

# Sermons on Matthew

## Why Are You Here?

*Matthew 11:7-19*

*With Study Questions*

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## Why Are You Here?

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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? <sup>-8-</sup> But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. <sup>-9-</sup> But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, \_\_\_and more than a prophet. <sup>-10-</sup> For this is *he* of whom it is written:

‘\_Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,  
□Who will prepare Your way before You.’

<sup>-11-</sup> “\_Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>-12-</sup> \_\_\_And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>-13-</sup> \_\_\_For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>-14-</sup> And if you are willing to receive *it*, he is \_Elijah who is to come. <sup>-15-</sup> \_\_\_He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

<sup>-16-</sup> \_\_\_“\_But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, <sup>-17-</sup> and saying:

‘\_We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not \_\_\_lament.’

<sup>-18-</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘\_He has a demon.’ <sup>-19-</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘\_Look, a glutton and a \_winebibber, \_a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ \_\_\_But wisdom is justified by her \_children\_.”

(Matthew 11:7-19)

## John's Church

### No Flip-Flopping

Every Sunday morning millions and millions wake up, get dressed, get their families in the cars and go to church. What exactly are we hoping is going to happen? What are we coming to see? This seems to be the nature of Jesus' repetitive question. When you went to the church of John the Baptist, what did you go to see?

Jesus gives a couple of examples. Did you go to see a reed shaken by the wind? Did you go to see a flip-flopper? Politicians often flip-flop depending on their audience or when they realize their position is losing popularity. Is that what you want—someone sticking their theological finger in the air and adjusting his message with the breeze? Maybe they were surprised at John's plight. John is in prison; if you follow his teaching, you may end up there as well. Don't be surprised if true religion puts you at loggerheads with your community—even your religious community. Jesus testifies that John was masterful at not falling into the pit later addressed by Paul:

**. . .that we should no longer be \_children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of \_\_deceitful plotting. . .  
(Ephesians 4:14)**

Unsound doctrine, trickery, and craftiness were no doubt all on the list of John's foes. But he would not bend.

When you went to John's church, what did you go to see? A man whose compromise and willingness to flex with his surroundings afforded him the comforts of a palace? On the contrary, he rebuked those in the palace and was suffering for it (Matthew 14:3, 4).

Clearly John's environment would not suffer sound doctrine or a man unwilling to bow—or even rub elbows with—his religious contemporaries. Let us all learn a lesson from John's courage. Religious compromise for the sake of a facility, or funding, or to avoid conflict would be a font of nausea for John.

John was a man with taste buds and dendrites just like any other man. The morally acceptable comforts of this world would have been comforts to him but his current religious turf would not permit such. And all because of what he was...

## A Prophet

**But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, \_\_and more than a prophet. (Matthew 11:9)**

John was a prophet. How fruitless the junket to church if not to hear the prophetic voice. John as a prophet was the very mouth of God (Exodus 4:15-17). And although we have no prophets in this sense today, we do have the prophetic message contained in the Scriptures.

Why did we come to church? We endeavor to rightly understand the prophetic word through which we have an encounter with the Living God. Better to be in the geographical wilderness baptized in the refreshment of God's word than in a palatial basilica hiding a spiritual wilderness. The surroundings are second fiddle to the message.

John was more than a prophet, for he was also a fulfillment of prophecy (Malachi 3, 4). The Old Testament ends with God's promise that there would be one who would prepare the way before the Messiah. John was not merely a prophet bringing the types and shadows; he was a contemporary of Jesus, Jesus' cousin. He was the messenger before the face of Christ.

## The Greatest Man

Jesus then gives a shining testimony concerning John. There is simply not a human being greater than John. What great words of encouragement. John was a man and a sinner just like all men. But this did not prevent Jesus from speaking highly of him. Our knowledge that man is totally depraved with desperately wicked hearts (Jeremiah 17:9) should not cripple us from finding and pointing out the good in others.

John was a noble herald. John lovingly preached forgiveness (John 1:29). John boldly preached repentance (Matthew 3:2). John fearlessly preached judgment (Matthew 3:7-12). And John humbly acknowledged his own need to decrease as Christ is magnified (John 3:30).

Jesus then makes a statement which no doubt raised the eyebrows of His listeners: He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. (**cf. Matthew 11.11b**) Of what does this superiority consist? Are we all braver than John? Smarter than John? More moral than John? None of these seem to hold water. It would seem that the superior nature of the member of the new covenant (which I would understand the kingdom of

heaven to mean in this context) versus the old has to do with the superior nature of the new covenant (the time in history after the cross).

John would see no Calvary, no Pentecost. John's message would, for the most part, be rejected. John brought a message of judgment to an apostate people under the power and influence of the devil (John 8:44). The cross of Christ would break the power of the devil and his power to deceive the nations (Colossians 2:15; Revelation 20:3). The superior nature of those in the new covenant has to do with the victory of Christ accomplished and its unfolding blessings. How much more ought we, with the full and complete message and accomplished victory of Christ, to deliver the good news!

## **A Fickle Congregation**

### **Violence**

Verse twelve is a tricky verse. Some versions say that the kingdom suffers violence, other that it is "forcefully advancing." (NIV) This all because the word for "suffers violence" (\_\_\_\_\_) can be middle or passive, thus affecting its meaning. This is not theologically problematic because both are true. The kingdom of God was forcefully advancing, and there were those (like John) who were suffering violence as a result.

It seems like the point here is that the faithful should be ready for a fight. John was the Elijah promised at the end of the Old Testament. He was delivering the true message of repentance and redemption in preparation for Jesus who would take away the sins of the world. Jesus is reinforcing the fact that there was nothing wrong with the message. The problem was the congregation.

### **Like Spoiled Children**

"What are you people like?" Jesus rhetorically asks. You're like spoiled children playing with each other. You won't dance with the fun music and you won't cry with the sad. You continually establish excuses for your antagonism toward religion. John the Baptist was an ascetic. He didn't eat normal food or drink normal drink, so he must have had a demon. Jesus came, eating normal food and drinking normal drink (in this case wine<sup>1</sup>), so he must have been a glutton, a winebibber and a carouser.

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<sup>1</sup> This, by the way, pretty much obliterates the whole idea of moderate alcohol consumption being a bad witness.

People can and will find any number of excuses to reject the truth of Christ. "Church is full of hypocrites... all they care about is money... my neighbor is a Christian and his dog barks all night and his kids are out of control... look at all the evil done in the name of religion." Once I cancelled a plumbing job with a plumber that and I my friend had been witnessing to. The plumber told my friend that he could never go to a church where the pastor cancelled a plumbing job.

## **Justifying Wisdom**

Jesus ends this section with the words, "**But wisdom is justified by her children.**" (Matthew 11.18b) God doesn't change, Jesus doesn't change, the message of John wasn't going to change, and wisdom doesn't change. The word justified (\_\_\_\_\_) here means "was shown to be right." In other words, wisdom is shown to be right by what it produces (Luke 7:29).

Criticism and rejection of Jesus reveals the wisdom of God as much as humility and repentance. If the whole world rejected God it would not be an indictment against God, as Paul proclaimed, ". . .**let \_\_God be \_\_true but \_\_every man a liar.**" (Romans 3:4b) God is the ultimate source by which everything is measured. They don't adjust the atomic clock to my Casio watch. It would seem to me that those listening to the words of Jesus would have had to ask themselves the question we should all ask ourselves, "Will my life reveal the wisdom of God through my hardness of heart, or through my repentance and faith in Christ?"

## Questions for Study

1. How was John not like a reed (pages 2, 3)?
2. What lesson should we learn from John (page 3)?

3. What should John's audience have gone to see (pages 3, 4)?
4. In what respect was John the greatest man (page 4)?
5. How is the least in the kingdom greater than John (pages 4, 5)?
6. How was the kingdom growing (page 5)?
7. How does Jesus criticize the congregation (pages 5, 6)?
8. What does it mean that "wisdom is justified by her children" (page 6)?