
Advent 3: No room for blind faith

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 14 December 2025

Isaiah 61:1-3 • Matthew 11:2-11



Isaiah 61:1-3 The Good News of Deliverance

THE spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to

proclaim the year of the

LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

Matthew 11:2-11 Messengers from John the Baptist

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Sermon outline:

John, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”
Jesus, “Go and tell John what you hear and see.

What of faith, and is it blind?

Who doesn’t have faith?

Were Jesus contemporaries fantasists?

Does the bible call us to trust without grounds for trust?

What makes a prophet a prophet?

Jesus fulfilling prophecy.

Is it OK to have questions?

Prayer: Lord Jesus open our eyes to you truth and give us confidence that what we see in your word is trustworthy and we can entrust ourselves to you, amen.

When unpacking the scriptures I often highlight the encouragements we find in God’s word, the bible, to share our faith and do everything we can to make the gospel as accessible and attractive to folk as we can.

But I fully acknowledge that, given the world we live in, and the way church and faith in general is portrayed and viewed, that is quite a challenge.

- We live in a time where certainty and having opinions is dismissed as being dogmatic.
- To disagree with someone is to attack them.
- Use words carefully lest you be accused of hate speech.
- Express a view that is not politically correct and risk being cancelled.

Such a climate has a chilling effect on free and open speech. Writers, social commentators, journalists, academics, teachers, university lectures, some preachers even, tow the party line lest they fall foul of those who can effectively ruin their careers.

History shows that nothing good comes when those in power try to keep, or increase their power, by controlling and silencing people.

This is becoming more evident as the decades pass. In my 20's I devoured many of the books by Solzhenitsyn along with other Russian writers.

Solzhenitsyn barely survived the terror of Stalinist Russia and spent years in the Siberian labor camps. Shockingly, it is estimated that between 20 and 60 million Soviets died during the period of Stalin's purges, depending on what you factor in.

I've lived long enough, and read widely enough, to know that when you start to create an environment where people are afraid to speak out it is not going to end well.

Free speech is important. Even if it means letting some pretty repulsive ideas have a voice. As long as there is freedom for any view to be challenged and debated, free speech is healthier, and less dangerous, than prescriptive censorship.

It will be interesting to see what the history books say of the current American political and cultural system that would appear to be silencing free speech where it can, and punishing it where it can't. ■

Cross neoliberalism, fascism, and consumerist Christianity, and it looks chillingly like the current political and cultural climate where some pretty strange bed fellows seem to be cozying up to each other.

What then of a world where truth is flexible, and it is largely controlled and shaped by a small group of powerbrokers and manipulate facts to suit their addenda. Given the internet, and all that goes with it, I think it is becoming somewhat obvious that more than ever before in human history, we are living in a world where the truth doesn't have to be true.

What of the role of the church in such a world? We follow the one who says "I am the truth". We follow the one who claims to shows us the right and true way to live. Can you see the way our truth denying or discounting culture tears at the very heart of the gospel.

We have moved so far past Pilates mocking question to Jesus. What is truth? Our voice and witness is needed today in a way that is unparalleled in human history. There is nothing redundant about the church and the gospel message that we have been entrusted and empowered with.

And for followers of Jesus, the reality of being cancelled, ignored, silenced, discounted, marginalised, mocked, is something of the norm if you seek to have a voice. If you seek to speak truth to power.

Now one of the ways of discrediting or discounting the voice of the church is to equate any kind of faith with blind faith. The inference being that there is nothing substantive or credible behind the faith. There is in other words no proof.

- To believe in Jesus, blind faith.
- To believe in the resurrection, blind faith.
- To believe in the miracle stories, blind faith.
- To believe in a future life after death, blind faith.

- To believe that Jesus will one day return in power and glory and he will hold all accountable for their actions. Blind faith.
- To believe there will be a new heaven and earth where righteousness will reign, and all will be fully enlivened and empowered in the love of God and each other. Blind faith.

The first thing one could say in trying to address this charge is that everyone, religious or not, scientifically minded or not, lives on the basis of faith.

- To varying degrees all people trust or have faith in people, institutions, governments.
- Anyone that gets in a car or on a plane has faith that our cars and planes will work as they should.
- If I go to the supermarket today I will have faith that the bank will honour my eftpos card and the machine won't overcharge me.
- When I get to an intersection I have faith that the traffic lights or road code is going to be followed.

Even those who say there is no God are saying that on the basis of faith. Ask an atheist to prove there is no god and their arguments are still faith based. "Science proves it", they might say. As if that ends the discussion.

The Christian might equally argue that science is the very thing that proves there is a God. You see it's hard to conduct experiments when nothing repeats and everything is random and chaotic, and everything is simply a matter of chance and time.

It is exactly the biblical worldview, that God is responsible for bringing order out of chaos, that makes science a tenable discipline.

So firstly, the idea that modern scientifically minded people don't exercise faith is misplaced. |

Secondly, people in Jesus day were not fantasists who loved believing impossible things. People generally did not believe you could be raised from the dead. Especially crucified people.

Jesus own disciples, those who had seen Jesus heal and raise people, even they took quite a bit of convincing that the resurrection had actually happened.

- They locked themselves away for fear of the Jews. Not a lot of faith there.
- Then when Jesus showed up they were terrified thinking Jesus was a ghost. Not a lot of faith there.
- Thomas who wasn't in the room and on hearing about it "Unless I see the nail holes and put my finger in his side". Not a lot of faith there either.

The people in Jesus day were not fantasists who loved believing impossible things. Even Jesus disciples took some convincing that he had indeed risen from the dead in a tangible flesh and bones way.

Thirdly, the bible gives and demands evidence before it asks us to trust. The bible gives us names, places, dates, historical examples that we can verify. A prophet was only a prophet if their words came true. There were plenty of false prophets around so you had to check them out.

This important because John the Baptist used the words of Isiah to describe his ministry. I'm the voice of one calling in the wilderness. God is at work and he is making a way for people to meet the saviour.

John B links the road Isiah spoke of with repentance and his ministry of baptism. Isiah in his context 700 years before said that the exiled people of God would one day restored to their homeland.

God will make a way. "the rough places will be made smooth." "The hills will be levelled." "The valleys will be filled in." It happened and the people were rescued from exile in Babylon and returned home.

John B uses the imagery of that historical fact as he says I am the voice of one getting the people ready to meet with Jesus. And we could note that this will be a homecoming and a dwelling with God that far surpasses anything that happened in the past.

My point, John B had some historical evidence to back up his faith claims about Jesus.

Now John is in now prison because he spoke truth to power. “It is not right for you to have your brothers wife” he said to Herod. It took a John’s head being served up on a platter to silence him.

John has questions as many do when things get rough? Was John having a crisis of faith? It’s important we understand that there were political as well as spiritual expectations tied up with the coming of the Messiah.

Part of the reason behind John’s question may well have been tied to the expectation that when the Saviour came he would not just save people from their sins. He would save them from the Romans.

John siting in prison for speaking truth to power doesn’t quite line up with the Jewish expectations that the Messiah would put the Jewish religious authorities back in charge and Jesus would be a king David type of character. Jesus was indeed a king. But not in that way. Jesus was going to change things but not in the way some expected.

Remember the words of Isaiah that Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment of as he began his ministry.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he is anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim released of the captives,
and recovery of site to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

John now in prison, asking his questions, knows what Jesus is doing. Vs2-3 when John heard in prison what Jesus was doing he sent word by his disciples asking “are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

John’s faith is not blind faith. He is questioning, wanting evidence that Jesus was the one. “Go and tell John what you hear and see:
the blind receive their sight,

the lame walk,
the lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
and the poor have good news brought to them.

Were Jesus claims and actions consistent? Clearly yes.

Does it not seem out of character then, that John, even having heard what Jesus is doing would still want first to have things verified from Jesus himself.

It has the ring of authenticity. People generally don't die for something they believe to be wishful thinking, or untrue. Are you the one to come or are we to wait for another?"

Now Jesus didn't actually say this. But you could imagine Jesus saying, "go back and give John some evidence that will get him through this". "It's important he continues to witness to me." "It's important he continues to speak truth to power." "Tell John what you hear and see." "Tell John the many ways I am fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy."

Bottom line, as Jesus meets with us, and as we turn to him things will absolutely and eternally change for the better.... but they may not get easier.

It was certainly true for John. It was certainly true for 11 of the 12 apostles. It has certainly been true for multitudes of Christian's who have paid with their lives for following Jesus and speaking truth over the last 2000 years and counting.

We are not called to have blind faith. Nor can we.

To get back to our Advent theme. When Jesus says he is coming back we can trust his word.

And yes it's Ok to have questions and want evidence that what he hold to be true is actually true. John was rated pretty highly by Jesus.

“No one greater” said Jesus. “Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”. John B was the last and greatest in the line of OT prophets.

Then comes the voice of Jesus. Now God is speaking directly. And we as people of the kingdom speak with Jesus authority and truth.

As I said earlier, in our age of where so many are scared to challenge those in authority. Or have opinions different to the cultural norm, our voice, the voice of faith, the voice of the gospel is needed more than ever.

God is sovereign. There is no power that compares with his. There is no lie that will not be exposed by his truth.

Let's pray: Lord Jesus increase our faith. But even so you can do great things with faith as a mustard seed. Our faith is not blind. It opens eyes as the greatest of all truths captures and liberates us, amen, come Lord Jesus.