

# JOHN THE BAPTIST: ENDORSED BY JESUS MATHEW 11:07–15

## *Introduction*

John had just questioned if Jesus were the true Messiah. The questions had been asked in the presence of all. Some thought John was wavering in his faith, that he was weak and inconsistent.

If the people were allowed to think this, they would soon question if John were the real prophet who was to pave the way for the Messiah. Then following upon the heels of this question would be the questioning of Jesus: Was He the true Messiah? If this kind of talk and questioning had begun, it would have affected not only the crowd but also those who already believed. It would have been devastating to the Lord's mission. Note how fickle people really are and how easily people forget a prophet's real calling and pick up the news of his weak moments.

What Jesus did was reprimand the crowd. He vindicated John and his mission, reminding the forgetful and fickle that John was the forerunner, and He claimed that He was the true Messiah.

- I. John was not a wavering reed but a man firm in his conviction: he knew the Messiah was coming (v. 7).
- II. John was not a man of fine clothes, but a man disciplined and self-denying (v. 8).
- III. John was a prophet and more (v. 9).
- IV. John was the Messiah's forerunner, the herald of the true King (v. 10).
- V. John was the greatest of natural men, yet not as great as the least in the Kingdom of Heaven (v. 11).
- VI. John launched a violent overthrow of the kingdom (v. 12).
- VII. John was the last of an age, the age predicting the Messiah (v. 13).
- VIII. John was the promised Elijah, the one to precede the Messiah (v. 14).
- IX. The conclusion: a person must hear (v. 15).

## ***I. Mathew 11:07 John the Baptist: Questioning, not Wavering***

John was not a wavering reed but a man firm in his convictions. Questioning does not necessarily mean that a person is wavering in his beliefs or behaviour. John was not a vacillator, a reed swaying with the winds of change. He did not sway nor weaken because of the frown and terror of Herod. He was not a man who preached with force when he had the applause of men and weakened when he had the frown of men. He was God's servant, and he knew it. He served God faithfully in His calling despite having to deal with some questions.

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Despite his questioning John was still...

- believing in the Messiah
- strong in spirit
- consistent in his behaviour

As stated, John was unwavering in dealing with the problems and temptations that arose in his life: the recognition and praise of the crowds, the rage and imprisonment of Herod, the thought that Jesus was perhaps a mistaken Messiah.

Despite all, John was unwavering. He held fast to two things.

=> He held firm to his faith in God and in God's Messiah.

=> He held firm to his call:

**John 3:28** *You yourselves can testify that I said, "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him." (see John 1:20)*

**Thought 1.** John did not sway with every breeze of change or trial or opposition or crowd. He stood firm in his own calling. Applause, frowns, statements of approval and disapproval, of appreciation and disagreements — so much affects too many of us and too much of our work. We must learn and learn quickly that no matter what, we are to go on for Christ and keep on going.

**Eph 4:14** *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

**Heb 13:9** *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.*

**James 1:6** *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

## II. **Mathew 11:08 John the Baptist: Discipline and Self Denial**

John was not a man of fine clothes but a man of discipline and self-denial. John was dead to the world and its fame, power and ease. He was not worldly nor soft but disciplined and self-denying. He was not a man who was out to save what he had nor to save himself. He was not crumbling under the weight of opposition as a soft and materialistic-minded person would be. He was not a compromiser. John was a man sent by God to proclaim the truth, and he proclaimed it no matter the cost. Christ was saying, "When you look at John, you do not see a man of the world with the fine clothes of the world on his mind, but you see an ambassador for God." What a lesson on self-denial and faithfulness in the face of opposition!

**Thought 1.** A life of discipline and self-denial better prepares us to stand against all trials. If we live for God, denying ourselves, then...

- trials will work patience (endurance).
- endurance will work experience.
- experience will work hope, and
- hope will not shame us (Rom. 5:3-5).

**Luke 9:23** Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

**Rom 8:13** For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

**Gal 5:24** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

### III. **Mathew 11:09 John the Baptist: More than a Prophet**

John was a prophet and more. A prophet is a *foreteller*, a proclaimer of God’s message. The message may deal with the past, present or future. Note several things about the prophet:

=> He is chosen by God.

=> He is chosen to proclaim the message of God.

=> He is a man who must be trustworthy — one who will be faithful to his mission and courageous in proclaiming God’s Word (1 Tim. 1:12).

John was such a man. He was a prophet. Jesus said that John was more than a prophet. What does this mean? Very simply, his message included more than the message of the other prophets. His message was the heralding, the actual proclamation that the Messiah had come. In this, John excelled above all the other prophets. They only *foresee* the Messiah’s coming, but John *saw* Him come. Therefore, it was his responsibility to proclaim Christ’s coming.

Note that John’s primacy over the other prophets had to do with duty and responsibility and not with privilege. Some are called by God to excel and to take the lead in responsibility. It is duty and accountability, not privilege. What a lesson on *the need for humility and fear* — fear lest we come short!

**Thought 1.** John was more than a prophet: he was the subject of prophecy as well as the messenger of it.

**Isa 40:3** A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”

**Mat 3:1-3** “See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

#### **IV. Mathew 11:10 John the Baptist: The Forerunner**

John was the Messiah’s forerunner, the herald of the true King (see Isa. 40:3; Ma1. 3:1; Mt. 3:1-3). When God chose a person to run ahead and herald the coming of the Messiah; He did not choose a King or any other person of power or fame. He chose *a simple man* and called him *to preach* the coming of the Messiah. This convey a powerful message: God’s kingdom is not based on earthly pomp or earthly power. It is based on God’s Spirit and God’s power. It was not brought about by man’s hands but by the hand of God. Thus, God’s kingdom is a lasting, eternal kingdom, not a temporary kingdom that eventually will pass away.

**Thought 1.** Christ applied this prophecy to Himself; that is, He *claimed to be the Messiah* before whom John the Baptist came and prepared the way. This is a graphic scene. In ancient days, most roads were hardly more than dusty paths. When a king was about to visit a certain place, a runner would run some distance ahead of the king and shout, “Prepare! The king is coming.” And the people would immediately begin to clean and level the road for the coming king. John was saying, “I am but a voice calling. ‘Make ready! Prepare! The King is coming!’”

Two things are to be remembered.

- 1) He and John were the fulfilment of prophecy. He was the Messiah and John was the forerunner who prepares the way by proclaiming His coming.
- 2) All believers, preachers and laymen alike, are to be preparing the way of the Lord. By proclaiming (1) that He has come, and (2) that He is coming again. Remember: He came the first time, so He will come the second time.

#### **V. Mathew 11:11 John the Baptist: Kingdom of Heaven**

John was the greatest of natural men, yet not as great as the least in the kingdom. John did not have what believers have today. In knowledge, he did not have the full revelation of salvation which God has given to the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In experience, he did not have the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in the sense that New Testament believers do.

1. Believers have the opportunity for more knowledge about God than John had. In the Kingdom which God is building, those who believe in Jesus have access to the full

revelation of God. The believer sees the cross. He knows that the Messiah has come, died, risen and ascended into heaven. The believer knows the full scope of salvation. He sees the cross, the symbol of the great love of God. He can know the love of God in a way that John and others before John could have never known. The humblest believer can know more about God than the greatest of the Old Testament saints! He can know more than Abraham, Moses, Elijah, or Isaiah! It should be noted, however, that this is not favouritism. It is a heavier responsibility for which followers of Christ shall be held more accountable.

2. Believers have the opportunity of more experience with God than John had. The basic difference between believers before Christ and believers after Christ is the Holy Spirit. Believers after Christ have the opportunity to experience God more fully through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. They also understand God's revelation more clearly by knowing the Lord Jesus Christ personally and following Him.

Positionally, both the Old Testament and New Testament believers stand justified before God. Abraham, a believer before Christ, believed God and was counted righteous or justified (Rom. 4:3). The Philippian jailer, a believer after Christ, believed God and was saved or justified (Act. 16:31). Positionally, those in the Kingdom of Heaven today stand no more justified before God than John the Baptist. But having the opportunity to know and experience the full revelation of God, the believer of today is unsurpassed in privilege. However, for this privilege the world today stands much more responsible and accountable.

**Thought 1.** In God's estimation, John was the greatest man ever born of a woman. John was neither a prince nor a king. He was not a man of wealth, fame or power. Who was he? He was simply a man who believed in the Messiah and who totally committed his life to that belief. God does not value a man by his birth or earthly attainments but by his relation and commitment to the Messiah.

**Thought 2.** John's eminence was probably due to two things.

- 1) His dedication and commitment to God were most unusual. He was self-denying in his commitment to the Messiah, and although there had been many disciplined people who had sensed God, John's heart was probably closer to true self-denial than any others. Only God (Christ) would know this. At any rate, Christ declares John's eminence over all men; and in John, we have a blazing example of self-denial and commitment to God.
- 2) His preaching was repentance and the coming of the Messiah. Many had preached the same message; however, there was probably a difference. John's heart was perhaps more intense and intimate with the presence of God. Only God knows, but Christ did say John was the greatest man ever born. In John, there is certainly an example of intense commitment to God's calling.

**Luke 1:15** “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.”

**Mat 5:19** “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

**Mat 20:26** “Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”

**Mat 23:11** “The greatest among you will be your servant.”

**Thought 3.** Note two points.

- 1) The preacher today has the privilege to proclaim the cross and resurrection. John never knew the cross and resurrection; he only knew that the Messiah had come. Yet look at how committed he was to his mission. What a lesson for preachers of all generations!
- 2) Man today has the privilege to know the cross and resurrection of Christ. John did not. He only knew that the Messiah had come. How much more accountable we shall be!

**1 Cor 1:18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**1 Cor 1:30** It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

**1 Cor 2:2** For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

**1 Cor 2:9-10** However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”— but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

**1 Cor 2:12** We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

## **VI. Mathew 11:12 John the Baptist: Storming into the Kingdom**

John launched a violent overthrow of the kingdom. This means at least three things.

1. He stirred people to storm and rush into the kingdom just as an army storms or rushes into a city. In covering the beginning of John’s ministry, Luke says:

**Luke 16:16** “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.”

2. A person must storm the kingdom to enter it. He must have the spirit of a soldier who storms a city (2 Tim. 2:3-4). He cannot be half-hearted, lacking spirit or energy. He cannot be complacent, indulgent and at ease. He cannot expect to just slip into heaven. There has to be a real interest and desire, a vigorous stirring and struggle, a diligent seeking after God to enter heaven.

*Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

*2 Tim 2:3-4 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.*

3. A person who *really* wishes to enter heaven will storm it; that is, he will endure anything to enter heaven. He will deny himself and change his behaviour; he will turn from sin to God (repent). He will subject his desires to God's will and alter his mind in order to enter heaven.

*Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

*Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

*Eph 4:23 To be made new in the attitude of your minds.*

## **VII. *Mathew 11:13 John the Baptist: The Last Prophet, the Bridge***

John was the last of an age — the age predicting the Messiah. John ended the age of Old Testament prophecy. He was the last of a long line of prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah. He was the bridge that spanned from the predictions of the Messiah to the coming of the Messiah; the bridge that spanned the Old Testament to the New Testament. He was the one whom God raised up to be the end of one era and the beginning of a new era, the era of a long line of new prophets who would introduce the Messiah.

*Heb 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

## **VIII. *Mathew 11:14 John the Baptist: the Promised Elijah***

John was the promised Elijah, the forerunner who was to precede the Messiah. He was Elijah, the fulfilment of the last prophecy of the Old Testament: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah" (Mal. 4:5-6; see Mal. 3:1). John was not Elijah in person, but he was like Elijah in spirit, power and work (Jn. 1:21-23).

Some believe that John was the promised Elijah and some do not. It is a matter of belief. This is what Jesus was talking about: “If you are willing to accept it.” To receive the fact means that a person also has to receive Jesus as the Messiah, the One whom John predicted.

### **IX. *Mathew 11:15 Conclusion***

A person must hear. A man has ears in order to hear; let him hear this message.

*Mat 13:16* “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.”

*Prov 18:15* *The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.*

**Thought 1.** God expects us to use the faculties we have in order to receive His message: we have eyes to see His work; ears to hear His message; minds to reason the truth; hands to work His works; feet to go where He wishes. We are to be as committed to the Messiah as John was.

**Thought 2.** Note the warning: a man with ears can fail to hear. ■