

Lesson #12- Matthew Chapter 11 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”
 - a. Why do you think John the Baptist, the one that baptized Jesus, asks such a question?
 - b. How does Jesus react to John’s question?

Help for Teachers:

- a. There are several ideas among Bible scholars as to why John asks this question. One thing that is obvious is that during John’s ministry and prior to being imprisoned by Herod, John was confident that the Messiah was coming and confident of who He was when he saw Him arrive at the Jordan River. John confidently announced His arrival to all that were there. Here are a couple of thoughts.
 - One idea is that these disciples of John the Baptist were sent by him to ask this question of Jesus for themselves, for their personal confidence. I don’t think this is the case, based on Jesus’ reply that they should “go and **shew John** again...”
 - Jesus will declare John to be as great a prophet as there is among those born of women, but John is a still human. He is, like us, a child of God but for the time stuck in a fallible human body with a fallible human mind. It isn’t hard to imagine that, isolated from all but a few people and in jail, this not being what you had expected, doubts could easily creep in. John the Baptist was of the same Jewish background that the twelve Jewish apostles were from. We know that they expected Messiah to establish a visible kingdom and throw out Rome. They had to be reminded of the “servant” prophecies. Perhaps John suffered some of this same confusion. Charles Spurgeon, in discussing this topic said, “Blessed is he who can be left in prison, can be silenced in his testimony, can seem to be deserted of his Lord, and yet can shut out every doubt. John speedily regained this blessedness, and fully recovered his serenity.”
- b. Jesus responds to John the Baptist by giving him exactly what he needs, just like Jesus responds to our needs with mercy and grace when we bring our weakness to Him. Jesus could have scolded John for not being steadfast in faith, but He tenderly sends reassurance back to John. I think it’s important to see that Jesus understands us and has compassion. We can run to Him when it’s hard to believe. When faith is great, we can go through the storms (Phil 4:13). When faith is low, everything is a storm. Jesus, on several occasions, did scold His disciples for having “little faith”. It seems like these occasions were marked by the disciples being overwhelmed by events and coming to Jesus to deliver them from the problem at hand, but oblivious to the fact that Jesus already had the

situation mastered (Matt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8). They did not see that they were already safe in Him and that their real need wasn't protection from the danger (they already had that), but faith. John the Baptist didn't ask for release from prison or protection from Herod- but faith. Jesus abundantly supplied.

2. In verses 7-19, as John's disciples leave, Jesus turns His attention to the multitudes that have been watching and just observed this exchange.
 - a. What does Jesus challenge concerning how they (the multitudes) had come out to John's baptism in the wilderness?
 - b. What does Jesus tell the crowds that they should have understood concerning John's purpose?
 - c. What do you think Jesus means when He says in verse 11, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."?
 - d. What do you think Jesus means in verse 12, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."?
 - e. How is John the Baptist Elias?
 - f. Discuss the comparisons Jesus makes in verses 16-19.

Help for Teachers:

- a. Jesus challenges their heart; why did you come out to John's baptism? (Some commentaries seem more in line with "What did you find when you saw John the Baptist?")
 - "A reed shaken in the wind?"- Seems that every scholar has their own idea about the plant Jesus had in mind, but most come back to the idea that those that came out to John in the Jordan thinking that he was some unstable teacher (as Paul described spiritual children in Ephesians 4:14), easily swayed like a reed blowing in the wind, was badly mistaken. John was resolute in his doctrine and message and bold to proclaim the coming King. There is nothing unstable about the Kingdom Jesus is building. We need to be stable.
 - "A man clothed in soft raiment?"- John's clothes were like Elijah's, completely about function. He wore rough attire that didn't meet the standards of the fashion designers of the day. It would have been obvious that John didn't care what the world thought. His attention wasn't on building a kingdom of his own, like a human king amassing earthly wealth in a fine palace. John the Baptist found no value in what the world treasured but

placed supreme value in the kingdom of heaven. If people looked at us (and they do), what would they determine about the kingdom we are building?

- “A prophet?”- Israel had not seen a prophet in generations. Malachi was the last, and then God had not given them a prophet for about 400 years. The news that a new prophet was preaching along the Jordan would have been a thing not to be missed, like knowing that some history-making event was about to happen and making a trip to go see it. Jesus tells the people that they saw more in John than what they had bargained for, not just a prophet, but among the greatest prophets. That’s because John was purposed by God to herald the arrival of the King of kings, and that encounter forever changes everyone, like it or not. When we herald the message of the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ forever changes those that hear (Isa. 55:11, 2 Cor. 2:16).

b. From the Scriptures, they should have recognized John as the messenger of prophesy, sent to prepare the way of the Lord (V10 refers to Isa. 10:3 and Malachi 3:1). Are we familiar with prophesies of the returning King? Will we be as unaware as those that attended John’s baptism?

c. The value of gaining the kingdom of heaven cannot be overstated (Matt. 13:44-45). John was great among those born of women, but here Jesus says that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Nothing “born of women” compares to the blessedness of being “born of God”. Jesus said in Matthew 23:11, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” Jesus became our servant (Phil 2:5-11).

d. Most commentators concur that this is a difficult passage. There is quite a bit of agreement that once John began announcing the kingdom and Jesus began His ministry, common people like Matthew, who were disdained by the religious “experts”, seized at once the mercy offered by the gospel message and in a manner of speaking, took it violently from the hands of the Pharisees and other self-righteous groups that believed they alone had rights to the Messiah’s kingdom.

e. Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 prophesy directly of a herald, fulfilled in John the Baptist. When an angel of the Lord appeared to John’s father, Zacharias, he was told that John would go before Jesus in the “spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Elijah’s ministry was all about directing the people God had chosen back to the one true God, and away from the idolatry of Baal worship and the influence of the wicked leaders, Ahab and Jezebel. John’s ministry, in the same spirit and with the same powerful, God-given message, was all about turning the hearts of a rebellious people from the influence of their wicked leaders to the one true God, now incarnate in Jesus Christ. If the people would “receive it”, that is, if they would believe the gospel message, John was the fulfillment of these prophesies. If they would not believe that Jesus was the Christ, then John was just another weird entertainer on the stage of life. Elijah as the herald of Christ is also foretold in Malachi

4:5, although this passage seems more directed to the second coming of Jesus as it says he will come before “the great and dreadful day of the LORD”. [Note: Many think that Elijah was reincarnated as John the Baptist and may be again as the one mentioned in Mal. 4:5. There is no Scriptural basis for this idea.]

f. In verses 16-19 Jesus says that He has went to great and extraordinary lengths to bring the kingdom of heaven to this generation, but the masses have rejected His plea that they come to Him for life, even offering up absurd excuses (V19). What more could God have done than what He already has? Read Isaiah 5:1-7.

3. In verses 20-24 Jesus pronounces woes against the cities of Judea where He had done most of His mighty works.
 - a. What was Tyre and Sidon? Sodom?
 - b. Why will it be more tolerable for these far less “wicked” cities than for the cities where Jesus had ministered?

Help for Teachers:

- a. They were gentile cities that God destroyed because of their great wickedness. Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities that the tribe of Ashur allowed to remain, despite God’s command to destroy them. As a result, they were a source of trouble for the Hebrews. God fulfilled His prophesy (by Ezekiel) to destroy these cities through the conquests of Alexander. Sodom God destroyed by divine fire from heaven.
- b. The sin that brings eternal damnation is unbelief (John 3:17-18). Because God knew before creation that man would fall and be helpless to self-correct, He planned that God the Son would come into our world and be what we couldn’t be and do what we couldn’t do so, that we could have forgiveness for the lawlessness. So, all sins will be forgiven, EXCEPT the sin of unbelief (Matt. 12:31-32). Jesus, God in flesh, literally walked the streets of these Jewish communities and evidenced miracles that only God Himself could have done so that they would have every reason to believe, and yet the people hardened their heart in unbelief. Thus, it will be more tolerable for the law-breaking gentile cities that God destroyed than for the people that professed to be God’s chosen and yet rejected their King through unbelief.

4. Considering verses 25-27:
- a. The masses of the people in the cities where Jesus preached the gospel refused to repent. Was Jesus a failure?
 - b. What about when we share the gospel and people are indifferent to the message?
 - c. In His prayer, Jesus says that He is thankful that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and prudent but revealed them (Himself) to babes. He goes even further and says that “for so it seemed good in thy sight”. What does this mean?
 - d. [27] “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” Discuss this verse.

Help for Teachers:

- a. through d.

All mankind has sinned and deserves God’s wrath (Isa. 53:6). God would be wholly justified in destroying all of us (Rom 9:18-24). But in his sovereignty and great grace, He has elected to save those He has chosen and known (foreknown, He has determined a relationship with them before they ever were born, Rom 8:29-31) from the foundation of the world. Concerning those who willfully reject the gospel message, it is because God has blinded their eyes to the truth (such as in John 12:37-41). He “never” knew them (Matt 7:21-23). Their names are not recorded in the lamb’s book of life (Rev 17:8, 20:12-15). It is no failure on the part of Jesus (John 18:9), conversely, He declares that to hide these things from the “wise and prudent” of this world, and declare them unto “babes”, those the world thinks are ignorant and foolish, “seemed good in thy sight” (V25-26). Jesus clearly expresses that God the Father has delivered all things to the Son and that no man can “know” the Father or the Son unless the Son wills to reveal Himself and the Father to that person (V27). We are messengers to share the gospel with the world, and successful when we obey the command to sow the seed. We are to indiscriminately share the gospel message and when it lands on soil that God has made fertile, it will produce fruit (Matt 13, Mark 4, Luke 8).

5. Discuss the wonderful invitation Jesus extends to all that come unto Him in verses 28-30.

Help for Teachers:

In Acts 15 Paul addresses the Jewish legalizers who insisted that circumcision was and keeping of the Mosaic law were required for salvation and says, “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Concerning the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said, “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers (Matt 23:4). Jesus offers rest to those that will come to Him by faith, trusting that He has shouldered the burden of fulfilling the law that we could not. He not only lifted a finger but was lifted on a cross and suffered the wrath of God that we deserved so that we can rest in His completed work. His righteousness is imputed for us, Jesus carried the burden of our sin.