

In vv. 13 & 14 Jesus gives the reason for why the kingdom has been advancing ever since John was thrown into prison. What is that reason? (NOTE: The reference to John being Elijah is a reference to Malachi 4: 5)

The whole OT and John were prophesying about that kingdom. They were pointing ahead to Jesus. But now that Jesus has come it is advancing. Their work of predicting that Jesus is coming is over because he has come. The "great and dreadful day of the Lord" has arrived in the coming of Jesus. What is Jesus challenging us to hear (v. 15)?

It is in and through the work of Jesus that God's promised kingdom is forcefully advancing. The entire OT is fulfilled in him (cf. Matt. 5: 17-19). "The hopes and dreams of all the years are met in him tonight", in the words of the famous Christmas carol. All of God's plans and promises are being fulfilled in Christ. If you belong to him, then you are being swept onwards toward the culmination of all that God has planned. If you do not belong to him you are heading for the worst of all possible disasters regardless of how nice your life is going at the present. God is doing nothing in the world apart from what he is doing in and through Jesus, which means he is doing nothing apart from what he is doing in Jesus' body, the church, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph. 2: 22).

Are all your hopes and dreams for happiness met and fulfilled in Jesus?

Identify and explain the behavior of children that Jesus compares "this generation" to in vv. 16-17.

While we may not know the exact games to which Jesus refers, we do know about children whining and complaining. What parent hasn't had a child run up to them and say, "Mom, Sarah won't play dolls with me. She only wants to watch TV. Make her play with me." What often happens when children try to decide which game to play? Some want to play "Super Mario Brothers" and others want to play the latest NFL football video game. They argue and argue and finally one of them succeeds in putting the Super Mario Brothers game in the machine. But the one who wanted to play NFL football doesn't move his man and plays with no enthusiasm and soon can be heard the accusation, "You're so selfish. You're not even playing the game. What fun is it play with you when you won't even try."

How did the people who heard and saw Jesus prove they are like these children?

Jesus says to the Jews of his day, "You are exactly like those petulant, whining children who are only happy when other children do exactly what they want. John showed up out of the desert, wearing a camel skin garment and living a very severe and ascetic lifestyle. You told him to lighten up and quit being so serious. You told him he was acting like a religious fanatic. You called him crazy and worse. You rejected his message because he didn't do and say what you wanted him to do and say. You had him thrown into prison. Now I've shown up and I freely eat and drink. I like going to parties. I hang out with tax-collectors and sinners and all you can do is insult me. You call me a glutton and a drunkard behind my back. You tell me I need to be more serious about God and his laws, that I'm too free in how I treat the traditions of the elders. You accuse me of the grossest hypocrisy simply because I spend time with those you consider are under God's curse. The only messengers you will be happy with are the ones who do and say exactly what you want. Has it never crossed your mind that you might be wrong? But let me tell you something. Our actions, John and mine, while they appear very different on the outside are motivated by the same God and aimed at the same goal. We both are declaring the message of the kingdom. We both are displaying the greatness of God by declaring his greatness and serving others out of joy and for God's honor. Guess what? The end will show that we are right and that you are wrong. The day is coming when it will be clearly seen that we acted in accord with God's wisdom but that you are fools."

What are the ways in which we behave just like "this generation"?

Part of the work of this book is to challenge us so that we will not rest on false assumptions but will have a true and living faith. So we have to ask ourselves, am I like the people Jesus is criticizing in these verses? Am I like a child who whines and complains because God isn't as interested in the things I am interested in? While professing to be a follower of Christ am I really critical of how God is treating me? While going to church regularly do I just as regularly refuse to believe and submit to what the Scriptures clearly teach? When you look for a church do you look for a pastor who makes you feel good about yourself or for one who says what the Scriptures teach and so makes you uncomfortable? When was the last time you changed your mind, repented of a sin or changed a behavior because of what you heard in a sermon or read in the Bible on your own? Is it really our ambition to believe and obey whatever God says? Are we like children, like the generation that lived with Jesus, saying, "Play the game our way God or we quit. Make my life go the way I want it to go or I'm out of here"?

conclusion, then perhaps Jesus is a fraud. So Jesus is setting out to defend John and in doing so he is displaying his own greatness.

What does it mean for Jesus to ask if they thought John was a “reed swayed by the wind”?

He is asking if the reason so many of them went to see John is because he was a man who vacillated in his teaching. Was he like a politician that tells everyone just what they want to hear? Did he speak out of both sides of his mouth at the same time? Did you go listen to him because he had a reputation for telling people whatever they wanted to hear? The obvious answer is no. Nobody consciously goes to listen to a person who they know is telling them one thing and then somebody else the exact opposite thing.

What does it mean for Jesus to ask if they thought John was “a man dressed in fancy clothes”? (NOTE: The word “fancy” is only used three times in the NT. In 1 Cor. 6:9 it is translated “homosexual”.) Why does he make the point that those who dress in “fancy” clothes are in kings palaces?

He wants to know if they went to listen to him because he was a weak man, a man who was more like a woman than a man. His point of saying that men dressed in soft and effeminate clothes are in palaces is to emphasize the “weakness” of being a person that always agrees with those in positions of authority. Was John like a “yes man” who loves the luxury of the palace, of living as a friend of the king and so never contradicts the king? Did you consciously go listen to him because you think he is weak and listening to weak men is what you like to do? Again, obviously, no one goes to listen to weak men on purpose.

Why did the people go to listen to John?

They were convinced he was a prophet.

Jesus tells the people they were right to listen to him as a prophet but then he says that he was more than a prophet. According to v. 10 how is he “more than a prophet”? (NOTE: Jesus is quoting Malachi 3:1 but he changes it by adding a part of Exodus 23:20.) Before you can answer the main question you must answer these three questions:

- ◆ Who is the “I”? *God, i.e., Yahweh*
- ◆ Who is “the messenger”? *John the Baptist, the one who prepares the way for the Lord to come to his holy temple.*
- ◆ Who is the “you”? *God’s Messiah, Jesus.*

He is more than a prophet because he is the last prophet to appear before the Lord returns. He is the prophet who prepares God’s people to welcome him when he comes.

Why does Jesus say that John the Baptist is the greatest human being to ever live up to the time that Jesus was speaking? What makes him so great? (Read 1 Peter 1: 10-11 and compare what all the prophets did not know with what John knew.) How is every Christian greater than John?

John is so great because he knew who the Messiah was and the circumstances surrounding his appearing. He clearly identified God’s Savior in ways that no prophet or anyone else ever had done. Every Christian is greater than John because every Christian knows more clearly than John who Jesus is and why he came. Every Christian reveals Christ by their “saved” life in greater ways than John ever did. (See John 14: 6-14 for another statement of the greatness of Christians in this regard.) There is an interesting observation to be made here. God measures greatness by a person’s ability to correctly identify and relate to Jesus.

What period of time is Jesus referring to when he says, “From the days of John the Baptist until now”?

The period of time covered by Matthew 3:13-11:11. In other words, the period of time in which Jesus has been preaching the good news of the kingdom.

What then does it mean for Jesus to say that the kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing during this time?

God’s rule over the world of men has been advancing through the preaching and miracles of Jesus. God has been extending the “territory” over which he rules through Jesus’ work. All the promises in the OT regarding the “day of the Lord” when God overcomes all his enemies and saves all his people are being fulfilled in the work of Jesus.

What does the last phrase in v. 12 mean, “...forceful men lay hold of it.”? (See the NASB translation: “violent men take it by force”.)

Right now, at the very same time that the kingdom of God is advancing, evil, violent men oppose it and try to destroy it. John is living proof that this is happening as he has been thrown into prison. In chapter 10 Jesus described in detail this violent opposition to the advancing kingdom. It will advance and conquer but not without casualties.

Have you ever asked a question like that? Have you ever asked, if you really are God's Son and you really do love me then why is this happening to me?

What is the answer that Jesus sends back to this man who is suffering because he has been faithful to Jesus? Find one example of Jesus doing each of these things in Matthew 8-9.

He tells John's disciples to tell John what they have seen and heard. Then he tells them what they see and hear. Here is a literal and I think more poetic translation of v. 5:

Blind ones, they see. (9:27-30)

Crippled ones, they walk. (9:1-8)

Leprous ones, they are cleansed. (8:1-4)

Deaf ones, they hear. (9:32-33)

Dead ones, they are raised. (9:23-26)

Poor ones, they are told the good news. (9:35)

Compare verse 5 to Isaiah 35: 5-6 and 61:1. Note how similar they are. John knows the OT, especially Isaiah. What does Jesus intend for John to think when he hears his answer?

John is supposed to realize that Jesus is doing exactly what the OT says that the Messiah would do. He is to reason that if Jesus is fulfilling these parts of God's promises in the OT, then he will most certainly fulfill the rest. John must therefore be patient with God's timing. There can be no doubt that Jesus is God's Savior, so the problem isn't with Jesus but with John's understanding of how Jesus is going to fulfill all God's promises.

Jesus ends his answer to John with a statement that is at once a promise and a warning. Here is a translation to think about in addition to the one in the NIV and the NASB. "Blessed is the person who does not take offense at me and so abandon their faith in me as God's only Savior." What is Jesus saying to John and to us with this promise/warning?

Let me give you an expanded translation of this promise. "Blessed is the man who does not look at his life and then at Christ and say, 'If this is all the better you can do, then I want nothing to do with you. If you're the kind of Messiah that lets your servants get thrown into prison then forget you. If you're the kind of king who cares so little for your subjects then I want no part of your kingdom.'"

You are taking offense at Jesus when you declare by your words or your actions that his salvation is not good enough for you. You want more or you

want something different from what he is offering. When you demand that he treat you different than he is treating you. The person who has received God's favor acknowledges, in spite of the suffering, that Jesus is God's only Savior and loves him because he is. The person who looks at him and sees how he has fulfilled God's promises and trusts that he is bringing in his kingdom exactly according to plan will have peace and rest.

John is in prison and obviously discouraged and confused because of the dissonance between his expectations and his experience. Based on Jesus' answer, what does he expect to strengthen and encourage John in his suffering? Would Jesus' answer be enough for you if you were suffering like John?

Jesus clearly believes that if John knows that he is the Messiah and therefore fulfilling God's promises and threats according to plan, then John ought to be able to faithfully live out his life, regardless of what happens to him. There is no better news you could get than the good news that Jesus has come and died and risen and is coming again. Blessed are you if you know that, if that is enough for you.

After John's disciples leave Jesus turns to the crowd that has witnessed this interchange between Jesus and John's disciples. Read vv. 7-15. How would you describe the main thing that Jesus is doing in these verses? What is the main thing that he wants the crowd to know?

The main topic of these verses is John the Baptist. Jesus is describing who he is and how he is related to God's kingdom, God's Messiah. He clearly believes that it is necessary for people to understand what it means that John has come. The fact that he concludes this section with "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" shows how important he views people's understanding of who John is and what his coming means.

Read vv. 7-10. How would you describe "how" Jesus is talking to the crowd? What is the point? Why does he begin with these questions?

Jesus is using sarcasm/irony. Very large crowds of Jewish people went into the desert to hear John and to be baptized by him. Jesus is challenging them to think about why they went to hear John. Who did they think he was and is? He is challenging the crowd because many would be shocked by the fact that John asked the question he asked. They may have been critical of John and his question may have planted seeds of doubt in their own minds about the identity of Jesus. If John, who identified Jesus as the Messiah is now questioning his

HE FULFILLS GOD'S PLANS Matthew 11: 1-19 (Sermon 12/3)

INTRODUCTION

Has the “problem”¹ of suffering ever caused you trouble in your faith? Have you ever wondered why God was permitting (causing) you to experience suffering?

The problem of suffering is especially troublesome for people who believe in God. If you are an atheist and bad things happen to you, you just blame the government or bad luck or bad genes or bad parenting. However, if you believe and especially if you believe in Jesus you are confronted with a huge problem. You say you believe in a God who loved you so much that he killed his only Son for you. You say that you believe in the God who made the heavens and the earth and who is working out all things after the counsel of his will. You say you believe in a God who is perfectly just and is opposed to all evil. If all this is true, then why do we suffer?

Matthew 11 follows Matthew 10. In Matthew 10 Jesus declares that when you become a Christian you are volunteering for a life of suffering. In Matthew 11 we are shown a real life person suffering because he bore testimony to Christ. In these 19 verses we are shown how Jesus assures his people while they suffer. **You can be sure; contrary to appearances, that Jesus is faithfully fulfilling God's plan.**

STUDY

In v. 2 Matthew tells us how John the Baptist responds to what he hears about Jesus while he sits in prison. We have been told nothing about John since Matt. 4:12. Review Matthew 3 and 9: 14. Make a list of all the things these passages tell us about John.

- ◆ *He came into the desert of Judea, preaching*
- ◆ *His message was the same one Jesus preached (4:17) and the apostles (10:7)*
- ◆ *He was the one Isaiah prophesied about in 40:3. His “job” was to prepare the way for the Lord.*

¹ The problem of suffering is stated like this: “If God were good he would wish that his creatures be perfectly happy. If God were all-powerful, then he could do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore he is either not good or not powerful or both.”

- ◆ *He wore “rough” clothing (made of camel hair) and he ate a wild diet (honey and locusts)*
- ◆ *People flocked to him and confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan river*
- ◆ *He was very confrontational to the Pharisees and Sadduces, calling them a “brood of vipers”.*
- ◆ *He warned the Jewish leaders not to trust in their “Jewishness” because God was not going to be kind to them because of their race. He could make children of Abraham out of rocks if he wanted to.*
- ◆ *He warned of the soon and coming judgement of the Lord*
- ◆ *He described the person and work of Jesus*
- ◆ *He baptized Jesus and heard and saw God's testimony that Jesus is his beloved Son*
- ◆ *He was thrown into prison*
- ◆ *He and his disciples practiced fasting*

Based on this information what are we to conclude is the reason that John is in prison?

He is in prison for bearing testimony to Jesus. We are not told the specific reasons for his being in prison, nor are we told who put him in prison. But based on what we do know we are to conclude that he is in prison for the same reason that Jesus has just told his apostles that they and all Christians will be hated by all men...for his sake.

What is the question that John sends his disciples to ask?

I told people you were God's Messiah, his only Savior. Was I right? Are you the one who is coming, that the OT predicts, beginning in Gen. 3:15, or should we expect someone else?

Why does John ask this question? Look at Matthew 4:12, Malachi 3:1-5 and 4: 1-3. What was not happening that John was sure should be happening?

How would his being in prison compound his confusion?

John clearly expected the Messiah to be doing something more or other than what Jesus was doing. His expectation was that the Messiah, Jesus, was going to come and destroy all God's enemies (the corrupt Jewish leaders and the Romans) and save all his people (all faithful, believing Jews) by restoring them to their land. He did not understand how he could be in prison for bearing testimony to Christ if he had come to destroy the oppressors of God's people and restore Israel to its former greatness. He wanted to know, where is this gathering of God's grain into his storehouse? Where is this burning up of the chaff with unquenchable fire?