

Intro

This morning we resume the book of Matthew. In 2020 we saw the arrival of John the Baptist, announcing the kingdom's arrival while preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus appeared on the scene. Passing Satan's test where Adam failed. Going about healing, casting out demons, preaching and teaching, amassing a large following. We toured the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus taught that kingdom righteousness goes beyond mere external law-keeping. Jesus isn't satisfied if we just refrain from murder. He also wants to drive hate out of our hearts and replace it with love for neighbor, and even our enemies. Jesus proceeded to go about the towns performing mighty works that revealed he wasn't a mere man. He was God the Son in human flesh. Last we encountered Jesus instructing his 12 apostles as he prepared them for a short-term evangelistic mission. And previously, in chapter 4, John the Baptist had been imprisoned.

This morning we encounter an imprisoned prophet who wonders whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. We'll consider struggles God's people have faced throughout the ages: doubt and opposition. When we're confused and doubts appear, what does Jesus have to say? When unjust accusations weight us down, what would Jesus say to us? Let's look to Matthew 11:1-19...

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

A prophet's doubts answered leads to discussion of the kingdom

FCF: doubt, opposition, slanderous accusations

Grace given: reminder of promises fulfilled, reminder that God's assessment matters

Point 1: When doubt arises consider God's promises (11:1-6)

Why JB doubts

While in prison John the Baptist heard reports about what Jesus. So John sent his disciples to ask Jesus a question:

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (11:3)

In other words, "Jesus, are you the Messiah?"

- 1) John the Baptist was prone to doubt

If the one chosen to prepare the way for Jesus' coming struggled with doubt, surely we can struggle with doubt

- 2) John doubted because of mistaken expectations

The Jewish people expected that the Messiah would overthrow Rome, punish the wicked, and restore Israel's kingdom when he arrived:

Jeremiah 23:5-6 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and **he shall reign as king** and deal wisely, and **shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.** ⁶ In his days **Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.** And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

The apostles clung to this expectation after the resurrection of Jesus:

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus wasn't fulfilling this expectation, so John wondered, "Is Jesus really the promised Messiah?" John was ignorant of the fact that the Messiah would come in two stages. 1st to die as a suffering servant. And 2nd to install a physical kingdom, execute justice, and bring universal peace.

3) John likely doubted because of hard circumstances

Put yourself in John's place. How could the prophet of the Messiah be imprisoned? Doesn't faithfulness result in blessing? Maybe Jesus isn't the one.

Jesus' response

1) Jesus recounts his deeds

the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. (11:5)

Yes, I'm the Messiah. I'm doing the things that Isaiah said the Messiah would do (see Isa 29:17-21):

Isaiah 35:4-5 Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

In other words, "Consider my deeds. Aren't I doing what the Scriptures said the Messiah would do? Yes, I'm the Messiah."

2) Jesus issues a promise with a warning

"And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (11:6)

Blessing for receiving the Messiah with assumed consequences for rejecting the Messiah.

Application

Surely we are susceptible to doubt too. Like two reasons John doubted:

1. Mistaken expectations (think something is promised and it doesn't come = God can't keep his promises or God's unreliable)

● wrong expectations we may have: perfect health, perfect finances, perfect children, perfect method = guaranteed evangelism success, perfect church scenario (every preference met; everyone just like me; etc.)

- we can doubt God because we expect something he never promised (= God hasn't failed & our understanding is faulty)

2. Hard circumstances

- God can't care if this happened to me: abusive parent, abusive spouse, death of a child or loved one, failing health, loss of a job

- God can't be sovereign if these things happened to me (he cares but he's powerless)

Doubts we may have:

→ does God actually care? Is God's plan actually good? Is God's plan wise?

What's the answer to doubt? God keeps his promises. We see that in Jesus' response. God kept the OT promises that John was clinging to. But God didn't keep his promises in the way John expected. Jesus reminded John that he was doing the Messiah's deeds foretold in the OT.

Despite what we see, Jesus promises blessing when we follow.

Point 2: When gospel opposition arises don't be alarmed (11:7-15)

Explanation

After John's disciples left, Jesus gave his take on John. John the Baptist was a prophet, not an unstable tossed to and fro reed shaken by the wind (11:7). He wasn't fickle and subject to the whims of public opinion. John was a prophet, not a kingly man of wealth (11:8). He wasn't above suffering for the kingdom. Jesus endorsed John's ministry.

John was greatest in that he played a unique part in redemption history: he prepared the way for Jesus. And John's ministry fulfilled OT prophecy:

Matthew 11:10 This is he of whom it is written, "' Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

But the least in the kingdom of heaven (you and me if we believe) is greater than John. Meaning as subjects of the kingdom we receive the new covenant blessings foretold by the OT prophets. We're greater because we experience what John paved the way for.

From John's arrival the kingdom has suffered opposition:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (11:12)

The kingdom of heaven, God's saving reign... a spiritual realm to be entered (Col 1:13) and a reign that manifests its effects in the lives of believers (Rom 14:17), appeared on the scene with King Jesus' arrival and awaits its final form in the new heavens and new earth. Since its arrival, the kingdom has been violently opposed. For example, John's imprisonment.

Jesus continues... John is the Elijah to come:

Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

John was a prophet like Elijah (= similar ministry), not the same Elijah resurrected.

Jesus concludes with a warning:

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (11:15)

Receive John's message because he's from God. Kingdom entry results in opposition.

Application

Opposition is inevitable. This is how it's always been for kingdom citizens. Expect it and embrace it. Don't be shocked when our culture has different values than us. Don't be shocked when the church's stance on a moral matter is different than the culture's. Don't be shocked when your grandchildren or great-grandchildren have a different worldview. There will be strife between those under God's sway and those under Satan's sway (1 John 5:19). No comment on opposition. Just a statement of fact.

Don't try to escape opposition at all costs. Instead, embrace opposition as essential to being Christian.

Point 3: When gospel opposition arises engage with wise deeds (11:16-19)

Explanation

Jesus describes the generation he came to:

It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." (11:16-17)

Jesus is indicting his generation for rejecting both John and himself:

- Jesus and John are the ones calling to their playmates
- Jesus played the flute (celebrate the king's arrival and rejoice in the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead raised, demons cast out) and John sang a dirge (mourn over your sins and get your hearts ready for the king's arrival)
- that generation was guilty of failing to respond to both Jesus and John

Jesus continues:

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' (11:18)

= an odd prophet with a message of repent was demonized = rejected as not from God. "God wouldn't warn us" say the scribes and Pharisees. "We know we're right with God, so John can't be God's messenger."

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (11:19)

= A teacher who dined with sinners and taught them couldn't be from God said the scribes and Pharisees. "We know God despises sinners and would never associate with them, so Jesus can't be from God." And they slandered Jesus calling him a glutton and a drunkard = guilt by association. Jesus never sinned so he didn't actually engage in gluttony and drunkenness.

What's Jesus' response to the charges?

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

In other words, our wisdom is vindicated by our actions. As we conduct ourselves wisely we render charges unfit. It's okay if false claims get leveled at us. It happened to John and Jesus. But, in the end, God will vindicate his people.

Application

The point is sometimes no matter how faithful you are to God, how well you represent him to the world, you can still suffer opposition (surely Jesus and John were faithful!). One word of caution: beware of calling everything persecution for faithfulness! Carefully examine whether or not our tone or our arrogance or our nastiness created opposition.

Another caution: thinking persecution always follows faithfulness and assuming we must be doing something wrong if persecution is lacking and going out of our way to seek persecution like intentionally irritating and arousing anger. Jesus says live wisely.

So say PCC is charged with being judgmental or intolerant or bigoted. Or your grandkids accuse you. How do we answer this charge? Use 11:16-19 to guide our response:

1. John's example: courage to share unwelcomed truth

John shared with people their true spiritual condition and their need to get right with God. And he challenged the flawed practices of the scribes and Pharisees. He courageously proclaimed truth even when it wouldn't be received well. As God's people we subscribe to the Bible's authority:

The Bible, as originally written, is God's Word, that it was written by men divinely inspired, and that it is the supreme, infallible authority in all matters of faith and conduct. – PCC Constitution

The Bible, and the Bible alone, is where we look to understand the nature of salvation and to determine godly conduct. We don't look elsewhere. And we don't give other voices priority over God's Word. When it comes to ethical behavior, God's Word is our authority.

We also believe in the clarity of Scripture. With effort, a willingness to obey, and the help of the Holy Spirit, God's Word is able to be understood. Yes, some things are hard to understand, like the precise manner in which OT prophecy is fulfilled. But God is able to providentially preserve a written Bible and he was able to move on its writers in such a way that truths he wanted us to understand were communicated in an understandable way. He can reveal himself to us with clarity.

Like John, we submit to biblical authority. And we trust that Scripture is clear enough for the untrained believer to grasp its basic teachings. We keep Christian convictions.

2. Jesus' example: compassionate deeds and a message of hope

Jesus came doing good: healing, casting out demons, preaching and teaching. He had mercy on those suffering physically. He had mercy on those suffering spiritually. He spent time with sinners. He taught them. He had mercy on rebellious and enslaved people. And he brought hope. The saving reign of God had arrived. Forgiveness of sins was available.

Like Jesus we should do good to our community. Helping with physical and spiritual needs. Sharing a message of hope in the person of Jesus. Spending time with sinners. Having compassion on their suffering. Caring for them as humans with dignity.

3. Wisdom-guided deeds

We answer the charge of being judgmental, etc. by interacting well with individuals in our community. We build relationships where we seek to understand others, and in turn they understand us. Empathize with people. Understand them. So when we encounter people who have a negative view of Christianity we have to intentionally avoid being confrontational or acting superior. And we intentionally engage people in conversation instead of running from them. Invite conversation, show concern, and build a bridge through how you treat them.

We want them to say, “They don’t agree with my lifestyle or my worldview, but they do care about me. They do treat me with dignity.” Our doctrine may be considered unwelcoming, but our conduct shouldn’t.

What reputation should PCC have?

Firm commitment to God’s Word. Firm trust in Jesus. Confidence in God. Conduct consistent with our teaching. Humility when we fail. A merciful people. A kind people who treat others with dignity even when they don’t agree with our doctrinal and moral commitments. We can’t force people to like us or to follow Jesus, but can commend our message and our Savior with our conduct. We can live wisely.

Conclusion

From John’s doubt and Jesus’ discussion we glean several truths. First, **when doubt arises consider God’s promises.** Ask yourself, am I expecting something not promised? In hard times, remember Jesus’ coming was a promise kept. God keeps his promises. Second, **when gospel opposition arises don’t be alarmed.** Embrace the reality of opposition instead of running from it. Third, **when gospel opposition arises engage with wise deeds.** Let the offense be your message, not your conduct.