

## Matthew 11B

- Why did Israel reject Jesus?
  - It's a question we take for granted, but it's not easy to answer
    - After all, Jesus offered Israel something they longed to receive
    - And He proved His ability to deliver it with miraculous power
    - Why wouldn't Israel embrace Jesus?
  - The answer to that question is more fundamental and more important than you may think, and understanding the answer takes some time
    - We have to gain a better understanding of first century Judaism
    - And we need a greater appreciation of how unbelief corrupts and handicaps the human heart
  - Chapter 11 is the place in Matthew's Gospel we see these things
    - In Chapter 10, Jesus began preparing for His rejection by Israel
    - In Chapter 10 He trained His disciples in the program of the Kingdom so they could reach the people of Israel in His name
    - And in Chapter 11 Jesus turns His attention to the fickle crowds, with their fleeting affections and easily manipulated emotions
- Last week the chapter began with an odd scene involving disciples from John the Baptist
  - John wanted clarity about Jesus' identity
    - Rabbis in that day taught that Israel was to receive two Messiahs – a prophet who dies for Israel and a king who rules over Israel
    - John assumed Jesus was the dying prophet, but then he heard Jesus preaching the Kingdom and wondered if Jesus was the king
    - Jesus answered that He fulfills prophecies for both, so that He was both the dying prophet and ruling king
  - Matthew opens Chapter 11 with that moment because John's confusion reflected a growing concern within Judea over Jesus' identity

- For Jesus' supporters like John, there was confusion over why Israel wasn't running to embrace His claims
- The religious leaders in particular were resisting Jesus despite His supernatural demonstrations
- And the crowds themselves were on the fence too
  - Jesus amassed a large following, but those crowds represented a small fraction of Israel as a whole
  - Moreover, many were following Jesus for reasons unrelated to His claims to be Messiah
- These two groups, the religious leaders and the crowds, each contributed to Jesus' eventual rejection and death on the cross
  - And in Chapters 11 & 12 Matthew is showing us how each played a part in that rejection
  - Chapter 11 focuses on the crowds while Chapter 12 focuses on the religious leaders
  - And by the time we reach the end of Chapter 12, Jesus' formal rejection has taken place
  - And Jesus' offer of the Kingdom comes off the table
- Last week in v.6, Jesus ended His conversation with John's disciples saying the one who isn't offended by His claims will be the one who will be blessed
  - Jesus draws a line in the sand saying, your eternal future turns on what you believe about Him
    - Are you offended by Jesus' claims to being God and your Judge?
      - Then you will know His justice in the end
    - Or do you embrace His claims and confess His name?
      - Then the Lord will bless you by forgiving you and adopting you into His family
    - There is no third choice
    - This chapter tells the story of how this crowd kept looking for a third choice and as a result they ended up with nothing

- John the Baptist's own ministry suffered from the same fickleness and organized opposition
  - Like Jesus, John's followers followed him for a variety of reasons
  - And also like Jesus, the Pharisees conspired to diminish John's influence
  - So having dismissed John's disciples, Jesus now uses John's example to expose the crowd's false intentions

**Matt. 11:7** As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

**Matt. 11:8** "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces!

- Using metaphors, Jesus asks the crowd sarcastically what were you expecting when you went to see John in the wilderness?
  - Many in the crowd now following Jesus in the Galilee had earlier flocked to John the Baptist in the wilderness
    - Certainly, some of them were moved by the Spirit and were operating out of sincere faith
    - But for every one of these true disciples there were hundreds of unconvinced, uncommitted observers
    - They were culturally Jewish, religiously curious and generally opposed to orthodoxy and authority
    - In today's parlance, we might call them ecumenical, unchurched or seekers
  - When they heard reports of John's ministry in the wilderness, they were intrigued
    - They were drawn by the spectacle, especially for the chance to watch a rebel like John stepping on the religious leaders' toes
    - So they traveled out to see John for themselves, and they hung around for a time
  - After John was imprisoned, many of that same crowd found their way to Jesus in the Galilee for the same reasons

- So Jesus turns to the crowd and asks rhetorically what interested them about John's ministry?
  - What did they expect to find in the wilderness?
    - And Jesus suggests a couple of answers using two metaphors
    - First, He asks if they thought they would find a reed blowing in the wind?
      - A reed is a tall, hollow grass that grows by a river, and when wind blows through reeds, they make a low howling sound
  - The Greek word for reed comes from Greek mythology
    - The Greeks tell a tale of two young boys, Karpos and Kalamos, who were close friends who spent all their time playing together
    - One day, as the myth goes, Karpos fell into the river and drowned
    - His friend Kalamos was so grieved by Karpos' death that he turned into a river reed
    - And to this day you hear the mournful song of Kalamos mourning Karpos as wind blows through hollow water reeds
    - And the Greek word for reed is *kalamos*
  - Jesus draws upon this myth to make a point about the crowd's superficial interest in John's ministry
    - Jesus says the crowds treated John as if he were a reed standing by the edge of the Jordan river making mournful noises
    - He fascinated and mesmerized the crowd, drawing their attention in the same way that we slow down to gawk at a car wreck on the freeway
    - They weren't interested in his message...they were captivated by the scene, the novelty of what John was doing
    - He was a spectacle, a rabble-rouser, someone railing against the powers that be in his day
- Or maybe, as Jesus suggests, they went out expecting a man dressed softly

- Obviously, we know John's clothing was anything but luxurious
  - In fact, Jesus Himself points out that we should only expect to find such things in king's palaces
  - Jesus is referring to those who visited the king's court, seeking to gain influence with the powerful and connected
- He's accusing the crowd of seeking after John as if he were a man of importance, a man of prominence and fame
  - For these opportunity seekers, John represented a chance to get in tight with a new power player in Jewish religious culture
  - Someone to cozy up to for influence and the chance for wealth
  - After all, they assumed surely John had some some plan to turn all that attention into an advantage
- So whether it was for spectacle or self-interest, Jesus says the crowds followed John under false pretense
  - And Jesus' implication was they were doing the same thing in His case
  - Some were there for the spectacle of the crowds and the entertainment value
  - Others came hoping to gain something
  - Each had his own agenda, his own expectations, and each projected those things onto Jesus
- That same translation process takes place today and it largely follows the same pattern we see here
  - Today, we have huge buildings filled on Sundays with crowds
    - But the question remains...why are they there?
    - Many are drawn to Christ in authentic desire to be His disciples, to see His name lifted up and to serve the Kingdom Program
    - But just as it was in Jesus' day, many are attracted for spectacle or self-interest
  - Many of those crowds are flocking to a hyped and over-produced Jesus starring in a weekly Broadway show called "Church"

- He's an entertainment event, a motivational experience, a light show and concert followed by a pep talk
- They come looking for a reed blowing in the wind, so to speak
- And then there are those chasing the Jesus genie
  - They have felt needs, and they're told that following Jesus is like rubbing the lamp
  - Follow the Christian recipe and Jesus will give you everything you desire
- Just as Jesus was surrounded by fickle crowds, the church today is dominated by movements turning the Christ-centered story of the Bible into a man-centered story of self-actualization
  - Whenever we remake God in accordance to our own expectations, we set ourselves up for disappointment
  - Because when the spectacle grows old or the prosperity never arrives, we become cynical and ultimately we blame God
  - But the problem wasn't with a God who failed us but with false expectations that deceived us
- Jesus didn't leave His place at the right hand of the Father to take on flesh and die on a Roman cross so that we could be entertained on Sundays
  - Nor is Jesus our genie or good luck charm promising us our best life now – or anytime prior to the Kingdom
  - Jesus is the the Alpha and Omega, the Creator of the Universe, our Savior and Lord and Judge of the living and the dead
- By His grace we are called out of darkness and into His marvelous light, commanded to follow Him in submission to His will
  - We are to live a life set apart from sin, fueled by a love for His word and focused on His glory among the nations
  - Those are the expectations we find in Scripture, and they are not self-affirming...they are Christ-affirming
  - And any other view of Jesus is false religion – no different from any other – even if it comes with a veneer of Christianity

- In a way, it's reassuring to know that these false views of Jesus are not new... they existed even in His day, as we see here
  - And now Jesus turns to explaining what the crowds missed about John and what they were missing about Jesus

**Matt. 11:9** "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.

**Matt. 11:10** "This is the one about whom it is written,  
'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,  
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

**Matt. 11:11** "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

- Jesus asks yet another question, but this time it comes without irony or mocking
  - He asks the crowd did you believe John was a prophet? If so, you were right
    - But John was much more than a prophet
    - He was the one sent to announce the arrival of Messiah
  - Jesus quotes from Isaiah 40 where the prophet foretells of John's ministry
    - Isaiah says that shortly before the Messiah appeared, the Lord would send a prophet
    - This forerunner would serve God by alerting Israel to their Messiah's arrival and prepare their hearts to receive Him
    - In that sense, John was a prophet, but because his ministry ushers in the Messiah's ministry, he was much more than a prophet
    - John represented the end of Israel's waiting, the end of one age and the beginning of the next
  - In fact, Jesus says that no one born from the dawn of time was more important than John the Baptist – save Christ Himself
    - Consider that statement for a moment

- Adam was not more important than John
- Nor was Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David – not even Isaiah who prophesied of John
- How can this be true? Because as important as those men were, they could only speak to the promise of the Messiah
  - But John...John ushered in the fulfillment of that promise
  - There is simply no event in human history more important than the Savior entering the world to save the Creation
  - And John had the unique privilege of introducing the world to its Savior at His baptism
  - So John not only prophesied about the Messiah, he presided over the fulfillment of that prophecy – and no one could be more important than that
- Then Jesus adds that as great as John was, the least who enters the Kingdom will be greater than he
  - What Jesus means is that as great as John was in earthly obedience and purpose, he was still a sinner
    - But the one who has received the one John foretold will by faith be made even greater
    - As obedient as John was, we will be made perfect, sinless, in our eternal bodies through our faith in Jesus
    - And as close as John came to the Messiah in the river, we will be like Christ in glory
  - Jesus' point is clear...John was a prophet, the most important prophet of all time
    - But his importance came by association with the Messiah, and his message directed his followers to receive that Messiah
    - So that if we truly believed John was a prophet then we would also heed his message
    - And if we heed his call to believe in Jesus as Messiah, we become even greater than John was in his day

- Acknowledging John was a prophet was simply agreeing with the obvious, and acknowledging the obvious gains us nothing with God
  - The people knew John was a prophet, but they ignored the prophet's call to follow Jesus as Messiah
  - It was hypocritical and self-serving
  - If we truly believe someone possesses the truth, then shouldn't we agree what they say and act accordingly?
  - Instead, the crowd was saying John had his truth about Jesus and they had their truth about Jesus
- But that's not how truth works...there is only one truth...two people can't each have their own, different "truths"
  - At best, one will have the truth while the other holds to a lie thinking it's true
  - There is no third option
  - But Jesus is pointing out that His crowds wanted a third option
  - They know John was a prophet of God and at the same time they remained skeptical of Jesus' claims to be Messiah
- That's relativism...it's redefining truth to suit our evil desires so that we can hold onto our preferred view
  - Today the world thinks it fashionable to invent personal views of God and eternity
    - And of course each person's view of God is carefully crafted so it doesn't conflict with our social views
    - How convenient that what they think is true about God just happens to agree with what their flesh desires
  - And even inside the church, we hear people expressing their own views of God's word as if truth is a matter of personal opinion
    - So that in a small group or a church body you may find multiple people holding to mutually contradictory views of the truth and content to remain there
    - But in reality, some know the truth while the rest are simply wrong

- As Peter wrote...there is no third option:

[2Pet. 1:20](#) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,

[2Pet. 1:21](#) for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

- If something is Scripture (or prophecy as Peter calls it), then it's true and from God, and therefore the meaning of it is also set by God
  - Jesus' crowds were seeking for a third option
  - They wanted a way in which they could both respect Jesus' ministry without acknowledging the truth of all Jesus said
- In other words, they believed they could still get to Heaven even as they rejected Jesus' claims that no one comes to the Father but through Him
  - And it's what post-modern society does today
  - In a sense, it's trying to make your way to Heaven
- We've all heard that meaningless statement at some point...all roads lead to Heaven
  - Never has Satan crafted a more appealing lie
    - It says two things we desperately want to believe...that everyone is ok and God likes us just the way we are
    - Both statements couldn't be farther from the truth
    - We are not ok apart from Jesus, and God detests our sin
- Consider what Jesus says about them next

[Matt. 11:12](#) "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

[Matt. 11:13](#) "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

[Matt. 11:14](#) "And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

[Matt. 11:15](#) "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

- Referring to John again, Jesus says that ever since John the kingdom of heaven suffers violence

- Now how can God's kingdom suffer violence
  - Well first, remember that the concept of the Kingdom moves through four phases in the Bible
  - Promise → Proposal → Program → Place
  - In the time between John the Baptist until Jesus, the Kingdom concept has transitioned to a proposal
- So Jesus is talking about violence being done to the proposal of the Kingdom, that is to the message John and Jesus preached in their day
  - That message centered on a Person, on the Messiah
  - Said another way, entering the Kingdom isn't about accepting an idea or starting a journey or performing a work of any kind
  - It was only about receiving a Person – Jesus
  - The Kingdom Proposal is essentially a marriage proposal...enter into covenant with Jesus and He will give you the Kingdom
- That proposal was suffering under violence, Jesus says, because those who came to John and to Jesus didn't like the message they heard
  - So they tried to change it, to make it what they preferred
  - They were taking it by force in that they were pushing back against what they heard, contending with the truth of it
- In reality they were trying to change the testimony of God's word
  - Notice in v.13 the Lord says that all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John
    - The phrase Law and Prophets was the Jewish way of describing their Bible, or as we would say today, the Old Testament
    - The entire word of God has been foretelling the very same things that John the Baptist declared in his day
  - Which means that those who opposed John's message and Jesus' message were no different than those who opposed the prophets before them
    - We're not talking about a clash of ideas or interpretations

- We're talking about two kinds of hearts...those who hear the word of God and those who don't
- Those who are children of God and those who are not
- Those who receive the grace of Christ in their Messiah and those who haven't
- Believers, unbelievers
- Jesus is looking at His audience and saying, if you accepted the word of God then you would accept John's testimony
  - And if you accepted John's testimony, then you would also accept Mine
  - And if you accept Me, then you have the Kingdom
  - There is no third option
- In v.14 the Lord says if you are willing to accept the truth, then for you John is like Elijah
  - This is an important but veiled comment...it ties back to something we learned last week
    - Remember, I said that the rabbis taught there would be three visitors before the Kingdom of God appeared
    - They taught that there would be two different kinds of Messiahs (rather than one Messiah coming twice)
  - But before them the rabbis knew that Malachi said Elijah would appear to warn the people that their Messiah was coming
    - Malachi specifically says that Elijah's appearing will happen shortly before the end of this age
    - So we know that Elijah appears before the Kingdom becomes a place, which happens at Jesus' Second Coming
    - Elijah will appear for Israel shortly before Christ's Second Coming to earth
  - So why is Jesus saying that for those who accept the truth of John's testimony, John is Elijah for them?

- We know John wasn't Elijah, since John specifically denies being Elijah in John 1
- What Jesus is saying is that John is a type of Elijah
  - To use the rabbi's teaching of two Messiahs, we could say that John comes before the Prophet, the son of Joseph
  - And Elijah comes before the Christ, the son of David
- So for those Jews who received John's testimony about Jesus, they could have the Kingdom in their day
  - For them John was their Elijah, because they won't have to wait for Elijah to appear to have that promised Kingdom
  - They could receive it now in faith
- He who has ears to hear, let him hear, Jesus says
  - Or as Paul says later, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ
    - Jesus is saying, not everyone hears the truth
    - Even though many followed them in huge crowds, still not all received John's testimony, and not everyone received Jesus
  - Why was Israel willing to reject their King? Because they preferred a different path into the Kingdom
    - They preferred a path that allowed them to remain unrepentant
    - They intended a recipe for Heaven that didn't require submission to God's word
    - They preferred to take Heaven by force rather than accept it the way God offered it
  - John said Jesus is the Messiah...follow Him, but the people said that's not the kind of Messiah we were expecting
    - Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life...no one comes to the Father but by me
    - They said we want to go to the Father, but we prefer another way
    - Jesus says there is no third option