

Jesus – The King of the Jews #28
The Inquiry by John the Baptist
Matt 11:1-15

Introduction:

1. The first ten chapters of Matthew are a series of testimonies that prove who Jesus is.
 - a. He presents the testimony of history ([1:1-17](#))
 - b. Testimony of the miraculous birth ([1:18-25](#))
 - c. Testimony of fulfilled prophecy ([2:1-23](#))
 - d. Testimony of Christ's forerunner ([3:1-12](#))
 - e. Testimony of God the Father ([3:13-17](#))
 - f. Testimony of Jesus' power ([4:1-11](#))
 - g. Testimony of His words ([5:1-7:29](#))
 - h. Testimony of His works ([8:1-9:38](#))
 - g. And testimony of His disciples ([10:1-42](#))
2. Matthew marshals all of that evidence in the courtroom, as it were, to testify that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah and Son of God.
3. In [chapters 11-12](#) Matthew focuses on the reactions of various individuals and groups to that evidence, organized into several general categories of response.
4. In each chapter there is a series of negative responses followed by a positive appeal.
 - a. [Chapter 11](#) looks at the negative responses of doubt ([vv. 1-15](#)), criticism ([16-19](#)), and indifference ([20-24](#)), followed by a positive appeal to faith ([25-30](#)).
 - b. [Chapter 12](#) looks at the negative responses of rejection ([vv. 1-21](#)), amazement ([22-23](#)), blasphemy ([24-27](#)), and curious fascination ([38-45](#)), followed by another positive appeal to faith ([46-50](#)).

I. Overcoming Doubt – vs 1-6

- One of the evidences of the veracity of the Bible is that it faithfully reports the failures as well as the successes of some of its greatest characters.
- This chapter of Matthew reports the doubts of John the Baptist about Christ.
- Though John the Baptist was one of the greatest men ever to set foot on this planet, he was still made of human flesh; and when circumstances were discouraging, he had his moments of doubt.
- Doubt is the common experience of ordinary Christians, but it is sometimes a visitor to the great saints as well.

A. Jesus Ministers Alone – vs 1

- 1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.**
1. After instructing the disciples, Jesus sent them out to minister
 2. Then Jesus Himself left and began teaching and preaching
 3. Though John was in prison, Christ seemed to pay no attention to it
 - a) *He carried on His ministry without visiting John or delivering John*
 - b) *This apparent disregard of John would cause doubt in anyone.*
 4. How could a man like John the Baptist be attacked with doubt?
 - a) *The answer is not difficult to discern.*
 - b) *Scripture gives us enough information to understand why he had his low moments regarding his faith about Christ.*
 5. The ordinary Christian doubts in far lesser adverse circumstances.

BYZ **Matthew 11:1** Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς διατάσων τοῖς δώδεκα μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ, μετέβη ἐκεῖθεν τοῦ διδάσκειν καὶ κηρῦσσειν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν αὐτῶν.
διατάσων verb ptc pres act nms from **διατάσσω** - strictly *arrange carefully, make precise arrangement*; hence *order, direct, command* (MT 11.1); middle with the same sense (AC 24.23); passive *be ordered or ordained* (GA 3.19)
μετέβη verb ind aor act 3ps from **μεταβαίνω** - (1) literally; (a) of persons *go from one place to another, pass from, depart* (JN 13.1); (b) of things *change, remove from* (MT 17.20); (2) figuratively, of going from one state to another *change* (JN 5.24)

B. John Doubts Jesus – vs 2-3

- In the case of John the Baptist, and of countless believers since his time, doubt might better be described as perplexity or confusion.
- This is the perplexity of a believer, a true child of God
- John was not questioning the truthfulness of God's Word as revealed in the OT or as revealed to him at the baptism of Jesus.
- He was rather uncertain about his understanding of those truths.
- Virtually all the gospel references to doubt pertain to believers rather than to unbelievers; and the kind of questioning John the Baptist experienced concerning Jesus' identity can only occur in the life of a believer.

1. Difficult Circumstances – “In prison”

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

a) *Humanly speaking the career of John the Baptist had ended in disaster.*

- (1) He had been the fiery, independent, dramatic, confrontational, courageous man who preached exactly what needed to be preached, to whom it needed to be preached, and when it needed to be preached.
- (2) He was fearless, aggressive, and faithful to the Lord in every way.
- (3) He called sin sin and sinners sinners.
- (4) And now he was **in prison** because of his faithfulness.

b) *John had been put in prison by Herod because he had protested Herod's unsavory marriage to Herodias.*

c) *The prison was a small, dank, and dark dungeon below the lavish palace living quarters of Herod.*

d) *This would be a severe trial to John.*

e) *He had been an outdoors man and used to much freedom of movement, fresh air, sun, and enjoyment of the views of hills and valleys and the sky.*

f) *But in prison, he was cooped up in a hole; and furthermore, his ministry had stopped.*

g) *The dungeon contributed much to John's doubts. His situation could dampen anyone's spirit.*

2. Incomplete Revelation - “Heard of the works of Christ”

2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

a) *The disciples of John brought news to John about "the works of Christ."*

b) *The fact that John sent his disciples to Jesus is a strong testimony to his faith.*

c) *In his heart he believed that Jesus truly was the Messiah and trusted Him as his Lord; but the events or lack of them caused his mind or emotions to put a cloud of doubt over his assurance.*

d) *He was saying, in effect, "I have firmly believed You are the Messiah; but have I been wrong?"*

e) *He was not asking for information but for confirmation. He believed, but his faith had become weakened.*

f) *John came to Jesus through his disciples, saying, like the father of the boy Jesus cleansed of an evil spirit, "I do believe; help my unbelief" [Mark 9:24](#).*

g) *While these works were wonderful and amazing, yet they would perplex John as his concept of Christ's coming was like most of the Jews, namely, they viewed Christ as One Who would come to earth to destroy the Jews' hated enemies.*

h) *John saw more in Christ than the typical Israelite did, yet John's attitude towards Christ was one that expected more judgment.*

i) *John had emphasized the judgment ministry of Christ in "the axe is laid unto the root of the trees" ([Matthew 3:10](#)), and His "fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor... will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" ([Matthew 3:12](#)).*

j) *But Christ had not done any of that. Rather His ministry was healing people and preaching and teaching.*

BYZ **Matthew 11:2** Ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης ἀκούσας ἐν τῷ δεσμοτηρίῳ τὰ ἔργα τοῦ χριστοῦ, πέμψας δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, δεσμοτηρίῳ noun nes from δεσμοπήριον - prison, jail

3. Worldly Influence – “he that should come”
3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?
- The Jewish people also thought the Messiah would eliminate all suffering—all disease, affliction, hunger, and pain.*
 - Yet Jesus' miracles, marvelous and extensive as they were, had not fully banished those things from Israel, much less from all the world.
 - Many Jews also probably envisioned a type of welfare state, in which all their material needs would be provided for them.
 - They expected health, wealth, and instant happiness, and when Jesus fed the multitude on the far side of the Sea of Galilee, they were ready to immediately crown Him king ([John 6:15, 26](#)).
 - There is nothing more important than seeking Christ and learning the truth about Him.*
 - Mankind pursues all kinds of knowledge; but few pursue the most important knowledge of all, the knowledge of Jesus Christ.*
 - Apostle Paul said, "That I might know Him" [Phil 3:10](#)*
 - If you know anything in life, know all you can about Jesus Christ.*
4. Unfulfilled Expectations – “look for another” – vs 3
- “shall we look for someone else?” indicates that John's expectations about the Messiah were unfulfilled*
 - John the Baptist knew the right place to go to get help in dealing with his doubts.*
 - He took them to the Lord.*
 - He did not go to some unbeliever or some enemy of the Lord.*
 - If you want help with your spiritual problems, go to the Lord.*

C. Jesus Reassures John – vs 4-6

- The Reminding**
4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:
 - The reminding is in the word "again."*
 - John did not need new proof; he simply needed to look again at the proof he already had about Who Christ was.*
 - We do not need a new message today; we simply need to preach the old message again and again.*
- The reviewing**
5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.
 - Christ told John's disciples what to review.*
 - He listed six major items about His ministry which the review should include.*
 - This last item was especially significant, for it was prophesied that the Messiah would minister to the poor ("meek" in [Isaiah 61:1](#)), which was a contrast to the practices of the day.*
 - Philosophers of that day spoke chiefly to the great and learned and looked down on the lower classes of society.*
 - But Christ lifted the poor in status by letting them listen to His teaching and preaching.*
- The Rebuke**
6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.
 - This is the beatitude of the unoffended and belongs with the beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount.*
 - This beatitude is for those whose faith stumbles over that which they cannot understand about God, it is for those who are upset by the fact that Christ is not popular, that His doctrine is hard on the flesh, and that self-denial is required to be His follower.*
 - It is the beatitude to help us have a better perspective of life, to not look at today's inequities as the final conclusion of life.*
 - Righteous John is in prison while unholy Herod is in a palace—that's today's situation, but do not be offended by Christ because of today's situation.*
 - Look at eternity where Divine equity will be the situation.*

BYZ **Matthew 11:3** εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ἢ ἕτερον προσδοκῶμεν; **προσδοκῶμεν** verb ind pres act 1pp from **προσδοκάω** - wait for, look for, expect, anticipate, with an added element of tension arising from hope or fear

BYZ **Matthew 11:4** Καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Πορευθέντες ἀπαγγείλατε Ἰωάννη ἃ ἀκούετε καὶ βλέπετε· **ἀπαγγείλατε** verb imper aor act 2pp from **ἀπαγγέλλω**
 (1) as carrying back word from a happening *report (back), inform, tell* (MT 2.8); (2) as announcing something *proclaim, declare* (MT 12.18); (3) as acknowledging something publicly *confess* (LU 8.47); as announcing what must be done *order, command* (AC 17.30)

5 τυφλοὶ ἀναβλέπουσιν, καὶ χωλοὶ περιπατοῦσιν, λεπροὶ καθαρίζονται, καὶ κωφοὶ ἀκούουσιν, νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται, καὶ πτωχοὶ εὐαγγελίζονται·

BYZ **Matthew 11:6** καὶ μακάριός ἐστιν, ὃς ἐὰν μὴ σκανδαλισθῇ ἐν ἐμοί. **σκανδαλισθῇ** verb subj aor pass 3ps from **σκανδαλίζω** - cause to stumble; figuratively in the NT; (1) active, as occasioning transgression *cause to do wrong or sin* (MT 5.29); passive *be led into sin, be caused to do wrong* (2C 11.29); in an absolute sense *fall away, give up believing* (MT 13.21); (2) passive, as taking offense at Jesus or refusing to believe in him *be offended* (MT 11.6); (3) as furnishing an occasion for someone to be shocked or angered *give offense to, offend* (MT 17.27)

II. True Greatness – vs 7-15

A. John's Personal Character – vs 7-8

- The world has many standards by which it measures greatness.
- These include intellectual achievement, political /military leadership, scientific and medical discoveries, wealth and power, and athletic, dramatic, literary, and musical skill.
- After John spoke his worst about Christ, Christ spoke His best about John.
- The praise for John was not spoken until the disciples of John had departed, so John did not hear about the praise. Why?
- This would keep the temptation of pride away from John
- This also remind us that one of the great tests of faith is to do well but hear little praise and honor for our work in this world.

1. He Overcame Weakness – vs 7-8

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

a) *Many people cannot rise above their difficulties /circumstances.*

- (1) Everyone has problems; it is overcoming them that separates great people from others.
- (2) Great people fight through, refusing to give in to their ignorance, handicaps, laziness, indifference, or whatever other obstacles may be in their way.
- (3) John the Baptist had that characteristic of greatness in full measure.

b) *John had no resentment of Jesus' popularity even when it began to overshadow his own and had in fact declared of Jesus that "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).*

2. Strong in Conviction – vs 7

a) *To answer the questions in the minds of the multitudes, Jesus asked them a question: What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?*

b) *A reed shaken by the wind?*

c) *He appealed to their own experiences, asking, in effect, "Was the man you saw preaching and baptizing in the wilderness uncertain and vacillating, a reed shaken by the wind?"*

d) *Did you ever hear John change his message or compromise his standards?" He asked.*

e) *The reed to which Jesus referred was common along Near Eastern river banks, including those of the Jordan where John baptized.*

- (1) They were light and flexible, waving back and forth with every breeze.
- (2) The people knew that John was not swayed like those reeds. If ever there had been a man with unswerving convictions, it was John.
- (3) He stood up to the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and even to Herod himself—for which boldness he was now in prison.
- (4) The people knew John was as far as possible from being spineless or irresolute

3. His Self-Denial – vs 8

a) *Great generals put their lives on the line with their troops.*

b) *Great athletes train their bodies mercilessly, denying themselves pleasures most people take for granted.*

c) *Great scientists often risk their health to make an important discovery.*

d) *Great inventors sacrifice social life in order to develop and perfect an invention.*

e) *Great medical researchers risk exposure to deadly disease in order to save thousands of lives.*

f) *The easy way is never the way of success.*

g) *John did not wear soft clothing – he wore a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey*

h) *John did not do these things in order to win approval of God like the ascetics*

BYZ **Matthew 11:7** Τούτων δὲ πορευομένων, ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγειν τοῖς ὄχλοις περὶ Ἰωάννου, Τί ἐξήλθετε εἰς τὴν ἔρημον θεάσασθαι; Κάλαμον ὑπὸ ἀνέμου σαλευόμενον;

σαλευόμενον verb ptc pres pass ams from **σαλεύω**

transitively in the NT; (1) literally, as the unexpected and disastrous shaking of what would be thought to be stable, e.g. earth or sky *shake, cause to move to and fro, cause to waver or totter, make to rock* (AC 16.26); (2) figuratively; (a) of stirring up a crowd *incite, move, agitate* (AC 17.13); (b) mentally, of an individual *agitate; passive be distressed, be upset, be shaken* (2TH 2.2)

BYZ **Matthew 11:8** Ἀλλὰ τί ἐξήλθετε ἰδεῖν; Ἄνθρωπον ἐν μαλακοῖς ἱματίοις ἡμφιεσμένον; Ἴδού, οἱ τὰ μαλακὰ φοροῦντες ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τῶν βασιλείων εἰσὶν.

ἡμφιεσμένον verb ptc perf pass ams from **ἡμφιέννυμι**

literally *clothe, dress* (MT 11.8); figuratively, of the beauty and form God has given to even common field flowers *adorn, cover* (MT 6.30)

B. John's Privileged Calling – vs 9-11

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

- John's second mark of greatness was his privileged calling.
 - Until Christ's own ministry began, no human being had been called to a task as high and sacred as that of John the Baptist.
 - John was chosen to announce and prepare the way for the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of kings.
1. A prophet?
 - a) For 400 years Israel had no prophet until John the Baptist
 - b) He was the most dynamic, articulate, confrontational, and powerful spokesman God had ever called.
 - c) As the last prophet, he would not only announce that the Messiah was coming but that He had arrived.
 2. More than a prophet!
 - a) John was both prophet and fulfillment of prophecy.
 - b) He was the Lord's **messenger** who was to **prepare [the] way** for Messiah and who would even baptize Him.
 - c) He announced the Messiah and ministered to the Messiah with his own hands—as no other prophet had done
 - d) After thousands of years of preparation /prediction, John was given the privilege of being the Messiah's personal herald

C. John's Powerful Culmination – vs 12-14

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

1. Even if a man has outstanding character and an outstanding calling, he must also have opportunity in order to reach his potential
 - a) **John the Baptist** entered the scene of history at precisely the right time—according to God's own plan, prediction, and provision.
 - b) After 400 years with no word from the Lord, Israel was expectant; and until Jesus began His own ministry, John was the focal point of redemptive history.
 - c) He was the culmination of Old Testament history and prophecy.
2. But John generated conflict because his message upset the status quo.
 - a) With his call for repentance, he stirred up a hornet's nest among the religious leaders and even with the king.
 - b) Everywhere he moved there was reaction, often even violence, which eventuated in his being arrested, imprisoned, and executed
3. Elijah

Mal 4:5 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.

 - a) This man would not be a reincarnated Elijah but another prophet much like Elijah.
 - b) That Malachi's prophecy referred to John the Baptist and not to a literally-returned Elijah is made clear by the angel's message to Zechariah about John: "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" ([Luke 1:17](#)); and John himself denied that he was actually Elijah ([John 1:21](#)).
 - c) John was like Elijah—internally in "spirit and power" and externally in rugged independence and nonconformity

BYZ **Matthew 11:9** Ἀλλὰ τί ἐξήλθετε ἰδεῖν; Προφήτην; Ναί, λέγω ὑμῖν, καὶ περισσότερον προφήτου·

BYZ **Matthew 11:10** οὗτος γὰρ ἐστὶν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται, Ἴδού, ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.

BYZ **Matthew 11:11** Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐκ ἐγήγερται ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν μείζων Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ. Ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν.

BYZ **Matthew 11:12** Ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ ἕως ἄρτι ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται, καὶ βιασταὶ ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν.

BYZ **Matthew 11:13** Πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου προεφήτευσαν·

BYZ **Matthew 11:14** καὶ εἰ θέλετε δεῖσθαι, αὐτός ἐστιν Ἡλίας ὁ μέλλον ἔρχεσθαι.

BYZ **Matthew 11:15** Ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω.