. Right. We see it even here in our little family. People come and people go. They come for a while and then we don't see them again. And they didn't leave town, they only left . . . us. Why is that?

One pole says about 31% of the world's population identifies as Christian. That's almost a third. That's easy math. Google says the population of Tonopah Nevada is 2478. That means we should have 800 people worshipping with us. Easy peasy.

You say, you're getting a little greedy Jim, there are 3 Protestant churches in Tonopah plus Catholics. OK, I'm willing to share. That's still 200 people in each church. Where are they?? 2478 and a third are Christians. We can't even get 2 1/2% of the "Christians" in Tonopah according to that pole to come to church??

Something's wrong with that picture. Something's desperately wrong with that picture. And it's getting worse. We're getting down to the nitty gritty. In VBS on the only night I was able to visit, there were 4 kids.

VBS used to have such a positive appeal, even to non-Christians. It was a safe place to send your kids to have some fun and maybe learn not to lie and steal and fight with each other. Good positive influence.

How much has changed within the last year? People in Congress shrieking at the top of their lungs that someone is unfit to be a representative of the ruling classes of the government if they're a Christian. If they hold those evil bigoted views that Jesus held.

The SBC making the news over and over talking about the problems of sexual abuse. Child abuse. We don't even talk about the Catholics any more. The Baptists are far more salacious.

Turn on the media in whatever talking box you've got in front of you and the message is replete. Christians bad. Christians are bad people. Dangerous bigots. Haters. Christians are excluded from the cultural conversation. Christians are excluded from the culture. Keep your distance from christians while the culture decides what we really need to do with them. We need to punish christians, and we're getting there, but meanwhile, keep some distance.

Add to that scenario, the church is a mess. The church is a disaster. I'm talking about the larger church in Nevada. Not ours. I visited with Larisa for 45 minutes or so. She had 3 excellent competent teachers for 4 kids. She was free to visit for a time.

Two of the groups in Nevada locally that she was partnering with are imploding. She gets to one and discovers they've merged with another church and now have women in the role of elder / pastor. She's going to have to step away from un-sound doctrine.

Another church she's visiting a lady gets up and shouts that the pastor is a heretic preaching heresy because he quoted some verse from a non King James Version. Heretic! Disrupts the whole church. And a third church has gotten so removed from sound doctrine, sound teaching that she can no longer associate with them. All in Nevada.

The culture says beware of christians and it sounds like . . . maybe they're right. The churches are going banana's just at the moment the culture is distancing themselves anyways. It's a scary time. A storm is brewing and it's moving toward us fast.

I'll make a prognostication that I also shared with Larisa. When the persecution comes, if the Lord tarries, what I see is people who claim to be christians persecuting the few real christians that are holding firm to this book. Christian against christian. Family against family. It's not going to be clear black and white. It's going to be this shade of gray

persecuting that shade of gray, and which camp do we get in?

How far do we bend? Where will the lines be that divide? It's rather scary to be thinking about? Are we up to the task? When the storm descends and we have to make hard decisions, are we up to the task? John was confused by Jesus. That's a warning to us. Confusion about what God is doing in the world is a very real possibility.

John is a man who is in a tough spot, because of his big mouth. Right? He's in prison because he transgressed his culture's views on sexual liberty. He had the audacity to tell the king that he was living in a sexual lifestyle that God forbids.

He had his brother's wife. Pretty tame compared to our current culture. One man one woman. Pretty old school tame ordinary boring sin. We wouldn't even blink. John called him out on it.

So John is in prison at Machaerus. Machaerus was a fort that was north and east of the dead sea. It's elevation was about the same as perhaps Scotty's Castle? Beatty is 3300 ft. Machaerus was 2200 ft. and the terrain is like what you'll find as you're climbing out of death valley. Actually there's less vegetation. It's more like what you see at Furnace Creek as you climb a little bit up that canyon.

So let's set the scene. John isn't rotting in prison, he's probably cooking. Let's review. John's dad is visited by an angel to report that John will be born via a miraculous birth to two people perhaps in their 80's who have never been able to have kids. And the angel tells Zecharias that John will be the fore-runner to Messiah.

John becomes a mighty prophet, the first real prophet in Israel in over 400 years. He lives in the desert and eats locust and wild honey. He's like the re-incarnation of Elijah. The real deal. And he is busy doing God's work, God's will preaching that the Authority to Reign of God, the

Kingdom of God, is at hand.

John is getting people ready for Jesus to come and depose Satan and crush all unrighteousness and rule on David's throne. That's his business and he's good at it. The people stream from everywhere to be baptized by John. They want to be prepared to go into the kingdom. Thousands come and repent of their sin and are baptized in the Jordan river.

Then Jesus appears and asks John to baptize Him. John says why would I baptize you? You need to baptize me. Jesus says permit it now and John complies. When Jesus comes up out of the water the heavens are opened and the Spirit of God descends on Him as a dove, and a voice out of heaven says, This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.

John affirms and says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is the Messiah. Then John says, I need to fold up and fold out. He must increase and I must decrease. He keeps preaching and baptizing people into repentance at the Jordan.

Then the deal with Herod happens and John is whisked off to prison. He's locked in a bake oven, but he knows, Jesus is going to ascend David's throne and rule the world, right? Herod will be crushed, right. Unrighteousness will be judged and crushed, right?

Not so fast John. When Herod throws John in prison, and Jesus hears about it, Jesus beats feet for safer territory. He goes up to Galilee. He puts some space between Him and Herod. Safe space. OK, John didn't see that coming.

Jesus is busy saving tax collectors. People that sold out to the enemy to get rich. And He's going to parties with tax collectors and other outcasts. And He's even associating with centurions. Roman soldiers. He goes at the request of the enemy and delivers a centurions slave from near death.

Meanwhile the greatest prophet who ever lived is baking in a bake oven. Jesus runs off where it's safe and heals everybody, and is clearly not ascending David's throne and crushing evil. It's all very weird.

The reason I had the long introduction about how weird things are getting, and we haven't even scratched the surface yet, we're looking at the storm from a distance, it's still out there somewhere. We see the sky blaze up from lightning but we don't hear the thunder yet. The storm hasn't gotten to us yet.

But my point for you all is, when it does, know ahead of time, it's going to be confusing. The greatest prophet who ever lived is thoroughly confused about what God is doing. Nothing is falling in place according to what he expected. What do you do with that?

Listen to Malachi, where the prophet who preceeds Messiah is announced;

3:1 *“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,”* says the LORD of hosts. 2 *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap.* 3 *“And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.* 4 *“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.*

4:1 *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,”* says the LORD of hosts, *“so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”* 2 *“But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth*

and skip about like calves from the stall. 3 “And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.

John was preaching a harsh repentance warning the people of this refiners fire. Repent! A fire is coming. Get ready. And the people are getting ready. They're repenting and expectant. The Son of David is coming to set up His kingdom.

John's baking in prison and Jesus has beat feet to safer places, and frankly, the reports coming back to John don't sound anything like Malachi's prediction. John's like I did my part. I'm in prison for doing my part. Where's the kingdom. Jesus doesn't seem very king like.

Up at the top of Galilee saving tax collectors and healing slaves of centurions. Partying with the riff raff.

Did you know it's OK to be confused about what God is doing?
Isaiah 55:8“ *For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways,*” declares the LORD.

*9“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

Psalm 50 states our problem;

*21 “These things you have done, and I kept silence;
You thought that I was just like you;
I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes.*

*22 “Now consider this, you who forget God,
Lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.*

We think God is just like us. We're confused when God doesn't do what

we would do. We tell Him what he ought to do and then we're stunned when He doesn't take our counsel, He does it different. Really really different and we're confused. We thought God was just like us.

What do you do when you thought you had everything figured out and God throws a whammy at you that you never saw coming? That's exactly where John is at in our verses this morning.

18 And the disciples of John reported to him about all these things.

What things? Everything Jesus is doing up at Galilee. You know the other gospel writers who record the event where Matthew Levi the tax collector is called to be an apostle and he throws a giant party and invites all the other rejects of society; the other gospels tell us an important piece of information regarding this story about John's disciples. They were there.

None of Matthew's friends would be on the cultural inside in Israel. Tax collectors were the scum. They sold out to Rome so they could get rich skimming money from their own countrymen. You couldn't get any lower than that. Tax collectors and harlots and dogs and vomit always showed up in the same conversations in Israel. Matthew invites all of those guys and has a giant party with Jesus as guest of honor. John's disciples watch from a distance.

Listen to a passage in Malachi 3 that I didn't read earlier; 3:5 *“Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, **and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages,** the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.*

God is furious against people who oppress wage earners and take away their wages by oppression. Now in John's mind does that not sound like

Matthew Levi??

The other gospel writers tell us there were 2 groups sitting outside the giant dinner party Matthew threw for Jesus and the rest of the outcasts. The pharisee's. We expect that. The other group sitting outside, asking questions about what in the world Jesus is doing in there was; the disciples of John.

In Matthew 9, the setting is this feast, the pharisees ask the harsh question and Jesus answers them He's come to heal the sick, not the well, which is a solid burn because they're sicker than anyone and they think they're the well. That's a hopeless situation. When the sick think they're well and they think the only person who can heal is sick. Hopeless.

But then the disciples of John ask this question: It isn't from the same mindset as the pharisee's. Confused, maybe. Judgement? No, they're not there. They're outside with the pharisees at this deal but they're respectful;

Mt. 9: 14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" Like, Jesus, we don't get it. John said you're the Messiah but shouldn't we be fasting? Why are your guys having a party?

You can read His answer in Matthew 9. We just studied it a few weeks ago. The attendants of the bride groom don't fast. The wine skins that burst. You're trying to put me into a box that I'll never fit in.

It's those disciples who go back and report to John who is locked up in a bake oven. Jesus is acting really weird. REALLY weird. He isn't doing anything we would have thought He would be doing. In fact it looks like exactly the opposite of what we would expect.

There's no fire burning up the wicked while we stand by fasting and

waiting for that. In fact, we just came from a giant party thrown for Jesus BY the wicked. And His disciples are eating and drinking at a giant festival full of wicked sinners while we're fasting and waiting for fire to reign down from heaven.

It isn't adding up. AT all! Many commentators say, John himself never doubted, he sent these guys back with this question because they were doubting. Well, that isn't what it says. That's a leap we really don't need to take.

It's OK to doubt . . . as long as you go to the right source with your doubts. And that's exactly what John does. He goes to the source. It's OK to cry out to God in humility; What in the world are you doing!!

It's OK to come to Jesus like the father of the demon possessed boy who said if you can help us, please . . . and Jesus says, If I can??? Remember that story from Mark 9.

But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” 23 And Jesus said to him, “If You can!” All things are possible to him who believes.” 24 Immediately the boy’s father cried out and began saying, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

That's OK to say. Help my unbelief. You've brought your doubts and your unbelief to the right source. That's what John does next;

19 And summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?”

Are You the ***expected one***? That's code. That's jewish code. All through the old testament scriptures those words only mean one thing. Expected one is the jewish code words for Messiah. Are you the Messiah.

But by using those words, John immediately takes us to something that is lost in our modern times, our modern church. Something that is downplayed and almost dismissed.

Expected One is a loaded term. By saying that John is saying we want to know if you are the one that is described in God's revealed truth. By asking the question that way, John is saying, we've read the books. We have a set of expectations because of what God's book says.

We christians need to learn from John. Read the book. 99% of the answers are there. John is asking the question from the perspective of a subject matter expert. We can quote all the passages about the expected one. The Messiah. We've read the book. We know what every one of the passages about the expected one says. We can quote them.

You're confusing us. You don't look like what we expected based on revealed truth which we've studied and know. Are you that expected one? The one that should be aligning with all the passages about the expected one.

I can't say it any better than John MacArthur does, so I'll read you a long quote from his sermon about this passage. This is John the baptist's mindset. This is where the questions come from; <quote>

JMaC= Messiah wasn't doing what everybody thought He would do, which was knock off the Romans, right? First there would be a military movement on Messiah's part in which He would massacre the Romans. It would set Israel free from Roman occupation. Then there would be the great society would come. Abrahamic blessing would flood the land. There would be a welfare state, free food for everybody, health, wealth, prosperity, the whole business. All the wicked people would be thrown out. All of the apostate people would be judged by God in a Day of the Lord kind of holocaust. And the glory of the kingdom would fill the earth and everybody would come to Israel and the desert would blossom

like a rose and there would be a river opened from Jerusalem flowing east, and the lion would lie down with the lamb and everything the prophet said about the glories of the kingdom would come to pass. And David's greater Son would sit on the throne and He would reign and rule and all nations would be subject to them and Israel would be the glory of God on earth.

End quote. John the baptizer says, that's our picture of the "expected one" and you don't seem to fit. What's going on? Answer quickly because I'm getting baked like a cake up here at Maechaerus.

20 And when the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'"

The jews, over the centuries had worked up quite a list of things that they imagined would precede the Messiah. Not from scripture either. Malachi is clear.

Jewish tradition by the time of Jesus was that Elijah would come, and then Jeremiah, and then as many as 4 other prophets before messiah. You can find that in their traditions.

And that's what you get when Jesus asks His disciples "Who do people say that I am" in Matthew 16.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

Their answer fits with the jewish imaginations about who precedes messiah. Elijah, and Jeremiah and a whole bunch of other prophets are all possible answers to who the people think Jesus is.

That confusion is perhaps reflected in John's questions. Are you Him? Or are you one of these other predecessors and then it makes sense that you're doing stuff, but it isn't the stuff we expect. Maybe that's a possibility.

John asks the question in Jewish code. Are You the Expected One. Are you the coming one. Are you the Messiah. It's code they all understood. Are you the expected one according to the scriptures.

And Jesus answers in code. The answer Jesus gives will send John straight back to prophecy. Are you the one the prophets foretold according to the scriptures. Here's who I am according to the scriptures.

Again, people, we need to be bathed in this book so that we can also talk in code. John isn't asking something stupid. This discussion is bathed in God's revealed truth. Are you the expected one.

Here's what the book says about the expected one;

21 At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He granted sight to many who were blind. 22 And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

He answers in scriptural code. Oh how I long to be so bathed in scripture that when these discussions come we know exactly where to go in scripture to volley ideas back and forth that are scripture based.

The modern church discourages that. I've been accused of being a Bible fathead, as if that's something bad. Set all that doctrine and scripture aside for the sake of unity. It isn't important. Let's all just get along (in

the words of Rodney King) Sacrifice doctrine and scripture for the sake of unity.

Well, I hate to tell you this, but John asks his question based in revealed truth and Jesus answers John's question based in revealed truth. That's our model. John's portions about expected one are all fire and judgement. Jesus portions are messianic, but not fire. Jesus answers John's question in two ways. First of all, what I am doing IS foretold in scripture.

the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

Those words are triggers for John's mind to go and recall scripture. But the other lesson for John is that Jesus is selective. He draws from 2 scriptures that John could quote, but what He doesn't say is almost more important than what HE does say. He's purposefully selective.

He gives John passages of scripture, but they are partial quotes. I'm doing this part, but not the rest.

Isaiah 35:5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

*Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is on Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to **preach good news to the poor.***

John knows his scripture and his mind will snap like a bear trap to those two passages that Jesus has included in His answer.

The problem is; John knows those passages in total, but Jesus is selective.

Listen to Isaiah 35 as John knows it;

4 Say to those with anxious hearts: "Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance. With divine retribution He will come to save you." 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue will shout for joy. For waters will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert....

This is why we need to know scripture. Jesus actually says more to John by His selective quote than what the words say. Jesus says I'm doing this part. Blind people are seeing. Deaf people are hearing. But He purposely leaves out the part John is wishing He would say. *Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance. With divine retribution He will come to save you.*"

Oh how John wants to hear that first part. Divine retribution would be really nice right about now! Some divine vengeance would be so welcome. Jesus leaves that part out, and John is painfully aware of it.

I'm doing the blind and deaf thing John, not the vengeance and retribution part.

There's a second trigger for John, just as painful, in fact, perhaps moreso. This one is like a slap in the face for poor John.

*the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, **the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM***

The poor have the gospel preached to them. That's a trigger in John's mind for Isaiah 61. That's a direct quote from Isaiah 61. But again, it's painful how selective Jesus is, because John wants the other part of the verse. Desperately so.

*1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To **bring good news to the afflicted**;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And freedom to prisoners;*

*2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,*

Jesus says I've been anointed to preach the gospel, the good news to the afflicted and poor. That's what I'm doing John. And that's where He stops. Stops cold. And John is thinking, how about my broken heart? How about proclaiming liberty to the captives! And freedom to prisoners!

I'm happy your preaching the gospel but it sure would be nice if you would bust me out of here. What about my broken heart? What about the favorable year of the Lord. What about some vengeance. Vengeance would be good right now. Even comfort for all who mourn. I'd even settle for some comfort, Jesus.

Since John knows the scripture, Jesus is actually saying more to John by what He doesn't include than what He does.

No liberty for you John. Not now. No vengeance. Not now. The only part of Isaiah 61 I'm addressing at the moment is preaching the gospel to the poor. Ouch.

Now if Herod throws you in prison and you don't know the scripture, you can't receive the message. You can't have a scriptural conversation. Are you the "*coming One*". **Code.** *the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the*

lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM
Code. But you must know the scriptures or the answer in code back is meaningless.

In effect, Jesus by being selective is saying; I'm fulfilling the scripture, but not all of it. Not now. And then the most important thing of all, because Jesus knows very well, John isn't going to like the answer. At all.

In fact John's disciples need to hurry back with Jesus message because soon, very soon, a beautiful teenage girl is going to dance and a lascivious old wicked king is going to foolishly promise her anything she wants, in exchange for who knows what . . . and what she's going to want is the head of John the baptizer on a platter.

Jesus final words to John are for each and every christian that finds him or herself in some part of the plan of God that is devastatingly confusing. This makes no sense. Why would God allow this. Why this?? What in the world is going on?? This isn't what I expected! This isn't what I signed up for.

We can imagine John saying something like that, and we can see a million more times in church history when God's people are devastated and are asking similar questions. What is going on God? This doesn't make sense!

Why does Larisa have to struggle every day with debilitating pain? Why don't you heal her? She's like the best tool in the toolbox God, why wouldn't you heal her? Me we could probably do without, but Larisa, we need her?

Multiply that by about a million times? We look at the providence of God and we say, Why? This doesn't make sense. It looks to us like

Satan is gonna win this thing. Why is it so difficult.

Why did it take me 49 years before I got to some place where I might actually be useful. Whose got 49 years?? Why didn't I get here in 9 years? Or 9 months?? Even better. It seems like my life span has been mostly wasted, and even now, I'm only seeing the most minimal of fruit. Why?

We have all these questions, and they come from the right place. We want to see Satan lose and God win. We want, we desperately want to see Jesus glorified, victorious, crushing Satan. Stepping on his head. Glorified. We want that, and what we see is more like 2 steps forward, 3 steps back.

In our poor minds we're thinking, this can never add up to victory. And Jesus says the most remarkable thing to John, and to us;

vs. 23 "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me."

And that's also code. You have to know your book. Where does this take John, who knows the book, knows the code.

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed."

Isaiah 8: "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

When Jesus says to tell John, blessed is he who doesn't stumble over me, both of those scriptures should come into John's mind. All of it should be for a comfort to John. Along with Psalm 118, you can build an entire doctrine of Jesus. John had it all at his grasp;

Psalm 118

*22 The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.*

*23 This is the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.*

*24 This is the day which the LORD has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Those few words of Jesus, don't stumble over me, will bring all of this scripture into John's mind.

The builders, the rulers in Jerusalem will stumble over God's stone. They will reject Him. But God will place Him as a precious corner stone, and he who believes in that stone will not be disturbed.

And when you realize *that*, your circumstances seem small. Even John in prison will think on what Jesus says and rejoice with the Psalmist from so long ago.

23 This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.

We don't have to understand God's providence in order for it to be marvelous. All we have to do is release ourselves to the sovereignty of God and say, with the Psalmist; *23 This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day which the LORD has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

This has gotten longer than usual, longer than I planned for it. And that's OK, the Spirit has been wonderful to me as I've studied. This is SO important for us. If hard times come we need this. Desperately important.

I'll finish now with words from Habakkuk, who was in a very similar place as John was.

Israel was corrupt, wasted, and Habakkuk has been crying out to God for revival. You've got to bring revival to your people God. They're horrible and the only thing that will work is revival. Huge revival God. Bring it please, you must. That's Habakkuk's fervent prayer for his people Israel.

And God tells Habakkuk, I'm not going to bring revival, I'm going to bring the Assyrians and they're going to crush my people. Not the answer Habakkuk was looking for. His mind is boggled that God would use a nation twice as wicked as Israel to punish Israel.

And it goes on like that for 3 chapters. Habakkuk keeps calling out: God, you must be kidding. That's a terrible plan, God. 3 chapters. And God graciously keeps revealing to Habakkuk what He's going to do, which is awful. Awesome, but awful. And finally Habakkuk gives in to the sovereignty of God. Listen to his words when he gets to that point;

Hab 3:16 *I heard and my inward parts trembled*, (sometimes we don't want to know God's ways. . .it's too much)

At the sound my lips quivered.

Decay enters my bones,

And in my place I tremble.

Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,

For the people to arise who will invade us.

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom,

And there be no fruit on the vines,

Though the yield of the olive should fail,

And the fields produce no food,

*Though the flock should be cut off from the fold,
And there be no cattle in the stalls,*

*18 Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*

*19 The Lord GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places.*

Some day when we see John in heaven maybe he can share with us that after the stone thing, his mind went to this passage of Habakkuk for his strength and his comfort. We should not be surprised.

What we should each do though, is memorize Habakkuk 3:16 - 19, so when we get thrown in some dungeon we'll have it close in mind. It's not about us and our little lives now. It's about His Glory.