

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

For the past several weeks we have been studying the book of Matthew. We are on Matthew chapter 11 this week; that does not mean that we are going “bankrupt.”

It is actually the opposite. Matthew has enriched us immensely by showing that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah that has been expected, the expected King of Israel and also the expected “Shepherd of Israel.”

Through miracles, visions, fulfilled prophecy and more, Jesus has been shown to be all of these things, we are now in these next two chapters going to be looking at how people reacted to Jesus. **Did they believe in him or not?**

The book of Matthew is in five sections. Each section ends with something like what is in these verses,

Matthew 7:28 (ESV)

²⁸And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,

Matthew 11:1 (ESV)

¹When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

We are now into the third section and we are going to see that the Kingdom is revealed and also hidden. It is seen by some and not by others. It is easy to not believe in Jesus, though he is standing in their midst.

Matthew 11:1–30 (ESV)

¹When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

²Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples

³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

⁴And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see:

⁵the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

⁶And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

⁸What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

¹⁰This is he of whom it is written, “ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,

¹⁴and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

¹⁶“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

¹⁷“ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

¹⁹The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

²⁰Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

²⁴But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

²⁵At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

You may have heard the axiom, “If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail” (2x).

Well God had a plan, and if you look at it from human terms, then God planned to fail; the Messiah was going to be largely rejected by average folk and the learned Pharisees. And there are various reasons that people were rejecting Jesus. This chapter of Matthew shows some of those reasons.

Some of the last verses of this chapter, spoken by Jesus are a commentary of what was happening,

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

The process of people believing in Jesus and even that people would be saved by faith is part of God’s wise plan. Somehow, it is necessary that people are humble, like children, and that they put their faith in Jesus in order to be able to be saved.

People are always trying to figure things out. In the absence of knowledge, people will still make up various theories as to why things happen. Sometimes they will hang onto those theories even in the face of better evidence.

Because science had not yet discovered the microscopic world, medicine in the 18th century had many different theories for where disease came from and how to treat it.

Geri Walton, says in her writing about the subject, that Physicians,

... believed in the longstanding central principle of Western medicine, known as the Humoral theory, which believed in balancing the four humors—blood (sanguine), black bile (melancholic), yellow bile (choleric), and phlegm (phlegmatic). Among the ways to balance the four humors was bloodletting, which was thought to cure everything from acne to diabetes to indigestion and from nosebleed to scurvy.

People are logical, but sometimes lack information. So was the case with John the Baptist. John is the first example of people that were struggling to believe in Jesus that we see in this passage. We see this in Verse 2 & 3,

²Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

You see John was sitting in prison, because he was bold and probably did what he thought the Messiah would do, go straight after un-righteousness at the highest places. He thought the Messiah would confront and overthrow those in power and bring righteousness to the land; that was according to prophecy. And so John did that too and it landed him right in prison. He also knew also that the Messiah would liberate the prisoners; so why is Jesus not liberating him or doing any of these other things? John was perplexed. He heard about the healings and casting out of demons and other things, but he wondered when was he going to cast out the evil, unrighteous Romans and their unbelieving puppets? So, he sent a few of his followers to ask Jesus what was up... “Jesus, this is great, but you are really letting me down. You are not getting to any of the things that I expect.”

Jesus replied with verses from Isaiah that John obviously knew that were about the Messiah, but these showed him that the Messiah would be doing exactly what Jesus was doing.

⁴And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

These verses would have reassured John that his faith was not misplaced, though there were doubts. John had to personally put his faith in Jesus despite his expectations, which he would have done with these words of encouragement from Jesus.

Jesus proclaimed, "*Blessed is he that is not offended by me.*" The word to "offend" means to put a snare in the path or to cause someone to stumble.

"Blessed is he that is not offended by me." That really is an odd statement, and it comes also from Isaiah chapter 8,

Isaiah 8:14–15a (ESV)

¹⁴And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵And many shall stumble on it...

People's expectations become a snare and rock of stumbling on the path. Jesus can offend us when he does not meet our expectations. What are some ways that we or others that we know have stumbled or been offended by Jesus?

Some people come to Jesus and are offended because he does not heal them or a loved one; so they drift away from faith.

Some people are offended by Jesus because he does not give them the prosperity that they are looking for.

Maybe some are offended by Jesus because he does not give them the spouse that they are looking for.

Maybe some are offended by Jesus when they don't have the sort of ministry that they think they should have; they don't get acclaim, so they drift away from faith.

Maybe some people think that the Lord is coming back soon. When it did not come back soon enough, they drifted away from faith.

Jesus can be disappointing, and cause people to stumble. **It is not easy to believe in Jesus**; especially when we come to him with our own expectations. Jesus did come to break the powers and authorities of darkness. He did come to bring his Kingdom with power and establish righteousness forever, as John was expecting, but differently than John expected. He came to bring a spiritual revolution, not a political one and we will see in just a few verses what that means. Verse 7,

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ... A man dressed in soft clothing? ...A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Verse 11,

¹¹Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

Jesus calls John the greatest person who ever lived. And one that was "more than a prophet." Why is this? One thing might be, I don't know of any prophets that had prophecies about themselves; I might be wrong. Yet,

John had several. The last verses of the book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, speak of John the Baptist. Also in Chapter 3,

Malachi 3:1a (ESV)

¹“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

Malachi 4:5 (ESV)

⁵“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Jesus says in verse 14, “and if you are willing to accept it, he (John) was Elijah who is to come.”

But John is greater than the prophets because he was chosen as the very fore-runner of Jesus. He saw Jesus; he saw the prophecies come true in real life. He said, “Behold, the lamb of God” and even baptized Jesus.

Jesus says something very interesting in verse 11,

^{11b} *Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

Many people like to think that they are great. People with great learning, like the Pharisees, thought they were great, and they tripped and stumbled over their own greatness.

But Jesus says that each believer in him, even the least in the Kingdom of God, is actually greater than the greatest person that ever lived.

How is that? Similarly, because every believer has seen more than John the Baptist. John died before he could see Jesus accomplish his work. Jesus’ work was to die on the cross for our sins and to be resurrected to new life. Each person that puts their faith in Jesus, sees more than any of the

prophets or John the Baptist. We actually get to see what God's had planned from old; that Jesus would be our savior and die for us in order to forgive our sin and restore us to God! Even the least believer, sees Jesus and God's plan more concretely than any prophet of old.

Jesus continues in verse 12,

¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

These verses are a bit enigmatic. There have been various ways to try and understand them, the NLV (New Living Version) puts it this way,

¹² And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.

The problem is with the adverb (forcefully); is it a positive or a negative connotation? It means "to force" something; like force your way in. My dad used to tell me, rather sarcastically, after I broke something, "If at first you don't succeed, force it!"

In the NLT, rather than the kingdom "suffering violence" it is forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it. That makes sense as an answer to John the Baptist's reservations of Jesus not forcefully advancing the kingdom. He is saying that it is forcefully advancing, but in the spiritual realm. Satan is being displaced, demons are being thrown out, people are being healed and most of all people are being ripped out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and put into the kingdom of light!

Jesus talks about the issue of people not putting their faith in him – in fact the generation is under scrutiny in the parable that starts at verse 16,

¹⁶"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷" "We played the flute for you, and

you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

Perhaps the play of children sitting in the marketplace was a well-known type of game. It seems like a pretend game. Let’s play wedding, and we will play the flute and you can dance. Or let’s play funeral and we will play a dirge and you mourn. The problem was in this game, the other side didn’t want to play.

We can see this as spoiled children not getting their way, perhaps the Pharisees were upset that John the Baptist and Jesus were not going along with their game. Another way to see it is that John the Baptist and Jesus were the ones playing the instruments; John played the dirge (he came neither eating bread nor drinking wine); telling people to repent of their sins. Jesus played the flute (he ate bread and drank wine and associated with tax-gathers and sinners). He announced the good news of the kingdom of God that had come and he healed people of their illnesses.

In either case, “You are darned if you do and darned if you don’t.” They criticized John for the seriousness of his message and Jesus for not being serious enough. John and Jesus were not meeting the expectations of the leaders and those under their influence. **The Pharisees were leading the whole generation into not believing.**

The message of John and Jesus undermined the influence of the Pharisees because it showed that people did not need to depend on the Pharisees, but rather have their heart right with God. Because of this, the Pharisees attacked their own Messiah and did not believe in him.

Jesus explains to the people the “woe” that comes in not believing in him. Jesus is the person who will judge everyone’s life. We are judged by him, but also judged by what we do with him and his teachings. Verse 20,

²⁰Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Finally, we come to where we began. Jesus gives spontaneous thanks to God, verse 25,

²⁵At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will

There are lots of ways and reasons not to believe in Jesus. It is easy not to believe in Jesus. We can be prideful; we can be slaves to our own misconceptions. John the Baptist did the right thing; he sent messengers to ask. Many people stay “stuck” in their misconceptions for years - or even a lifetime and never venture in faith to investigate if what they believe is actually true or not! We can be “offended” by Jesus when he does not meet our expectations. He doesn’t bring justice to bear for our cause, or prosper us the way we think we should be prospered. God hides things from the “wise” but reveals them to the little children; those that are humble and know that they know nothing.

²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

If we are going to know the Father, we need to know the Son.

John 6:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.
And I will raise him up on the last day.

And likewise, no one can come to the Father unless Jesus reveals him. The Father and Son are one; they share mutual knowledge and wisdom and power as does the Holy Spirit with them.

Jesus concludes this passage with an invitation.

²⁸*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* ³⁰*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

It does not matter that a person cannot come unless they are drawn, Jesus invites all to come.

Those that are heavy laden are those that are under the burden of the Pharisees or in our day, under the burden of trying to live up to God's standards. Jesus invites those that are burdened to come; He will give rest.

He invites them to take his yoke and take off our old one. It is a yoke that is well fitted, which makes it "light" and "easy." When we follow Jesus, it is immensely easier and more satisfying to know that we follow a person. Our obedience comes because we love him and are loyal to him. We want to do what pleases him and the Father and Spirit, because the Holy Spirit renews and gives us a new heart! When we fail, we desire to come and confess our sins and dependance on Christ, because he is "gentle and lowly in heart."

It is easy not to believe in Jesus, but it is also easy when we do believe in Jesus; he unburdens our hearts and lifts our heads. He invites us to come as children. C.S. Lewis said this,

“As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people, of course as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”

He continues,

“... and He and you are two things of such a kind, that if you really get into any kind of touch with him, you will in fact, be humble - delightedly humble, feeling an infinite sense of relief of having for once got rid of all that silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life.”

Jesus cried out to the crowd,

²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

We find satisfaction in believing in Jesus. He makes it easy for us.

...

Please pray with me.