

Matthew ch.11 vs.7-19

For those of you who brought your bibles lets turn in them this morning to Matt ch 11. We find ourselves basically in the middle of a little segment devoted again to John the Baptist.

Jesus was following up on His disciples teaching and preaching in their cities and John who had put into prison by Herod having heard of all of the things that Jesus was busy about, sent a question to Jesus via his disciples, and he wanted to know if in fact Jesus was the messiah or should they be looking for someone else. and You recall the basic conclusion we drafted was that it wasn't that John's faith that was failing him so much as his patience was. Because he was expecting upon the appearing of the Messiah (just like everyone else) that He would immediately establish His earthly kingdom and break the Roman yoke and set Israel above all the other nations and peoples who opposed them judging them and condemning them. But Jesus said *“My kingdom is not of this world”* and that *“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”*

John (much like us) was simply frustrated because things weren't going exactly like *he thought* they were supposed to go. Because he had been prophesying of the coming judgment of the Messiah and was aware of the Messianic prophecies that proclaimed liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison doors of those who were bound and yet here he sat as a captive, bound up in the prison of Herod. And He's heard that Jesus is out there teaching and preaching but meanwhile here he sits and so hey if you're indeed the one I've rolled my dice on; let's get this kingdom business on the road. Or do we need to be looking for someone else? and So he poses the question to Jesus are you the coming One, or do we look for another? And so how did Jesus respond? (Vs 4-5)

So rather than answer John directly He refers to His works as His credentials and tells John's disciples to tell John these things so that it will evoke John's recollection of Messianic prophecy in a fuller capacity. And last week I read to you several scriptures that testified of these things happening when the Messiah hit the scene.

He's gently letting John know that things are moving ahead, and that things are on schedule, just not his schedule. All the things that John had been prophesying concerning the Messiah will happen; just not as soon as John had supposed that they would. He just naturally assumed that at the appearing of the Messiah that Israel would be vindicated and the earthly kingdom age would begin, he had that preconceived conclusion in his mind based upon his own understanding and interpretation of scripture as it pertained to the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus sent back word to John of all that was happening and said to John, (vs6). In other words blessed is the one who doesn't get tripped up or stumbled because they have preconceived ideas of what the Messiah should be like. And doesn't take offense at who He is or what He does. And you recall we spoke of how easily so many people get tripped up over Jesus because He's not doing things for them exactly like *they* think that He should or in the amount of time that they think He should or that what they want right now isn't the top priority on His list.

But who's the Lord? Is it you? Is it me? Who is it that has unlimited knowledge and understanding and knows what's eternally going to be best for you and me? It's Jesus Christ so it's best if we just let the Lord be the Lord and not be offended by any of our own thoughts or ideas as to how we think things should be done and get all upset when the Lord's not serving our agenda.

Isa 26:3 "*You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*" When you or I get all bent out of shape or upset, or "offended" because Jesus isn't doing things exactly like we think He should. #1 Your thoughts are no longer on Him they're on you and your problems (like Peter in the midst of the storm) but on top of that #2 it shows a lack of trust in God's ability to lead and guide your life. Because if you trusted God you wouldn't be all worked up over your circumstances. Because you would take comfort in the fact of knowing that even though every thing seems to be going all wrong in my life I know that God has a plan and somehow, (even though I personally may not know how this side of eternity) but somehow God's going to work this out to His glory. The one who's mind is stayed on Him, trusts Him; and as a result there's peace because no matter what happens you have the assurance that God is in control and the Lord gives and the Lord takes away blessed be the name of the Lord.

Now that Jesus has sent back word to John, knowing how easily things can be misconstrued and that there are those there that would probably take what He just said to John to mean that He was somehow upset with John or in opposition to him. He immediately clears up any misunderstandings that people may have concerning His opinion of J.B. by sharing His thoughts concerning J.B. and exactly where he stands in His sight and exactly how significant he is to the big picture.

Vs 7

Now remember He's speaking of John the Baptist here and the desert (or your bible might say wilderness) was where John was preaching. And people don't take the time and expend the energy to make a trip out into the desert for no reason. Or because of some little insignificant thing, such as a reed being shaken by the wind. How many of you want to load up the family to take a trip to the desert so that you can watch the reeds being blown around by the wind in some little stream?

So Jesus is trying to make point to these people that John is someone of major significance and warranted these people's time and attention. And if Jesus is making an analogy here in regards to John, what does a reed suggest (as it's being blown to and fro with every little gust of wind?) It suggests weakness and vacillation. Something that's inconstant and unstable, which would be the complete antithesis of a description of John, he was characterized by anything but fickleness, (speaking 1 thing today and something else the next.) So the 1st thing that Jesus commends about John is the fact that he knew the truth, took a firm and steady line in his preaching of the truth, and with conviction he continually, steadfastly asserted the truth, and his lifestyle backed it up. Now coming from Jesus that's a pretty high compliment. Because Jesus speaks only the truth and He doesn't butter people up to seek advantage nor does He try save peoples reputations that have messed up.

If John were blowing life Jesus would've made no bones about it because He would've been concerned for John's eternal well being and would've sought after repentance. But He didn't do that; instead He acknowledged John's consistency, and his unwavering proclamation of the truth. And again coming from Jesus you can rest assured that's an honest and factual assessment of John's life. I wonder if Jesus were to assess your life, and evaluate my life, what it would be that He would declare openly concerning you or me and our commitment to the truth and sharing it unwaveringly and unashamed? Would He say that you're someone as consistent as they come, and that with every opportunity you have you share the message of Jesus Christ knowing that there are people perishing everyday with out hope?

Or would it be more like, you know I'd really like to use their life for my glory in a radical way but I just can't count on him/or her. Every time I bring someone across their path that needs Me they buckle and refrain from sharing My love and grace and mercy that I've shared with them and long to share with others. Because they're afraid what that person might think of them; so they just let them walk off empty, hurting, and with out hope. May God help us and strengthen us to have a testimony like that of John the Baptist. One that Jesus would stand up and say Hey here's a person that was faithful to My cause and willing to be used at any given opportunity to build up and edify their brothers and sisters and reach out to those who were hurting and lost. This question that Jesus asks here in Vs 7 demands a no. That definitely doesn't characterize John.

Vs 8

What was it that John wore? He wore camel's hair (the bible says) and a big leather belt around his waist. And the guy had grasshoppers for his meat and potatoes with a little honey on the side. It's hard to imagine anything less soft except for maybe an outfit of 80 grit sand paper, so that's definitely not what they went out there to see. (Besides finish)

Jesus is drawing another contrast, John is in the kings prison not the kings house, you wouldn't find people arrayed like that in the kings prisons, only in the kings houses and you won't find John there, and besides John's home was in the desert as we spoke earlier. Now that Jesus has pointed out quite clearly who John's not; on the 3rd time He lands the plane as to just who John is.

Vs.9

Jesus says that the motivation for them going out into the desert in hordes was so that they might see a prophet sent from God. Why? Because it had been 400 years since God had spoken to Israel by means of a prophet. They had never seen a prophet their parents and even their grandparents had never seen a prophet and then here comes John storming on to the scene prophesying of the coming Messiah and the urgent need to repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. So these people were flocking to see a prophet and Jesus says and that's exactly what John is; but in reality he's even more than that. And it would've been hard for them to esteem anyone in any higher position than that of a prophet and yet that word "more" that Jesus uses indicates *abundantly more*.

It's clear by the words Jesus is using that He is giving John the highest praise that man could ask for, which would quickly dispel any notion that Jesus had any animosity towards John. and How is it that John was more than a prophet?

Vs 10

So Jesus is saying that John's greatness arises from the fact that not only is he a prophet but he himself is also the fulfillment of prophecy. And Jesus is quoting from Mal 3:1, which says, "*Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,*" Says the LORD of hosts.

And it's interesting to me that in the context of Mal 3:1 God was speaking of the messenger that would go before Him and here Jesus is quoting the vs. in such a way as to apply it to His own coming. So Jesus is subtly telling these people (even though He's in reference to John) but in talking about John He's revealing to them His own identity, telling them that the coming of God has been fulfilled in His coming to them. Jesus is telling them in sort of a veiled way that He is God.

And He's making it clear to all these people that in the providence of God, John the Baptist had an extremely important and significant role, and a role that was exceeded only by the Messiah Himself. And as I said had they been listening closely with ears to hear they would've caught Jesus identifying Himself as their Messiah.

Vs11

Many times you can think of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob or maybe Moses or David and wonder who was the greatest of the OT figures. But the reality is, is that there's no need for debate because Jesus tells us very plainly right here that J.B. outranks them all. Of those born of women there has not arisen one greater than J.B. Yet notice this next statement that Jesus makes. (Read)

Now don't be confused here Jesus isn't saying that the least up in heaven is greater than John the Baptist and making the obvious statement that it's a greater privilege to be in heaven than it is to be on earth. He's showing you and me the awesome privilege it is to be found in Christ and clothed in His righteousness. You see He's not belittling John here in any way, but rather showing us the wonder and privilege we have in being apart of the kingdom that He's established. Nor is HE saying that any of us are greater in the sense of moral character or even in achievements. He just said that J.B. was the greatest man (other than Jesus obviously) ever born of women. The thought here is that it's better to enter the kingdom of God (and to be apart of the kingdom age being found in Christ) than to herald it's coming. He's saying the era in which we've been born into is a greater one than that of J.B.

Now John was a friend of the bridegroom make no mistake (John 3:29) but as the church we're in the privileged position to be the bride of Christ; and that's what He's driving at here. God has privileged us in so many ways above those of the old dispensation, the message they heralded was one of a coming savior, John prepared His way directly and showed them that the Savior was here, and today we're privileged to be the ones who show that Christ *has* come and that He's suffered and died and resurrected and is alive forever more and that He's entered into His glory and that repentance and remission of sins are proclaimed through His blood and that salvation is available by believing in His name. They were under law, we're under grace. God would during that time pour out His Holy Spirit on select individuals for a specific purpose.

Today He gives His Spirit to all who believe. Eph 1:3 tells us that we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. We've also been given greater understanding and insight into the Scriptures than they had. 1 Peter 1:10-12 says, "*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.*"

In other words there were a lot of things they received by faith because they just didn't get it. They prophesied just they were told but that doesn't mean they understood all the things they were prophesying of. But now that Christ has come; we by the power of the Holy Spirit have been given a degree of insight into the Scriptures that they just didn't have. Everything about the new covenant and the new dispensation is better than the old one of which John was apart of. He basically closed that period in that He was the last of the OT prophets. And I'm trying to show you just a fraction of the ways that you have been privileged in Christ above those who were of the Old Covenant, he who is least in the kingdom of heaven (Jesus said) is greater than he.

Vs 12

Now due to the way the Greek here is laid out there's a couple of different ways that this has been taken in what exactly Jesus meant when He said (the...it by force). And I'm not going to split hairs over the issue but to me it seems as though the context lends itself to the fact that those who aren't apart of the kingdom of God are often hostile towards the kingdom of God. And from the days of John and even before clear up till the present day that Jesus was standing there the kingdom of God had suffered violence. Heb 11:35-38

Tells us that there were those who had trials of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-- of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. In our text this morning John finds himself in prison and soon to be beheaded and the King Himself will be beaten, scourged and crucified. And even to this day people are tortured and persecuted and martyred simply because they love Jesus. So the *kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.*

Vs 13

In other words the prophets were all setting the stage for the coming of Christ. Gal 3:24 says, "*The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ,*" all the law and the prophets acted as groundwork preparing the way for the coming of Jesus Christ But they were of limited duration. And with John their work was accomplished because now Christ had been revealed.

Vs 14

Now Jesus isn't saying that John was the literal Elijah, you remember that one day when he was preaching that the Pharisees asked him straight up are you Elijah and John said no. And so they asked him, what do you say about yourself?" He said: "*I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness:' Make straight the way of the LORD,*" as the prophet Isaiah said." Quoting another prophecy concerning the forerunner to the messiah.

But you remember when Gabriel appeared to John's dad Zacharias in the temple when he told him that he would have a son, and at that time Gabriel told Zacharias that John would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. So in essence he was Elijah who is to come but not in the literal sense but in the same spirit and power as Elijah. And we'll probably touch on this a little more in depth when we get to ch. 17 because it comes up again, but Jesus knew that a statement like that would be difficult for them to grasp and so He says here.

Vs 15

And this is in regards to spiritual principals not the physical act of hearing. Jesus says this same phrase many times over in the book of revelation. 7 times in His letters to the churches alone, and it's when He's trying to impart some spiritual truth or a spiritual principal that's of value. He's saying it's not good enough to just physically hear this it needs to be taken in and comprehended and assimilated into our lives. And as I said we'll probably look a little more in depth at what all was being implicated or intimated here when we get to Ch 17 (Lord willing).

Vs16

This is the 1st time we see the phrase "this generation" and just mark down in your mind that most generally when Jesus used the phrase this generation He was usually in reference to an unbelieving generation. And in this case He likens them to children hanging out in the market place seeking entertainment, so they called to their companions.

Vs 17

In other words nothing that we do satisfies you, what is it going to take, or what is it that you're looking for. Because no matter what we do you don't want to be involved, well in the same way what Jesus is telling them here is that His contemporaries won't have anything to do any of the messengers sent to them by God. But instead like the children of this illustration they refuse to participate in anything offered to them.

Vs 18-19

So He says look John came to you and he wasn't interested in feasting or being social. He was one who fasted regularly and was an ascetic and austere individual who lived in the desert and chomped on grasshopper's with honey on the side. He was dressed in camels hair and was all wild looking and serious as a heart attack. And because of his demeanor and the way he presented himself with such intensity you guys thought he was crazy or said he had a demon.

But then here comes Jesus, and far from being an ascetic individual He was always at banquets and feasts, and being social with people from all walks of life, just ministering to people and turning them onto the kingdom. And since He hung out with people who needed God i.e. "sinners", well then He was a glutton and a drunkard.

They wouldn't repent with John or rejoice with Jesus; why, because unbelief is never satisfied and that my friends you can take to the bank. They'll always find an excuse to justify their own position while criticizing the others. They don't like one preacher because he's too monotone; they don't like the other because he's too rambunctious and is always pounding the pulpit. One is too profound and hard to understand, but the other is too simple and not insightful enough. And the list goes on and on John is way too serious and Jesus isn't serious enough.

But isn't it interesting that they were both sent from God, they both had a message to herald, they were both rejected and they were both killed; by what? The unbelieving generation, unbelief is never satisfied. But Jesus rounds this section off by saying, (repeat, but...children). In other words in the end even though they were both rejected they would both be vindicated as coming from God by the results or outcome of their ministry. This is a "by their fruits you shall know them" type of a statement. The fruit of the critics ministry was death to both John and Jesus.

John's ministry prepared the way for the King and the fruit of His ministry is life and that everlasting and so we would surely agree that wisdom is justified by her children.