

I imagine that John's disciples were pretty confused by everything that had happened. Confused, and frustrated. Probably a little cynical. Probably a little scared. I can't really blame them. When things don't go according to plan, it's easy to get confused. And frustrated. And cynical. And scared.

Has that ever happened to you? You were going along in life, everything perfectly planned out. The American dream. Success and family and security and all the best things in life. And then – boom – something happens to change everything.

You lose your job. Your marriage falls apart. Your pension dries up. Your children rebel. Your friends abandon you in a time of need. Someone you love passes away. And everything you thought you knew about this world, about your life, suddenly becomes uncertain.

And pretty soon, you begin to wonder where the plan has gone. Your plan. God's plan. We worship a God of perfect justice and righteousness and order. A God who took the formless void and created life in it. Surely, he doesn't intend for us to be swallowed up by chaos. So why is there so much chaos around me. At our worst moments, these are the doubts that go through our minds.

For John the Baptist's disciples, that moment was his arrest and imprisonment by King Herod. This was something that they had surely considered a possibility, but also probably had good reason to believe wouldn't happen anytime soon. After all, John was building quite a large gathering of passionate disciples, and Rome was intolerant of uprisings.

The arrest of John was a politically dangerous move for Herod if John's disciples decided to revolt in protest. But I suppose King Herod felt he had no choice. John had just publicly rebuked him for cheating on his wife with his sister-in-law. Creating that kind of scandal can't go unanswered.

So here is John sitting in prison. Awaiting a likely execution. And his followers don't know what to do. John was the second coming of Elijah to them. The fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. He was like nothing they had ever seen. A man who practiced what he preached in a way the Pharisees never had. A man who could argue toe-to-toe with any of the scribes or Sadducees, the great theologians of the Jews.

And a man who gave them hope like no one else. Because he actually talked about the coming Messiah like it was an imminent reality. He actually made them believe that the savior of the nations was coming any time now. And they needed to repent. Not to earn God's favor, like the Pharisees preached. But to be ready and waiting when the heir to David's throne arrived and led them into victory and righteousness.

John was important to them. And now... he's in prison. His ministry is all but over. In a few weeks, his head will be on a platter. And they don't know what to believe. If John is the voice in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord, and John's voice is now silenced... then where is the Lord? Where is the one for whom he was preparing them?

And so they ask him: "Where do we go now?" And John tells them, "Go find Jesus." And they're like, "Really? Jesus? I know he's your cousin and you're friends with him and all, but... really?" To them, Jesus was a nobody. The son of a carpenter from Galilee. A wannabe rabbi with a ragtag group of disciples.

But they go anyway. After all, John seems pretty convinced. I mean, this is the guy who was leaping in the womb at the just the sound of Jesus' mother's voice. This is the guy who took one look at Jesus and declared with absolute confidence, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" If John has that much faith in Jesus, they should probably at least go check him out.

So they go and they find Jesus. In fact, they march right up to him and ask him point blank, "Are you really the one we're looking for? Are you absolutely sure there isn't somebody else coming?" It sounds a little absurd to us, but these people are confused and scared. And nothing is going according to plan.

And so Jesus responds, “What do you think? Since I arrived, since John baptized me in the Jordan and the heavens were opened, blind people can now see. Those who were once paralyzed can now walk. Those with incurable diseases are cured. The deaf can hear. Even the dead are rising from the grave. And the good news of God’s love and mercy is preached not only to the rich and powerful, but to the poor and powerless who need to hear it most.”

“So you tell me? Am I the one you were waiting for? Go back and tell John about all this. I’m pretty sure I know what he’ll tell you.” This was not what they expected to hear. I don’t know exactly what they knew about Jesus at that point in his ministry, but it was obviously not enough.

Because what Jesus had just laid out was a mountain of evidence pointing directly to him as the Messiah. As the Christ. As the Son of God. As the promised savior foretold by the prophets. And there was no way they could ignore it any longer.

But I think that almost made it worse. Because now, instead of having a plan that made sense and a reality that didn’t match it, they had a plan that matched reality, but the plan itself didn’t make any sense. Who is this Jesus person? John was the son of a priest. Jesus is the son of a nobody. John spent his entire life preaching. Jesus just appeared last year.

And it wouldn’t get any easier. John only claimed to be a prophet. Jesus claimed to be God made flesh. John told his disciples to be baptized. Jesus told his disciples to eat His Body and drink His Blood. John’s disciples stuck with him to the very end. Jesus’ disciples abandoned him in his hour of need. John died a beloved martyr. Jesus died a disgraced criminal. What were they supposed to do with that?

But that’s where Jesus’ final words to them become so important. “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” Blessed is anyone who can keep the faith even when the world makes no sense at all. Blessed is anyone who does not let doubts and confusion and fear overtake them when the plan seems to be going all wrong. Blessed is anyone who does not question God’s ways.

Blessed is anyone who lets God be God and simply accepts the gifts given to him. Whether that gift is sight to the blind and healing to the sick. Or whether that gift is life in the midst of death and the good news of salvation even in poverty. Blessed is anyone who does not let the way that God chooses to work interfere with the amazing work that God has done – and continues to do – in and through his Son.

The truth of the matter is, God’s plan doesn’t always make sense. God’s plan isn’t always what we expect. God’s plan isn’t always obvious or comfortable or predicable. But if we believe that the baby of Bethlehem really is God’s Son sent in love for us, fulfilling all those prophecies of the Old Testament, then we also must believe that the plan God worked through the life of that infant was done in love for us. The plan that God continues to work through our lives is done in love for us.

The ways of God are foolishness in the eyes of the world. The world looks at a savior who dies for people who don’t even believe in his salvation, and they say, “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” And yet, it was by that very foolishness that we are saved. That anyone is saved. That’s the kind of wisdom God has. That’s the kind of planning God does. And like it or not that’s the kind of plan that you are a part of.

Human beings are creatures of habit. We like things to be predictable. We like things to be stable. We like security and the knowledge that no matter what happens, there are certain things of which we can be absolutely sure.

God’s plan is not predicable and it is not stable. But God himself is. And I can assure you of this: There is no place in all the world that is more secure than the arms of our savior. And there is nothing in all the world of which we can be more sure than the love of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.