

JESUS TAKES OVER JOHN THE BAPTIST'S MINISTRY

Matthew 11:1-19

Key Verses: 11:4-6

"Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

In chapter 10 Jesus called his twelve disciples and gave them essential, indispensable instructions for future gospel work, as well as for their immediate fieldwork [training](#). When we review Jesus instructions, the disciples were to go out and preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick, depending on God whatever situation they were in. We were amazed that Jesus disciples were mostly uneducated people, but Jesus treated them like four-star generals and gave them seemingly impossible instructions. Jesus taught them that he came to bring peace and at the same time a sword to extinguish those who are out of God's law and engaging in the activities of the devil (10:34). Jesus also taught that disciples must love Jesus more than their own parents; otherwise, they are not worthy of being his disciples. When they love Jesus more than their parents, Jesus the King blesses their parents, too. But if disciples do not have absolute loyalty to God, they cannot be disciples of Jesus (10:37-39). Jesus also wanted his disciples to receive a prophet's reward, which is the highest in the kingdom of God. Today's passage tells us of the transitional period from the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, to the ministry of Jesus, who would [complete](#) world salvation work.

First, the work of God is going on. After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he sent them from there to everywhere to preach the [kingdom of God](#) and heal the sick in the towns of Galilee. At this important historical moment, something unusual happened.

John the Baptist was imprisoned. John's disciples might have thought the work of John the Baptist would go on. John the Baptist knew that his disciples were still spiritually immature and he sent them to Jesus to ask him, Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else? John the Baptist was a straight-forward prophet. So he had rebuked Herod the tetrarch to repent that he had taken his brother's wife as his own (14:3). Herod wanted to kill John but he was afraid of the people. One day, his unlawful wife Herodias threw a party for Herod and had her daughter dance. When they were very joyful by drinking much wine, and Herodias daughter danced, Herod spoke nonsense to Herodias daughter, I will give you whatever you want. Then she asked Herod for the head of John the Baptist. Herod, though stunned at her request, yielded to Herodias manipulation. Thus Herod, who respected John the Baptist, sent his soldiers to the prison and cut off John the Baptist's head and offered it on a platter. These things would happen in the near future. But at this time the disciples of John the Baptist did not understand what was going on. So John the Baptist, who was in prison, not yet beheaded, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask him, Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?

Jesus did not explain why John the Baptist would die in such a way. Jesus did not explain who he was, even though they were asking who Jesus was. But Jesus showed them the work of God which was going on, that is, what Jesus and his disciples had been doing. Let's read verses 4-6 together. Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

These verses show that the messianic ministry was going on. Of course, the imprisonment of John the Baptist and his upcoming martyrdom was unavoidable. But Jesus did not say anything to John the Baptist's disciples about their teacher's future. Jesus also didn't identify himself as the long awaited Messiah and King. He simply showed them that the work of God was going on through Jesus and his disciples, just as the work of God had been going on through John and his disciples. Humanly speaking, it was the moment of a sorrowful tragedy for John the Baptist and his disciples. Jesus was mindful of John the Baptist, who was in prison, and of his disciples, who had lost their master.

But to Jesus, the most important thing was whether the messianic ministry was going on or not. So he powerfully told them. Let's read verses 4-6 again. Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. Here Jesus told them that John the Baptist had completed his mission as the forerunner of Jesus. In order to prepare the way for the Lord, he preached the baptism of repentance and now he was waiting for his martyrdom. People thought that without John the Baptist the work of God could not go on. But Jesus here clearly told them that God's work was going on mightily and steadily. This is Jesus' explanation in view of God's salvation work. But John the Baptist's disciples might not have understood. They must have said, Your work is going on. But what about ours? John the Baptist's disciples had to learn how to see the work of God from God's point of view. We also learn that as long as the work of God is going on, everything is going on well. There was nothing to worry about, even though injustice was prevailing and they were apprehensive of becoming like their teacher, John the Baptist.

Second, what did you see? As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: What did you go out into the desert to see? Jesus was sorry that people had no point when they went to John the Baptist to be baptized, even though they had repented. They did not see who John the Baptist was. Twenty years ago, one student was doing God's work. But he was always pointless. So his shepherd gave him the nickname, Point Kwon, so that he might have a point. The people went out to John the Baptist to see the work of God through John the Baptist and the mighty work of repentance and baptism. But they did not understand and they became pointless people. So Jesus, in his deep sorrow, said, What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in king's palaces.

Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you (7-10). Jesus was sorry that the crowd who came to him also did not have the point to see the work of God. So he sorrowfully lamented over them saying, What did you go out into the desert to see? Then in verse 10b, Jesus clearly told them that John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Messiah King Jesus. It says, I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. It was prophesied and fulfilled concerning John the Baptist that he would come as the forerunner of Jesus and fulfill his mission. His situation seemed to be gloomy. But he was a man who had fulfilled his mission. God made man to receive a mission from God and to fulfill it. So John is known as one of the greatest men in Bible history, not because he ate locusts and honey and lived in the desert, but because he received a mission from God and fulfilled his mission with life-giving spirit.

So Jesus praised John the Baptist. Look at verse 11. I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. This means that John the Baptist was indeed a great man in the sight of God. At that time people were gripped with fear and were paralyzed until they could not open their mouths. But John the Baptist fulfilled his mission, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah through the baptism of repentance. Let's read verse 11. I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. This does not mean that John the Baptist is the last person in the kingdom of heaven. It means that in the kingdom of heaven everybody is equal. True equality, true peace and true victory are in the kingdom of heaven.

It was a time of despair. It was a time of sorrow and tragedy when everybody saw the imprisonment of John the Baptist and his wandering disciples. But Jesus did not think so. He said that everybody must see the kingdom of God and everybody must enter the kingdom of God. In order to enter the kingdom of God, each person must do everything with all his heart and with all his strength and with all his soul. Jesus rarely used an overly emphasized expression. But here Jesus says, ...the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it (12). Here we learn two things. First, the work of God seemed to have been extinguished by the imprisonment of John the Baptist; but it was not so. The work of God is always marching on mightily and powerfully, shaking the world. Second, we may do many things, but most importantly we must strive forcefully with all our strength to enter the kingdom of God. Why must we do this? As we know well, man is like grass, and all his glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever (1 Pe 1:24,25). Man's glory is that though he came from the dust of the ground, he has a soul. When he believes in Jesus, he will not perish but have eternal life. It is our glory that because of God's immortality in us we will not go back to the dust of the ground but we will go to heaven and see our Lord Jesus Christ face to face, and David and Paul, and even Bartholomew, with everlasting joy.

Third, the childishness of mankind (16-19). To Jesus, to enlighten the

hearts of sinful man was life-giving, but it seemed absolutely impossible because of man's childishness. To Jesus, man's childishness was selfishness and indifference and ignorance of the work of God. Look at verse 16. To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others.... At that time, there were many kinds of people and many nations. But they were all like children sitting in the marketplace and enjoying looking at the goods of this and that. They were very indifferent. So Jesus said in verse 17, We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. Throughout history, God wanted to save his people from their sins and so he sent many prophets and servants of God to them. But they never responded to their voices. They were like ignorant children, sleeping during an orchestra concert. Indifference is a great sin before God. One man who has some money does many things for his family. But he is very indifferent to his wife. He is going around saying, I don't love my wife. He does not love his wife because he does not love himself. He does not love himself because he is like a cut flower with no root in God. One who does not know God cannot love himself or his wife. So this man goes around doing many wild things. He has several kids, but he doesn't pray for their true happiness in this world. He wants to make them indifferent to what he has been doing to their mom. So the family is indifferent to each other. They are not a blessing to each other, but very harmful to each other.

Childish people are always critical, as a school child complains about his teacher who gives him homework every day. He would say, Our teacher is surely a machine, not a human being. He gives us homework every day without missing a day. In America, a decent petition to the government doesn't work. To our impression, even one decent petition has not been properly accepted. But if one complains bitterly, then the government workers immediately respond. So without knowing how to complain in the USA, nobody can survive. It is the social consensus that complaining is good and criticism is beneficial. But criticism is criticizing oneself. Criticism comes from one's heart and soul. It is a kind of poison. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they criticized him, saying, He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' life on earth was a very lonely one. But he was happy that an absolute minority understood what he was doing. Let's read verse 19. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But wisdom is proved right by her actions. Here, wisdom means those who know the Son of God.

Today we thought about God's men from above, John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus was sorrowful because John the Baptist was imprisoned. Jesus was sorrowful because people were indifferent and ignorant and critical. But he was happy when he saw that God's work was going on mightily and steadily. Let's also learn to rejoice to see God's work going on mightily, and be happy.