

## Matthew 11, Portraits of the King, Part 1

I don't know if you share this experience, but I receive what feels like almost daily calls from telemarketers. They are sneaky. I even had the moment the other day, a computer. And my inbox is flooded with spam. I even have a program that helps me unsubscribe from folks. Why do I hang up and unsubscribe? I perceive no value in what they are offering. My response doesn't matter.

Now unlike how we may respond to the marketers, our response to Jesus carries eternal significance. Whether our response is hatred, indifference, or faith, our response matters. There's no neutrality. We can't hang up the phone, that in itself is our response.

In Matthew 10 and 11, Matthew shows us 10 different portraits of Jesus. This morning we will cover four of them, seeing Jesus as the Promised Messiah, the Authoritative Judge, and Sovereign Son, and the Gracious Master. We must respond.

And at the same time there is this thread that ties these portraits together, Matthew shows us how various people respond to the King.

And there is something for each of us here this morning, all calling us to faith. Whether we are angry, doubting, tired, running, or sinning, these pictures of Jesus are meant to inspire and deepen our faith.

### Jesus is the Promised Messiah

**11:1 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.**

**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?" 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."**

Matthew shifts here in his gospel book and brings back up John the Baptist. You may remember him from chapter 3, the crazy bug eating guy out in the desert telling everyone to repent because of the wrath of God that is coming. Well John gets put in prison, because he was raining on Herod's parade telling him its not lawful for Herod to have his brother's wife.

John, the forerunner of the Messiah, who alone had the ministry like no other of coming before Jesus, and who had the unthinkable privilege of baptizing Jesus, now is experiencing some doubt. This should give us some needed encouragement, especially to those of us that are prone to doubting God. It's okay, and part of the christian life, to experience doubt and to wrestle with reality and God's promises.

There's a difference between unbelief and doubting. Alister McGrath says, "Unbelief is the decision to live your life as if there is no God. it is a deliberate decision to reject Jesus Christ and all that he stands for. But doubt is something quite different. Doubt arises within the context of faith. It is a wistful longing to be sure of the things in which we trust." (McGrath, When doubt becomes unbelief)

There's a number of reasons why we might begin to doubt. Pain. Loss. Unmet expectations. Any number of reasons may lead us to doubt Jesus. John is wrestling with unmet expectations. He knew the Messiah was coming, but he did not know the manner in which He would come. His eyes were likely on a King who would physically deliver His people, you see they are under Roman rule at this time. So, yeah, the Messiah is here, its time for the Kingdom to be established. And yet here John is in prison. While John's message was one of

repentance and God's wrath, he's looking out and not seeing Jesus judge, he sees Jesus blessing others, and so maybe he was confused. Jesus was not lining up to how he imagined the Savior to act.

But I love this, how does Jesus respond. By first pointing John back to the Scriptures. John, don't be so focused on what you see out here, focus on the Scriptures. If you are focusing on the Scriptures, what you see will then make sense. So Jesus points him back to Isaiah, prophesy of the Messiah, what's happening—the blind see, lame walk, lepers cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised, poor have good news preached to them. John, it is happening. It might not be happening the way you expected it to, Jesus is here. God is faithful to His promise.

Then Jesus says blessed is the one whose not offended by me. So, you need biblical revelation, but you also need to submit to that revelation. What that means is trust it. You come up underneath it and you give everything to the Scriptures, and you let God be God and let God do things His way in His time.

This is the same process for us when we struggle. We go back to God's word, and we humbly submit our lives to it and trust it. Ruthless trust. When everything around me, that cancer, that job loss, that marital struggle, life circumstance not what you expected would say something different, we look to the Word, and say along with it, Jesus is Lord. Jesus is good. He is sovereign and working all things together for my joy, for my conformity to Christ.

*John doubts Jesus, then we see Jesus defend John,*

**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. 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.' 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. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered 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 accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.**

As much as Jesus is validating John, what He's in essence doing is pointing to Himself as the one to whom John's ministry was pointing. John was a prophet. Prophets are those that speak on behalf of God. So people were going out to see John because he was a messenger for God. But Jesus also says, he's more than a prophet, literally abundantly more. Why? He's the chosen messenger. This is a quote from Malachi 3 where Yahweh says He, Yahweh, is coming to the earth, and right before He does a messenger will announce His arrival. That messenger is John. What's important to note is the "You" language is not present in the Malachi passage. So Jesus here clearly identifying Himself as Yahweh, as the Messiah to come.

Then Jesus makes another incredible statement. Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Of all humans, no one is as great as John. His greatness was not in his character, but in his position in redemptive history. He's great because no other human had the role of announcing the Messiah.

If that shocks us, the next verse should even more. "yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom. A new age is here, the age of Christ. John belonged to the old order, looking forward to the Messiah. You have the Messiah. Jesus highlights the absolute privilege of being in the kingdom. You want significance, if you are a believer, you have it!

But your greatness will not be appreciated by the world. The kingdom suffers violence. You will be misunderstood, mistreated, and attacked. It started with John and will continue till glory. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence because the world refuses the King. (How do you respond when the road is hard?)

We must accept that Jesus is the fullness of the revelation of God. All the prophets prophesied until John. John's the last because the divine revelation has come in all its fullness in the person of Christ. We don't need any more prophets, we have Christ. We interpret the prophets now by the Word of Christ. If you are willing to accept Christ, you are blessed. Receive the Christ that John points to.

*Then Jesus compares Himself to John, and rebukes the crowds...*

**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.”**

Jesus openly invites everyone to receive the revelation of God, but there are some who refuse. This is likely the religious leaders here, who don't have ears to hear (v.19). The sharp rebuke comes in a cleverly pointing out their hypocrisy. He says we turned on boogie wonderland and you didn't even tap your foot. So we also put on samual barber's adagio, and you didn't cry. It's an analogy.

The sound of judgment produced nothing. The sound of mercy produced nothing. You didn't repent with John, and you didn't rejoice with Jesus (Morris). Both were the voice of God, and you refused to respond. Instead, you found a way to attack both. Accused John for having a demon, and accused Jesus of being unclean.

They are only about themselves, ready to attack the kingdom in any way they can. If you are against God, you will find any reason to refuse Him. These were smoke screens. They didn't want to hear the voice of God. But Jesus is not concerned what people think, He knows in the right time, the King and the kingdom will be vindicated. Wisdom will be justified by her deeds.

Jesus is the Promised Messiah, how do you respond? Anger, Indifference, or Faith?

### **Jesus is the Authoritative Judge**

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

Jesus does mighty works in these two cities, but it caused no repentance. That's what Jesus was after. He was after amazement, He was after repentance. Miracles are never ends in themselves, they are signposts to the identity and mission of Jesus, they are evidence of the kingdom of God that is at hand. And these cities evidently saw Jesus perform a number of miracles, mighty works. And instead falling on their faces, worshipping in repentance, they go about doing things as they always have.

Jesus says if I did these works in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. This was a slam because in the OT these cities rejected God and were denounced for it. The difference is they didn't see the Messiah directly. Chorazin and Bethsaida saw Jesus do mighty works and still rejected Him. Then Jesus offers a similar rebuke to Capernaum.

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

Capernaum is prideful, arrogant, self-sufficient, reminds me of the tower of Babel reaching up to heaven. All about themselves. Jesus condemns them in the same way, comparing them to Sodom, who in OT, was full of immorality, but they did not have Jesus. You have rejected Jesus directly. Where are you going, to Hades, the lowest place.

What we learn from this story is that Jesus is judge, a judgment is coming, and repentance is needed. We can't coast along in life indifferent to Jesus. We can't go on sinning and think we are going to get away with it. None of us like accountability - moral law. It has been appointed for every man to appear before God and give an account for the things done in the body. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Our righteous acts are filthy rags to God. Our hearts are deceitfully wicked. If that's the case, then no matter of effort and behavior modification can save us. We need something greater than better behavior. We need a Savior.

Repentance is not just stop sinning, but start worshiping Jesus. The complete turning of a heart that trusts in, finds satisfaction in, anything other than Christ. It's completely and totally forsaking this world and trusting Christ as the One to save you. It's what gets behind the lies and exposes the true object of your worship, maybe your own reputation. It's not just stop sinning, its start worshiping Jesus. that's what repentance is.

The warning is that a judgment is coming. We can't escape it. We will appear before Jesus. How do you respond to the judge? Anger, Indifference, or Faith. Next we see...

### **Jesus is the Sovereign Son**

**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 way of the Kingdom was hidden to the theologians and religious professionals of the day. Blinded by their own self-glory, they boxed in who God was and what God was doing. Jesus draws an analogy of those that would receive him by pointing to children. You know whose not blinded by self-glory, children.

He's saying that the ones who receive the kingdom are those that are open to hear your voice, that are humble enough to drop their self-glory and man made religious performances. The people that understood were the simple ones, the outcasts, the nobodies, the desperate.

How did they have ears to hear? Jesus makes no mistake here, it's by supernatural revelation. Children don't automatically hear the kingdom, Jesus, in His wisdom, chooses to reveal Himself to children.

**And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)**

Spiritual understanding does not depend on human effort or equipment or status, it depends on grace. “for we are saved by grace through faith, and this is not our own doing, it is the gift of God so that no one may boast, for we are His workmanship (Eph. 2:8-9). Boasting is excluded. children highlight God's grace!

It is God's sovereign choice, and He chooses to reveal Himself to those who we would least expect to be recipients of the gift. He delights, in His pleasurable will, to give abundantly to those who don't deserve it. God loves to upend the systems of this world that point in the totally opposite direction. Degrees. Wealth. Status. Performance. God says nope, it is my pleasure to reveal myself to the children of this world. It's a gracious will. It's gracious for us. God has come for us, the weak ones, the not important ones, the beggars, the broken. If you feel like that this morning, be encouraged, it's the Father's gracious will to reveal the kingdom, to give you the kingdom, to give you His Son, the King. And we see here that Jesus is in on this, Him and the Father are one.

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This is a breathtaking picture of the divine relationship between the God the Father and God the Son. Their knowledge is mutual, and it's a deep, intimate knowledge of one another, and exclusive, no one shares this type of relationship with the Father and Son as they do. And what is clear here, is that there is only one way to the Father, that's through the Son.

So we need supernatural assistance to see and behold the glory of Jesus. To know and worship Him cannot come from our own strength or ability. How do we respond to the sovereign Son. Do we bow in worship, that salvation belongs to Him alone, or do we mock His salvation that is by grace alone through faith.

Anger? Indifference, or Faith?

The Promised Messiah, the Judge, Son, and finally, the Gracious Master

### **Jesus is the Gracious Master**

**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."**

Jesus here offers an invitation to come to Him, given to all who labor and are heavy laden. Jesus' ministry contrasts that of the Scribes, from Matthew 23, that place heavy burdens on people. These were legalistic demands that burdened people down and crushed their joy and life abundant. A pursuit of holiness that is through the demands of the law is impossible, and so despair and fatigue, or else the delusion of self-righteousness are the only natural outcomes.

On the contrary, there is a rest that Jesus offers. A rest from the burden of having to perform to get God's favor. A rest from the "try harder, do more, be better" mentality. Religion is incredibly draining and fruitless. Jesus says, if that's you, if you are tired (and there may be a physical or emotional exhaustion to this as well), then come to me, and I will give you rest.

How does Jesus give rest? You find rest in Jesus by believing in His work on your behalf. He works so you can rest. As Hebrews says there remains for the people of God a sabbath rest. God rested from His work, and we believers enter into His rest. We experience it to one degree now, we will experience the fullness of it in heaven.

Now this does not release us from the law, we saw that in the sermon on the Mount. the rest is in a different way in how we relate to the law. The law still guides us. As Paul says in Romans 7, we agree that the law is good and holy. The law, however, has lost its power to condemn us. We no longer use the law to justify

ourselves before God. We have forsaken the efforts of our own performance and fling ourselves on the performance of Christ.

But, having been justified freely, shall we sin that grace may abound. Absolutely not! No, rather with should now live in the power of the Spirit who has been given to us, crucifying the old man, and living in accordance with our new nature in Christ. We do this out of joy and life and freedom.

The yoke is easy and the burden is light. Yokes in the bible are metaphorical for the thing that you are submitted to, that is in authority over you.

**5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**

The Galatians were battling adding circumcisions to the gospel. Grace plus anything destroys grace, destroys the gospel.

We must fight against our flesh that wants to point to self, self-glory self-justification. That is a yoke of slavery. Christ's yoke is light. He does all the carrying.

We don't want to dishonor our bodies. Jesus rested. But rest does not mean we check out of life and buy a beach house and sip drinks by the ocean the rest of your life. The same Jesus who said come and rest, is the Jesus who said in chapter 10, whoever does not take up his cross daily and follow me is not worthy of me, leave all for the sake of Christ, do not love anything more than me.

Our rest is a deep spiritual rest. Paul in 1 Cor. 15, by the grace of God I am what I am but I worked harder than anyone. We rest in Christ and spend ourselves for the King. Even then we taste rest now and we will live it fully for eternity. How do you respond to the gracious master? Allow Him to carry your burdens, or are you going to pridefully keep working yourself?

**The portraits of Jesus should cause us to respond in faith. We see them all climax in the cross.**

The Promised Messiah is the eternal One who lays down His life for man.

The Authoritative Judge is the righteous One who bears our judgement for sin.

The Sovereign Son is the faithful One to not only reveal the way, but become the way through His death.

The Gracious Master is the selfless One who carries the cross to set us free.

How do you respond to Jesus? Anger, Indifference, or Faith. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may our response be one of faith. Let's pray.