

Building Opposition to the Gospel Mathew 11

We continue again this morning in the Gospel of Matthew. Thank you for allowing us to be out of the pulpit for a couple of weeks.

When we were last in the Gospel of Matthew we completed chapter 10. Chapter 10 is all about the instructions that Jesus gave to the 12 disciples who were also called the Apostles and would become part of the foundation of the church. Jesus was sending out the 12 to spread the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus was still offering to the people of Israel the Messianic kingdom and the 12 were sent out to spread the message of the kingdom. We should remember that the 12 were told that they should go out in faith and not take clothes or food. They also should go into a new town and look for people to stay with who were like minded and agreeable to the spread of the gospel. Those who rejected the message were to be left in the dust and go on to people that were receptive to the message. Jesus also told them that the people were not going to listen. There would be all sorts of attacks and the people would use every tool they could against them. This includes the government and family going against them. In effect Jesus sent them out to do a job that would be rejected by the masses.

So let's pick up our walk through the gospel of Matthew in chapter 11. I have titled this section: Building Opposition to the

Gospel. The Pharisees are beginning to ramp up their opposition to Jesus and the gospel message.

Matthew 11:1 (ESV)

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

In chapter 10 we have the instructions Jesus gave to the 12. He sends them out to the cities and towns of the Galilee region. Jesus then goes to teach and preach in other locations. The disciples are out learning and experiencing ministry. Remember, they were warned about the rejection they would face and the struggles they would go through.

As we look at early church history, it becomes clear that this training was important in the development of these men who would be at the forefront of the new church movement. All going to their graves still ministering and preaching the gospel. The experience they gained in those ministry teams provided them the knowledge that they would need when the church started.

I think it is important that we see they gained this experience without Jesus by their side. Not that God was not with them, but that they saw no visible Jesus standing with them as they went town to town. They had to trust God, to have faith in Him, while not seeing Jesus with them. I think Matthew writes this way so that we see this reality. They were on their own like they will be

after His death, burial, and resurrection. I am sure that it was only after Jesus had ascended did they recognize what they had learned in this ministry experience.

Messengers from John the Baptist (11:2-19)

Matthew 11:2–3 (ESV)

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

We have to go back to Matthew 4:12 to see that John the Baptizer was arrested and put in prison. Jesus was aware of John's arrest and I would assume He kept tabs on what was going on with John.

It also appears that John was keeping tabs on Jesus and His ministry. When John heard, in prison, about what Jesus was doing, about His ministry, the healings, the resurrections, the casting out of demons, etc, he wanted to know more. Remember that Jesus and John were cousins and it was John that first publicly declared Jesus was the messiah.

So John sends some of his disciples to inquire from Jesus if in fact, He is the messiah. As we worked through the miracles, or as Matthew refers to them here verse 1, the deeds of Jesus, we saw that these deeds were consistent with what Israel expected

the Messiah to do. So John's question was legitimate when you consider the opposition that Jesus was getting. I don't think that Israel anticipated that the messiah, they longed for, would face such opposition. John's question or doubt is understandable. Jesus was doing messiah type miracles but was also facing opposition, in contrast to what was anticipated.

There is a sense here that John, sitting in prison for no crime, was wondering how this could be. Think about this from his perspective. John was the first to recognize Jesus and he served as an ambassador for Jesus, the messiah. The messiah who would become king. So why am I, your ambassador in prison? Perhaps you are not really the messiah. Can't you just see that?

Matthew 11:4–6 (ESV)

4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the 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. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Jesus' response to the disciples of John is clear. You go back and tell John what you have seen, all of these messianic activities, such as the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and the poor have the gospel preached. Those are all things that the prophets had told Israel the Messiah would do.

So, Jesus instructions to the disciples of John was to listen to the message the He and the disciples were preaching and the things that He was doing all point to Jesus as Messiah. Despite John still being in prison, he should have no doubt that Jesus was in fact, the messiah.

Here's the issue that John was facing. Despite the fact that Jesus was fulfilling the prophesied facets of the messiah, He did not look like the messiah would look. You have seen this as you read through the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. The picture of the Messiah was not one like Jesus was beginning to present. Despite the prophecies in Isaiah and other prophets that the Messiah would suffer and be rejected, the image that Israel had come to expect was one of a conquering messiah. Here was John, the first one to publically declare Jesus was messiah, the advance man paving the way for Jesus, sitting in jail. It is natural to have doubts and questions.

We all face doubts and questions from time to time. Things are not as we expected and we question where we are and what we are doing. I don't think that this disqualifies us or even speaks to a lack of faith in God. I think it is natural when we get in our head that things will go a certain way and then they don't that we question. That does not mean that we are not still trusting Jesus to save us and guide us. It simply means that we question what is going on. We have to evaluate our expectations along with the direction we have been given. I think this is healthy. You have to determine if you, in fact, were faithful to the

instructions given by God and to what He expects for us to do. We don't doubt who God is or what He wants from us. We have to evaluate if we are faithful because we know that He is faithful.

Matthew 11:7–8 (ESV)

7 As 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?

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

The disciples of John leave to take Jesus message back to John. Jesus then begins to speak to the crowds that gathered. As I imagined this scene in my head I thought about how fantastic it really was. The last of the Old Testament prophets had his disciples talking with the Messiah the Old Testament predicted. Yet, Jesus knew that what they expected from the Messiah was not what He would deliver to them right then, but would one day bring to the world. What a scene that must have been.

As Jesus begins to speak to the crowd He asks them a question. The crowd was made up of Jews from the region and no doubt Pharisees and Sadducees were in the crowd as well. Jesus asks the crowd what they expected when they went out to the wilderness to see John the Baptizer. Jesus then asks if they expected to see a “reed shaken by the wind.”

I think Jesus was defending John as being the true forerunner of the Messiah. The crowd no doubt had heard the exchange between Jesus and the disciples of John. The crowd probably thought that John was doubting his declaration he had made about who Jesus was. Jesus was now speaking to his defense.

If you go into a wilderness environment where cattails and reeds grow up in the wadi's and then when it is dry just get tossed to and fro by the wind. Jesus uses this picture to ask if that is what they expected from John, tossed to and fro by the changing opinion winds. Rather than remaining loyal and faithful to Jesus and His mission the people thought John had his opinion changed by the opposition.

Remember that I said it is natural to have questions when things do not go as expected. That does not mean we lose faith, that we no longer believe. As I said it is time to reevaluate if we had been obedient and if our expectations are centered on God or on us.

Matthew 11:8 (ESV)

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

Jesus carries the analogy even further. A man dressed in soft clothes would be a wealthy man, in this case a man who, as a prophet, proclaims what the wealthy, those in control of Israel want him to say. He would be rewarded for these actions

through large payments which would mean he too could have fine clothes.

So Jesus has set up this defense of John the Baptizer by saying he would not sway with prevailing opinions and he could not be bought. The message John brought was true and from God, not adulterated by popular opinion.

Have you ever thought about the message God has given us to bring to the world? It is not consistent with popular opinion, in fact, it is often opposite from it. We don't get to preach what man wants, we don't get to preach what is popular. Many do preach what is popular but in doing that they will incur the wrath of God and will not hear "well done, good and faithful servant." Later in Matthew, we will see Jesus present the parable of the talents in which He reminds us that we are to be faithful to use for Him what He gives us. Jesus then says to the servants who used the talents given to him. "Well done, good and faithful servant." He says this to servants who received 5 talents, another servant who received 2 talents and another who only received 1 talent. It was not about how many they received but about their use of the talents. God has given a message to preach and to live out for the world. Not preaching that message, not living it out for the world, not loving the people of the world is not using what God gave and will end hearing from Jesus "you wicked and slothful servant" rather than well done good and faithful servant.

I cannot be a reed flapping in the wind, I can't bow to those who want a message that is less direct and forceful. Jesus defended John the Baptizer who was in jail for not being a flapping reed or sell out to the rich. I look forward to His praise as well.

Matthew 11:9–10 (ESV)

9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written,

“ ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face,

who will prepare your way before you.’

Jesus then says that John was the one the prophet spoke of, coming as the forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus quotes from

Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Jesus identifies that John the Baptizer as the one Malachi predicted would come to pave the way. Jesus was defending His cousin who was in prison, unwavering in his support for the Messiah.

Matthew 11:11 (ESV)

11 Truly, 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.

Jesus now, while still defending John introduces to the crowd a paradox that He will revisit several times as He teaches and preaches in the rest of Matthew. This paradox is the reality that being the greatest to God is entirely different than the greatest to man.

Jesus calls John the greatest of all mankind, all born of women. He is the greatest because of his role of being the forerunner, the advance man to the Messiah, the savior of the world. But God measures greatness differently than the world does. John was in prison, no way the world viewed him as great and certainly not the greatest in the world of all time.

I think Jesus here is setting up a truth that He will teach over and over again. That there is a great blessing to being a servant, slave, of Jesus, during the kingdom age. John is the last and most significant of the Old Testament Prophets. It was his job to announce the coming of the Messiah. But those who get to serve Jesus in the kingdom age, well be even greater than John. So, who gets to serve during the kingdom age. We do, we will reign with Jesus during the messianic kingdom and Jesus says that will be greater than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets.

Matthew 11:12 (ESV)

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

Many scholars that I read in preparing this message stated that was an extremely difficult verse to interpret. But I think that what Jesus is saying here is that there has been an increase in opposition to the coming of the real messiah, Jesus. From the time that John announced that Jesus was the messiah until the day He was speaking, that day, opposition to the message of the kingdom and the Messiah had grown. Even coming to violence. Remember John was arrested and put in prison and before long would have His head cut off. That's violent. Both Israel and Rome will resort to violence to stop the spread of the gospel message.

Matthew 11:13–15 (ESV)

13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

When John the Baptizer appeared on the scene a new paradigm began. The end of the Old Testament prophets, and the beginning of the ministry of the kingdom. Jesus asks the crowd, which undoubtedly included Pharisees and Sadducees if they were willing to accept this reality.

Malachi 4:5–6 (ESV)

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

6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

The last two verses of the Old Testament predict or promise the coming of Elijah before the Messiah comes to judge. One final opportunity to turn back to God before judgment was the message that Elijah would bring.

Now right in front of them was the Messiah, John a representative of the prophetic office held by Elijah had offered Israel an opportunity to repent. He offered to them repentance and Jesus offered them the messianic kingdom. It was there for the taking.

But we know that Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah and the message of the kingdom. Jesus identified John as the forerunner of the Messiah which meant that Jesus was the Messiah. The 400 years of silence from God had been completed with John and Jesus, yet Israel rejected the one they had waited for.

Matthew 11:16–17 (ESV)

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.’

Jesus now ends what began as support for John with a condemnation of the crowds, the people of Israel who were rejecting the message of John and Jesus Himself.

The reference to playing music and you did not dance was a reference to games that children play. Israel refused to respond no matter what kind of music was played or sung. They refused to respond to God in any way. The disbelief of Israel was in all reality very childish and not warranted by the truth presented. So, Jesus called them childish.

Matthew 11:18–19 (ESV)

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.”

Israel rejected John because he was not a fun-loving guy, not having dinner parties and getting drunk. John was a loner out in the wilderness, looking and acting differently. Because he did not act like them, they claimed that John was possessed by a demon. An ad hominem attack if I ever heard one.

Jesus then came and did the opposite of John. He did socialize and fellowship with people. He went to parties and spent time with His friends. To which the people of Israel complained that He was a drunkard and glutton. He likes to hang out with sinners.

Two completely different lifestyles, both rejected by Israel. It is as though Jesus is saying, no matter how we act, it won't be right for you.

The grammar of verse 19 leads to some confusion. Jesus says "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." If we view the life of John the baptizer and or Jesus with honesty we would see that they both lived righteous lives, and ultimately the wisdom of God's plan will be vindicated. Because John was the proper forerunner of the Messiah, and Jesus was the perfect Messiah. Different than Israel thought they were going to get but the perfect Messiah to take away the sins of the world.

Conclusion

Opposition to the gospel message will never be satisfied. That is until the Holy Spirit works in the heart of people. The gospel is

foolishness to those who are perishing. It is only after the Holy Spirit begins to work in their life that people begin to see the gospel message as anything other than foolishness.

As we reach out to our friends and family we have to do so asking the Holy Spirit to work in the lives. John the Baptizer, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets could not do. The Messiah standing right in front of them did not do it. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit will the gospel be effective. So make sure you seek the Holy Spirit's involvement in our mission.

We also need to remember that it is ok to question and review your situation. That is not the same thing as losing faith in God. You are more questioning your own actions rather than God's. Were you obedient? Did you do what God told you to do the way He told you to do it? Or did you freelance and do it your own way?

Opposition and doubts are part of the reality of the world we live in. The world will reject you and the message you have to share. You are going to question where you are and what you are doing. But never lose faith in the Messiah, In God to save you and protect you. John sat in prison waiting for the end to come but still trusted God to save him.

We should as well.

Let's Pray!