

# INSIDE PRISON WALLS

Locked away in a cold, dark prison cell, John the Baptist starts to realize he may never again see the light of day.

by Michael Mancha

# HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO QUESTION GOD?

I mean really. Have you ever just cried out to Him, asking Him exactly what He's doing or why He's taking so long?

Prayer can be like that sometimes. Most of the time our prayers are "regular prayers" — you know, where we thank Him for everything, ask Him for what we need, and pray for those dear to us. I don't mean to cheapen prayer, but in a nutshell that's what it's all about. But sometimes prayer can be an earnest outpouring of frustration. Sometimes it can be a flurry of anger and pain. Sometimes it can just be tears.

I used to think that these kinds of prayers—the ones where I was angry or frustrated with God — were sinful. I felt like less of a Christian and more of a doubter. I felt that asking God why would result in the same answer I'd get from my earthly father: "Because I said so."

Then I found something in Matthew's Gospel that changed my thinking forever. In chapter 11, John the Baptist is in prison, awaiting his fate. Probably deep down John knows his future isn't bright, because he does something very unlike his character: He gathers his disciples and sends them to Jesus with this message: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (v. 3).

That line beaks my heart. It comes from a man whose birth was announced by an angel to his father Zechariah, a man directly affected by the presence of Jesus while both men were still in their mothers' wombs (Luke 1:41), a man who baptized Jesus and whose ultimate calling was to announce the coming of the Christ.

Yet now, in his darkest hour, John asks Jesus himself if He is who He says He is. That's heart-breaking.

How can a man so close to Jesus suddenly need confirmation that Jesus is really the Messiah? Can you imagine? John knew his life was ending, and all he wanted to know is whether he had done the right thing or wasted his life.

John was human; he wrestled with fear and doubt just like the rest of us. And when things got scary, he questioned just like the rest of us.

Asking God questions isn't sinful. If nothing in your life has compelled you to question God, then maybe you're not doing anything in your life at all. Even Jesus asked questions.

Just before His arrest in the garden, Jesus' heart was so overwhelmed that He was sweating blood. On His knees, Jesus asked God if there was another way out. Plan B. He asked if there was a way out of a plan He knew had to happen.

Asking questions allows God to speak to you. It gives God an opportunity to give you what you need: answers. That's exactly what He gave John the Baptist.

When John's disciples brought John's question, Jesus replied like this:

"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Matthew 11:4-6).

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The Bible doesn't say more about this story, but I imagine it went something like this. . . .

John's disciples make the journey back and tell him all they'd witnessed. With miracle after miracle, people praise the name of God and rejoice. Some are filled with tears after finally being freed from the bondage of disease and lifelong disabilities. The men tell John story after story with such passion that John is moved to tears. And with that, his heart is restored. Soon, John is dead.

Sometimes things work out well, and our prayers are filled with praise and gratitude. And sometimes things blindsides us, and our prayers are painful. It's in these moments that we may fear and worry. It's in these moments that we want to cry to God for answers, and it's in these moments that God wants us to seek no one but Him. In their darkest moments Jesus and John the Baptist turned their eyes to God.

Is it OK to question God? Yes. He wants us to be honest with Him. And when we're honest, we will see and seek Him as never before.

## NFYC CALENDAR

### SW DISTRICT WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

December 31, 2009 - January 3, 2010

Salvation Army Camp Hoblitzelle, Midlothian, TX. Contact Jason and Rose Rodriguez, [jandrrodriguez@att.net](mailto:jandrrodriguez@att.net).

### WESTERN CANADIAN DISTRICT WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

December 31, 2009 - January 3, 2010

Long Island Conference Centre, Crownsnest, Alberta. Contact Cisco and Debbie Chavez, [fm.chavez@shaw.ca](mailto:fm.chavez@shaw.ca).

### NFYC REGISTRATION

National FYC registration for 2010 will begin January 1! Get your group information ready now. The first youth group to register will receive a special gift from the NFYC. Just go to <http://nfyccog7.org/register> or e-mail [nfyccog7.org](mailto:nfyccog7.org) for more details.