



“Open Church – Open Bible”

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Sunday Church School

August 15, 2021

“Jesus Corrects and Commends John-- Matt. 11:1-15

Golden Text: Matt. 11:10

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Matt. 11:1-15

1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve
disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.
2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he
sent two of his disciples
3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"
4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which
you hear and see:
5 *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.
6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."
7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John:
"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?
8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?
Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses.

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- ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.
- ¹⁰ For this is *he* of whom it is written: '*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.*'
- ¹¹ "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptizer but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.
- ¹² And from the days of John the Baptizer until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.
- ¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.
- ¹⁴ And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who is to come.
- ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

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TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to understand that for purposes of ministry or our spiritual growth, God sometimes calls us into some very dark places.

Principle: to assure us that God never abandons us in the dark places but stays with us to accomplish His will in those situations.

Application: to encourage us to trust Jesus as our Guide who always knows where to take us even when we are unable to see the way ahead.

Have you been faced with circumstance where your expectations are disappointed by the reality of the apparent fulfilment?

The truth is, slightly skewed or incomplete expectations can interfere with someone’s thinking.

A figure as stalwart as John the Baptizer experienced this, as our lesson today demonstrates to us.

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John the Baptizer had been put in prison for preaching against Herod’s sin of taking and marrying his brother’s wife (Matt. 14:3-5).

- John was thrown into a dark place for standing up for truth.

While in the prison, John began to wonder whether Jesus was really the Coming One, the Messiah.

- This question bothered him until he had to find out the answer for himself.

This quarter has dealt with areas of Courage

(a) Acts of courage in the lives of Joshua, (Josh.10), Gideon (Judges 6) , Jonathan (I Sam. 14) and Elijah (I Kings 21)

(b) Courage while facing threats in the lives of (a) **Abijah** (II Chron 13) (b) **Hezekiah** (II Chron 32), (c) **Nehemiah** (Neh. 4) **Esther** (Est. 4) (d) **Jeremiah** (Jer. 26) and (e) Four Young Men (**Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego** – Dan 3)

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This final Quarter we are examining

(c) **Courage for Jesus** reviewed through the experiences of: (a) Jesus and John the Baptizer (Matt. 11) (b) Peter and John (Acts 4) (c) The Apostle Paul (Acts 22)

The LESSON OUTLINE:

I. CORRECTING JOHN’S EXPECTATIONS —Matt. 11:1-6

II. CORRECTING THE CROWD’S EXPECTATIONS —Matt. 11:7-15

I. CORRECTING JOHN’S EXPECTATIONS (Matt. 11:1-6)

- In the previous chapter, Matthew 10, records Jesus’ lengthy instructions to His disciples before their first preaching mission throughout the region.
- After cautioning them on how to react to various situations, He sent them out in pairs on their own.
- Alone for the first time in months, Jesus could have taken a well-deserved break.
- Instead, He used the time to continue His ministry on His own, setting off to preach and teach in other towns nearby.

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- Reports of Jesus’ ministry had been coming to the ears of John the Baptizer
- Matthew says that John heard these things “in the prison” i.e., he was locked up in Herod’s dungeon.
- This is mentioned only briefly in Matthew 4:12; but we learn more details concerning the reason in chapter 14, with the report of his beheading.
- Herod Antipas had arrested John for speaking out against his unlawful marriage to Herodias, who had been the wife of his brother Philip, whom she had left (V 3).
- Herod’s behavior was in direct violation of Leviticus 18:16 and 20:21, and John did not shy away from saying so publicly.
- Having heard the reports of what Jesus had been doing, John sent two of his disciples to make a special inquiry.
- He wanted to know, was Jesus really the One who was to come – the One about Whom he preached; should he and his followers be looking for someone else?
- This unexpected crisis of confidence is strange, considering he was the cousin of Jesus who had leaped in his mother at the presence of Mary (Luke 1:41-44)

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- What caused John to start questioning things he himself had taught so ardently? Some of the reasons are not difficult to discern.
 - 1) He was languishing in prison, which was not the outcome he had envisioned when he began his ministry.
 - the risks of challenging a powerful figure such as Herod and did not deter his commitment to his calling
 - But an extended time alone in a dark cell would have a damaging effect on his spirit.
 - 2) John may have wondered why God did not intervene, either by allowing his death or effecting his vindication and release.
 - It must have been disheartening to remain in confinement
 - 3) Beyond his personal circumstances, there seems to have been a deeper root to John's unease.
 - The wording of Matthew 11:2 suggests that the very things he was hearing about Jesus' public ministry were contributing to his doubts.
 - In some key way, Jesus was not living up to John's expectations for Him

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- The widespread anticipation at this time regarding Messiah was for a purely political deliverer who would throw off the shackles of Roman occupation
- While it is clear John did not share this shallow conception, he did appear to look for a vigorous turnaround.
 - He had preached in dramatic terms.
 - His uncompromising language in Matt. 3:7-12 shows that John associated the Messiah’s coming with a deep spiritual cleansing and judgment
 - But he was not seeing or hearing any signs of judgment happening yet.
- Jesus did not become indignant or beat John over the head with rebuke.
- He simply instructed John’s disciples to go back and report to him what they were seeing and hearing: people’s lives were being changed.
 - Jesus enumerated several specifics. Blind people were seeing again; lame ones were walking; lepers were being cleansed; deaf individuals were hearing; and dead people were being raised to life again.
 - On top of all this, the poor were having the gospel—good news—proclaimed to them.

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- These were repeatedly occurring acts that John’s disciples could verify.
- Jesus was not merely talking about the kingdom but was demonstrating its nearness through acts of divine power.
- The real power of Jesus’ answer, however, lay in His confidence that John would recognize the messianic prophecies Jesus was alluding to.
- The works He listed were listed in passages such as Isaiah 29:18-21, 35:5-6, and 61:1.
- The Master did not need to indicate where He had drawn the phrases from; He knew John would get the point: Jesus was fulfilling Scripture.
- The Lord had one more challenge for the disciples to take back to John.
- They were to tell him, “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Matt. 11:6).
- The Greek term for “offended” speaks of putting something in a person’s way that he might trip over—a stumbling block.
- John was not to allow his discouragement to trip him up, to pull him away from faith in Jesus.
- Jesus was offering a bracing exhortation to persevere, to keep the faith.

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II. CORRECTING THE CROWD’S EXPECTATIONS —Matt. 11:7-15

- As soon as the disciples left to return to John, Jesus turned to the crowd with some questions of His own.
- He knew that many of them had gone out to see John when he was baptizing and preaching by the Jordan.
- Jesus wanted them to examine for themselves why they had done so.
- John the Baptizer had been raised up by God to prepare the hearts of the people to be spiritually ready for the coming of the Messiah.
- Many had sincerely responded, demonstrating true repentance in being baptized, and were prepared and responsive to Christ’s call on their lives.
- But Jesus knew that large numbers of those who went to see and hear John did so merely out of curiosity.
- So, Jesus began probing this curiosity. “What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” (V 7).
- What expectations did they have? That is, did they think he would sway in every direction according to popular opinion?

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- Knowing John’s fiery preaching, that was an absurd thought.
- John was the very opposite of this picture, as the crowd well knew.
- Jesus then asked another absurd question: Did they go out to the Jordan wilderness thinking they would find a man draped in fine, luxurious clothing?
- Jesus Himself pointed out the incongruity. To find people in such attire, you would go to a royal palace.
- John, of course, had been dressed in the roughest of attire, a camel-hair garment with a leather belt (3:4).
- But Jesus did not bother to point this out; the people were already quite aware of it. Instead, He brought them around to the heart of the issue: “What went ye out for to see? A prophet?” (11:9).
- He then immediately confirmed that this was the right reason to go see John.
- With His questions, Jesus was pointing out that the only legitimate reason for making the trip to the wilderness was to hear the words of a prophet, a man who spoke for God.

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- In fact, God’s people had not had a prophet for four hundred years, so even in this aspect, John would have been a novelty.
- Since the close of the OT there had not been a word from God.
- After this long, certainly people thought God had abandoned His people.
- This would have been a good enough reason to go hear from John.
- But even “prophet” was not sufficient to describe John. Jesus said John was “more than a prophet.”
- His mission had been unprecedented. The people crowding around Jesus needed to come to terms with this astounding truth (Matt. 11:10-11).
- Jesus now declared truth that few had grasped, for John was more than a prophet; he was the special messenger of the One who was to come.
- Paraphrasing Malachi 3:1, Jesus made clear that John was God’s chosen herald of the Messiah Himself.
- Jesus then made an enigmatic declaration, one that still continues to puzzle many readers.

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- Jesus said John occupied a position of highest honor “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11).
- John stood at the culmination of the line of all the prophets.
- That much was simple enough for all to understand, but then Jesus threw the curveball: Despite all this, even the most insignificant person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John!
- What was Jesus saying? It was a paradox the crowd could scarcely guess at then, but it contained a profound truth.
- Everything that God had done with and for His people up to this time was preparatory.
- Everything led and pointed to the time when Christ would usher in God’s kingdom on earth
 - First in the hearts of His people and
 - Secondly in a glorious, world-renovating reign.
- John belonged to the era that was preparatory; and the kingdom era was at hand; the Bridegroom was being revealed.

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- Even John recognized he was only a friend of the Bridegroom (John 3:29).
- Anyone who would be made part of the bride would enjoy greater spiritual privileges. This is a deep warning (Matt. 11:12-15).
- Jesus gave the crowd a further riddle to chew on. He stated that since John’s time, the kingdom of heaven “suffereth violence.”
- There have long been two primary views regarding this phrase.
 - The first view translates the phrase as we have it here and sees the kingdom of heaven under attack by the forces of evil.
 - ❑ Christ may well have been specifically referring to the opposition He endured from almost day one of His public ministry.
 - ❑ And He gave His disciples no false hope that such conflict would soon dissipate.
 - The second view translates the phrase along the lines of “the kingdom has been forcefully advancing” and sees it as a positive.
 - Through Jesus’ miracles and preaching, much progress had already been made even in the face of opposition.

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- While the second view of this phrase has some merit, it does not seem to hold up as well under examination.
- This is especially so in considering the second half of Jesus’ statement: “and the violent take it by force.”
- Under the first understanding, this would refer to those who resisted the kingdom by violent acts and sought to establish their own kingdom.
- The second interpretation suggests people become Jesus’ disciples through exercising spiritual courage, vigor, and determination.
- While such qualities are necessary for enduring persecution, it seems an odd way to describe sinners who come to faith offering nothing but their own brokenness and need.
- Jesus then noted that all the Prophets, and even the Law itself, prophesied until John.
- The Lord then made one final comment about John, declaring that he was Elijah who was prophesied to come.
- In saying this, Jesus was alluding to the last two verses of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6.



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“ADVANCE YOUR KNOWLEDGE”



1. Why was Jesus alone at the start of this passage? What doubts was John undergoing in prison?
2. Why was John questioning his own proclamations about Jesus? What answer did Jesus have John's disciples take back to him?
3. What point did Jesus expect John to grasp?
4. What was Jesus trying to point out with His questions about John?
5. In what way was John the Baptizer more than a prophet?
6. What truth was contained in Jesus' paradoxical statement about John's greatness?
7. How should we understand the statement in verse 13? In what way was John the prophesied Elijah?



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“DEVELOPING THE LESSON”



1. Jesus had just finished a teaching session with His disciples where He commissioned them to go out on a preaching tour throughout Galilee. At a certain point in His travels, Jesus was approached by some messengers sent by John the Baptizer. How do you respond to people who doubt their calling?
2. After John’s messengers left, Jesus turned His attention to the crowd and gave them an important lesson as to exactly who John was. He quoted Malachi 3:1 to establish that John the Baptizer was the one sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. What did Jesus mean when He said ‘even the least of those in the kingdom of heaven are greater than John.’
3. Jesus said those who have “ears to hear” (Matt. 11:15) have been called to hear the Word of God. How does what is heard connect to what one believes in their heart; and what is the hearts “soul connection?”

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