

• *John the Baptist in prison – puzzled*

• *John did not understand the sequence of events – salvation first – then judgement*

• *Consider the signs*

1. He points John to the miracles

• *Prophecies fulfilled*

• *The miracles – a foretaste of the final triumph ought to show John that Jesus is indeed 'the One who is to come'*

2. Jesus points John to His preaching to the poor

• *The genuine message of the gospel is good news even to the most needy person*

3. Jesus encourages John to go on believing

At this time Jesus has been ministering for at least a year. It must be about mid-year AD 31, and about six months after John's arrest and imprisonment. John has been hearing about Jesus but he is puzzled. Like all of the Old Testament prophets John was given a vision of **all** that the Saviour would do in salvation and in judgement. But the judgement has not come; John was not given the sequence of events. John did not know that the judgement could be much later than the salvation. He was not aware that Jesus' first coming would be followed by Jesus' Second Coming centuries later. So he sends a message to Jesus: 'Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?' ^{☞1}. Jesus does not simply say 'Yes' or 'No'. Instead He invites John to consider the 'signs' of who He is.

1. **He points John to the miracles.** Many people were being healed and delivered from countless ailments and troubles ^{☞1}. The miracles are signs of Jesus' very great faith. In the prophecies of Isaiah ^{☞2} it was predicted that when God's Servant came He would put bandages on wounded people, and would proclaim release for the prisoners. Perhaps John feels that Jesus is not doing this; he himself is in prison and there is no release for him from his imprisonment! Yet Jesus' many miracles are in fact binding up broken-hearted people and releasing people from many kinds of bondage. But John continues in prison. It is a sign that some have to suffer for the sake of the kingdom. The final triumph of the kingdom has not yet come. Yet the miracles which are the foretaste of the final triumph ought to show John that Jesus is indeed 'the One who is to come'.

2. **Jesus points John to His preaching to the poor.** One of the greatest indications that Jesus really is the promised Saviour is that He is preaching to the poor ^{☞1}. This is what Isaiah said would be true. 'Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the poor'. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only message which is really ideal for the totally needy. It says that nothing is needed to endear us to God except willingness to receive His grace. It says that God will give salvation, that the empty hand of faith is the great channel of blessing. It says that the rich have no advantages with regard to the things of God, and the poor have no danger of exclusion because of their destitution. No other message is like it. Jesus selects this relevance of the gospel to the poor as the proof of His authenticity. If our message is not good news to the poor, it is not Christian faith. If our message requires people to be wealthy, or if it is highly suitable to the intellectual or to clever people but has nothing to say to the needy – then it is not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Conversely, if our message is genuinely and truly an announcement of good news to even the most needy person, it is likely to be the genuine article.

3. **Jesus encourages John to go on believing.** 'Blessed is he who takes no offence at me' ^{☞1}. John has been troubled by something about Jesus that he does not understand. But he has done one thing right. He has taken his doubt to Jesus Himself! When we have doubts and difficulties about Jesus that is always a good thing to do. Take them to Jesus Himself and let Him answer them.

^{☞1} 7:18-20

^{☞1} 7:21-22
^{☞2} see Isaiah 61:1

^{☞1} 7:22

^{☞1} 7:23

John the Baptist - his greatness

1. John was notable for his firmness

Jesus' reply is: there is blessing on the person who goes on believing despite a few unanswered questions. One does not need to know the answer to every question in order to trust in Jesus. All of this leads Jesus to say something about John the Baptist and his greatness.

1. **John was notable for his firmness.** He was not a 'reed shaken by the wind' ^{Ⓜ1}. He was not a wavering or easy-going person. He was called to preach about sin and repentance. Yet his preaching about the sin of Herod Philip had brought trouble into his life and now he was in prison. But he was a man who stood firm.

Ⓜ1 7:24

2. John was notable for his discipline.

2. **John was notable for his discipline.** He was not a man who lived for earthly luxury ^{Ⓜ1}. He did not wear the nice comfortable clothes of people who lived in palaces. God had called him to live a tough and disciplined life. He was not looking for a life of ease or pleasure.

Ⓜ1 7:25

3. John was a prophet

3. **John was a prophet** ^{Ⓜ1}. He was a man who was given what to say by God, like the prophets of the Old Testament.

Ⓜ1 7:26a

4. John occupied a special place in God's salvation

4. **John occupied a special place in God's salvation** ^{Ⓜ1}. He had the unique task of summarising the message of all the Old Testament prophets. He preached about sin and salvation and made it clear that Jesus was a Saviour from sin, not simply the kind of Messiah that the politicians were hoping for.

Ⓜ1 7:26b

5. John was the last great servant of God before the coming of the kingdom in Jesus

5. **John was the last great servant of God before the coming of the kingdom in Jesus** ^{Ⓜ2}. Among preachers and prophets no one was greater than John before the coming of Jesus, but he was not in the kingdom of God introduced by Jesus. He was not one of Jesus' disciples, and he was not present on the Day of Pentecost. John was a great man but anyone who came under the ministry of Jesus, who knew of the atoning death of Jesus and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by Jesus would be in an altogether greater position.

Ⓜ2 7:28

Slices of Bread from Sovereign World Trust

Chapters from Michael Eaton's *Preaching Through The Bible* reformatted for Internet distribution



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His expository commentaries are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.

Slices of Bread is an initiative of **Sovereign World Trust**, a UK based ministry that provides Biblical teaching literature to pastors, colleges and libraries in the developing nations. Each week a mailing is distributed with four PDF attachments. We encourage people to forward them or give them out to others. Slices are available free of charge. To be added to the mailing list, please send your request to: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk



We are always pleased to receive feedback on how you have been using "Slices" or suggestions to improve this programme.