

## Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

### F. Crucial Events Leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tour of Galilee

#### 3. John the Immerser Seeks Reassurance from Jesus

##### The DAILY JESUS NEWS #083

Base Text: LK 7.18-23 (Parallel Text: MT 11.2-6)

18 <sup>L</sup>John's disciples told him about all these things. So <sup>MT</sup>when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, <sup>L</sup>he called two of his disciples, 19 and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we be expecting someone else?"

20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Immerser sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we be expecting someone else?'"

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 22 So he replied to the messengers,

*"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 'THE BLIND ARE RECEIVING SIGHT, THE LAME ARE WALKING, THOSE WHO HAVE LEPROSY (SKIN DISEASES) ARE BEING CLEANSED, THE DEAF ARE HEARING, THE DEAD ARE BEING RAISED, AND THE GOOD NEWS IS BEING PROCLAIMED TO THE POOR.'* (Is. 35.5-6; 61.1)

23 *"Anyone who does not stumble on account of me is truly blessed."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Somewhere in Galilee
Timeline	May, 31 AD (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	F. Crucial Events Leading Up to the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tour of Galilee
Title	3. The Imprisoned John the Immerser Seeks Reassurance from Jesus

#### COMMENT:

The cluster of six readings covering the key events that occurred after Jesus' appointment of the Twelve and Teaching on the Mount, and led up to his pivotal 2<sup>nd</sup> Tour of Galilee contains a different kind of content today. After featuring two powerful miracles demonstrating the divine authority of Jesus' words, the saga of Jesus will next introduce a series of encounters emphasizing different responses to Jesus.

In the next four readings we will see John the Immerser's questioning response to Jesus' ministry in Galilee (DJN #083, #084). Next Jesus will warn the residents of three towns in which he performed many miracles about the consequences of their total lack of response to him (#085). The cluster will close with the contrast between a Pharisee named Simon (#086), and one of the most poignant and profound responses to Jesus by anyone in the gospel record: the woman who loved Jesus much because she was forgiven much. Each of these readings will prepare for us for the pivotal changes that would soon occur in Jesus' ministry during his 2<sup>nd</sup> tour of Galilee.

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Today's reading indicates how widely the news about Jesus was spreading throughout Palestine during his ministry in Galilee. Outbursts of miraculous compassion will do that.

John the Immerser had been thrown into prison by Herod Antipas about 8 months earlier. While the Scripture does not tell us the location of his imprisonment, Josephus--the 1st century Jewish historian--wrote that John was held at the palace/fortress at Macherus, which had been built by his father, Herod the Great. The isolated, wilderness setting of fortress Macherus to the east of the Dead Sea enhanced its value as one of the most defensible strongholds in the region.

John was sure about Jesus' identity as the Son of God, but he was confused about the way his messianic ministry was developing. The prophet did the right thing by approaching Jesus honestly with his questions. The Lord's response made it clear that he found no failure or unfaithfulness in John's confusion.

What was so difficult for John to understand? First, consider the way imprisonment had worn down John's patience with the constant psychological and emotional stress. He had no idea what his fate would be. Herod Antipas would call him in occasionally to hear him preach, and then send him away when he came under too much conviction. Yet Herod did not charge him with a crime, nor free him. John was stuck in limbo when the Messiah was out ministering, and John had such a strong divine calling to prepare the way for him. His patience had worn thin.

Secondly, John shared to some degree in the popular messianic expectations that anticipated Jesus overthrowing the empire of Rome. John knew Jesus was primarily a Savior from sin and death, but the messianic kingdom was still a reign on earth. During the six months in Judea when John's ministry overlapped with Jesus, the Lord had quietly witnessed to individuals rather than crowds. He performed no miracles. It probably appeared to John that Jesus was quietly building an underground movement in the wilderness that would suddenly rise up and revolt against Rome. This was the common pattern for the other messianic hopefuls that rose up every few years.

When Jesus moved to Galilee after John's imprisonment, the character of his ministry suddenly changed to public preaching, healing, and deliverance ministries. Massive crowds began to follow Jesus. John probably expected Jesus to raise an army out of the huge throngs that followed him. Yet eight months in Galilee had gone by already, and the Lord showed no signs of taking his kingdom throne. John did not understand where all this was heading.

There was a third troubling matter for John. We already noted the way John's disciples questioned the way neither Jesus or his disciples fasted (DJN #059). John was a man who followed strict spiritual disciplines, and taught his disciples to do the same. He was a great example of a what the movement of the Pharisees started out to be. (Read Psalm 119 for a sense of the heart of devotion of the original Pharisees. They were not legalists, but pietists, like Ezra, who dearly loved the word of God.) Jesus' freedom from following the Rabbinic traditions, seeming de-emphasis on spiritual disciplines, and willingness to confront the Pharisees on the issue of Sabbath observance were not what John expected.

When we put this all together we can see that John was struggling with the differences between some of his expectations of the Messiah, and the news that was reaching him deep in the prison at Macherus. Being a humble man with the highest respect for Jesus, he was wondering if he was wrong in some of his views. John's honesty and sincerity in approaching Jesus with his question was appreciated by the Lord, who knew John's heart, it and touched him. The Lord had nothing but good things to say about John, as we shall see in the next reading.

The truth was that nobody alive in the flesh (other than Jesus) understood the prophetic chronology of the Messiah's ministry, and particularly the way the suffering of the cross had to precede his reign in glory. Jesus understood John's quandary. So he encouraged him in the most effective way possible: by giving John Scripture to hold on to.

Jesus was engaging in another outpouring of mass miraculous ministry at the time John's two disciples arrived with his question. Jesus sent his own message back to John by quoting messianic passages from Isaiah that John knew well, to cause the prophet to lay hold of the way Jesus was fulfilling Scripture in his ministry. John would never fully understand the chronology of the events predicted by Isaiah and the rest of the prophets, but he could know

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for certain that Jesus was doing exactly what the Scripture said he would do: opening blind eyes; making the lame walk; healing leprosy, making the deaf hear; and proclaiming the gospel to the poor. These were messianic miracles, and Jesus was performing them on a scale no one had imagined possible, including John.

We note in closing that this was the 5<sup>th</sup> instance of Jesus conducting mass healing and miracles in his Saga so far. We do not know how many people Jesus healed that day, but the Greek verbs make it clear that it was an ongoing process of ministry throughout the day. It was a time of great rejoicing among the many people Jesus healed, and a spectacular witness to John the Immerser that Jesus was doing exactly what the Scriptures said the Messiah would do, in a way that only God could accomplish. John could rest assured that Jesus was the Messiah.

### APPLICATION:

Just as Jesus had emphasized at the conclusion of his Teaching on the Mount, true disciples abide in his Word. Jesus encouraged John by sending him Scriptural evidence of his Messiahship. He wanted John's faith to remain firmly grounded on the rock of his authoritative word.

What was good for the Immerser is also the best for us. We need to see and know Jesus on the basis of his Scripture-fulfilling life, death and resurrection. This is what the gospels show us so clearly.

Yes, there are some hard things to understand in the gospels, and even more difficult things to obey. But Jesus said:

***“Anyone who does not stumble on account of me is truly blessed.”***

The blessing of knowing Jesus by seeing him with child-like eyes of faith is the greatest blessing we can experience on earth. This all comes through his word.

*How are your expectations and understanding of Jesus changing as you look at his life every day in the gospels?*

*What questions do you need to bring to Jesus today?*