



The King on Mission Pt 1: Encouragement for a Friend
February 24, 2019

HOLY TEXT: MATTHEW 11:1-19

In Matthew 11, the LORD returns to His preaching ministry, ever pressing His way towards the cross. In the midst of such ministry, our LORD receives word from a dear friend and His forerunner, John the Baptist. However, let us back up...

THE DISCIPLES RETURN

- For the last several weeks, we have studied our LORD's sending out of the Twelve on a very difficult prophetic mission (Matthew 10).
- Matthew, however, does not tell us what happened. Mark and Luke declare that they obeyed their LORD:

Mark 6:12-13 (KJV) And they went out, and preached that men should repent. 13 And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Luke 9:6 (KJV) And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where.

- Based on the Gospels, however, it seems that between their leaving on their mission and their return, there was another prophetic development. The very next verse in Luke picks up the narrative this way:

Luke 9:7-10 (KJV) Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; 8 And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. 9 And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him. 10 And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

- William MacDonald comments on Luke 9:7:

Herod Antipas was tetrarch in Galilee and Perea at this time. He reigned over one-fourth of the territory included in his father, Herod the Great's, kingdom. Word reached him that Someone was performing mighty miracles in his territory. Immediately his conscience began raising questions. The memory of John the Baptist still troubled him. Herod had silenced that fearless voice by beheading John, but he was still haunted by the power of that life. Who was this who made Herod think continually of John? It was rumored by some that John had risen from the dead.

- Luke 9:10 chronicles the return of the disciples from their mission. By the time of their return, John the Baptist had likely been killed by Herod. Why? Because he spoke the truth concerning Herod's illegal marriage to Herodias. (Mark 6:14-29)

Mark 6:14-29 (KJV) And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. 15 Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. 16 But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is

risen from the dead. 17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. 18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. 19 Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: 20 For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. 21 And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; 22 And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. 23 And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. 24 And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. 25 And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. 26 And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. 29 And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.

JOHN IN PRISON

- In between Jesus sending the Twelve and their return, we pick up Matthew's narrative.
- John, may have been discouraged or perhaps in need of reassurance. Jesus, knowing His time was short, encouraged (and essentially eulogized) him.
- For those of you needing encouragement, may our LORD's words do the same for you!

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR A FRIEND

1. **Jesus, although busily preaching and teaching, took time to answer and exhort His friend. (vv1-4)**

- Simple point, but not a small one: let us rejoice that our LORD always has time for us!
- Somehow, in the midst of ruling over all creation (Col 1:16-17), reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:19), and working out all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11), He cares for His people! (1 Pet 5:7)
- As we'll study soon, LORD willing, Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28-30 (KJV) Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

2. **Jesus pointed John to His messianic power and authority to encourage his faith. (v5)**

- John MacArthur writes, "John the Baptist had introduced Christ as One who would "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" ([Mat 3:12](#)) in fierce judgment. John is understandably confused by the turn of events: he is imprisoned while Christ carries on a ministry of healing, not judgment, in Galilee, far from Jerusalem, the city of the King—and not finding a completely warm reception there (cf. [Mat 8:34](#)). John wonders if he has misunderstood Jesus' agenda."
- Evidently, John's disciples saw Jesus manifesting His power. Either that, or Jesus reminded them of all they had seen previously.
- The bottom line, however, was for John to be reminded of the Son of God's authority over His creation and to look for none other!
- Oh that we might be reminded of the same! Jesus is LORD and rules every aspect of His creation! Be encouraged! Nothing is too hard for God! (Gen 18:14)

3. Jesus inspires John's faith. (v6)

- The word *offended* in Greek is *skandalizo*. In this context, it means "to stumble" or "fall away."
- In other words, Jesus may be saying to John: "Don't lose faith now! You've done a good job! Keep your blessing! "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me!" (John 14:1)
- Keep in mind that John was in prison, about to die! I don't think John was experiencing some huge lack of faith, but if you were about to be beheaded, perhaps you'd need some reassuring too! I pray the LORD encourages us if/when the pressure is on to this extent!

4. Jesus speaks to the crowds of John's character and mission. (vv7-10)

- Noteworthy, Jesus began this eulogy of sorts as John's disciples were leaving. Is it possible they heard a bit of it and reported back to John?
- Jesus confirms John's fearlessness and tenacity. He was no weak flower blown about! (v7)
- Jesus exalts John's humility and purposefulness. He was not driven by appearances! (v8)
- Jesus corroborates John's prophetic status and declares that John was more than a normal prophet! (v9)
- Jesus calls attention to John's role as His forerunner, as prophesied in Isaiah 40:3! (v10) The whole passage to which Jesus refers is beautiful, and shows that John was sent in love, justice, and mercy:

Isaiah 40:1-5 (KJV) Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

5. Jesus essentially calls John the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. (v11)

- And yet, a citizen of the Kingdom is greater!
- We don't believe Jesus is saying John wasn't an eventual citizen of the Kingdom or isn't in heaven. He's saying John didn't live to see the resurrection and age of the Church!
- MacDonald writes, "To be a citizen of the Kingdom is greater than to announce its arrival. John's privilege was great in preparing the way for the Lord, but he did not live to enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom."
- Oh that we might see how blessed we are to be alive on this side of the cross and to know the risen LORD! Beloved, "...blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear...many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them*." (Matt 13:16-17)

6. Jesus frames John's ministry as a starting point of Kingdom "violence." (v12)

- This verse is commonly interpreted that the Kingdom advances "violently" or relentlessly, and passionate, zealous people press their way into it. There is great truth in this!
- In context, it appears the LORD is speaking of the opposition and persecution that began with John, after many years of no prophetic voice in Israel. This period between the ministry of Malachi and John (about 400 years) is also called the Intertestamental Period.

- The implication seems to be such persecution and violence could continue through the ministry of Jesus and beyond.
- The NLT combines these views: *Matthew 11:12 (NLT) And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it.*
- **Be encouraged that the Kingdom of Christ WILL be persecuted but WILL advance by God grace! Violent people will attack the Church but zealous people WILL still repent and believe!**

7. Jesus reminds His hearers of John's critical mission. (vv13-15)

- Regardless of his present circumstances, his labor was not in vain! (1 Cor 15:58)
- John's ministry fulfilled the calling of the "Elijah who was to come" before the "Day of the LORD," a ministry of great significance!

Malachi 4:5-6 (KJV) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: 6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

- Much could be said of these verses, but in short, John announced the LORD's coming, prophesied His judgment (Matt 3:11-12), and would be used greatly by God to cause men to repent.

8. Jesus defended John's ministry, calling out those who refused to hear John, using the indictment (as He often did) of "this generation." (vv16-19)

- Essentially, Jesus calls "that generation" impossible to please. As MacDonald noted on the parallel passage in Luke 7:30-34:

The Pharisees and teachers of the law refused to submit to John's baptism, and thus rejected God's program for their welfare. In fact, it was impossible to please the generation of which they were the leaders. Jesus likened them to children playing in the marketplace. They didn't want to play either wedding or funeral. They were perverse, wayward, unpredictable, and refractory. No matter what ministry God used among them, they took exception to it. John the Baptist gave them an example of austerity, asceticism, and self-denial. They didn't like it, but criticized him as demon-possessed. The Son of Man ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, that is, He identified Himself with those whom He came to bless. But still the Pharisees were unhappy; they called Him a glutton and a tippler. Fast or feast, funeral or wedding, John or Jesus—nothing and no one pleased them!

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS:

1. John burst on the scene as the one prophesied to herald the coming of the LORD Christ, the Messiah. He accomplished his mission. He also showed that even a great prophet is just a human being, with all the frailties and fears thereof, seeking a bit of encouragement before his death.
2. Our LORD not only encouraged him in his final moments, but spoke highly of him, essentially saying to him through his disciples, and to the crowds concerning him, "well done."
3. Like Paul, John fought the good fight, kept the faith, and finished his race, commended by the LORD. (2 Tim 4:7)
4. May we all, regardless of our final circumstances, finish well too! (Php 1:6)

Amen.