

Day 5

Today's Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 NLT

"John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, ³ "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?"

⁴ Jesus told them, "Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen— ⁵ the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor." ⁶ And he added, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me."

Backstory:

John the Baptist was a close relative of Jesus, and more importantly, he was the first to publicly herald him as the long awaited Jewish Messiah — God in human flesh come to deliver the Jews and bring life to Israel. John's fame and popularity grew because of his odd appearance and fiery preaching until many began pointing to him as the Messiah, but all the while he kept redirecting the crowd's attention away from himself and towards Jesus. He was convinced Jesus was the Son of God come to save the world.

Eventually, his convictions and public proclamations about Jesus landed John on death row, and this turn of events threw John into a tailspin. Depression, doubt, and confusion set in. He couldn't understand how — if his cousin really was the Messiah — Jesus could leave him rotting in jail. After all, not only did Jesus have the power to work miracles, but according to the prophet Isaiah, when the Messiah arrived he would give sight to the blind, strengthen the legs of the lame, cure lepers, raise the dead, AND SET CAPTIVES FREE. (Isaiah 35 and 61)

So John sent his friends to Jesus to find out what was going on. "Are you the Messiah or not? Was I wrong about you? Have you forgotten about me?" And Jesus sent back the strange reply we read in today's passage. 'Hey, John, you've been right about me from Day One. I'm the Messiah God promised through Isaiah. I'm doing everything he said I'd do. I'm healing the blind, the lepers, the deaf, and the lame. I'm giving hope to the poor and feeding the destitute. Shoot, I'm even raising the dead.'

Jesus' response to John is almost word-for-word what Isaiah prophesied — EXCEPT — he left out the part John most wanted to hear. Jesus didn't say anything about setting prisoners free. In other words, Jesus said, 'Yes, I'm the Messiah. Yes, I'm healing the sick and raising the dead. But, no, I'm not getting you out of prison.' Imagine how John felt. Jesus said, 'I'm bringing life and hope and healing to all sorts of people, but your situation's not gonna improve.'

Why wouldn't Jesus fix things for John? Why wouldn't he eradicate his problems, shake the prison bars until they broke free, and set John free? The answer's found in verse 6. *"And Jesus added, 'God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.'"*

Jesus had omitted the line about setting prisoners free, but he also added something. He said, 'God reserves special blessing for those who stay true to me when their lives and their world are falling apart.' Or, 'When you join me and my mission, it's not a promise that life will never get dark and scary. Rather, it's a promise that even in your suffering and doubt you can bring life, hope, and healing to others.'

Think about it:

A lot that's happening in our world and our city doesn't make sense right now. The same may be true in your personal life. There's all sorts of unwarranted pain and unjust suffering, and God could easily step in and fix things. It's 100% within His power to do so. In fact, He could have done a dozen different things to thwart the gunman's plans. Or prevent the cancer from growing. Or keep the hurricane from making landfall. BUT HE DIDN'T.

God doesn't always calm the storms of our lives. Sometimes He allows us to endure more than we can bear; so that by suffering well and not walking away from our faith we can bring life to those around us.

Will you suffer well? Will you allow your response to darkness to light the way for someone else to join Jesus? Will you take the soul crushing blows life's throwing at you and throw a counterpunch of love and praise that frees others to fully live? Will you join Jesus in bringing life to our city even when you feel like you're dying inside?

DAY FIVE JOURNAL

What does this say about God? _____

What does this say about people? _____

What am I going to do about it? I will _____
