

John the Baptist had identified Jesus as the coming Christ (Messiah) when he had baptized Jesus, but since then John had been imprisoned and Jesus had not yet established the kingdom of God here on earth. John was likely starting to wonder if he had misunderstood Who Jesus was and so he sends two of his own disciples to ask Jesus to confirm if He is indeed the Messiah.

² Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, ³ And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

Jesus is apparently alone at this time because v. 1 says He had just finished giving His disciples their marching orders and sent them out to preach, heal and cast out demons in the various cities of Israel. Since it says that Jesus left to preach and teach in “their” cities, it may mean that He followed the disciples and preached in the same cities that the disciples had just left. Many commentators believe it refers to the cities in the region of Galilee, since that would be “their” region where they lived.

“Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples” – By this time John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod (Mark 6:17-20) but even in prison he had been hearing of the things that Jesus had been doing. Luke 7:18 tells us that John’s disciples had informed him of the things that Jesus was doing. Although some commentators believe John’s faith was wavering, it was more likely that John was wondering if he had misunderstood Who Jesus was and His purpose. After all, John had preached that the Messiah would come in judgment to establish the kingdom of heaven and so far Jesus had not done so.

“And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” – John had preached about “he that cometh after me” (the Messiah - Matthew 3:11) and had identified Jesus as being that Messiah. Was Jesus indeed the Messiah or should they continue to wait?

⁴ Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 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. ⁶ And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see...” – Jesus points to the things that they could see and hear as evidence that He was the Messiah. They could see for themselves that Jesus was healing the blind, deaf, lepers and the lame and was raising the dead. They could hear as Jesus preached the gospel to multitudes. He knew that John, who was familiar with the scriptures, would recognize that the things they were seeing and hearing had been predicted in the prophecies concerning the Messiah and His kingdom. The answer to their question was right in front of their eyes.

Isaiah 35:5-6 ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶ Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

Isaiah 61:1-2a ¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; ² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD...” (These are the verses Jesus read in the synagogue when He said “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” [Luke 4:16-21]).

“And blessed [happy] is he, whosoever shall not be offended [(skandalizō) to stumble; to distrust and abandon] in me” – Anyone who does not reject faith in Jesus as the Messiah will be happy because their faith will result in salvation.

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.

“And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John” – As the disciples of John leave, Jesus now addresses the crowds that have come to hear Him preach. Jesus begins speaking to the crowds about John the Baptist.

“What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?” - A reed blown about by the wind is a picture of someone who is blown about by public opinion or circumstances. Jesus asks the rhetorical question of what motivated people to go out into the wilderness to see and hear John preach. Was it to see a man who changes his message depending on what people thought or what benefited him the most at the time? Obviously, John was not “a reed shaken with the wind” for he preached the truth whether men liked it or not.

“But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses” – Being clothed in “soft raiment” speaks of someone who caters to their flesh with comfort and pleasure. In Luke 7:25, Jesus adds a second phrase: “live delicately,” referring to living in luxury. Jesus asks the second rhetorical question: Did you go out to the wilderness to see someone whose priority was pleasing his flesh? Again, this did not describe John because he was not the kind of man that would compromise the word of God in order to please himself. Jesus points out that the type of people who wear “soft clothing” are those who live in king’s houses, a possible reference to Herod, the king who had locked John in prison because his wife did not like what John was preaching (Mark 6:17-19).

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.

“But what went ye out for to see? A prophet?” – What would motivate someone to go out into the wilderness to see John? Someone whose message constantly changed according to public opinion (“a reed shaken with the wind”) or would not preach truth because it would make things unpleasant for them (“clothed in soft raiment”) would not be worth the effort. But to hear from heaven through a prophet would be worth the trip into the wilderness. Genuine prophets were known to preach the truth no matter the personal cost to themselves.

“yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet” – John was not just a prophet sent by God, but his role was more important than just being another prophet of God that has come declaring the word of the LORD.

“For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” – Jesus declares that John was fulfilling the role of being the forerunner of the Messiah, quoting from **Mal. 3:1**: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.”

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

“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” – Because He will contrast John with someone in the kingdom of heaven (Christ’s kingdom here on earth), Jesus seems to be drawing a distinction between the two covenants: the old covenant under law (of which John was a part) and the new covenant under grace. In the OT, no one could claim to be greater than John and John’s greatness stemmed from the fact that God had chosen him to be the forerunner of the Messiah.

“notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” – However, John could only anticipate the kingdom because Christ’s work of redemption on the cross had not yet taken place. Even though he had been filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), John had not yet experienced the new birth, which will be required for entrance into the kingdom (John 3:3). As a result, even the least saint in the kingdom will be greater than John was at the time when Jesus made this statement.

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence” – This refers to the period from when John started preaching “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” until the time that Jesus was speaking. Jesus also has been preaching the gospel of the kingdom but those opposed to this preaching had responded with violence. John had been imprisoned (and soon would be executed) and Jesus was then currently undergoing persecution that would eventually result in His crucifixion.

“and the violent take it by force” – These violent people will attempt to bring about the kingdom on their own terms. Jesus uses two parables in vs. 16-19 to make the point that they want the kingdom their way. The Jews will reject the kingdom as offered by Jesus in favor of one based on their own sinful desires and they will be willing to kill in order to bring it about.

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.

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” – John was the last of the OT prophets predicting the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.

“And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come” – Jesus is referring to **Mal. 4:5-6** (“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.”). Jesus says that if they would receive “it” (the context is the kingdom) then John would be the fulfillment of Mal. 4:5-6 and Jesus would then establish the kingdom. However, the Jews do not accept Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom or Him as their Messiah and so God sets the Jews aside for a period of time until the “fullness of the Gentiles” is completed (Rom. 11:25). After this, He will return to dealing with the Jews in order to bring about their redemption (Rom. 11:26-29).

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” – Jesus stresses that those listening to Him should understand the importance of what He is saying. The kingdom of heaven is coming and they need to be ready.

Verses 16-27: After using two parables to illustrate how the Jews want the kingdom to be established on their own terms, Jesus rebukes three Galilean towns for not recognizing their Messiah and repenting of their sins in spite of the many miracles He had done there. He then thanks His Father that such revelations do not come through the wisdom of men but through the wisdom that comes from the Father so that, as “babes,” we cannot claim such spiritual insight as our own.

²⁸ 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.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” – The Jews that Jesus was speaking to were under the burden of the traditions of men that the Pharisees and other religious sects had established as being “necessary” to being right with God. Jesus invites them to come to Him to be freed, not only from these legalistic requirements, but also from their sins. They could rest in Him, knowing that their sins were forgiven and their salvation assured.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of [from] me” – His listeners were already under the heavy yoke of religious legalism placed there by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:4) but Jesus urges them to trade that yoke for His. There is a yoke involved in following Jesus but it is a much better yoke than the one forced upon them by the scribes and Pharisees. He also encourages them to “learn of me” (that is, “learn from me”). He is inviting them to follow Him as His disciples.

“for I am meek [gentle] and lowly [humble] in heart” – In contrast with the hardhearted scribes and Pharisees who had no compassion but insisted on adherence to all the religious rules created by man above all else, Jesus describes Himself as a gentle Savior Whose priority is to humbly care for those that are His. His priority is their well being rather than the keeping of religious rules that did not come from God.

“and ye shall find rest unto your souls” – They will be able to rest in the redemption provided by Jesus Christ instead of working in a futile attempt to save themselves through the keeping of the legalistic religious rules of man.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” – This statement may seem to be contradicted by other scriptures describing how we must suffer for Christ and even by Jesus’ own words warning us that we would be hated by the world just as it hated Him. However, compared to the yoke of the scribes and Pharisees, Christ’s yoke is indeed light. Their yoke insisted on adherence to rules and laws that can never bring salvation or spiritual growth but bearing Christ’s yoke is our response of love for the One Who has already redeemed us. The yoke of the scribes and Pharisees has to be borne by our own limited human strength but Christ helps us bear His yoke.