



Lesson 5 July 4th, 2020

Wisdom's Vindication

MIDDLE SCHOOL/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – Matthew 11:7-19

Background Scripture – Matthew 11:1-19

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

INTRODUCTION

Doubt and unbelief are closely related sins, however in the spiritual sphere the consequences of both to a believer are markedly different. While doubt may be remedied at the source and need not linger or progress, unbelief is a settled condition with inevitable consequences. It is critically important for us to understand that we are dealing with this most important matter of Wisdom. We are also now examining this word “vindication” which according to the Dictionary means “proof that someone or something is right, reasonable, or justified”. So we are looking at something or someone that is acquitted, cleared, absolved, freed from blame, declared innocent, or exonerated. The point therefore is that wisdom is vindicated and those who approach their Messiah properly with their doubts and remain faithful to Him will be vindicated by their wisdom. Our Study Text will certainly show that.

The Lord Jesus has a ministry of healing, saving souls, and giving people power to do what is required by them by their possession of the Holy Spirit. His ministry was not the kind of ministry that the people of Israel expected even though they knew or should have understood what the prophecies had said about the coming Messiah the Servant of Jehovah.

The people of the nation of Israel expected a judgmental, fiery, and destroying Messiah that would bring woes to the nations that had opposed and afflicted the nation of Israel. Even John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah had some misunderstanding about the role of Messiah even though he was led by the Spirit of God. Sad to say the other leaders of Israel, the priests and the scribes and Pharisees were even more way off in their interpretation of what Messiah was going to do and they had misled people accordingly.

We tend to forget that Wisdom has a particularly indispensable role in our lives. When we stray from the path of wisdom even a little bit, which we tend to do because of that sin nature that is in us and even when the Spirit of God is trying to steer us in a particular direction, we will end

up with a slightly or even substantially off-base or skewed expectation of what God really intends to do.

Because of this incident in our Study Scripture that we will examine we will be taught in this Study how the Messiah Son of David, the Servant of Jehovah, saw His role. He was forced to spell out in detail what His role and mission was. Interestingly, when He did so for the benefit of John the Baptist and his followers we see a rather unique feature of His mission which was totally unknown to the Judaism of His day. He made the Forerunner, His disciples, and the people that He addressed understand that a central part of His mission was to preach the gospel to the poor, a group that had been neglected over the many centuries. We would have thought that Jesus would have only needed to list the many miracles that the prophets said He would do but clearly the love of God shone through and He could not leave out this incredibly necessary part of what God the Father wanted to be done.

Jesus considers preaching the gospel to the poor to be the centerpiece of His and our ministry. Clearly therefore we should be always examining our expectation of our Messianic Expectation. Jesus does not apparently live up to our billing. He does not seem to have only what one writer calls “an ambulance ministry of healing” or restoring people to a position of power, status, and glory and of course giving many material things, but His focus seems to be shepherding people especially those that are vulnerable and simple. He calls to those who live without any agenda, who behave without any understanding, and who are easily led astray.

We are therefore now looking at how wisdom really is, how it operates and how it is manifested in real life by the perfect Son of God.

With this understanding comes a warning that ***Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me***”. Verse 6.

It is not that the Forerunner of Jesus, the man of excellence and highly regarded John the Baptist had taken offense at Jesus but he had expressed doubt about the true meaning of what the Lord Jesus Christ was all about. He therefore had to be brought to the stage where he would struggle to come to grips with a new understanding of who Messiah was. He had to understand that Messiah did not come to bring immediate judgment on the oppressors of Israel.

We too have to understand what the current ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ is for that rests on the work that He has already done and what that sacrificial work of shedding of His blood on the Cross means to us. We too would therefore like John the Baptist and the people of his day have to wrap our minds around the reality of Judgment and why and when it would take place at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is absolutely important for us, as it was for them, for that is the way of wisdom for wisdom underpins all our missionary activity and how we represent Jesus until He comes.

Jesus offers a blessing not just to John but to all those of us who do not take offense at Jesus, who are not scandalized by our faith in Him, and are unlike those of Jesus' day who listened



neither to John nor to Him. We must follow the path of reason and Wisdom and must remain faithful even though we pray and hope and our dreams seem to go unfulfilled. As Jesus put it, ***Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds***".

Jesus' deeds showed that He was 100% full of the Wisdom of God. He has revealed this Wisdom of God to us, and we believers can do no less by showing our faith by our works. We also should learn from our Study that the standards that we use to judge human beings are certainly not the same standards that God uses. So we should be careful not to make judgments about people just because they might wear what we consider to be weird clothing, speak in an extremely blunt and direct way, or eat strange looking and tasting food. Our judgments must be according to Scripture and definitely not according to the standards of the world.

There was clearly a problem with the generation of John the Baptist. There is clearly a problem with our generation. Their problem Jesus said was that they listened neither to Him nor to John and they were willing to accuse both of them, taking offense at both of them, and evading the call of both of them. They could not decide as to whether or not they would follow the path of Wisdom.

Though not in our Lesson Study Jesus goes on in verses 20 to 24 to thank the Father that the Father has hidden the things of wisdom from the wise and intelligent, apparently those with a sense of self-importance and hypocrisy, proud that they knew what God wanted yet failing to understand the basics of justice, mercy, and faith and therefore rejecting Jesus and the purposes of God the Father. Yet God had revealed the truths of Wisdom to the "infants" who nobody considered to be wise or important. But for God they were the poor in spirit, the meek, and persecuted, and so dearly beloved of God.

There are so many lessons for us to learn from this Study. But let us note that the difficulty of John and the difficulty that many since then, and of course many today have is the importance of accepting the deep meaning of the Cross as one writer states:

"He had to learn that the atonement is a prerequisite to reigning as king, that the shedding of blood is necessary before the Lord Jesus can come back and execute judgment upon the Earth. The King must come to his throne through the blood of the cross, and the proper sequence is always redemption by blood and then redemption by power".

So as we study this and recognize this fact we see the importance of the Lord's Supper in which we remember the Lord's death until He comes. We learn from this lesson who He really is, and the love that He and the Father shows by His presence on Earth and His sacrifice.

Today's Text therefore explores the dynamics of the relationships and perceptions between Jesus, John the Baptist and the generation to which both ministered. Jesus gives the definitive description of John the Baptist and his generation and the Text further provides the antidote for doubt.



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 reconciling mankind to Himself and restoring the relationship destroyed by human rebellion in the Garden of Eden.

The Evangelist has carefully presented the credentials of the King in relationship to His birth, His baptism, His temptation, His righteous doctrine and His supernatural power. Israel heard the message of the nearness of the 'kingdom' from John the Baptist, the King Himself, and His disciples. Great miracles had authenticated the call to repentance. Now Israel must make a decision.

Jesus' year of popularity had passed and now there was a rising tide of disappointment in and opposition to the kingdom of God that was resulting from Jesus' ministry. He was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah the people had expected. Matthew presented three lines of evidence of opposition to Jesus that indicated His rejection by the people: John the Baptist's questions about the King's identity, the Jews' indifference to the King's message and their refusal to respond to the King's invitation.

John the Baptist had clearly identified Jesus as that promised King and Messiah and had witnessed God's affirmation of Jesus as 'beloved Son' (Matthew 3:13–17). John was imprisoned for publicly rebuking Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, for seducing and then marrying his brother's wife, (11:2; 14:3, 4). News of Jesus' ministry reached John in prison but Jesus' ministry was not unfolding as John expected and had prophesied. Yes, many messianic miracles were happening but where was the judgment of the 'wicked', where was the Kingdom? John had said of Jesus:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3:12).

The fact he John, the 'forerunner', the 'herald' was in prison for almost a year, the spiritual and political structures of the nation were still in place seemed inconsistent to John's interpretation of Scripture. So he seemingly became distressed and sent messengers to ask Jesus whether He was indeed the promised king. 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? Scholars list three explanations as to why John asked this question.

First, some say that John's faith did not waver but he asked the question for the sake of the disciples and not really for himself. He wanted them to learn more about Jesus and His ministry directly from Jesus.

Second some say John did suffer from failing patience, not failing faith for he knew that the Lord Jesus had been born in order that at some point He would set up a kingdom on the earth by showing His messianic power, putting down all the nations and placing Israel at the head of all the nations.



Third, some say that John was losing patience with the speed that the messianic ministry of Jesus was unfolding for he really wanted a show of power to demonstrate that Jesus was really the messianic King.

John therefore seemed to suffer from an incomplete understanding of the truth. But we have to be cautious about criticizing him, for we too have times like the Psalmist when we jump from amazing words about our faith in God to times when we question simple things in Scripture. We remember that only Jesus was sinless and therefore never suffered from any fluctuation in faith, never had any self-doubts or second thoughts about Himself, or questioned who He was or what He wanted to do.

Each of the three sections of the chapter closed with a wisdom saying. At the end of the first section Jesus says, *"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me."* John may have had questions, as indeed others probably did, but he was satisfied that Jesus was the Messiah. At the end of the second section Jesus said, *"He who has ears let him hear."* This statement called for a faith response to what has been said. Then at the end of the last section Jesus says, *"Wisdom is justified of her children."* The results of the ministries of John and Jesus will validate what they were doing.

Men are always very concerned about who is the 'greatest' and Jesus provides some insight as to what constitutes greatness from God's perspective.

John may have entertained some doubts about Jesus; an occurrence not uncommon among even the greatest of saints, for example the Psalmist, Elijah, Paul Still the major issue of our Text is the unbelief of that generation that rejected Jesus to His face! The Chapter goes on to record Jesus' denouncing them and provides a stark warning to the readers of this Text.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. ... *he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.* The disciples' mission was undoubtedly important and interesting but Matthew has little to say on that subject. The evangelist's concern throughout chapters 4:17—11:1 is Jesus' ministry to Israel of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Actually, our Lord's words in this chapter sum up the response of Israel to the ministry of our Lord and His disciples.

Verses 2 – 3. ... *the works of Christ...* Christ meant 'an Anointed One.' It was used in the sense of God's special call and equipping. In the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. Jesus fulfills all three of these anointed functions (Heb. 1:1-3).

... *he sent two of his disciples* ... John sent Jesus a question through some of John's disciples. This use of "disciples" is another proof that the word does not necessarily mean believers in Jesus. These disciples were still following John. John questioned whether Jesus was "the Coming (Expected) One" (Ps. 40:7; 118:26; Isa. 59:20). 'The Coming One' was a Messianic title. John previously announced Jesus as the Coming One (3:11), but Jesus did not quite fit John's ideas of what Messiah would do. He was bringing blessing to many but judgment to none (3:10-12).



... *Art thou he that should come...* John's problem with Jesus was not rooted in unbelief, but rather in his concern that Jesus was not fulfilling the Scriptures. John was aware of his role as the forerunner of Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3) and Malachi (3:1-3; 4:4-6; Matthew 11:10; Luke 1:11-17).

John was also familiar with other passages that spoke of the Messiah coming in power to subdue His enemies and establish His kingdom, (Psalm 2:1-12). When John spoke of Messiah's coming, he spoke of Him coming in power and in judgment of the wicked, just as a number of Old Testament prophecies described His coming: *I baptize you with water, for repentance, but the one coming after me is more powerful than I am—I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clean out his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with inextinguishable fire*" (Matthew 3:11-12).

John was a prophet, and as such, under inspiration, he spoke with divine authority but like many other Old Testament prophets he only understood one coming of Messiah. *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who predicted the grace that would come to you searched and investigated carefully. They probed into what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified beforehand about the sufferings appointed for Christ and his subsequent glory.* (1 Pet.1:10-11).

The prophets were not given a full and complete grasp of the entire prophetic picture. One writer notes: **"John was not, at that moment in time, able to distinguish between those prophecies which spoke of Messiah's first coming and His second coming. The first coming was foretold in those prophecies which spoke of His rejection by men and His sacrificial death, by which He paid the penalty for our sins – prophecies such as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13—53:12. His second coming was described in prophecies such as Psalm 2 and Malachi 3:1-3. John struggled because Jesus did not fulfill those prophecies pertaining to Messiah's second coming, and we can now understand why. His was a problem that only time would solve."**

As noted earlier, John's present circumstances might have led to his doubt. He was a prisoner, and might have been tempted to think, if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, why was I His friend and forerunner in prison?

One writer points us to the language used in the question and states:

"When John asks, ***"Shall we look for another?"*** he employs the term ***heteros***, which suggests "another of a different sort". Had the Lord not fulfilled John's expectations? Had the Baptizer hoped that Jesus would be a different kind of ruler, and perhaps usher in a political regime?" The same questions of the ultimate triumph of God undoubtedly face everyone in suffering for Christ's sake. If our God is omnipotent, why does He permit the righteous to suffer? The answer, of course, is that the time of God's judgment has not yet come but that the final triumph is certain.



Verses 4 – 6. ...*Go tell John what you hear and see...* Jesus sent a summary of His ministry back to John. He used the language of Isaiah's prophecies to assure His forerunner that He really was the Messiah (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1; Isa. 26:19; 29:18-19). We may note that all of these Isaiah passages contain some reference to judgment. Thus Jesus assured John that He *was* the Coming One, and He implied that He would fulfill the judgment prophecies.

... *Gospel...* describes the contents of Jesus' message, "good news." It includes the news of the sin and separation of all humans from God, but continues in the offer of forgiveness, restoration, and eternal salvation for all in faith in Christ. The good news of victory is in the spiritual conflict. Notably, it appears the poor did not normally have the gospel preached to them!

Verse 6 is a gentle warning against allowing Jesus' ministry to become an obstacle to belief and a reason for rejecting Him (Isaiah 8:13-14). It assumes that John and his disciples began well, but warned them against reading the evidence of Jesus' miracles incorrectly. The verse commends those who believe God is working without demanding undue proof (John 20:29).

Verse 7. ... *as they departed...* *they* refers to John the Baptist's messengers. Concurrent with their departure, Jesus spoke to *the multitudes* regarding their attitude toward *John*. This large group likely included those who already considered themselves students of Jesus, others who are merely curious about His power and teachings, and still others who were skeptical or even hostile.

... *say unto the multitudes...* some might have overheard the exchange between Jesus and John's disciples and were now wondering if John was having second thoughts; if John the great prophet had doubts

... *A reed shaken with the wind?...* as John's disciples were leaving, Jesus took the opportunity to speak to the crowds about John. Reeds of cane grass grew abundantly along the Jordan River banks. "A reed" shaken with "the wind" represents a person easily swayed by public opinion or circumstances.

John was not the reed shaken with the wind; he was a wind shaking the reeds!

In our day, the pulpit has become very weak because it is in subjection to somebody sitting out there in the pew who does not like the preacher. Or the message might be always tailored to suit a certain group in the church. Too often the pulpit is a "reed" that is shaken in the wind. Thank God for John the Baptist, a wind shaking the reeds!

The multitudes certainly did not go into the Judean wilderness to view such a common sight as a '*reed shaken by the wind*'; there were plenty of those in the synagogues. They did not "go out to see ... a man dressed in soft," even effeminate clothes either. Such people lived in "*kings' palaces*." Jesus probably alluded derogatorily to King Herod, who had imprisoned John. Herod wore soft garments, but John wore rough garments (cf. 3:4-6).

Verse 8. ... *A man clothed in soft raiment?* ... being made entirely by hand, *clothing*, or *raiment*, in the ancient world was expensive. Ordinary people owned few garments and those few were



made of scratchy, uncomfortable fibers. Softer fabrics were too expensive for any but the wealthiest.

Jesus probably referred derogatorily to King Herod, who had imprisoned John. Herod wore soft garments, but John wore rough garments (3:4-6). John's characteristic garb was made of camel's hair and bound with a leather belt (Matthew 3:4). This perhaps imitated Elijah, the prophet who boldly confronted Israel's wicked King Ahab (2 Kings 1:1-8).

... *in kings' houses* ... John's clothes were anything but *soft*! The contrast in clothing with that of people who live *in kings' houses* points to a difference in lifestyle. John is a bold spokesman for God. Are people able to look past his attire and see that? Individuals with a worldly agenda may try to get what they want by flattery but that would not do for John the Baptist! His attire suggests that he had nothing and wanted nothing of earthly value.

Jesus asked, "*what went ye out ... to see?*" ... He tells us that men in soft clothing are to be found in kings' houses, not in wilderness areas. Only earnest seekers would be able to look past John the Baptist's rough clothing to the truth he taught. His garments were not sewn with gold stitching and his grooming was not up to par, but his message was!

By replying this way, Jesus was removing public suspicion that John's question might have arisen from a vacillating character or undisciplined weakness. John's question did not arise from a deficient character, but from misunderstanding concerning Messiah's ministry. Jesus was defending John.

When you hear the gospel preached, what matters more: the outward appearance of the messenger or the quality of the message itself?

Verse 9. *Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.* Having exposed as absurd the fictitious reasons for seeking out John, Jesus begins to offer the real one. People went to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist because they believed him to be God's *prophet* (Matthew 14:5; 21:26; Luke 1:67, 76); someone empowered to speak for God. Jesus affirmed that identification. He was the first true prophet who had appeared after hundreds of silent years.

Note that often we associate the work of prophets with predicting the future. Certainly, the biblical prophets did speak about the future (Isaiah 9:1-7), but their primary work was not prediction but proclamation (1:10-15). The prophets were God's spokesmen in their own day and time, declaring to their own generations what God was doing or was about to do (2 Kings 19:5-7).

Verse 10. ... *he, of whom it is written* ... John was an unusual prophet. He was not only a spokesman from and for God, as the other prophets were, but he was also the fulfillment of prophecy himself. He was the one predicted to prepare for Messiah's appearing. Thus Jesus can affirm that John is *more than a prophet* because his appearance on the scene fulfilled the promise of Malachi 3:1.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.



... *I will send my messenger...* The passage Jesus quoted is Malachi 3:1. The changes Jesus made in His quotation had the effect of making Yahweh address Messiah (Ps. 110:1). This harmonizes with the spirit of Malachi's context (4:5-6). By quoting this passage, Jesus was affirming His identity as Messiah as well as claiming by the words He used that He was deity. He viewed John as fulfilling the prophecy about Elijah preparing the way for Yahweh and the 'Day of the Lord'. Whether John really would have fulfilled it depended on Israel's acceptance of her Messiah then (v. 14). But let us note that there could have been no kingdom without the cross. Blood had to be shed as it was in the days of the Exodus, before victory. In either case, John fulfilled the *spirit of the prophecy*, because he came in the spirit and power of Elijah. *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias...* (Luke 1:17). So God Himself is the one who sends His *messenger* ahead of Jesus. Jesus has declared that He is the one about whom John spoke (Matthew 3:11). If John's role is to prepare the way for the Lord, and if John has indeed prepared the way for Jesus, then logically it follows that Jesus is the Lord, living among His people.

Verse 11. *Verily ...* In using this word *verily*, Jesus introduces this proclamation with an expression that affirms His trustworthiness (Matthew 5:18; 6:2, 5, 16; 8:10). But the declaration itself is very difficult for His audience to understand because it seems self-contradictory: First, Jesus says that *John the Baptist* is "more than a prophet" (vs. 9), which places him among the greatest people in history. How then can someone who *is least in the kingdom of heaven* be *greater than he*? Jesus was challenging His audience to rethink their understanding of the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3, 10, 19, 20; etc.). The people living in the time Jesus lived believed that the kingdom God will establish is to be a political continuation of David's throne (Acts 1:6). This interpretation means that Judah and Israel are to be restored as a united kingdom in political power, not subject to Rome or anyone else. But God's intentions are much broader: His kingdom is His promised reign over the world (Philippians 2:10, 11), His restoration of wholeness is to the world that currently suffers under the curse and brokenness of sin. It is the full realization of God's promises to all people. Jesus spoke of God's kingdom in terms of three-time frames: near, here, and yet to come. Like John the Baptist, Jesus spoke of God's reign as "nigh at hand" (Luke 21:31). But as Jesus healed and drove out demons, He was more likely to be speaking of God's kingdom as already present (Matthew 12:26-28). And as He spoke of what His followers came to understand as His return, He spoke of the kingdom as a future reality (7:21-23). So in the form that the Kingdom was now in Jesus can speak of John as less than the least in God's future kingdom. But when the future kingdom arrived John's position would be much different and he would not be counted as least in that Kingdom given his great work as the Forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus did not mean that John would fail to participate in the kingdom. All true prophets will be in it (Luke 13:28). He was simply contrasting participants and announcers of the kingdom.

Verse 12. *A...the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence...* Jesus follows one challenging saying with another that is even more challenging. The idea that God's *kingdom* can suffer *violence* seems absurd. How could the rule of the Almighty be challenged by anyone? Jesus seems to refer to the world's treatment of citizens of God's kingdom. One example is how Herod Antipas



has imprisoned John the Baptist for speaking out against Herod's sin (Matthew 11:2; 14:3, 4). Herod later will have John killed (14:9, 10). Jesus himself will eventually be arrested and crucified (26:50–56; 27:32–50). Looking further into the future, Jesus has already spoken of the opposition that His followers will face (10:16–31).

God's kingdom is great, but until it comes in its fullness, God's people experience great hardships. God's kingdom enters the world in Jesus, but the fullness of God's reign, including the complete defeat of evil, awaits Jesus' return. Until then, Jesus' followers experience the blessing and power of God's reign in the midst of a world that opposes them and the king they serve. It is not an "all at once" kingdom. It is an "already but not yet" kingdom.

... from the days of John the Baptist until now... One writer believes: **"Jesus meant that the religious leaders of His day were trying to bring in the kingdom in their own, carnal way, while refusing to accept God's way that John and Jesus announced.**

Thus Jesus' reference is to the period from the beginning of John's ministry to when He spoke. Ever since John began his ministry of announcing Messiah, the Jewish religious leaders had opposed him. Moreover, in 23:13, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of trying to seize the reins of kingdom power from Messiah, to lead the kingdom as they wanted it to go. They also snatched (took "by force") the kingdom from the people by rejecting, and eventually crucifying, the Messiah. The imprisonment of John was another evidence of violent antagonism against the kingdom, but that opposition came from Herod Antipas. John and Jesus both eventually died at the hands of these violent men."

Verse 13. *...prophets and the law ...* is an expression referring to Israel's Scriptures that Christians call the Old Testament. Jesus says that John's work was the climax of the message of those books. Jesus speaks of the Old Testament in its entirety—the stories of the patriarchs and the nation of Israel, the laws, the teachings of the prophets—as coming together as a message of promise. They announced this promise *until John*, who was directed by God to announce the soon-to-be fulfillment of the promise.

The Old Testament, *'all the prophets and the Law'* predicted the Messiah, *'until John,'* but when John began his ministry, the time of fulfillment began. That was a unique time that the law and the prophets had foretold.

Verse 14. *And if ye will receive it,* to stress His point, Jesus identified John as *Elias*, known in the Old Testament as Elijah. That prophet had confronted the evil leaders of his day with the reality of God's powerful authority (1 Kings 18:16–40). Generations later, the prophet Malachi promised that one like Elijah would appear as the forerunner of God's promised rule (Malachi 4:5, 6). John is this promised prophet like Elijah, the one who announces the fulfillment of God's long-awaited promises.

Note, Jesus did not say that John was Elijah. That depended on Israel's repenting and accepting Jesus as the Messiah. John fulfilled Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, prophecies about Messiah's forerunner, but not Malachi 4:5-6, the prophecy about the forerunner turning the people's hearts to God, since Israel rejected Jesus. John the Baptist stands in fulfillment of the promise



of Malachi concerning the coming of Elijah, but only in the sense that he announced the coming of Christ.

Verse 15. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* Jesus sometimes ends a discourse with this word of warning and encouragement (Matthew 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35). The saying encouraged hearers to think carefully about what they had heard and to respond appropriately to the challenge it posed (Mark 4:12).

Verses 16 – 17. ... *this generation...* were the Jews to whom He offered the kingdom (vv. 20-24; 12:39, 41-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34). This use of 'generation' refers to a group or circle of His countrymen (Prov. 30:11-14). Jesus must have observed 'children' playing the marriage and funeral games He referred to here, and He used them to illustrate the childish reaction of most of His adult contemporaries. Whether a wedding or a funeral it was all the same. There was no response to either. Neither the glad note of the gospel nor the solemn call to repentance seemed to have any effect on the great majority of the people.

The point was that the people found fault with whatever Jesus did. He did not behave or teach in harmony with their script of what the Messiah would do and His concept of the kingdom was different from their model. They wanted a King who would fit into and agree with their traditional understanding of the Messiah. Consequently they rejected Him. The people in Jesus' day may not have realized it but their refusal to trust God was exactly the same attitude of their ancestors during the time of the Exodus and journey to the Promised Land. Their refusal resulted in their wandering in the wilderness until the generation died off (Numbers 26:62–65; 32:13).

Children want their way and pout when it does not happen. Adults who act like this do not have ears to hear God. We become as children who cannot see beyond their own wants. As adults, which describes us, or we those who look to God's desires or are we like those who expect Him to meet ours?

Verse 18. *For John came neither eating nor drinking...* the two actions of the children in the marketplace suggest the contrast that Jesus now makes. John the Baptist lived under the vow of the Nazarite, refusing wine (Numbers 6:4; Luke 1:15) and adopting a diet symbolic of a great crisis (Matthew 3:4), refusing ordinary food. Jesus describes those who reject John's message as justifying their refusal by claiming that his strange actions indicate that he was possessed by a *devil*. Like the children just noted, John refused to dance to their tune.

Verse 19. *The Son of man came eating and drinking,....* Jesus, by contrast, was known to attend banquets given by those on the margins of society (Matthew 9:9, 10). *Publicans* collected taxes for Rome and were regarded by fellow Jews as having forfeited their standing in God's people. *Sinners* were notorious in their communities for violating God's law. In contrast to John, Jesus is called *gluttonous* and a *winebibber* for His association with such people at meals. Jesus, of course, has an explanation: He has come to save just such people (9:12, 13; Luke 19:10).



... *But wisdom is justified of her children...* For those unwilling to heed God's wisdom, no messenger is good enough.

Note the wrong-headed criticisms: John is too strict with himself and thus has a devil; Jesus is too indulgent. But God is at work in both, bringing His promises to fulfillment. The *children of wisdom*, those who responded to John and Jesus in faith, will prove the truth of what those two proclaim.

Jesus concluded with this proverb that justified John's and His lifestyles. The Jews had criticized both John and Jesus for the ways they lived. Jesus' point was the good "deeds" that John and Himself did "vindicated" their choices to live as they did. Who could justifiably criticize them, since they went about doing good?

Wisdom in the Old Testament is linked with *God* in a way which cannot be broken. Jesus claimed that He and John were living wisely, under God's control, by behaving as they did. The Jews could make childish criticisms, but the lifestyles of John and Jesus argued for their credibility.

CONCLUSION

The New Testament tells us that the wisdom of God will not be met with universal acceptance. The gospel has always been sharply divisive. Jesus inspired joyous faith from many but received powerful, even violent, opposition from others. God's wisdom appeals to some people as it addresses their deepest needs, even as it repels others, as it challenges their self-rule.

For those expecting a kingdom to come with military and political power, Jesus seemed the opposite of God's true king. For those who expected God to bring an immediate end to injustice and suffering, Jesus' idea of God's kingdom seemed absurd.

But for those with ears to hear and eyes to see, Jesus brings the fulfillment of every divine promise and the answer to every human need. That He was rejected comes as no surprise to us, for God's messengers have always been rejected by many.

God's kingdom is present but not in its completeness. It is both "now" and "yet to be"?

Circumstances can prove discouraging at times, but trusting that Christ reigns now and will reign fully in the future can provide strength and encouragement to meet even the biggest challenges. Those included even the challenge of Herod's prison for John and the challenge of the Cross for Jesus. In the strength we have in Christ, we witness the vindication of God's Wisdom.

John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus directly: "Was He the promised Messiah or not? Were the Jewish people to embrace Him as the Messiah, or should they look at Him or someone else?"

We see Jesus praying to the Father in this chapter after declaring "woes" to the unrepentant towns in Galilee. He prayed to the Father that it was good that He the Father had hidden these things of Wisdom from the wise and prudent and revealed them to the babes.

The wise and the prudent (or the intelligent) may refer to those that rejected Jesus and John and their message. The religious rulers, and the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees who



prided themselves on their knowledge of the Scriptures yet rejected Jesus and conspired against the purposes of God and God's Messiah. They did not choose the way of Wisdom, and they dragged most of the people along with them, along the broad road that led to destruction.

The babes or infants according to chapter 5 and other chapters were those that are poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the sick, and the lame, the tax collectors and sinners who came to Jesus to heal their body and their spirit.

Those are the ones that chose the way of wisdom and so Jesus would in verse 28 invite them **“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest”**. So Jesus invites you to choose the way of wisdom. That is the only sensible and logical path.

Is Jesus our only hope? That is the most important question you will ever ask or answer. It is just as important to you today as it was to John and his disciples thousands of years ago.

