

## **Sunday School Lesson for July 5, 2020**

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Lesson for July 5, 2020 "Wisdom's Vindication" Scripture passage is from Matthew 11:1-19.

Throughout this passage there are a number of questions. They are not rhetorical questions, questions used to make a point, but without the expectation of an answer. Rather, they are very effective teaching devices because the answers are either self-evident or answered by Jesus.

Matthew Chapter 11 comes immediately after Jesus has sent His twelve hand-picked apostles out on separate missionary journeys, in pairs (Matthew 10:1-4). Jesus Himself, continues through Galilee, teaching and preaching (Matthew 11:1). In Chapter 11 Jesus is speaking all the time.

John the Baptist was in prison and he heard what Jesus had been doing as he traveled from place to place. John had been put in prison by Herod. Herod had married his own sister-in-law, and John publicly rebuked Herod's flagrant sin (Matthew 14). John sends a message to Jesus through his own disciples, asking if Jesus is the, "one who is to come or should we expect someone else?" John wants to know if Jesus is really the Messiah, apparently because Jesus has not yet brought judgment on those who have not repented. His question might not be an expression of doubt, so much as wondering why Jesus hasn't yet done what John expects Him to do (Matthew 11:2-3).

Jesus tells John's disciples to go and tell him what they have seen Jesus do. He references Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah: that He will heal the blind, the lame, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, as well as the dead raised, and preach good news to the poor. Jesus wanted John to be reassured by this. Even when God does not meet our exact expectations, we can be confident that He's fulfilling His promises (Matthew 11:4-6).

As John's disciples leave, Jesus turns to the crowd and reminds them of how strong and unmovable John was during his ministry to Israel. Jesus declares that not only was John a prophet, but he was the very one that Isaiah prophesied would come to prepare the way for the Messiah (Malachi 3:1). Among all human beings born up to that point, John is the greatest. Still, the lowest person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. The meaning here seems to be that John the Baptist more clearly understood God's plan

than any prophet who came before. Jesus adds that, if His listeners can accept it, John is the spiritual fulfillment of the prophecy that Elijah would return (Matthew 11:7–11).

But the people had a problem with both John and Jesus. They think John is strange for living in a manner that is almost aggressively simple. They also think Jesus is careless about his society connections, sitting down to eat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus points the crowd back to the same evidence he offered to John's disciples. We can recognize wisdom by the results it brings in our lives and in the world. Wisdom bring healing, new life, and good news for people on margins. "Let anyone with ears hear" (verse 15).

Jesus makes clear, that Israel mostly rejected the preaching of John the Baptist; Israel has also mostly rejected Jesus' message. Christ compares the Israelites of this generation to children complaining that their playmates won't participate in their games. No matter what they see, and no matter what God provides, they simply demand the opposite. Their real motive is to resist, not to submit. Instead of hearing John the Baptist and truly repenting, the people decided he had a demon because of his strange and restrictive lifestyle. Instead of hearing Jesus and repenting, this generation decided that Jesus was a glutton and a drunk because He *did not* lead a restrictive lifestyle. Jesus uses a proverb to show that both He and John will be proven right in the end (Matthew 11:12–19).

Jesus pronounces judgment on the cities where the people did not repent, despite seeing Him perform great and powerful miracles. If the same miracles had been performed in the wicked Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, those idol-worshippers would have repented in great humility. The Jewish cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida will find God's judgment less bearable than those pagan cities. The same is true of Jesus' own adopted hometown of Capernaum. Even wicked Sodom, which God utterly destroyed (Genesis 19:24–25), will have a more tolerable judgment than Capernaum. This suggests the people of Sodom are still subject to judgment, despite the end of their earthly lives. It also hints that somehow, there are levels of punishment or judgment for our earthly sins (Matthew 11:20–24).

Jesus thanks His Father, God, for hiding the truth from those who are wise and understanding, according to the world. His implication is that those who arrogantly assume their own wisdom will miss the truth, because they aren't really looking for it. Instead, God will reveal truth to those the world dismissed as "children." Jesus declares that He and God the Father know

each other completely and that He can reveal the Father to anyone He chooses. He invites those listening who are weary and weighed down—in the sense of the Pharisees' extra rules and requirements—to take on His yoke and find rest for their souls (Matthew 11:25–30)

Sometimes preconceptions blind a person to the truth. Both Jesus and John fulfilled Old Testament prophecies; the identification of Jesus as the Messiah and John as His forerunner was therefore confirmed. The Old Testament prophecies proved to be accurate, but the people who were interpreting them often made tragic errors, just as we sometimes do. Maybe you know someone who initially rejected another person due to a wrong perception of that person. But later, after discovering the misconceptions, they became close friends. The old adage that the first impression is a lasting one is often true. Unfortunately, the tragedy comes when a person's first impression of Jesus Christ is wrongly affected by preconceived ideas caused by the erroneous actions and behaviors of Christians.

In verses 16-19, Jesus rebukes those who refuse to be pleased by either John the Baptist's or Jesus' ministry. Jesus here considered the nature of His current generation, and how they were choosy and uncertain in receiving God's message and His messengers. In verse 17, Jesus said, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn". The idea is that those who have a heart to criticize will find something to criticize. Many people wouldn't be pleased with either John or Jesus. "They refused to hear God's voice in either form, the somber or the joyful, in judgment or in mercy, if it did not accord with their conventions. There was no pleasing them." Jesus quoted the criticisms of others against Him. Though these words were meant to condemn, they have become wonderful. Jesus really is a friend of sinners. The wise man is proved to be wise by his wise actions (her children). Jesus had especially in mind the wisdom to accept both Jesus and John for what they were and what they were called to be. People might criticize John, but look at what he did – he led thousands of people into repentance, preparing the way for the Messiah. People might criticize Jesus, but look at what He did – taught and worked and loved and died like no one ever has.

If John was the forerunner announcing the Day of the LORD, and if Jesus was the Messiah he introduced, then there should have been celebration and rejoicing. But John did not dance. He did not even come eating normally or drinking wine. He came turning his back on the society and demanding that it repent. He announced that the axe was at the base of the tree and judgment was coming if they did not repent. The people said he had a demon. If Jesus was their Messiah, He should have taken up their cause as an oppressed people. He should have lamented with them over their

suffering at the hands of the Romans. But instead, He came eating and drinking, as if celebrating life as it was. He ate with sinners, even with Romans and tax-collectors. And so of Him they were saying that He was a glutton and drunkard.

All that generation did was demand that John and Jesus conform to their way of thinking, and when they did not they criticized or killed them. They hated the message of repentance and of the proclamation of the Gospel, and so they played their control game while Rome burned (as it were). But if they had understood John and had come to repentance, then they would have understood Jesus. Once again the issue seems to be that the unbelief and opposition of people not only criticized and attacked the messenger and the Messiah, but by doing so raised all kinds of questions about the Messiah. And Jesus, in answering the questions, affirmed that John was the messenger and He the Messiah.

The fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person and the same institution, from quite opposite grounds. Grown men and women; sometimes, can be like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

The last statement, was designed to say that wisdom, which throughout the Bible is concerned with right living, has been vindicated by her actions. Or, both the lifestyles of John and of Jesus must be acknowledged as authentically what wisdom produces. John had a mission to call the nation to repentance, and his lifestyle harmonized with that mission. Jesus presented the message of the kingdom to all who would receive it, and his lifestyle harmonized with that part of His mission. And through the ministries of John and Jesus, the kingdom made steady advances, even though men of violence like Herod tried to subvert it.

One observation on the text (Matthew 11:1-19), that explains this passage as three sections. The first is the question from John and Jesus' answer (verses 1-6). The second is Jesus' comments about John--some have said it was Jesus' eulogy of John who was about to be beheaded in prison (verses

7-15). This section was necessary because Jesus needed to remove any doubts in the people's mind about John's faith in view of his question. Then the third section in which Jesus gives the reason for the question John asked--the fickle nation had rejected John and Jesus (16-19). Had the nation received the message of John and the message of Jesus, John might not have been imprisoned at all. But the rejection brought all kinds of questions about the plan of God.

In each section there are quotations to answer the questions. The first question was John's about Jesus, and Jesus answered it with a collection of quotations from the Book of Isaiah about what the Messiah should be doing. In the second part Jesus asks a number of questions about John and answers them with the support of the prophecy in the Book of Malachi. In the last section Jesus asks the question about the current generation of people, and then answers it, not with a quotation from the Bible but with a quotation about what children say in their play.

Each of the three sections is closed with a wisdom saying. At the end of the first section Jesus says, "Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of 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 kind of a statement calls for a faith response to what has been said. And then at the end of the last section Jesus says, "Wisdom is proved right by her actions." The results of the ministries of John and Jesus will validate what they were doing.

From section "Stepping into the world" - When Jesus speaks of "this generation", we can fairly read ourselves into the story, because every generation seems to struggle with understanding him. We tend to seek a version of Jesus who does what we want rather than forming ourselves based on what he asks of us. If we take nothing else, we can reflect on the last thing Jesus says in today's passage, which can be translated differently. Instead of "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds", it can also be read as, "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her children." Vindication is the kind of win that gets you out of trouble by proving you were innocent all along. The world will know whether we were by the results of our actions.

The priority for those who follow Jesus cannot be what is good for “me and mine” but rather what is good for all people who do not have the advantages of health, education, social position, and economic resources. Jesus demonstrated his care both through his actions and through his teaching. If wisdom is vindicated by her children, then Christians will want to consider the legacy we leave to our families, our communities, and the world. Will people look back at us and call us wise? They will if we act in a way that honors Jesus.

StudyLight.org had this comment about Jesus’s statement, “But wisdom is justified of her children”. “It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suits us.”

**Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.**

Next week’s lesson July 12, 2020 “The Boy Jesus” from Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 and Luke 2:39-52.

*Sources for this lesson: An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, Matthew 11 lesson by Dr. Bob Utley, retired professor of Bible studies, Bible StudyLight.org, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.*