

Gospel of Matthew

11:1-12

The Baptizer's Question!

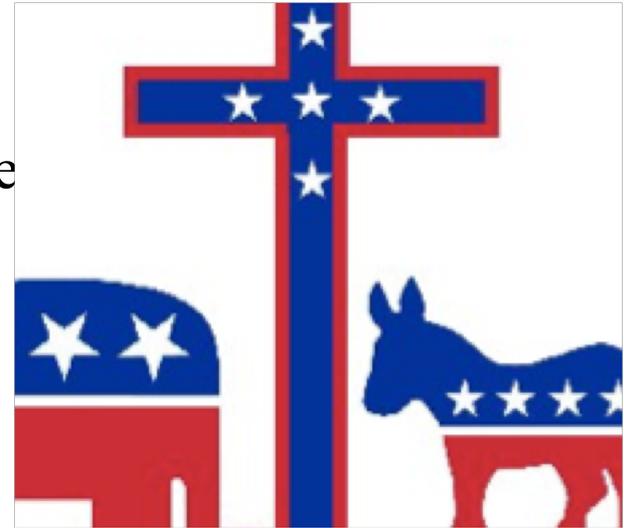


So last week we spoke of the gospelor's war – how the way of the Christ-follower is normally hard. Jesus was explaining this to the before He sent them out into the towns of and Judea to announce that the Kingdom had arrived – and it was Jesus who was Christ!



I warned you that we have been living and worshipping unnaturally. It's been too easy! We've come to believe it's our right. But our rights extend only so far as society is willing to let us have them. But things are shifting seismically these days! Our rights can and will be taken away with a stroke of a pen, and there is no doubt that the attitudes of society have shifted – and not in our favor. And it's okay! Now we will find out who is real! Under the acute pressures of persecution, God will separate the wheat from the tares! The wannabes-without-the-cost wont be able to hide in a mega-church! Our affluence will not protect us, because affluence too is moving down the social scale! People who claim to be Christians are going to have to decide if they are willing to be looked down on, belittled, lied about, hated – eventually lose status and money, perhaps property, family, and perhaps even our very lives - down the road! Once the Constitution that guarantees our rights is cast aside, a process that is happening as we speak, there is nothing that keeps this country from going down the same path as all the other countries that have persecuted Christ-followers!

So, what I'm saying is that we need to quit whining and moaning and voicing our outrage about the mindless fools that are ruining our democracy! ***It is coming! It cannot be stopped*** (unless there was a complete breakdown of the infrastructure – and the internet connection was broke and the universities were emptied for years, and the TVs went dark and silent – which I just don't see happening in the foreseeable future!) I'm not saying that you should give up voting or participating politically. In fact, if you have the stomach for it – run for office, become a judge, or aspire to a position of influence like a school board and recruit others of like mind – but places of influence in society where you can do good on behalf of Jesus. But you cannot stop, only delay, what is coming and we cannot run and hide, and we cannot deny Christ! We will have to endure it and do what we can. But I am convinced that persecution is coming down the road. According to the whole of Matthew chapter 10, “**normal**” is what Jesus would call it! So adjust your thinking, make a pre-decision to follow Jesus no matter the cost and to put Him first above all other things - relationships, plans, or possessions. Not even our families come first! He does!



Our highest calling is to continue to find opportunities to share Him with others! We don't need permission from anyone to fulfill our high calling, and no one can forbid us, because our mandate is from our Creator! We do it in times of peace with our own government and society, and we do in times of opposition and oppression from our own government.

Now, in that context, let's consider our text for today.

[Matt.11:1-19]

So John is in big trouble. This is probably just before Herod takes John's life by beheading. Remember, Herod's wife was greatly offended because John called them out for Herod taking his brother's wife! So she hated John the prophet with a murderous hatred, and when their daughter danced before the king, the king was so incestuously enamored that he promised to give her anything she wanted, her mother made her ask for John's head! Herod had given his kingly word – so he did it – but was not happy about it. John, I think, scared him. [Mk. 6:17-20]



So John is around 30 years old now and in prison, waiting some kind of action, not knowing it would be off with his head! But regardless - it is not a nice place – this dungeon - and things don't look too good for him. His freedom is gone. His rights confiscated. His disciples have to bring him food and provide the bribes to the guards and warden that will make his stay a bit easier. At this point, I doubt if he knew he was going to die. He was still quite popular with the people and He knew the king would be hesitant to take this too far and risk an uprising by killing him, but he had no idea how long he would be incarcerated. It would be whatever the king decided! The king didn't even need a provable and lawful reason to incarcerate him. He didn't need a provable reason to have John or anyone killed. The king could do as he pleased!

So John had been put in prison by a King that he and most Jews considered completely illegitimate. So He is disgusted that he has to be in prison under the orders of this usurper. Meanwhile, he had declared Jesus to be the Messiah some time before (months at least – maybe a year or two) and just like everyone else he was under the belief that the Messiah would take the throne of Israel and then conquer the world. Now, moldering in prison, with nothing but time on his hands, he’s not hearing any news of Jesus making any political moves. He is anxious for this to happen because he knows that Jesus will release him from prison as soon as he assumes power. But nothing is happening! He is starting to wonder and worry. *“Did I make a mistake here? He’s not doing what he’s supposed to. I’m going to send one of my disciples to just ask Him if he’s really the guy! Cuz if he’s the guy, He sure isn’t acting like it! And, if He’s not the guy, I’m really in trouble here in Herod’s prison.”*



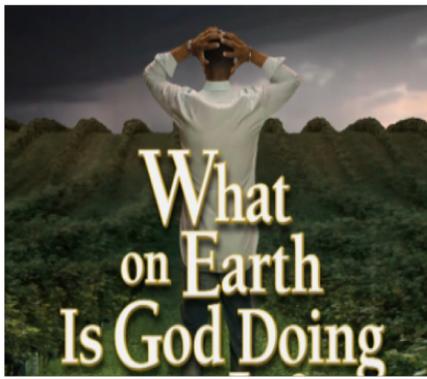
Vs. 4 – Jesus does not directly answer John’s question.

He tells the man to tell John of the miracles. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, *the dead are raised!* (None of this could happen without the sanction of Almighty God!) Also the gospel is being preached to the poor! And finally, *“Blessed is the man who does not fall away because of me!”*



Now,.. the gospel being preached to the poor was what John had been doing, but it wasn’t the extent of what a Messiah should be doing! He should have been hard at work formulating a political “platform” – (*What I will do for you if you revolt and make me your king*). Oh, and slogans – don’t forget the one-liners! And then collecting a following of charged up fans that would start a major political movement in society to help him meet his political aspirations! They would need secret hand signals, secret symbols, weapons – lots of weapons!

Jesus was forming a small following,.. but without any of that! It appeared that he had no political agenda! But he asks John to trust him with the way He is doing things. He asks him in an indirect way to not “fall away” just because Jesus wasn’t meeting His preconceived notions! Jesus might be a very confusing Messiah, but the miracles themselves proved that the power of the Creator was with Him and therefore, the approval to do things as He was doing them!



Sometimes Jesus does not do the things we think He should do them or not in the way that we think He should. We have a tendency to go back to the tired old doubts and fears, like even the great John the Baptist did. Is He really there, and does He really care? Of course He is, but our

disappointment in, especially, His timing, can be brutal upon our faith and trust. But Jesus always does things His way in His own time – always has. Since the mission came before even His own life, we should not be surprised that it comes before ours too! But perhaps it would be just as appropriate for HIM to ask US “*Are you really there and do you really care?*” How active are we in His purposes? Is the impact of our presence even felt in God’s Kingdom here on earth? Or after a few feeble and unsuccessful attempts to witness or invite people to church or church events, have we given up and disappeared into the woodwork? *My wife asked almost a half dozen people to our last movie night. All of them said they would come. None did. That has been our average experience with inviting people. But then every once in a while, one does come! That is who we are looking for - someone who is thirsty enough to come! So we keep looking for opportunities, keep inviting,

Then Jesus turns to the crowd and starts talking about John. “You all saw John. What did you go to see?! You went out to see a prophet, right? John is a real prophet, in fact, he is the greatest prophet that has ever lived! Vs. 10 says why. It’s because he was tasked with the greatest task any prophet was ever given to reveal. He was given the job of revealing Jesus – the Messiah – the focal point of all human history! He was the



one who got to say *“There He is – the One we’ve all been waiting for!”* John is the prophet who was sent to announce the Chosen One to the world. That makes Him a great man! Yet, any of my followers is greater than John because you get to announce me to the world as many times as you can!

It is a great privilege to point out the living Christ to people. There is greatness to be had in doing so!



But *timidity* is not one of the qualities that will launch us into greatness. *There is an

expression that describes a

timid girl or woman at a dance. It can also be used for a timid boy or man but is not used for a male as frequently. It is the term “wallflower”, a term which conjures up the image of a person that is so



uncomfortable with their public/social surroundings that they seem to try to blend in with the flowery wallpaper as they stay as far from the actual dance floor as the four walls of the ballroom will allow! They don't see themselves as worthy or attractive enough to be asked to dance by another person of the opposite sex. So to lesson their humiliation, they become very remote. But there is no one in the room more emotionally connected to that particular social activity! In that moment, they live in great despair, disappointment, and loneliness at not being chosen by at least *someone* at the event.

We cannot afford to be wallflowers. Jesus says that His Kingdom will be expanded forcefully by forceful men, by followers, men and women, that are thick-skinned, outgoing, on a mission, focused, purposeful, on-point followers who must tell their world about their great need for Jesus, somehow, some way. If there is a way, they will find it. They will pray, they will plan, they will partner up, they will find creative ways to win people over *without* being the least bit deceptive or disingenuous! These “forceful” people will do this and continue to do it despite repeated obstacles, resistance, and rejection. They will talk to 100 people to reach 1, because obeying Christ and loving people with the Gospel is their life – their highest calling, and greatest satisfaction in life!



We will learn, we will fail and learn from it, we will
We will persist because it is our identity, it is who we
are.

