



The Authentic Messiah
Isaiah 35:1-8; Matthew 11:2-6
December 21, 2014 by Diane Christopher

Several years ago, a friend sent me a YouTube video about a boy named Logan who called into a Christian radio station in Houston, Texas. Logan was a 13-year-old boy who lived on a small farm in Nebraska. The YouTube video is a recording of the call and conversation between Logan and Mike, the radio announcer.

There is no picture of Logan and Mike, just their voices and words on a black screen. Logan introduces himself, and then says, "I want to tell you something God just told me." Mike, the announcer, hesitated a moment and said slowly, "Okay" - in a tone that sounded like: Oh-oh, what is he going to say.

Logan goes on to talk about a calf that was born to an old cow. The old cow didn't have good milk – not enough vitamin C, Logan said – and the calf broke its back. Logan said, "So I got up this morning and put her down myself."

At this point, Logan begins to cry on the phone: "I was talking to God and I was asking God "why"? She was so special." And Logan goes on to share what God said to him in answer to his question.

As Logan was talking, I began to doubt the authenticity of this video. Was this for real? Logan's report of what God told him was so profound, so full of wisdom, that I began to doubt that a 13-year-old boy could say such things. I began to think that Logan was an actor – either an adult actor pretending to be a child, or a really good child actor.

So, how do you tell the difference between what is "really real" and what is "fake real"? This is an important question, because when something is really real, it has

the ring of authority and authenticity. As I began to think this conversation might be a fake, the power of the video lost its effect on me. I had to find out if this video was really real or fake real.

So, I replayed the video several times looking for clues to show me that this was an authentic, real conversation between Logan and Mike. I listened closely to Logan's voice. Yes, he really seemed to be crying.

At one point during the conversation, Logan's mother interrupts. You can hear her calling his name in the distance. He excuses himself for a moment, and you can hear him calling to his mom: "I'm talking to someone. I'll be right up." He comes back to the phone and apologizes for the interruption. That seemed real, too.

After listening to the video several times and reading the bio that came with it, I finally determined that the video was authentic. It was at that point the video became powerful, and I was very moved and touched by it.

Since then the video has been officially deemed authentic, and Logan is now known as the "sky angel cowboy." Millions of people have listened to this video. (You can, too. Go ahead and google: Logan, the Sky Angel Cowboy.)

In our passage today, John the Baptist asks Jesus a question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" John needed to know if Jesus was the *really* real messiah, or a *fake* real messiah. Back in those days, there were a lot of fake Messiahs. Are you the REAL one, John is asking.

Why did John ask this question?

John's purpose was to prepare the way for the Messiah. And he is wondering: Did he prepare the way for the right person? When John baptized Jesus, he saw the dove that came from heaven and land on Jesus. God was confirming to John that Jesus was the authentic Messiah. Thus, John declared with certainty, "This is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34).

So why is John doubting now?

Even now, even though I have walked with Jesus most of my life, every once in a while doubts will creep. Is this, all of this, really real? Or, are we all making it up believing it's real? I'm glad these stories of doubt and questions are in the Bible. Doubting Thomas. Doubting John. This says to me that doubts are normal. It's what you do with them that can get you in trouble.

John is doubting. He wants to know if he has spent his life in vain. Why? What has brought him to his point? Things aren't going well for John. He is in prison for telling it like it is: Herod was having an affair with his brother's wife, and John the Baptist called him on it. How do you shut some one up? You arrest him and put him in prison.

And to add insult to injury, Jesus' ministry isn't exactly what John the Baptist expected. John the Baptist preached fire and brimstone. Repent. Confess your sins. John was looking for the victorious Messiah, a strong Messiah, a Messiah you can be proud of.

And Jesus wasn't fitting the bill. Jesus falls miserably short of John's hopes and expectations. Instead of preaching fire and brimstone, Jesus preached grace. Instead of hanging out with the movers and shakers, Jesus hung out with the lame, deaf, poor, ill and even the dead. Instead of punishing sinners, He reached out to sinners. Instead of ushering in a political kingdom, Jesus preached about a different kind of kingdom: a heart kingdom.

Maybe this Jesus wasn't the "one who is to come" after all. Was John wrong about Jesus? Had his ministry been a failure?

Have you ever experienced this? Haven't you been disappointed with God? I certainly have. I remember being engaged at the age of 26, and my fiancé having a breakdown several months before the wedding. We had to cancel everything. He eventually turned his back on God and walked away.

Logan was disappointed in God. Maybe your walk with Jesus wasn't exactly what you expected. There is even a book called "Disappointment With God" by Philip Yancey. It is one of his best selling books. Apparently, a lot of Christians are disappointed with God.

Needless to say, God does not always act the way his servants expect God to act. Perhaps we have an incomplete expectation about Jesus that needs correcting? Someone said, "Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you." (*The Five Gospels*, p

So John, while sitting in prison, says to Jesus "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus doesn't say "yes" or "no." Ah, typical Jesus! Instead, Jesus says, what do you hear and see? In other words, study the facts. The lame walk. The blind receive sight. The deaf hear. The sick are healed. The dead are raised. And the poor receive good news. Jesus says look not only at my words, but my actions as well.

At first glance, I am not so sure this answer was helpful to John. Jesus is doing all these miracles, but John is wasting away in prison. Jesus said he came to set the prisoner free, but there are no miracles coming John's way.

We, too, have to deal with the fact that Jesus doesn't often rescue us from our difficulties. We can ask, "If Jesus is so powerful, why didn't he save the children from the terrorists' attacks?" "If Jesus is so powerful, why didn't he heal my father?" "If Jesus is so powerful, why didn't he save her from that accident?" "If Jesus is so powerful, why does he let people go hungry?"

We, like John, can find it easy to question and doubt Jesus when he doesn't save us (or others) from problems.

But let's take a deeper look at Jesus' answer to John. Jesus is doing something very interesting here. He is referring to several Hebrew scripture passages that talk about the Messiah; ones that John the Baptist will know. One of them is listed in your bulletin (Isaiah 35).

So, let's read Isaiah 35:1-8. And see if it sounds somewhat familiar.

Did you see it? Jesus says to John the blind will see their sight. Isaiah says the eyes of the blind will be opened. Jesus says to John the deaf hear. Isaiah says the ears of the deaf will be cleared. Jesus says to John the lame walk. Isaiah says the lame will leap like the deer.

Jesus is saying: see, I am the Messiah. I am fulfilling these prophecies. And, look at the magnitude of that fulfilling: the lame don't just walk; they leap like a deer. The tongue of the speechless are not only loosed, they sing for joy. It's not any old garden that blooms, but the dry desert. Water appears, not just as a trickle, but as pools and streams.

In the Messiah, an irredeemable situation becomes completely transformed. Jesus is saying: I am the authentic, really real Messiah. Not only is Jesus referring to and talking about prophecy, he is living it out. It is coming true through him. In Jesus, there is complete transformation. Maybe not the way John expected, but it is happening.

Do you have an irredeemable situation? Or, disappointments like John? Hear this: Jesus transforms our irredeemable situations, our disappointments. It may not be what you expect or want – keep in mind, it didn't change John's situation. He never made it out alive – he was beheaded by Herod. My situation didn't change. My fiancé and I never made it to the altar. He never returned to God. But my walk with Jesus was transformed, and became deep and rich like pools of water in the desert.

John was reassured that Jesus was the authentic Messiah. I was reassured that Jesus was the authentic Messiah. An authentic Messiah calls for authentic disciples, which means taking a risk with the authentic Messiah even if it's not what you were expecting.

Richard Hoefler says in his book *A Sign in the Straw*: "When will we learn that faith does not have all the answers? Faith is a risk. Faith is a life of trust, not of certainty and security. God never promised answers to all our questions. God

never promised life without stress. He promises and gives only himself, with all the dangers and risks of personal encounters."

He states further, "Our hope? Not faith without doubt, but faith within doubts. Not the answers we possess but who possesses us. We may doubt God, but God never doubts us. We may not know God but He with absolute certainty knows us. This is the gospel. This is our life. This is the love that will never let us go."

When we live like this, we become authentic disciples who follow the authentic Messiah. And we should not be surprised when God doesn't meet our expectations, because God's biggest surprise of all? God coming in the flesh as a baby, born in a poor stable. God coming not as a mighty warrior, but as a servant and dying on a cross.

Our world offers many messiahs. Scripture points only to one. There is only one Messiah who restores us to God. Jesus is the really, real Messiah because in Jesus lives are transformed. This is the Savior of the world. And one day, all of life will be transformed. One day, there will be no more death or hunger or tears.

Back to Logan. Here is what Logan said after he put down his calf:

"I was talking to God and I was asking God why? She was so special. God said, "You know Logan, my Son was special. But He died for a purpose.' (sniff) It's kind of the same thing. That calf was close to me, and God's son was close to him. This is so important. Just remember when you lose a loved one or a pet. Always remember, God gave His son, too, and He understands. He will always understand, so run to Him."

Jesus. The authentic Messiah – the heart of Christmas.

Or, in the words of Marvin Gaye: there's nothing like the real thing, baby.

Amen

Blessing

Cradle Christ in your hearts, bow in the presence of the Holy, and return to your homes with praise on your lips and joy in your soul.