

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 42

by Zac Poonen

The church must come forth in the spirit of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers to children and prepare the way for the second coming of Christ.

Duration: 25:00

Topics: "Repentance And Restoration", "Faith And Materialism"

Description

This sermon delves into the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 11, focusing on the significance of John the Baptist as the forerunner before the second coming of Christ. It emphasizes the need for reconciliation and closeness within families and the church, highlighting the importance of restoring relationships between parents and children. The sermon also stresses the message of repentance and the choice between serving God or material wealth, drawing parallels between Elijah's call to choose between Jehovah and Baal and Jesus' call to choose between God and mammon.

Transcript

We continue our study today on all that Jesus taught. We are in Matthew chapter 11, we are going through the Gospels, trying to understand how to teach people in every nation all that Jesus taught according to his command in Matthew 28 verse 20. We are now at Matthew 11 and verse 14.

He was talking about John the Baptist as the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets. And he goes on to say here in verse 14, if you care to accept it, then he himself is Elijah who was to come. There's a prophecy in the book of Malachi.

It's almost the last words of the Old Testament. In Malachi chapter 4, where the Lord says in verse 5, chapter 4, 5 of Malachi, Behold, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. This is not the first coming of Christ.

Because the first coming of Christ is not the great and terrible day of the Lord. It's the second coming of Christ when he will come in judgment. The last words of the Old Testament refer to the second coming of Christ when he comes in judgment, the great and terrible day of the Lord.

And before the great and terrible day of the Lord, that means just before the second coming of Christ, the Lord is going to send Elijah the prophet. And one of his main ministries will be within families to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. And it also refers to the church where

the generation gap between spiritual fathers and spiritual children will be removed in the sense that they will both have fellowship with each other.

Unfortunately, in many churches, the older brothers don't have much fellowship with the younger brothers. Their hearts are distant from the younger brothers. The younger brothers despise the older brothers as old-fashioned or something like that.

But Elijah will come and remove that distance and restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse, the Lord says. In other words, it's a serious thing in God's eyes when in a family, first of all in a home, the parents are distant from the children. That is not a good testimony for any Christian family.

Parents and children must be very intimate with each other. And very often that distance comes because parents do not continue to keep a fellowship with their children from childhood. When a child is born, the parents hug and kiss them and talk to them frequently, even before the child knows how to speak.

But as they grow up, the more the children grow up, there's less and less communication between parents and children. And by the time the children become teenagers, there's a distance, and when the children are in their 20s, any of them hardly ever talk to their parents. This is really sad.

The Lord says it's so sad, the earth should be smitten with a curse for this type of thing. But yet many parents don't seem to see the seriousness of it. And they don't see how important it is to restore that relationship between them and their children.

And it must begin with the fathers. It's not the children's responsibility first, it's the fathers whose hearts are to be turned towards the children. And then that will result in the children's hearts turning towards the fathers.

So this is a very important ministry of the last days, and this is what the Lord is going to send Elijah to do. Now when it says Elijah, here Jesus said about John the Baptist that if you accept him, that means if the Jewish nation, Israel, accepted John the Baptist, then it would be fulfillment of that prophecy. But we know that they did not accept him.

They rejected him. And finally Herod beheaded him. So there's going to be another Elijah.

There's going to come before the second coming of Christ. And that will not be one person. In the Old Testament, the prophets were individuals.

Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist. As soon as Jesus came, he never sent out his disciples one by one. Always two by two.

And that is what is carried on in the Acts of the Apostles. The Lord sent out his first missionary team, Paul and Barnabas. It's always two by two.

Peter and John going to the temple you read in Acts 3 after the Day of Pentecost. It's always two by two. And that is because in the New Covenant, the Lord ministers through a body, not through an individual.

This is never true in the Old Testament. The prophets all worked individually. The only exception could be just before the New Covenant began with Haggai and Zechariah.

Otherwise, all the Old Testament prophets worked individually. But in the New Covenant, it's never individual. It's a body.

So it's the body of Christ, the anointed body of Christ on earth, the new man, that's going to be the Elijah. It's a church, a living, powerful, anointed, spirit-filled church that's going to be the Elijah in the last days, proclaiming, bringing together spiritual fathers with spiritual children and earthly fathers with earthly children and preparing the way again for the second coming of Christ. This is the important thing.

Just like John the Baptist prepared Israel for the first coming of Christ, the church is going to prepare people for the second coming of Christ in this way, saying, prepare the way of the Lord. And just like John the Baptist's message was one of repentance primarily, the main message that the church is to proclaim in this day and age, just before the coming of the Lord, is repent. There's a tremendous need for the spirit of Elijah to be manifested in the proclamation of the gospel today to the Christians.

You remember the last messages of Jesus to the church in the New Testament, Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3, and to five of those churches that were backslidden, the message is repent. Repentance is the last message that Christ has given to the church. When he was on earth, he was preaching repentance to sinners.

In the Acts of the Apostles, they preach repentance to sinners. In the book of Revelation, the same message is to the church. The church needs to repent, and that is the message of John the Baptist that the church in the spirit of Elijah needs to proclaim.

Like Elijah stood on Mount Carmel and said to the Israelites, choose, whom do you want to serve, Jehovah or Beal? You cannot serve both. And that we understand very clearly. I mean, as we read that, we say it's obvious.

People could not serve Jehovah or Beal. Now, today, we don't pray to Jehovah. We pray to our Heavenly Father.

We don't call God Jehovah. We call him Father. So we understand that is on one side.

What does Beal represent today? Beal represents money and material wealth or what Jesus called mammon. Everything connected with earthly wealth. Jesus said in Luke 16, 13, no man can serve two masters or have two gods.

Just like Elijah said on Mount Carmel. You cannot serve Jehovah and Beal. Jesus said you cannot serve God and mammon.

This is the exact equivalent of what Elijah preached on Mount Carmel. And so when the church comes in the spirit of Elijah in the last days, the prophetic message of the church, which hardly anybody is preaching today, is this. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

You cannot serve God and mammon. If your heart is set on material wealth, forget about serving God. And if your heart is serving on material wealth, just go ahead and serve that God.

Like businessmen for example in the world, they serve the God mammon so devotedly they dream about it, live for it and work day and night for it. Where do we have Christians who work day and night to serve the true God and who are not at all interested in mammon? Most businessmen in the world are not

interested in God. They're only interested in mammon and money.

Why don't we have equally devoted servants of God who are not at all interested in mammon or money? Where do you find such preachers? This is the sad lack. The apostles were like that. They served God.

You never find in the entire New Testament any collection being raised for the apostles. All the money raised in the acts of the apostles and what you read of in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 was always for poor saints. The apostles, the servants of God had to trust God for their needs that God would move people to meet their needs.

Like the Philippians for example sent gifts to Paul. They trusted God. They didn't live by salaries.

They didn't serve God and mammon. This is a tragedy in Christendom today which has ruined God's work. So we have multitudes of preachers today who are not trusting God for their needs.

They're trusting some organization. They're looking to Egypt for their help. Where shall my help come from? Shall I look up to the hills? The Psalmist says, no, my help comes from the Lord.

But today's preachers say, where shall my help come from? Yes, it comes from this organization or it comes from America or it comes from some western country. It's not from God. They don't look to God and this is the tragedy.

And that's because the church is not coming forth in the spirit of Elijah saying you cannot serve God and money. This is such an important message. And the reason why this is needed, as I said, is because Jesus said to the Israelites, if you accept him this is the Elijah who is to come.

But you did not since they did not accept him, therefore this message needs to come forth in these last days. The message of repentance and the message of choose you this day whom you will serve, God or money. And Jesus says at the end of that verse 15, he who has years to hear, let him hear.

What does he mean by that? What I have just said in the last few minutes is not something that every Christian wants to hear, perhaps as you hear it. You may think that's too radical a message. It's not so important.

Exactly. So you don't have a year to hear it. So the Lord says forget about you, but there may be some who are listening to this who have a year to hear.

It's only those whom the Lord is trying to reach. He ignores all the others. Even when he was on earth, so many people heard his message.

They had physical years to hear, but inwardly, spiritually they had no years to hear what the Lord was saying to his people. It's exactly the same today. And so that's why he says he who has years to hear, let him hear.

And he's speaking about the inward years there. Then he goes on to say in verse 16, to what shall I compare this generation? Remember, we are trying to understand all that Jesus taught and trying to study in depth what Jesus taught, verse by verse, so that we can practice it ourselves and then proclaim it to others. So what shall I compare this generation to, verse 16? It's like children sitting in the marketplace who call out to their other children saying we played the flute and you did not dance.

And we sang a dirge and you did not mourn. So, you know, children saying hey listen, we're playing a game here. When you play the flute, you must dance.

And when we sing a dirge, you must mourn. And the other children are not cooperating. These children say hey, we're playing a flute, you should be dancing and you're not dancing.

Or we're playing a dirge and you're not mourning. In the same way the Lord says John came neither eating or drinking. He's comparing them to these children who, you know, whatever you do is wrong.

John did not eat or drink. He was fasting and eating locusts and honey in the forest. And they said well he's got a demon.

Imagine a man dressed in camel skin and eating all that type of stuff in the wilderness. He's got a demon. Jesus comes, it's exactly the opposite.

You know, it's a comparison of two opposites, like in verse 17 one is a dance and the other is, you know, a funeral song. So comparing the opposites, John the Baptist came fasting and living very simply, not even wearing you know, regular clothes but camel skin, etc. But the Son of Man came, you know, wearing the same type of clothes everybody else wears, eating and drinking and not emphasizing fasting and simple lifestyle and all that.

And they say well he's a gluttonous man and a drunkard. And John the Baptist was not a friend of sinners. He had nothing to do with sinners, but Jesus is a friend of sinners.

So he says whatever God's servants do, you always find something to criticize. This is the attitude of many Christians. Their whole mind is a critical attitude.

Whichever servant of God it is, they will find something to find fault in him. Do you find yourself like that, my friend? That every preacher has got something wrong with it. And you're the great expert for giving marks to the different preachers saying so and so gets 30% or 80% or 75%.

You're giving marks. Criticizing everyone because it depends on what you want to hear. I mean if you're comparing preachers with Jesus and the scriptures that's a very good thing to do.

In fact we should do it. I do it all the time. I seem to compare preachers with Christ.

I see Christ as an example of the perfect preacher, the person who really showed us how we should serve God. So I seem to compare every preacher with Christ. I seem to see whether a person is free from the love of money like Christ, whether he's humble, approachable and things like that.

That's okay. Or we compare a person's teaching with the word of God and see is it according to scripture. But this is different.

This is, you know, always trying to pick a fault. It says about the Pharisees that they would look carefully to see is there some way in which we could catch Jesus in some word that he said or something that he did. You know, watching carefully.

And there are some Christians like that who've got shrewd eyes. They don't have years to hear the truth. They're only watching and listening for something to criticize.

Most of these are not even converted people. They think they are Christians. Some of them say they are born again.

But if you're really born again, you'd have been delivered from this destructive, critical attitude. There is a constructive criticism which always seeks to go directly to the person and speaks in an encouraging, constructive way. But there's a destructive criticism which usually speaks behind a person's back and is only interested in tearing people down and tearing down the work of God.

So, there is a big difference here. So the Lord says John the Baptist came like this and you find some fault with him. I've come like this and you find fault with me.

Well, who's going to satisfy you? Nobody will satisfy you. And those are the people who don't have years to hear anybody. If Almighty God came down, they wouldn't listen to even him.

And so he says, but wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. Those who acquire God's wisdom, it's a difficult word to fully interpret. There could be a depth of meaning in that simple sentence which is capable of more than one interpretation.

That is, the wisdom of a person's life, we could say, would be manifested by the results of his life. I mean, whether a man has wisdom is seen in his deeds, in his actions, in the way he lives. People who claim to have wisdom in their head only to criticize people, the very fact that they are so critical proves that they don't have any wisdom.

Those who really have wisdom will behave like Christ and see things to appreciate and see what is godly there and accept that. And then he goes on to say in verse 20, he began to reproach the cities in which most of his miracles were done because they did not repent. Very important to understand, the purpose of the miracles, according to Matthew 11:20, was to lead people to repentance, not to show people what a great person I am, like a lot of so-called healers with fake miracles try to show people.

I mean, they're more like magicians who stand up on a platform and do a magic show to impress people. You see how cleverly I can fool all of you? A lot of today's healing ministries are like that, fooling people. A lot of today's so-called supernatural ministries are pushing people down.

It's like a magic show on the platform. We must not be deceived by that. Jesus' miracles were in order to lead people to repentance.

And he didn't care what they thought about him. If they repented, that was it. And he wasn't gathering crowds to demonstrate his healing powers.

He was gathering crowds to help them to repent. And he reproached them because they had seen these miracles and still not repented. And he mentions the names, Chorazin, Bethsaida, woe unto you, woe unto you, because the miracles that had occurred in Tyre and Sidon had occurred in you.

They would have repented. Tyre and Sidon were non-Israeli countries, cities outside the boundaries of Israel. And sometimes in the Old Testament you read the prophets denouncing them for their sins.

And the Lord is saying, if these miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon, those heathen nations, cities, would have repented. But they never saw it. You guys have seen these miracles and you've heard these wonderful messages.

Your responsibility is greater. Remember this simple principle in Scripture that to whom more is given, more is required. The more God has done for us and taught us, the more we have received of God's word, the more we are answerable to him for what we have heard.

See, God is not going to judge all people equally. It's very clear in Luke chapter 12 that to whom more is given, more is required. To whom less is given, less is required.

It's as simple as in a school a third standard student is expected to know less mathematics than a tenth standard student. Because he's been taught more, more is expected of him. The third standard student, less is expected of that person because he's been taught less.

This is a very elementary principle which you understand in school. But it's the same thing in the Christian life. There are many Christians today who claim to belong to separated assemblies who know the word of God better than other groups.

They looked on other denomination churches saying, we know more than you. That's probably true. But if you do know more than them, your standard of life must be much higher than theirs.

But is that true? Very often it's not true. There are people who look down on others saying, I'm filled with the Holy Spirit and I speak in tongues which you don't have. Fine, brother.

But I hope your standard of life is at least a hundred times better than the other person who you say is not filled with the Holy Spirit. If the fullness of the Holy Spirit does not make your life at least a hundred times better than the lives of other people who are not filled with the Holy Spirit, then I question it. I say, what type of spirit is that? That guy quarrels with his wife and you quarrel with your wife.

That guy loves money and you love money. So what has this so-called fullness of the Spirit done for you? What has this so-called speaking in tongues done for you? It hasn't delivered you from anger. It hasn't delivered you from lusting after women.

What has it done? It's one of the great deceptions of today. People thinking, oh, I got a little shaking and a little experience and I blabbered something and I'm filled with the Spirit. Don't be deceived.

The Holy Spirit makes us holy. Many people understand that an evil spirit makes people evil and an unclean spirit makes people unclean. A deceiving spirit deceives people.

So what should the Holy Spirit do? Make people holy. Not just make them make a lot of noise. And unfortunately, that's what a lot of people think.

That the Holy Spirit comes, we make a lot of noise. You go to a church Sunday meeting where everybody's making a lot of noise, you think, oh, they've got the Holy Spirit. I remember a man once came to our church in Bangalore and said to me, well you don't have the Holy Spirit here.

I said, how do you know? Have you seen how I speak to my wife at home? Do you know how I handle money? Those are the ways we find out whether a man is filled with the Spirit or not. You don't know any of those things. How do you say it? He said, well you don't have enough noise in the meetings.

Ah, I said, your trinity is Father, Son, and noisy spirit. My trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's the big difference.

You can follow your trinity if you like. It's a false trinity. The Holy Spirit does not make people noisy.

He makes them holy. Yes, we may or may not make noise. That depends a lot on our temperament and factors like that and what we're used to in our life.

But holiness is something which the Holy Spirit communicates to every single one whose life he fills. This is so important to understand. The purpose of the miracles, the purpose of the message is that we might come to repentance and otherwise, the Lord says, these heathen nations are better than you.

And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, you shall be descended to Hades. Capernaum is full of people who think they're very holy, but they go to hell because he says if the miracles done in you were done in Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have remained until today. But in the day of judgment, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.

I believe that's a word many Christians need to recognize, that it's going to be more tolerable for non-Christians in the day of judgment than for many Christians. How many Christians believe that? That in the day of judgment, it's going to be more tolerable for non-Christians because they never knew the truth. They never understood these things.

But we understand. May God help us to take this seriously and really repent. We'll continue in our next episode.

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