

July 5, 2020

Lesson 5

WISDOM'S VINDICATION

ADULT/YOUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: **Wisdom in Action**
YOUTH TOPIC: **Wisdom—Not Guilty**

CHILDREN

GENERAL LESSON TITLE: **Proving Your Wisdom**
CHILDREN'S TOPIC: **Proof Positive**

DEVOTIONAL READING
Matthew 10:1-14

ADULT/YOUTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 11:1-19**
PRINT PASSAGE: **Matthew 11:7-19**
KEY VERSE: **Matthew 11:19**

CHILDREN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 11:1-19**
PRINT PASSAGE: **Matthew 11:7-19**
KEY VERSE: **Matthew 11:19b**

Matthew 11:7-19—KJV

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

Matthew 11:7-19—NIV

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?"

8 "If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.

9 "Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

10 "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11 "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever 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 been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19 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.

13 “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

14 “And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

15 “Whoever has ears, let them hear.

16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 “‘We played the pipe 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, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE: People often label unusual or unexpected behavior as eccentric, foolish, or even wrong; and the persons who act in such unusual ways are vilified. What should be our assessment when someone’s behavior is unexpected? In the book of Matthew, Jesus says that His behavior and John’s, while unusual in their day, would eventually be proven wise by their subsequent deeds.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Explain how the actions of Jesus and John the Baptist, while very different from one another and different from the expected, ultimately displayed divine wisdom.
2. Feel encouraged to behave in ways contrary to the expected in order to follow Jesus.
3. Review their own behavior to determine whether it reflects godly wisdom and commit to focusing on one specific area of improvement.

AGE-LEVEL POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

Teachers of ADULTS and YOUTH

—Matthew 11:10 is drawn from Malachi 3:1 and is also reflected in Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27.

—Jesus expected John the Baptist to recognize Jesus’ identity as Messiah from the wise actions Jesus had been performing (see Matthew 11:2-5).

—Jesus intimates that showing wisdom means recognizing what is fitting, such as playing wedding music for a wedding—and what is not, like playing funeral music at the wedding instead.

—Jesus compares John (see Matthew 11:7-14) to the prophet Elijah. The reed was a Herodian symbol; John’s mission is contrasted with secular royalty and equated with Elijah’s role.

- “See, I am sending my messenger . . .” is a paraphrase of Malachi 3:1.
- Jesus embodies wisdom and is vindicated.
- Jesus compares the generation of His time to children sitting in the marketplace.
- The mention of violence to the kingdom is a precursor to John’s violent fate (see Matthew 14:10).
- Jesus and John’s work was misunderstood.

Teachers of CHILDREN

- Jesus’ speech to the crowd asserts John’s importance and the anointing given to him by God.
- Jesus asks the people if they came to see something

- as insignificant as frail grass blowing in the wind (verse 7).
- Verse 10 references the preparation for a royal visitation (see Malachi 3:1).
- Jesus proclaims John as a great prophet and declares none greater than John (verse 11), but also conversely states that the least in the kingdom is greater than John.
- Jesus’ and John’s social interactions were dissimilar, but both were considered controversial.
- John was reclusive, lived in the wilderness, and fasted. Jesus and the disciples did not fast and mingled among tax collectors/sinners.

THE CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The gospel of Matthew is one of four gospels and the first book presented in the New Testament. It is the longest of the four, having a total of twenty-eight chapters. Traditionally, the church has ascribed the first gospel to the apostle known as Matthew. Matthew composed his gospel in or around Antioch in the fifties and sixties of the first century. This date is chosen because there is no mention of the destruction of the Temple, which took place in AD 70. The entire text is artistically written and is consistent with the other three Gospels in the Bible (Mark, Luke, and John) regarding the historical events that occurred during Jesus’ time here on earth. In Matthew 11, there is great focus on John the Baptist’s question from prison and Jesus’ response to it. The book of Matthew was written to the Jews to answer their question about Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be their Messiah. The book served to answer the question, “If Jesus is the King of the Jews, then where is God’s promised kingdom?”

The gospel of Matthew presents many

important facts and significant lessons. It clearly establishes that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. It proves that Jesus was the Son of God as He claimed to be and proved it by living a sinless and perfect life. It also records Jesus’ performing miracles through exerting power over nature, sickness, and death.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE LESSON

The book of Matthew was written in Aramaic at a time when much of the evangelism by Christians was directed more exclusively toward Jews living within the immediate proximity of the homeland itself. The apostle Matthew was a Jew himself, and he offered a decidedly Jewish perspective on the ministry of Jesus with the emphasis being placed on Jesus’ Davidic lineage. The book of Matthew is the most Jewish of all the Gospels. The community for which Matthew was writing was a Jewish Christian community that was encountering some new

tensions in the period of reconstruction after the Great Revolt (also known as the First Jewish–Roman War). One of the obvious reasons behind this conclusion of the audience’s being largely Jewish is because the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is mentioned more than thirty times in this book of the Bible; however, the phrase “kingdom of God” is mentioned about four times. This stems from the fact that the Jews do not speak the name of God, and this could be the reason why the author of this book used the former phrase. It seems that the Jewish community had been there for quite some time. They show consciousness of an older legacy of Jesus’ tradition, going back to before the Great Revolt. But then they experience new tensions and new problems in the aftermath of the revolt as a political and social reconstruction is taking place.

The events in the book of Matthew take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Caesarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time, it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe the events surrounding Jesus’ birth in Judea, where Herod had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Antipas and Philip.

PROMINENT CHARACTER(S) IN THE LESSON

Jesus: also referred to as Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus Christ, and a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader. He is the central figure of Christianity.

John the Baptist: a Jewish prophet of priestly origin who preached the imminence of God’s

final judgment and baptized those who repented in preparation for it in the wilderness; he is revered as the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

KEY TERMS IN THE LESSON

Jesus (verse 7)—Greek: *Iésous* (ee-ay-sooce’): Jesus, the Greek form of the name “Joshua.”

Messenger (verse 10)—Greek: *malak* (mal-awk’): an angel; ambassador; envoy.

Prepare (verse 10)—Greek: *kataskeuazó* (kat-ask-yoo-ad’-zo): to build, construct, prepare, make ready.

Prophet (verse 9)—Greek: *prophétés* (prof-ay’-tace): an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will; a divine truth teller.

See (verse 8)—Greek: *horaó* (hor-ah’-o): to see, perceive, attend to.

Wilderness (verse 7)—Greek: *erémos* (er’-ay-mos): desert; lonely regions; an uncultivated region fit for pasturage.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction

- A. Messengers from John the Baptist
- B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture

- A. The Greatness of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-11)
- B. Rejection and Acceptance (Matthew 11:12-15)
- C. Generational Factors (Matthew 11:16-19)

III. Concluding Reflection

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Messengers from John the Baptist

Matthew 11 is centered on Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, and some particular cities. We see from this book that the news of Jesus' activities travelled far and wide, eventually making its way to John the Baptist, who at that time had been imprisoned. While John the Baptist was still free and preaching, his message had not been accepted by many. Now hearing about Jesus from prison, John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the one that was prophesied to come. Jesus compares that generation to be like children who dance when music is playing or do not mourn when there is a reason; He showed that He had no sympathy for the cities that refuse to repent.

B. Biblical Background

The gospel of Matthew was written before the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The frequent references to specific Old Testament texts are indicative that it was written for a Jewish Christian community. The eleventh chapter of this book reveals the disciples of Jesus to be ministering in the Jewish towns in and around Galilee. And we can glean from this section that John the Baptist, despite his strong faith, was going through a trial; the final verses of this chapter give a glimpse of the first Beatitude.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Greatness of John the Baptist

(Matthew 11:7-11)

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The role and responsibility of John was to prepare the way for Jesus and to be the fore-runner for the Messiah, preaching repentance

because of the coming kingdom of heaven. Jesus viewed John as a stalwart prophet who took his marching orders from God and who refused to be influenced by popular opinion or by current culture. When John went about as one crying in the wilderness, large crowds clamored to listen to him. Jesus, by His question (verse 7), wanted to know what they expected of this prophet. The imagery used by Jesus of a "reed shaken with the wind" is drawn from the bullrush plants that grew near the banks of the Jordan River. These reeds tend to bend in whatever direction the wind blows at the time. If they came to see a spineless, feeble character lacking strength or boldness, they were in for a rude awakening. John could be described as a

principles-driven, visionary prophet who was aware of his purpose and refused to be intimidated by the pressure-filled crush of the culture.

John's wardrobe (verse 8) did not consist of the soft, luxurious apparel of princes. The fashion sense of John the Baptist did not extend beyond clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. This somber ensemble paralleled the somber message of repentance that he was compelled to relay. This principle may have some contemporary inferences and implications for current prognosticators of the Gospel and the clothing that some choose to wear.

Those who went out into the wilderness to hear a prophet were certainly not disappointed when they encountered John the Baptist (verse 9). John was more than a mere prophet. He was connected to Jesus even before birth, as he leaped in his mother's womb upon hearing the voice of Mary. John introduced Jesus to the nation and proclaimed that he was even unworthy to unlace the shoes of Jesus.

Verse 10 is a free rendering of a Malachi 3:1 excerpt from the Hebrew Scriptures, which reads as follows: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty" (NIV).

What determines whether a person is considered great (verse 11)? James E. Faust put it this way: "A grateful heart is the beginning of greatness. It is an expression of humility. It is a foundation for the development of such virtues as prayer, faith, courage, contentment, happiness, love, and well-being." Human standards are not capable of accurately measuring

greatness, and that is why we need the divine perspective. God is great, and John was great because John was godly. Likewise, we can be great when we are godly.

B. Rejection and Acceptance (Matthew 11:12-15)

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The phrasing of verse 12 is a bit difficult to understand. Many biblical scholars see this as a description of the crowd's response to the ministries of John and Jesus. Whenever it was known that they were making a public appearance, the response was forceful and intense as the people strained to get close enough to see, to touch, and to receive from these men of God. In some cases, Jesus had to teach from a boat because of the press of the crowd. On one occasion, those who wanted to get to Jesus came through the roof of a home in which He was teaching. Even the family of Jesus occasionally could not reach Him and had to send word that they were waiting outside. These impetuous people seek to grasp the kingdom of heaven and all that it has to offer. Like soldiers who march against a rival city, those who seek the benefits of the kingdom take an assertive approach to receive what they believe they need.

Those who operated in the office of a judge or a prophet did their work pointing to the kingdom of heaven in the far-off future (verse 13). John, however, experienced Jesus firsthand and had the privilege of not only being a relative of Jesus' but also serving as the prophetic

forerunner of Jesus and personally introducing the Lord of glory to the world.

Malachi believed that Elijah the Tishbite would immediately precede the Messiah (verse 14), as taught by the scribes of the time (see Malachi 4:5; Matthew 17:10; John 1:21). This tradition of expectation has continued in some sects of Judaism. The words “if you are willing to accept it” in verse 14 (NIV) acknowledge the understanding that Jesus was setting aside a strongly held belief. In other words, “If you are willing to receive and believe the truth that John came in the spirit of Elijah and was in fact doing the work of Elijah, you don’t have to look further to receive the truth.”

Verse 15 is a statement frequently used by Jesus to emphasize the need to be receptive to a truth that has just been revealed. Sometimes, this phrase was used following a problematic parable or some other teaching that may have been somewhat difficult to comprehend or accept (see Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9). We need the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us process and digest the content and intent of kingdom truths delivered by the King of Kings.

C. Generational Factors (Matthew 11:16-19)

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. 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.

Some of the perverse people of that time were a contentious collection of the childish kind (verse 16) who tended to be critical

toward any and every religious group that was not their own. This silly “game” is still played by some, and the participants have been used by the enemy to distract from the truth of God’s message and to destroy the unity of God’s people.

During occasions of festivals and other special celebrations, joyful music was typically played on flutes and lyres (verse 17). On the sad and somber occasions of funerals, the people would sing slow and mournful dirges to accompany the occasion. Children often imitate their parents and other adults without fully realizing what they are doing. John’s ministry was serious and somber as he spoke the truth about the kingdom of God. In contrast, the ministry of Jesus was warm and welcoming, yet He also preached the truth of God’s kingdom.

Scribes and Pharisees who were judgmental described and assessed John’s austere and solitary approach as demonic (verse 18). They reasoned that only a possessed man would wear a loin cloth made of animal skin and maintain a diet of honey and grasshoppers.

Jesus was fond of social settings and communal dining experiences. On such occasions, it was and still is common in that culture to have dinner wine to accompany the meal. Obviously, this approach dramatically contrasted with John’s personal lifestyle. Rather than simply appreciating the warmth and accessibility of Jesus, His accusers went to the extreme and labeled Him as a glutton (one given to excessive eating) and a wine bibber (one who drinks much wine) (verse 19). The tax collectors, also known as publicans, were highly disliked by the Jews of Jesus’ day because of their perceived greed and collaboration with the Romans who politically and militarily occupied the region.

Tax collectors were also hated because they were sometimes known to extract more taxes than was legally required and take the excess for themselves.

Truth does not require a great deal of excess words in order to prove its veracity and legitimacy. Truth can stand on its own without false sources of support from questionable contributors. Émile Zola captured the force of truth when he wrote, “If you shut up truth and bury it under the ground, it will but grow, and gather to itself such explosive power that the day it bursts through it will blow up everything in its way.”

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

John the Baptist conducted ministry in a unique way that took many people by surprise. He looked different and preached a different message. Some people received his ministry, and others rejected it. Whenever the true Gospel of the kingdom of God is

preached, it will be recognized as truth by those whose hearts are in tune to receive the Word or prepared to receive the Word. Recognition of the truth should not be hindered just because the hearers of the truth are distracted by the outward appearance of the truth teller. Truth is truth, regardless of the wardrobe of the deliverer. God has given each disciple a special gift that is to be used to the glory of God. People who are unaware of their gifts are wasting precious time and potentially depriving the world of many spiritual benefits. Every Christian has something to offer, and it is through the working out of our faith that we increase in our spiritual maturity.

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to honor the working of Your Spirit in the lives of others through realizing that You manifest Yourself differently in a variety of people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 29–July 5, 2020)

Wisdom's Vindication

MONDAY, June 29: “Wise Counsel for Defending Your Faith” (Matthew 10:16-23)

TUESDAY, June 30: “Wise Deeds of the Coming Messiah” (Isaiah 35:3-10)

WEDNESDAY, July 1: “John the Baptist, God's Messenger” (Luke 7:24-28)

THURSDAY, July 2: “The Messiah's Wise Deeds” (Matthew 11:1-6)

FRIDAY, July 3: “Woes on Unwise Cities” (Matthew 11:20-24)

SATURDAY, July 4: “Wisdom's Invitation to Come and Rest” (Matthew 11:25-30)

SUNDAY, July 5: “Wisdom Is Vindicated by Her Deeds” (Matthew 11:7-19)