

FPFWC Christian Development



Many Faces of Wisdom
July 2020

Summer Quarter

July 3, 2020

Lesson #1 – Vindicating Wisdom

Scripture Focus – Matthew 11:7-19

ICE BREAKERS –

1. Based on this passage, how do you think Jesus reacts when we have moments of weakness and doubts about our faith?
2. What specific actions can you take today to strengthen a weak area of faith or when facing doubts?

Key Verse: “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”—Matthew 11:19

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Gospel of Matthew is one of four books in the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Through Jesus, God was restoring His rule over His world, setting right what human rebellion had made wrong. Matthew put special focus on the surprising way in which God fulfilled His promises to Israel in Jesus.

For instance, we might expect God's true king to be warmly received. But in fact, Jesus met with hostility from His infancy (examples: Matthew 2:13; 21:45, 46; 27:20). Jesus warned His followers that they would meet with similar opposition (10:14-25, 34-36).

The same hostility is seen in the arrest and death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12), which foreshadowed Jesus' own crucifixion (26:1-5, 14-16; 27:32-44). Yet this very climax of the hostility against God's wisdom was the means by which God fulfilled His wisdom, for Jesus died not merely as an innocent victim but as the willing and worthy sacrifice for the sins of humanity (20:28; 26:28).

God's victory came through rejection, death, and resurrection. Nothing could have been more contrary to expectations. In an episode preceding our text, the (to human thinking) upside-down wisdom of God proved confusing even to John the Baptist, the prophet who announced the nearness of God's reign and the coming of His true king (Matthew 3:1-3, 11, 12).

John had clearly identified Jesus as that promised king and had witnessed God's affirmation of Jesus as beloved Son (Matthew 3:13-17). John had been imprisoned for his declaration that Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, was wrong to have taken his brother's wife as his own (11:2a; 14:3, 4). John became distressed and sent messengers to ask Jesus whether He was indeed the

promised king, as John had previously proclaimed (11:2b, 3). John's question expressed either doubt or impatience as he languished in prison.

Jesus' response affirmed that He was indeed the promised coming one (Matthew 11:4, 5). But what did that imply about John? Had his impatience or doubt demonstrated him to be a failure as God's prophet?

LESSON COMMENTARY

11:7-11. Jesus defended John's ministry. **A reed shaken by the wind** would have been a common sight along the Jordan where John baptized; but people did not go out to see just something commonplace or even something with worldly splendor (**soft clothing** belonged to the rich and powerful). John was **more than a prophet** (v. 9) from the standpoint that he was the one chosen to prepare the way for the Messiah (citing Ex 23:20 and Mal 3:1). John was greater than all from the standpoint that he was the one who would point to Christ more clearly than anyone else. But even those **least in the kingdom of heaven** are greater than John, probably because those who are citizens of the messianic kingdom and who look back to the cross can give a more profound explanation of Jesus than John could.

11:12. Verse 12 is puzzling, but it probably should read, "The kingdom has violence done to it, and violent men are seeking to seize it." The verb **suffers violence** could be middle voice ("The kingdom is forcefully advancing itself" or something like it) but is probably a true passive judging from the parallel expression **violent men take it** ["violently seize" it] **by force**. The verse indicates the spiritual battle the opponents were waging against John and later Jesus as these opponents discouraged people from following them.

11:13-15. **John himself is Elijah** (v. 14), but not in the literal sense of Elijah descending to earth from heaven. Luke 1:17 says John came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," not unlike Elisha. God gave three orders to Elijah toward the end of his ministry (1Kg 19:15-16), only one completed by him before his ascension (1Kg 19:19), the others being accomplished by Elisha "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (2Kg 8:7-8; 9:1-3). At the transfiguration, it was not John the Baptist and Moses who joined Christ but Elijah and Moses.

11:16-19. In this little analogy, Jesus is symbolized by the children playing the flute for other children who refused to dance (cf. 11:19, where "playing the flute" corresponds to Jesus' "eating and drinking") and John is symbolized by the children who sang mournfully but other children did not mourn (cf. 11:18, where "singing a dirge" corresponds to John's refusal to eat or drink). **This generation** disregarded John and Jesus—John because of his asceticism and Jesus because of His "excessiveness." Both Jesus and John taught with **wisdom**, each in his own unique but complementary way, but the people found both repugnant. The **wisdom** John and Jesus voiced, however, was **vindicated by her deeds**; i.e., the works of John and Jesus (see 11:2) exonerated them from unwarranted accusations and showed the validity of the wisdom they articulated.

Lesson Nugget – John was not a compromiser (a reed) or a celebrity; he was God's greatest prophet. John had to wait on the Lord to fulfill His perfect plan. You may think you have failed, but God will see to it that your work is blessed. In fact, John won people to Jesus long after he was dead and buried (John 10:40-42)! Surrender to Christ's loving yoke and you will experience His perfect rest (11:25-30).

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary; Wiersbe Bible Commentary; The Word for Today Bible and Standard Sunday School lesson.*