

Matthew 11:1-19

The Dungeon of Doubt

Now if you were with us a month ago – You know that we left off in Ch 10 of the gospel of Matthew –

A) Jesus was sending out the 12 on a missions trip.

B) Sent them out in power – with a message – his hand was upon them

1) Always ironic to me that Judas was a part of that. – Experienced people getting healed – Demons cast out

C) Still turned against Jesus

D) But that is where Chapter 11 is picking up – after his instructions to the 12

Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. 2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples 3 and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”

Why was John in prison?

A) Because he was a gutsy man. This guy didn't back down for no one or for nothing.

B) **PC was not a part of his Vocabulary** - He was just this edgy, unafraid prophetic voice.

C) **Here is what got him in trouble:** Herod Antipas was the Tetrarch of Galilee- ruled that region

D) Herod Antipas wasn't happy with his wife so dumped his wife

1) but he took a liking to his brother's wife, named Herodias, and persuaded her to leave his brother.

E) So Herodias and Herod Antipas hooked up –

John the Baptist felt even though Herod was a non-believer that he needed to say something and publicly rebuke Herod

A) Because he's bringing defilement upon the Jewish homeland.

B) So, he rebukes Herod and Herod has him put in prison.

1) **Imagine John today – Some of our leaders... their infidelities**

C) According to the records, he's put in a prison called Machaerus.

1) Machaerus is in present day Jordan, five miles east of the Dead Sea in the middle of nowhere.

D) As John is there in prison, **10 MONTHS** - he's no doubt thinking, he's processing

1) John the Baptist – starts having doubts – is Jesus really the messiah

This brings up an issue. It's an issue that surprises many Christians.

A) Some of the greatest spiritual leaders of all time have suffered deep moments of depression, doubt and discouragement.

B) **Moses Numbers 11 – Asked the Lord to take his life.**

1) **Elijah** after his greatest spiritual victory – went into a horrible funk – and wanted to die – **Kill me**

C) **Jeremiah** – got discouraged from not seeing any results – Said I am never going to preach again

D) Paul and Silas – read in 2 Corinthians 1:8

Burdened beyond measure and despaired even of life

E) **Charles Spurgeon** was quoted as saying: that he gets so deep and in so many dark places of depression, he said, "I go to areas, I pray none of you ever go." He struggled.

F) Reformer **Martin Luther** struggled deeply with depression.

People don't expect that – they expect that their spiritual leaders always have it together.

A) Because they are in the word all the time – they never struggle like that –

B) I read an alarming statistic sometime ago that 1,600 Pastors quit the ministry every month.

C) For a number of reasons, the stress, the burnout, the people problems/ never ends it seems,

D) Spiritual warfare in ministry is intense – NOT SEEKING SYMPATHY - **PRAY** for your pastors

1) We need it!!!!!!!

BUT Doubt is something that all of us struggle w/ from time to time in our Christian walks

- A) We doubt God's leading in times when we need to make a step of faith
- B) We doubt God's provision as the bills start to mount - /
 - 1) doubt is something we all struggle with from time to time in our walks
- C) And I think there is a common characteristic in all the doubt that we struggle w/ -
 - 1) it stems from the fact that we often doubt if God cares !

Today we find John the Baptist in that type of a situation. **Dungeon of Doubt**

A) Go find Jesus and ask him if he is the Messiah or should we keep looking

B) Think about this – this is John

1) One coming after me – greater Sandals

C) This is John – I must decrease so he can increase

D) This is John – Behold the lamb of God.....

Now John is doubting why? – He is in prison.

A) If Jesus is the messiah why am I still in prison ?

B) Do you ever do that? – Lord if you really love me – why is this happening to me?

C) Lord if you are really for me – why am I sick

D) Lord if you really care Why

So John is struggling and he sends his guys

A) Picture the scene: Jesus excuse me **We have a question to ask you** – just for the record – not us - – John your cousin sent us to ask you a question –

B) John wants to know – are you the one – do we look for another?

4 Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 The blind see 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. 6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

GREAT LESSON ON HOW TO HANDLE DOUBT

A) Jesus is telling John – the same thing holds true for us in times of doubt when God is not responding the way that we wish he would

B) Don't FOCUS on what I am not doing – FOCUS on what I am doing!

C) That is the Key! -

What is God doing – how is He working – what has he done in your life

A) Focus on that

B) Pastor Chuck used to say: **When you don't know what is going on – fall back on what you do know.** – that is the key

C) Great lesson for dealing with doubt -

1) **Why I journal** – sometimes seasons of doubt and discouragement – what I need to read is not a book – it is my journal

D) What has God been saying to me.

Pastors – Need that confirmation:

A) Enemy and opposition coming – you need to be able to fall back on the confirmation that God gave you.

B) I HAVE HAD TIMES – I WANTED TO QUIT

1) Just done – I dig out a journal – the Lord confirmed this is where he wants me

C) Even though – nothing makes sense right now – I am resting in your calling

1) Fall back on what I do know..

D) So Jesus sends these guys along – with this message for John.

C) Then Jesus turns to the crowd to talk about John

Jesus testifies of John

7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?”

A) At the Jordan River like many rivers there are reeds like tall grass that is very **bendable/flexible**.

B) It moves with the wind in any direction, it is not very strong.

"Did you go down to the Jordan to see John like one of those reeds blowing in the wind?"

C) Were you expecting someone who catered to the crowd – trying to be liked by everyone?

1) That wasn't John –

John was pretty unbendable, inflexible. GUY

A) John was a black and white guy – This is truth, this is heaven, and this is hell.

B) He is hardly a reed. He is not some guy catering to the culture.

1) He is not given to extremes or pursuing the popular opinion of the day

Jesus continues 8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. – **John wasn't a softy**

A) True John was dressed in Camel's hair – but wasn't a camel hair sport coat – Picture:

I always wanted one of those

B) John is wearing the hide – Really rough – eating bugs – locust and wild honey

1) Grass hopper legs in his beard

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 10 For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

C) Now Jesus is quoting Malachi, Chapter 3.

1) Not only was John a prophet, He was fulfilling a prophecy made about **that prophet**.

D) The one who would come to prepare the way for the Messiah

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

A) That's a quite a statement, isn't it?

B) Basically, of all the people who've ever lived nobody is greater than John the Baptist

C) There have been a lot of great people who've been around, who have made great achievements,

1) Scientific achievement, monetary achievement, political achievement, spiritual achievement.

But this guy is greater than anyone ever born. How could that be?

A) Because if greatness were measured by worldly standards here. **Wealth, education, prominence,**

B) John wouldn't fit in any of those categories and by that standard, neither would Jesus.

1) No formal education, no monetary wealth,

2) John didn't invent any really cool thing out there by the Jordan River. **Why is he SO great?**

C) Well, a number of reasons.

1) **#1 John was filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb.** Nobody else has those credentials.

D) That's what the angel told his dad Zacharias, "He is going to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb."

#2 He was faithful to preach the truth and he was unbendable.

A) He was down at that Jordan River called in the wilderness making straight the way of the Lord.

B) #3 He was the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

1) He was the bridge builder between the OC and the NC – introduces Jesus the author and the initiator of the NC

C) **#4 He won many.** He turned many toward repentance.

V.11b But then Jesus says: but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

A) In this kingdom age in which we live, even the least of us is greater than John. Why?

B) Because we have an understanding of things John and the Old Testament prophets could not know.

1) Peter tells us the prophets of old tried to understand, asking, "How can these things be?"

C) New Covenant – we are partakers of what John pointed to.

1) **New Covenant** - we have been forgiven of all our sins by the blood of Jesus, and where we have the indwelling Spirit.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

A) This is an interesting sentence that in the original Greek language, this can be translated two ways.

B) It could mean that the kingdom of heaven is being attacked by violent men—for indeed it was.

1) John was in prison, and he was about to be beheaded.

2) Herod had killed perhaps thousands of babies in his drive to murder the Christ Child.

C) Bloodshed and violence abounded as the kingdom emerged,

1) so it could be that this verse speaks of the kingdom of heaven suffering violence by enemies trying to overtake it with force.

Another way to look at it with equal accuracy. Because in Luke's rendition it says, "That people press into it."

A) That is, that the kingdom of heaven is taken by men who are aggressively, enthusiastically pressing in and laying hold of it.

B) In other words It is not for those who just sit back apathetically and say, "Que Sera Sera, whatever will be will be."

C) Rather, it is taken by those who, with fervency in prayer, and exercise of faith,

D) Those who with a certain degree of passion and energy lay hold of the promises of God violently and aggressively.

1) Both meanings of this verse find illustration in John the Baptist.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

A) Now what on earth does that mean? - Confusing -

B) Anyone familiar with the OT knows that Malachi - the last book in the OT prophesied -

1) That prior to the coming of Messiah Elijah would return.

Malachi 4:5,6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet- Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

C) So the Jews were looking for Elijah the prophet to somehow appear on the scene.

But in John Chapter 1, "When John the Baptist is down at the Jordan River people come to him and they say, "Who are you?" And he says, "I am not the Christ." And then they ask them, "Well, are you Elijah?" And he says, "Nope, I'm not Elijah." "Are you that prophet?" "Nope, I'm just a voice crying in the wilderness" saying, 'Get right with God make a straight path for him.'"

C) So the OT predicts the coming of Elijah,

1) the Jews anticipated Elijah, they ask John, "Are you Elijah?" John says, "Nope, I'm not Elijah."

But now Jesus said, "That's Elijah. If you can receive that this is Elijah who is to come."

A) Well how can we reconcile this? The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself

B) Well, if you remember when John's dad Zacharias was in the temple worshipping.

1) And an angel came to him one day and he said, "Hey, I've good news for you Zach. Your wife Elizabeth is going to have a baby.

C) And you guys are going to be so happy and he is coming," listen, "in the spirit and the power of Elijah to turn people's hearts back to God

1) That is the Answer - John came in the Spirit of Elijah.

It gets even more interesting when you turn to Matthew 17

A) When did that ever happen? Ch. 17 Look at Verse 1, "Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John, his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves and he was transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun and his clothes became as white as light.

B) Jesus is here being displayed in His glory - the only time in his earthly ministry where the glory that was concealed in his humanity was seen

Verse 3 of Chapter 17, "And behold Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him." And Peter answered and said, "Lord, it's good for us to be here if you wish let us make three tabernacles, one for you one for Moses and one of Elijah."

A) Interesting – somehow – Peter knows who these guys are – Name badges

B) Go down to Verse 9, "Now, as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them saying, 'Tell the vision to no man until the son of man has risen from the dead.'" And his disciples asked Him saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed Elijah is coming first," **that's future. It's going to happen. Just like Malachi predicted, it's going to happen. In the future, he is coming first and will restore all things.**

But I say to you that Elijah has already come and they did not know him but they did to him whatever they wish likewise the son of man is about to suffer at their hands. **Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist.**

C) Jesus said, "He is going to come." "But he has already come and that's John the Baptist.

1) How do you reconcile?

Simple, John the Baptist came as an Elijah like forerunner.

A) He came, in the spirit and in the power of Elijah.

B) Not in the person of Elijah but in the spirit and power of Elijah.

D) Later Revelation 11 – During the tribulation – two witnesses

1) Moses and Elijah

Finish up tonight

16 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, 17 and saying:

'We played the flute for you,

And you did not dance;

We mourned to you,

And you did not lament.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came

eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Continuing His discussion of John the Baptist, Jesus asks, "What can I say about this generation?"

A) John came as an ascetic, he was strict - neither eating, nor drinking, but chomping on grasshoppers and living on honey, and you called him crazy.

B) They didn't receive John – (Mainly condemning the religious crowd)

1) Then I came, eating and celebrating, and you call Me a glutton and a winebibber.

C) You didn't receive John with his asceticism, and you do not receive Me with My celebration.

1) You don't want to dance, and you don't want to mourn. Nothing makes you happy."

I wonder if Jesus would say the same thing to our consumer minded Church today.

A) Attitude that plagues the church – what is in it for me? – How are my needs going to be met?

B) Church Shopping is a phrase created in our generation-

1) Shopping for a Church is like shopping for a car – want one with all the bells and whistles.

C) Too small – too big – need this group – that group

Today if a Church teaches through the Bible it is sometimes the last thing on the list people look for.

A) The true test: Are they making Disciples

B) That is what the Church is called to:

C) The Apostle Paul laid it out this way in Colossians 1:28 – Our Focus as a Church

²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Colossians 1:28-29

It is Him we preach: Jesus is the Focus

A) Not programs or principles – a Person –

B) We want to grow in our understanding of Jesus

E) What you do with it is up to you

2 Peter 1:2 “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,
3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him.”

Let's not be consumers – let's be Christ followers –

Amen

C) If the focus here ever gets on something other than Jesus – You should leave.

Paul said it is Him – Jesus we preach

A) Warning every man – times when warning is needed – Not all feel good.

B) The word of God exhorts us to flee from Sin and to walk in Holiness

C) Warning every man and teaching every man

1) Instruction is needed.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16

They are profitable for *doctrine* (what is right), for *reproof* (what is not right), for *correction* (how to get right), and for *instruction in righteousness* (how to stay right). Wiersbe

¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16,17

That is exactly what Paul said: Him we preach warning every man and teaching every man

A) This is the goal- Present every man and every woman Perfect or complete in Christ.

B) That is the goal - ²⁹ To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

C) **Premarital Counseling:** Give you the goods – to have a successful fruitful spirit filled and blessed marriage

1) Eight sessions we give you the goods – what you do with it is up to you.

D) Same approach to goal in ministry: See you grow in Christ – become complete in Christ

1) Whether it is me teaching or one of the other guys – our job is to give you the goods