

Matthew 11 v 1-4

When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see..."

There comes a time when Jesus completes the teaching of the disciples. The needs in the region were great and Jesus knew that He should continue to teach, preach and demonstrate the Kingdom of God in other Jewish cities. When John, who was imprisoned by the authorities because of his continuous prophetic ministry concerning the Kingdom, heard about the works of Christ, he sent word and asked if this was the Expected One.

Matthew 3 v 11

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

This man Jesus, was He the one who John referred to? He had to know; he wasn't sure about who this Jesus was. We can also understand that he was a little uncertain of the works of Christ, was this really the One about whom he had preached? We can sympathise with his dilemma; he had been out of touch with things. There is a lesson to be learned here, although John was a God-fearing man, his absence from fellowship created doubts and fears and although he was a prophet, he still had human uncertainties.

Matthew 11 v 5-6

...the blind receive sight 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. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me."

John was uncertain as to whether Jesus was the One that he knew was to come, it is interesting to see how He responds in verse; what Jesus quotes here is a passage of scripture from Isaiah 29 v 18-19 and 35 v 4-6. John would have recognised the signs that followed his ministry. The point is, was John convinced?

Again we see that Jesus describes Himself as a stumbling block, He gets in the way of all unrighteousness. We are advised to follow Him not to be confronted by Him; we do this by knowing what He expects of us and doing it.

Matthew 11 v 7-19

As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.' Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Jesus speaks well of John; notice that He is speaking to the multitudes. The question that He asks is interesting "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? This, bearing in mind that the crowds had obviously been attracted by the message of John as he heralded the coming of Jesus in the earlier chapters of Matthew. John's appearance was a feature of his heart and his task.

Matthew 3 v 4

Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

Jesus points out that the look of God's prophet was enough to attract interest. His clothing suited the occasion. He paid no attention to his own self but lived with just enough to enable him to carry out the task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. His reward seemingly was that he was now in prison! The role of the prophet in those times was a dangerous one. Jesus speaks of John's greatness, a greatness that was caused through his willingness to speak of the coming of the King of God's Kingdom.

Jesus speaks of the spirit of the man, he had the character, the boldness and the courage of Elijah who had dared to challenge more than 800 false prophets and God honoured him for it.

1 Kings 18 v 17-19

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" He said, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

The Jews believed and expected a Messiah to come; they were waiting for this promised one. They knew that the prophet Malachi had predicted it.

Malachi 4 v 5-6

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

God's intention was and still is to see the family of God restored, not removed.

Ephesians 2 v 17-22

And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 3 v 14-19

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

John was greater than anyone born of a woman, yet this is what Matthew had to say about him:

Matthew 11 v 11-12

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

What a recommendation to those of us who were, and are born of the Spirit of the Lord! The Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on His disciples, Jesus had received the Holy Spirit and was able to perform these great works as a demonstration that the Kingdom was now truly with them.

John lived a God-fearing life, he neither drank strong wine nor indulged in overeating yet they accused him of having a demon. Jesus came and He both ate and He drank and mixed with sinners and they condemned Him as well. Without passion and great determination we will not be able to bring this Kingdom into being. Verse 12 is a provocation and removes the idea that we can bring in the Kingdom in our lives without conflict. When the Kingdom life flows in our innermost being it will meet the obstacle of the flesh that is living in us. God seeks the breakthrough of the Kingdom in us, not around us, but in us. God has left the issues of the Kingdom in our own hands to implement.

2 Corinthians 2 v 10-17

But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

Paul describes himself with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, as one who is bold. He speaks of the war that has nothing to do with the flesh, but with the powerful forces of evil that would come against the Kingdom of God.

We have to be violent against all speculations and every lofty thing raised against the knowledge of God and we are to take every thought captive to the obedience Christ, destroying or punishing all disobedience. I take this to mean that there is no mercy to be shown to any disobedience of any kind, either in me, or around me.

Jesus shows this attitude to Simon Peter.

Matthew 16 v 21 -23

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

This reflects the difference between God's word and man's endeavour to keep the peace.

Jesus violently opposed all rebellion. Rebellion in the Kingdom is not acceptable; rebellion is anything that is out of God's order. Further evidence of God's violent and extreme attitude towards disobedience is seen in His dealings with King Saul. Saul had failed to do all that God had asked of him, he did some of it, but not all of it. Saul blamed the people; God spoke strong words to Saul.

1 Samuel 15 v 21 -23

But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal." Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king."

A little digression there but one that I think is worthwhile. Now, let's get back to Matthew 11.

Matthew 11 v 6

...And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

It's no wonder that Jesus says this; He dealt violently with those who misused the Temple as a market place, driving them out and turning over the tables and seats.

John 2 v 15

And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables... There is no truth in the story that Jesus was meek and mild, except when He was a baby; Jesus could be violent when it affected His Father's Kingdom. Should we not follow in His footsteps and be as bold and courageous for the sake of the Kingdom? How would you respond if you had been in Simon Peter's place? Jesus was and is still today someone who confronts those who oppose His law. He does it through the authorities that He delegated to mankind. To resist these authorities is to resist the Lord Himself. Whenever we do this we stumble over Him and we are likely to be humbled, hurt or unhappy. Adam blamed his wife, Saul blamed his people, who do we blame?

Matthew 11 v 20-24

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.'

Here Jesus compares the cities in the region; Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. Even the immoral cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would have repented had the Gospel of the Kingdom of God been preached to them. He says that the cities that have witnessed the wonderful works of Christ refused to repent. They are in real trouble as God's judgement will fall on them all.

We need to be encouraged when we are; or rather the gospel of the Kingdom is not received. Our responsibility is only to live the Gospel and declare it. We may be ridiculed or offended but if we take hold of the spirit of Elijah, we shall see the works of Christ at work in our lives.

Matthew 11 v 25-30

At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. 'All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

This final scripture is an invitation to come to Jesus as children, come with your questions, come with your burdens, come with your doubts and your fears but above all things, come with a childlike trust in Him and His Father's word.