

# Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

December 29, 2024

## I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 11:7-15**, As these men (*John's disciples*) 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? [8] But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! [9] But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. [10] This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' [11] 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. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. [13] For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [14] And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. [15] He who has ears to hear, let him hear.
- B. Today's portion of Matthew is more about giving us information about God and His ways than about how we should live. However, as A.W. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us," and the reason for this is because "we are not simply what we say or do, but what we, in the deepest reaches of our heart and mind conceive God to be" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg 1). Tozer went on to say that "A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg 2).
- C. Pray

## II. Uniqueness of John the Baptist

- A. [1] . . . 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? [8] But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!
1. What did you go out to see?
    - a. **A reed shaken by the wind?** Of course not, because no one would make the journey from town to the wilderness to see a weak, irrelevant nobody.

- b. **A man dressed in soft clothing?** And no one would waste a journey to the wilderness if they were looking for someone who had the dress and stature of an important person in a king's palace.
  2. However, John was neither a weak, irrelevant nobody nor the kind of person you would find in a king's palace. He was more the rugged outdoorsman – independent, free of ungodly prejudices, uncompromisingly honest, bold in his preaching and call to repentance, and clear about how a repentant person should live. Compared to the religious leaders of his day, John was unique.
- B. Jesus went on to ask, [9] “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is **more than a prophet**. [10] This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I (*God*) send My messenger (*John the Baptist*) ahead of you (*Jesus*), who will prepare your way before you.’ [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. [13] For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. [14] And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.”
  1. Jesus makes three statements about John that indicate his unique status as God's servant in the kingdom of heaven.
    - a. In **vs 9**, Jesus says that John is both a prophet, and yet more than a prophet – for he is also God's designated messenger/forerunner tasked with preparing the way for Jesus.
    - b. In **vs 11**, Jesus says that “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” In other words, there is no one more distinguished, or more important, or more indispensable than John.
    - c. Finally, in **vs 14**, Jesus says that “John himself is Elijah who was to come.”
    - d. Once again, we see John's uniqueness. However, this time it is in comparison to God's other prophets and kingdom workers. Therefore, we will look more closely at these three statements.
  2. **John is more than a prophet.**
    - a. Zacharias, upon being filled with the Holy Spirit, prophesied that his son, John, would “be called **the prophet** of the Most High;” for he would go on before the Lord to prepare his ways (**Luke 1:76**).
    - b. Here in **Matthew 11:9**, Jesus affirmed that John was a prophet, **but added** that John was more than a prophet, and supported this by quoting **Malachi 3:1**, “Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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.

- c. As a prophet, John called the religiously lukewarm and the unbelieving Jews to repentance, which prepared – at the very least – those who repented, to hear and accept Jesus’ message of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, the mercy of God, and godly living that went beyond their shallow application of the Law.
  - d. The reality is, at the time of Christ, Israel was a religious nation practicing their God-instituted religion in a way that turned their hearts away from God, dulled their ears to the truth of God, and blinded their eyes to the word of God. They needed John’s hard-hitting message to improve the possibility of them accepting rather than rejecting Jesus’ teaching.
3. **Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.**
- a. This is an interesting statement because our first thought is, “What about Jesus?” Isn’t He greater than John? Yes, He is. However, though Jesus was born of a woman, His father was divine, whereas both John’s parents were human. In other words, John was conceived in the normal way, whereas Jesus wasn’t – which is why, in my opinion, Jesus says what He did about John.
  - b. But why is John so great? God’s word gives us three reasons in **Luke 1:13-17**, But the angel said to Zacharias, “Do not be afraid, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son (*1<sup>st</sup> reason -miracle birth*), and you will give him the name John. [14] You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. [15] For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. (*2<sup>nd</sup> reason -filled with the HS before being born*) [16] And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. [17] It is he who will go as a forerunner before [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah (*3<sup>rd</sup> reason -the only one given the task of preparing the way for Jesus*), **to turn** the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, **so as to make ready** a people prepared for the Lord.”
  - c. I believe it was John’s Holy Spirit empowered preaching, his calls to repentance, and his straight-forward speaking that softened spiritually hard hearts, opened religiously deaf ears, and moved

blind, thoughtless eyes to consider and even ponder the truths Jesus would teach and preach when He came on the scene.

4. **Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

a. How so? As far as we know, John is the only person whom God filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb (**Luke 1:15**). John started life in a significantly different way than the rest of us start life. Therefore, it is my opinion that John had an advantage in knowing, obeying, and living according to God's will and plan for his life.

b. However, John is not the only unique individual recorded in God's word. There have been a few unique individuals that stand out above the rest. For example –

(1) Melchizedek was the king of Salem and priest of God. He was without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but being made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually (**Hebrews 7:3**).

(2) Enoch walked with God and God took him – as if on one of their walks they ended up in heaven (**Genesis 5:24**).

(3) Elijah was taken to heaven in a whirlwind (**2 Kings 2:11**).

c. Might there be others that God has not included in the Bible? We don't know and cannot say. However, most of us fit into what is more normal. We don't start life filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather, we come into this world full of self, self-will, self-rule, and selfishness.

(1) Therefore, we must encounter the truth of God, choose to consider it, choose to believe it, choose to work through what believing it means for daily living, and then proceed to live accordingly in every area of life.

(2) I believe it is in having to choose to respond that the least in the kingdom of heaven are greater than John the Baptist.

5. **John himself is Elijah who was to come.**

a. In **vs 14**, Jesus said, "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come."

(1) In saying this about John, it appears Jesus is referencing **Malachi 4:5**, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet **before** the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."

(2) You might think that "the great and terrible day of the Lord," refers to the second coming of Christ. However, if we apply the

words from Peter's Pentecost sermon to this prophecy in Malachi, it makes sense that it refers to John and Jesus.

- (3) In **Acts 3:22-24**, Peter said: "Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like Me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. [23] And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' [24] And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days."
  - b. Jesus also confirmed that John was Elijah in **Matthew 17:10-13**, And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [11] And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; [12] but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." [13] Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.
- C. In **vs 12-13**, Jesus makes a statement that is both interesting, and at first glance, hard to figure out. [12] From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. [13] For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.
1. Kenneth Wuest translated it this way: "Indeed, from the days of John the Baptist until this moment, the kingdom of heaven is being taken by storm, and the strong and forceful ones eagerly claim it for themselves, for all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."
  2. The Jews of Jesus day generally believed the time of the prophets ended with Malachi. However, Jesus extended their time an additional 400 years by saying the time of the prophets and the law did not end until John came on the scene.
    - a. In other words, John's ministry began a new era or time – so to speak – the era or time of the kingdom of heaven (*as opposed to the kingdom of Israel*), the gospel of salvation and the forgiveness of sins (*as opposed to covering sin with animal blood*), and the church (*which included people from every nation, tribe, people, and language – not just Jews*).
    - b. This new time did not negate the prophets or the law, but rather it went beyond them to include the teachings of Jesus, the inclusion of non-Jews into God's family, the replacement of Israel with the church, the NT epistles, and more prophecies about the end times.

3. However, to enter this new and expanded kingdom, you have to repent, believe in the saving work of Jesus, and proceed to live according to the both the Old and the New Testament – including the NT’s understanding and application of the OT.
  - a. In other words, you have to enter God’s kingdom through the door of repentance and a changed life, that is, a life that is lived in agreement with your repentance and the word of God.
  - b. This requires God’s work in you along with your own sincere efforts at humbling yourself enough to repent, trusting God enough to live according to His will and word, denying and dying to your old nature – so as to kill it off or drive it out, persevering at putting on Christ-likeness, and remaining faithful to the end.
  - c. Such efforts on your part are like going to war against a formidable foe who wants to remain in power just as much as you want to throw him out and become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Such warfare is neither easy nor quick. The battles are hard-fought and the war can seem never-ending.
  - d. Therefore, combining Wuest’s words with the apostle Paul’s, “It is the strong and forceful, who, with the help and empowerment of God, work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and in so doing, gain the victory. These are the violent ones who, from John the Baptist onward, take the kingdom by force.

D. [15] He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

1. Sadly, not everyone has ears to hear. However, it is not because God is preventing them from hearing, or because they were born deaf.
2. Everyone is born with the ability to hear. Not hearing is the result of not listening, and not listening is the result of a repeated choices and behaviors that dull our hearing, blind our eyes, and harden our heart to God, His word, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the visible presence and work of God in our world.
3. In other words, what has to want to hear to have ears to hear. May we never stop wanting to hear – for without question, if we are listening, we will hear God speaking.

### III. Conclusion

- A. God did something unique and marvelous in and through John the Baptist. He may or may not do something unique and marvelous in and through you. But that does not matter, for it is not what God has given or gifted you with, but rather what you do with what He gives that counts.