

(Matthew) ch.10:24-11:24

by Zac Poonen

A true disciple of Jesus must be willing to make a break with human attachment to their relatives and take up the cross, which means to die to themselves, in order to follow Jesus.

Duration: 54:45

Scripture: Matthew 5:6-7

Topics: "Discipleship", "Obedience To God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Matthew chapter 10 and verse 24, discussing the instructions Jesus gave to his apostles when he sent them out. The speaker emphasizes the principle that a disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master. They explain that we cannot expect to be treated better than Jesus, our master. The speaker also discusses how Jesus used a parable to illustrate the condition of the generation that wanted God's prophets to dance according to their tune. The sermon concludes by mentioning how Jesus departed to teach and preach in their cities after giving instructions to his disciples.

Transcript

Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 10 and verse 24, continuing with our study of the instructions that Jesus gave to his apostles when he sent them out, part of which, as we saw, referred only to that initial period when Jesus was on earth, which we read in verses 5 to 15, but the remaining part, from verse 16 onwards, refer even to us, who are sent out today in the Lord's name. A disciple, verse 24, Matthew 10, 24, a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher and the slave as his master.

If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household? Here is a very important principle. We cannot expect to be treated better than our master or our teacher. That is ridiculous, and yet it's possible that many Christians expect that.

And then, of course, they're on the wrong track. How did they treat the teacher and the master? They called him the prince of devils, Beelzebul. They hated him.

They finally crucified him. Let's never forget, dear friends, that the world has not become any better in the 20th century than it was in the 1st century. If Jesus were to come to earth today, the way he came in the 1st century, the world would still reject him.

No, the world has not changed. The spirit of the world is the same. The ruler of this world is still the same as the one who ruled the world in the 1st century, that is Satan.

And so, if we seek to establish the kingdom of God, which is the complete opposite of the kingdom of this world, we cannot expect the ruler of this world to accept that. That would be like a foreign body in the midst of a territory ruled by Satan. And he would attack it with all his power if he finds that it is a threat to his kingdom and his rule.

But if he finds that something that calls itself a Christian church is really no threat to the kingdom of Satan, or perhaps that he can accomplish his purposes through something that calls itself a Christian church, he will not persecute it. He will not oppose it. So, when we are part of a fellowship that is not opposed by Satan and persecuted and hated and probably falsely accused, we need to wonder whether we are a threat to Satan at all.

Maybe that's why he's leaving us alone. Maybe that's why we're getting the congratulations of the people of the world and of worldly-minded Christians. Because we're not a threat to his kingdom.

When worldly political leaders can support you and appreciate what you're doing, you can be pretty sure that the ruler of the world doesn't think much of your ministry. They would never treat Jesus like that. The disciple is not above his teacher.

If they have called the head of the house, that's Jesus, the prince of devils, what are they calling you? Are unconverted political leaders calling a preacher a man of God? Well, that preacher is not a disciple of Jesus. Because Jesus was called the prince of devils by religious leaders in his day. Nor the way for the church is the way of persecution by a world that does not understand or appreciate the kingdom of God.

We must never forget this. A disciple is not above his teacher. It's enough if we become like our teacher, if we too are called heretics and prince of devils, etc.

Therefore do not fear them, Jesus said. Don't ever be afraid of man. Here is a tremendous exhortation from Jesus to those who serve him.

Don't ever be afraid of men. For there's nothing covered that will not be revealed and hidden that will not be known. God is going to uncover every hidden thing, the hidden motives and reasons with which people have said various things to us and about us.

Everything will become known. So why are we afraid of what people are saying in the darkness and in secret about us? We need not be afraid. But the Lord says, what I tell you in darkness, speak in the light.

Bring it right out in the light. I tell you something quietly, you publish it out in the open. Don't be ashamed of it.

And what you hear whispered in your ear by the Holy Spirit, proclaim it upon the housetops. Don't hold back. Proclaim it from the housetops, what the Spirit of God has whispered into your ear.

And don't fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul. We must never be afraid of man, for man cannot touch our soul. But rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

If there is anyone who we should fear, it should be God. Nobody else. We need never fear any human being.

We need not fear Satan, we need not fear demons, we need not fear any human being, however much power or authority they have. We need only fear God. We can say what Jesus told Pilate, as we read in John's Gospel when he was brought before Pilate.

In John chapter 19 verse 11, he said to Pilate, you have no authority over me unless it is given to you by my Father from above. It's because my Father has allowed you to have this power over me that you can do this to me, he told Pilate. We can say the same thing.

Paul told Timothy, keep that good confession that Jesus Christ made before Pontius Pilate. We can also make that good confession to all human beings. You have no power over me unless the Father gives you power over me.

He may give you power to curse me, to hurt me, even to kill me, but you can't touch me until the Father gives you that power. Once we believe that, we are never afraid of human beings anymore. This is the secret of deliverance from fear.

The confession that Jesus made before Pontius Pilate, as we just considered in John 19, you have no power over me unless my Father has given it to you. No human being has power over a disciple of Jesus. So don't fear those who kill the body.

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Verse 29. Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Therefore do not fear. You are of more value than many sparrows. Two sparrows are sold for a cent.

In another Gospel it says five sparrows are sold for two cents. In other words, when you pay two cents, you get an extra sparrow free. And even that extra sparrow, which has no value before men, cannot fall to the ground apart from your Father.

God knows when a sparrow falls dead anywhere in the world, how much more you and I, who are His children, His disciples. The very hairs on our head are numbered, Jesus said. That doesn't mean just that He knows the total number of hairs.

It probably means even more than that, that each hair has got a number and God knows exactly which hair falls. Think of that. You can wake up in the morning and find perhaps a hair from your head on your pillow, fallen off from your head during the night, and you never knew when it fell.

But your Heavenly Father knew the exact moment when that hair fell from your head onto that pillow while you were asleep. That is the intensity. I wonder if God, if Jesus could use a better illustration to demonstrate the intensity of God's care.

One of the most painless things that ever happens to us is the falling of hair from the head. And it's one of those things which we hardly even take notice of. We don't get distressed when we see a hair from our head on a pillow in the morning.

Yet such an insignificant little event in our life, Jesus said, the Father knows. In other words, how much more will He not know? All the other, much more important events in our life, all things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to His purpose. Those who love God are the ones who keep His commandments.

Those who are called according to His purpose are the ones who have given up their own will in order to do the will of God in their lives. For such people, Romans 8.28 is true. Even the hair that falls from their head is known to the Father.

He cares for the sparrows. How much more value are you than many sparrows? In other words, like Job 23.10 reads in the Living Bible, He knows every detail of what is happening to me. There is nothing that can happen to us that our Heavenly Father doesn't know about.

God's care is so intense so we don't have to fear. We don't have to fear men and hold back from confessing Christ before them. Jesus said in Matthew 10.32, Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will confess him before My Father in heaven.

In other words, Jesus is proud to confess the names of those who boldly confess Him before men. And equally, those who are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of. Verse 33 says, Those who deny Me before men.

And we can deny the Lord in two ways. One is by openly saying, I don't know Him, like Peter said to the maidservant. And the other is by just keeping quiet.

You can go to your office and never let anyone know there that you are a disciple of Jesus. You can act as though you are not a disciple. Then you have denied Him and He will deny you before the Father in heaven.

Blessed are those who boldly confess in their office, to their relatives and wherever they go, that they are disciples of Jesus Christ, who are not ashamed to let it be known that they are disciples of Jesus. To such, the promise is there. Jesus will confess you before the Father in heaven.

Let's turn today to Matthew chapter 10 and verse 34, continuing with our study of the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples, as to how they were to conduct themselves in a world that was hostile towards them. Instructions that apply to all of us, Matthew 10, verses 16 to the end of the chapter, verse 42. The first part of those instructions, verses 5 to 15, apply primarily to that transit-free period when Jesus was on earth before the establishing of the new covenant on the day of Pentecost.

But from verse 16 onwards it applies to us, for it speaks about being a testimony before the Gentiles, in verse 18. And we now come to verse 34. Jesus says these amazing words, He who is known throughout the world as the Prince of Peace, says, Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth.

Peace is found in the kingdom of God, in the midst of the true church that Jesus is building, but it is not found on the earth. He did not come in His first coming to establish peace on the earth. He will do that when He comes a second time, when He comes as the ruler of the earth.

But right now the ruler of the world is Satan, so there can be no peace on the earth as long as Satan is the ruler. It is ridiculous to expect peace on the earth when Satan is its ruler. There will be violence, there will be evil, there will be distress among nations, perplexity, men's hearts fainting for fear.

And we can expect these things to increase as we approach the end. And we cannot pray that there will be peace on the earth until Jesus comes again, but we can pray that there will be a restraining of the forces of violence, so that we can have freedom to preach the gospel. That we are certainly commanded to pray in 1 Timothy chapter 2, to pray for those in authority, that we can live a peaceable life in all

godliness and dignity, so that the word of God can be spread.

But it can only be a restraining of the forces of violence within the will of God. Peace, finally, will come only when Jesus returns again. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth.

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. And in His first coming He has brought a sword, and that sword sets a man against his own father. It is not that a man wants to be against his father, but because he takes a stand for the Lord, he finds that it brings him at variance with his father.

Maybe the father is against the son, and the son is against the father. It could be either way. One takes a stand for the Lord, and the other one in the family does not want to be a disciple of Christ in the same way.

And so there is a sword. There is a separation. And the daughter against the mother.

Maybe the daughter wants to live for the Lord, and the mother does not want the daughter to live for the Lord, and there is a sword between them. For the mother wants to live for God, and the daughter does not. There is a sword between them.

And daughter-in-law against mother-in-law, because one of them wants to live for God and be a disciple of Jesus, and the other does not. The other wants to live for the world and the devil. And thus a true disciple of Jesus discovers, verse 36, that his enemies are found among the members of his own household, among his own intimate family members.

This is why Jesus said that no one could be his disciple if he did not hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters in his own life. It is only one who is willing to make that break with that human attachment to his relatives who can be a disciple. And many, many people have been hindered from following Jesus because they love their relatives more than they love Jesus Christ.

If any relative of ours is going to be a hindrance to our following the Lord, we must be willing to offend such a person, even if it is father, mother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, daughter, son, anyone. He who loves father or mother, verse 37, more than me, said Jesus, is not worthy of me. It is a question of whom you love more.

It is perfectly all right to love your father and mother, provided they are not a hindrance to your following Jesus. But where the Lord calls you to do something and your father and mother tell you not to do it, and you obey your parents because you love them more than Jesus, then Jesus says you are not worthy of him. Or it could be the other way around, that a man loves his son or daughter more than Jesus.

In order to please his son or please his children, he does certain things which would dishonor the Lord. He is not worthy of Jesus. And he who does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Here is another thing that prevents us from being worthy of Jesus. If I am not willing to take up the cross, in other words, to deny myself, to die to myself in temptation and in the situations of daily life, to die to my own will in order to do the will of God, this is what the cross means, where God's will and my will are clashing with each other. There is where I find my cross, where I want to go one way and God calls me to go another way.

There, if I am willing to deny myself, then only can I follow the Lord. So what we read here is very similar to the conditions of discipleship that Jesus laid down in Matthew 14, verse 26 onwards, in Luke 14, verse

26 onwards, the conditions of discipleship. And then Jesus speaks these amazing words in verse 39, which can only be understood by those who are interested in going the way of discipleship.

He who has found his life shall lose it, but he who has lost his life for my sake shall find it. What does it mean to find our life? That refers to the life of the flesh, that which we have inherited from Adam. If we value it in the sense that we always want to find it and preserve it and protect it, then we shall lose it in eternity.

We are not to seek to find our life, that is to protect it and preserve it, for this life that we have inherited from Adam is worthless. It is fit to be thrown away. This also is related to the taking up the cross.

For if you lived in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, crucifixion was a very common form of punishment among the Romans in those days. That's the way they punished the worst criminals. And if you looked out of your window one day and you saw a man carrying his cross, beaten by Roman soldiers, you can be sure where that man was going.

He was not going on a picnic, he was not going just for a little punishment, he was going to die. There was absolutely no doubt when you saw a man taking up his cross and walking down the streets as to where he was being taken. He was taken to be crucified, to be killed.

And so Jesus used that expression, which is very clearly understood by the people in his day. To take up the cross means to go to my death. If a man is not willing to take up his cross means if a man is not willing to go to the death of his self-life, he is not worthy of Jesus.

Whatever else he may do, if he is not willing to die to himself, he cannot be a disciple of Jesus. And it is in this context that he speaks about finding our life, that is preserving our life. In other words, if you compromise with the Roman soldiers and preserve your life, if you compromise with the world in order to protect that life of yours which you want to preserve and protect from death, that ego, that reputation, that self-life, then you will lose it in eternity.

You will not get that reward that God has. But if you are willing to lose your life here in this world, lose that reputation of yours and give up that ego and die to yourself, then you will find that reward, which is eternal life, the life of God Himself, which can never be destroyed, that life He will give to whom? To those who are willing to lay down the life that they have received from Adam. In other words, God says, if you are willing to lay down that life of the flesh that you have received from Adam, I will give you the life of Jesus.

It is a fantastic exchange to give up garbage and to get gold instead. In material terms, who would not be willing to throw away garbage and give gold in exchange? But that is exactly what it is. What we have from Adam is garbage.

God offers us gold. Blessed are those who see and are willing to make that exchange. And then Jesus says to His apostles, he who receives you, receives me.

If you receive an apostle of Christ, you are actually receiving Christ. And when you receive Christ, you receive the Father who sent Him. If you receive a prophet in the name of a prophet, you shall receive a prophet's reward.

So we see here how you can receive a prophet's reward even without becoming a prophet yourself. And that is by receiving a prophet of Jesus in the name of a prophet. You receive a prophet's reward.

God may not have given you the gift of being a prophet, but if you can receive, receive means warmly welcome the words that he speaks as well. Receive what he says and receive him into your home. A true prophet, we have to be careful there are false prophets around, but a true prophet sent by the Lord, if you receive him, you will receive a prophet's reward.

And if you receive a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, you welcome him and you welcome the word he brings. You can receive a righteous man's reward too. And even to a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus said in verse 42, if you give a cup of cold water to one of these smallest and littlest, the humble folk among Jesus' disciples, you will not lose your reward. In other words, Jesus says, anything that you do, the smallest little thing in a cup of cold water is the easiest and cheapest thing that we that's given to someone in the name of Jesus will bring a reward. God is never in debt to any man who has done anything to even one of his children in his name.

Here is a ministry that every one of us can engage in, even if we are not gifted to bless others in ways that God has given us the ability to. Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel chapter 11. And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

We were considering last week how Jesus, having taught his disciples the principles of the kingdom in Matthew five, six and seven, and having given them a practical demonstration of the power available in the kingdom of God in Matthew chapters eight and nine, then selected twelve to be his apostles and gave them personal instructions concerning how they were to conduct themselves, what their attitude was to be when they went out to represent him in Israel. And he sent them out, having given them instructions and the demonstration of the power of the kingdom, and then he himself departed to teach and preach in their cities. We read in verse two, When John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, Are you the coming one, or shall we look for someone else? It's quite amazing that John the Baptist, who actually saw the spirit like a dove descending upon Jesus when he baptized him in the river Jordan, and who heard the voice from heaven say, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, that he, John the Baptist, of all people should have any doubt concerning whether Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one.

But there is a Why did John have a doubt, even though he had such a visible and audible manifestation of the power of God and the proof from heaven itself that Jesus was the son of God? The doubt came because John did not receive what he expected to receive, and that was deliverance from prison. We must remember that John was under the old covenant, he was a part of Israel, and the promises given to Israel under the old covenant were that if they honored God and obeyed him, God would deliver them from their enemies, and they would be the head and not the tail, they would always be on top and never underneath. And John was familiar with these promises in the old covenant.

And here he found himself, though he had been faithful right until the very end, locked up in prison, and the one whom he had pointed out to as the son of God didn't seem to be delivering him from prison. He didn't seem to be answering his prayer in the way he expected. And that's why the doubt came.

And the lesson we can learn from that is that we too can come into doubt if we find that our prayers are not answered in the way we expect God to answer them. It may be some prison that you're in, may not be a physical prison, it may be some other type of prison, an invisible one. And maybe God hasn't answered your prayer to deliver you from those tight circumstances which constitute your prison.

And then you begin to wonder, and unbelief comes in. And it is in this context that Jesus said in verse six, Blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me, who keeps from taking offense at me, who doesn't get offended because I don't answer his prayer in the way he expects me to. Blessed is the man who can have faith even when his circumstances are tight and pressing and he prays and does not get the answer that he anticipates and expects.

Jesus answered and said to these disciples of John who came with this question in verse four, Go and report to John the things which you hear and see. Jesus gave them examples, a visible example for John to be encouraged by, to answer his question whether Jesus was indeed the coming one. The blind receive sight, he said in verse five, and the lame walk.

The lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. This is the culmination of all these things. This is the greatest of all, greater than the blind receiving sight and the lame walking, greater than the dead being raised up.

Jesus concludes with this which is the greatest of all, the poor have the good news preached to them and blessed is he who doesn't get offended over me. Jesus didn't reply directly to that question which John asked, are you the coming one? He didn't say yes or no. He gave that which would confirm to John that he was the coming one.

He said, here is the proof. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And a personal message for John, blessed is the one who doesn't get offended over me, doesn't get offended when I don't answer his prayers the way he expects me to.

And then after they went away, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, and he said some remarkable words concerning John, but he didn't say it when the disciples of John were present. He said it after they had gone. He didn't want to say those good words to unnecessarily tempt John to spiritual pride.

He said to the multitudes, what did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What did you go out to see? Verse eight, a man dressed in soft clothing, he said those who wear soft clothing are in king's palaces. But why did you go out to see a prophet? And I tell you, the one who is more than a prophet, this is the one about whom it is written, and he quotes from the book of Malachi, behold, I send my messenger before your face. This is a quotation from Malachi chapter three, verse one, who will prepare your way before you.

Truly I say to you, verse 11, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the greatest person born from Adam up to Christ. He was the greatest under the old covenant, greater than even Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Jesus himself said that, that among all those born of women up to that point, there was no one greater than John the Baptist. Of course, Jesus himself was excluded. His birth was miraculous.

But Jesus said, he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Jesus had come to establish the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, or the new covenant, as opposed to the old covenant, which was an earthly kingdom. This was a heavenly kingdom in the new covenant.

Those who belong to the old covenant, their mind is set on the things of earth. Their blessings are earthly, physical healing, material prosperity. And many other physical blessings were the blessings promised

under the old covenant.

But in the kingdom of heaven, which is the new covenant, the blessings promised are spiritual, spiritual healing and spiritual prosperity. And correspondingly, our mind, if we are under the new covenant and a part of the kingdom of heaven, should have our mind set on the things which are in heaven and not on earth. This is one mark of those who are living according to the principles of the kingdom of heaven.

And the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven, in other words, the one who is the very least person who has entered into the new covenant, comes to a higher level than John the Baptist, the greatest under the old covenant. This is not automatic. It doesn't mean just because we are living in the new covenant age that we have covenant experience in our lives.

No, far from it. In fact, most people who live nowadays do not enter into the new covenant because they haven't understood the new covenant properly. It's not just forgiveness of sins.

Under the new covenant, God promises to write His laws within our hearts and minds and lead us to partake of His nature to overcome sin and to be pure. And when we have come to this level of partaking of God's own nature, that is a far higher privilege than the greatest person who lived under the old covenant could ever attain to. This was the meaning of the most holy place in the temple of the tabernacle being blocked out to people under the old covenant.

But that was opened up when Jesus died on the cross and the veil was rent, teaching us that we had now the privilege of entering into a fellowship with the Father who lived beyond the veil in the most holy place that the greatest people under the old covenant could not have. And then Jesus went on to say, If you care to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. This also was a prophecy in Malachi chapter 4. It's not that Elijah would come himself, but Malachi 4.5 says that before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the Lord said, Malachi 4.5, I'm going to send you Elijah the prophet.

And Jesus puts these two prophecies in Malachi, the one in chapter 3 verse 1, quoted in Matthew 11.10, along with the prophecy in Malachi 4.5 and says, This messenger who came before Jesus to prepare the way for him and who came in the spirit of Elijah was John the Baptist himself, who prepared the way as a forerunner for Jesus, who inaugurated the new covenant into which all of us can enter if we have faith. Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel chapter 11 and verse 11. Truly, I say to you, Jesus said to the multitudes concerning John the Baptist, Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.

Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Here Jesus was comparing the old covenant with the new covenant and saying that the one who was the greatest human being born up until that time was John the Baptist, greater than everyone else, and yet he who was least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than him. Jesus, of course, was in the kingdom of heaven.

He was the leader and pioneer of our faith, the one who inaugurated the new covenant. He was the first, the eldest brother in God's kingdom, the firstborn among many brothers. Under the old covenant, they could not know God as father.

They could not be children of God. They could not be born again and become partakers of God's own nature. They could be servants of God under the old covenant.

They could be prophets and priests and God's people, but not God's children. This is why we find even the greatest men of God in the old testament could not turn to God and call him father. And as much as the son of a managing director of a company has a closer relationship with his father than the employees in that company, even so is the difference between those who have entered into the full privileges of the new covenant compared to those who are under the old covenant.

The managing director is a very kind-hearted good man, and yet his employees do not have the same relationship with him as his own children have. Such is the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. Under the old covenant, they were servants of God.

Today, the Lord Jesus told his disciples, even before you went to the cross, I no longer call you servants, I call you friends. But today we're even more than friends. Once we receive the Holy Spirit, the Spirit bears witness within us that we are children of God, and we can grow up from being children to be sons, mature sons who have a sense of responsibility, sharing in the Father's business as partners and fellow heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why he says that the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. And to whom more is given, more is required. If we claim that we have a greater privilege than this great man John the Baptist, certainly the quality of our life should also be correspondingly superior to John the Baptist's.

It's a great tragedy when people claim to have a greater privilege than John the Baptist, and yet the quality of their life seems to be inferior to that of John the Baptist or Elijah or Moses. And there we need to ask ourselves whether we're deceiving ourselves, for it is possible for us to live in the new covenant age, that is, this present age, and yet to live under the old covenant spirit or in a spirit which is inferior to the old covenant, in a legalism, so that we don't understand the full benefits and privileges of being under grace. For example, to be under grace means, Romans 6, 14, sin shall not rule over you, for you are under grace and not under the old covenant.

This is one mark of entering into the new covenant, that sin is not only forgiven but loses its power in our life because we partake of God's own nature. But we don't enter into this kingdom easily because he said in verse 12, Matthew 11, verse 12, Jesus said, From the days of John the Baptist, John the Baptist was the forerunner. He quoted that prophecy from Malachi in Matthew 11, verse 10, and also Matthew 11, verse 14, the prophecy found in Malachi 3, 1 and Malachi 4, 5. And he says here that from that time, the one who prepared the way, paved the way for the new covenant, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force.

And here we need to understand what this violence is that Jesus spoke of. In the Old Testament, because the kingdom was an earthly kingdom, they were permitted to fight with their enemies, their earthly enemies. Israel was helped by God against their enemies, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Syrians, etc.

They had many enemies, and even the giants in Canaan. And they did violence to their earthly enemies. Because their kingdom was an earthly kingdom, their blessings were earthly, physical healing, material prosperity.

But in the kingdom of heaven, the blessings are heavenly, spiritual prosperity and spiritual healing. And the enemies are also not earthly, but spiritual enemies. And those enemies are found in our own flesh, and in the hosts of wickedness headed up by Satan.

So if we have earthly enemies today, then our kingdom is also earthly. If we are seeking for earthly blessing, and earthly prosperity, and physical healing, if these are the main things in our life, then our kingdom is earthly. But when we come into the new covenant, our kingdom becomes heavenly.

We seek for spiritual healing more than for physical healing. We seek for spiritual prosperity and not for material prosperity. And our enemies become those powers of darkness that rule in the heavenly places.

And we are fighting the battle there, as we read in Ephesians 6.12 onwards. Our enemies are no longer the Moabites, or the Edomites, or the Romans, or the Syrians, or any other set of human beings, or any individual human being. This is why we can love our enemies in the new covenant, our physical enemies.

Because our enemies now, our real enemies, are in the heavenly places, Satan and his hosts of wickedness, and the lusts that dwell in our flesh, that tempt us constantly. And we have to do violence now to these enemies, if we are to possess the kingdom of heaven. When we are jealous of people, envious of people, competing with people, fighting with people, holding bitternesses and grudges against human beings, that is the clearest proof that we are still either old covenant, or sub-old covenant, below the old covenant.

That our kingdom is earthly, because our enemies are earthly. When the greatest interest in our life is physical healing, that's the clearest proof that your kingdom is earthly. When you are seeking after money, that is the proof that your kingdom is earthly.

When our kingdom becomes the kingdom of God, we seek after God's nature more than we seek for money. We seek for spiritual healing, and we seek to fight our spiritual enemies, and we no longer have any enemies on the earth. For Paul says very clearly in Ephesians 6.12, we do not wrestle with flesh and blood.

And it's the one who has completely stopped fighting with flesh and blood, who can tackle spiritual enemies. And then we have to do violence, just like the Israelites were ruthless with the Canaanites. When you read some of that history in the Old Testament, it's amazing.

They did not leave a single human being alive, not even children. They were all killed. It was a ruthless massacre of their enemies.

Correspondingly, today we have to ruthlessly massacre the lusts that dwell in our flesh when we are tempted. We are to do violence if we are to possess the kingdom. We are to do violence to the traditions of men that hinder us from possessing God's kingdom.

There are many traditions found even in Christendom today which are contrary to the word of God. They must be ruthlessly set aside. If we are going to be diplomatic and compromisers, we shall remain under the old covenant all our days.

For the kingdom of heaven is possessed only by men who have come to violence, who do spiritual violence to everything that hinders them. But in earthly things they are men of peace. And then Jesus says in verse 13, all the prophets and the law.

The prophets and the law is a phrase used to symbolize the entire Old Testament scriptures and that period which began with Moses. The prophets and the law prophesied until John. There was a period from that time, from Moses to John the Baptist, the period of the old covenant.

And now the kingdom of heaven is being preached. Jesus began preaching, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And that was inaugurated on the day of Pentecost.

And if you care to accept it, Jesus said, if you are willing to accept John as the fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy that he would come in the spirit of Elijah, then he was the one who was to come. He who has years to hear, verse 15, let him hear. Jesus realized that not everybody has a year to hear this new covenant message.

It's only those who are sick and tired of their defeated life. Later on in the same chapter, in verse 28, he said that. He said, come to me, not everyone, but those who are sick and tired of their defeated life.

Those who are sick and tired of that legalistic burden of the law and who are longing for something better, the new covenant, the covenant of grace, those who are longing to come into God's rest and peace, come to me. He who has years to hear, let him hear. Not everybody is willing to come.

For most people, like Jesus said in an earlier chapter, are satisfied with the old wine. They don't want the new wine. But if you are one of those who are sick and tired of your defeated life, being forgiven, sinning again, being forgiven, sinning again, sick and tired of the legalistic burden of the law, Jesus invites you to come to him.

But you must be a man of violence, to do violence spiritually to everything that hinders you from possessing the kingdom of God. Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel, chapter 11 and verse 16, continuing our study of what Jesus was speaking in relation to John the Baptist. He says here to the multitude in Matthew 11 16, But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to the other children and say, We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.

We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners.

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. We need to understand this little parable that Jesus spoke in verse 16 and 17 in the context of what he said in verse 15 and the previous verses. He was speaking about the kingdom of heaven in verse 11 and 12, the new covenant that John the Baptist was only a forerunner for and that Jesus inaugurated for us.

And then he said these words. He said, If you care to accept it, verse 14. In other words, not everyone would accept it.

In fact, we know that there are very few in the whole nation of Israel who were willing to accept it. Out of that nation in which Jesus had gone around preaching for three and a half years through the length and breadth of it, there were only 120 who waited for the inauguration of the new covenant on the day of Pentecost in the upper room in Jerusalem. It was a very, very small percentage.

They were the ones who cared to accept the word of God. They were the ones, verse 15, who had years to hear what Jesus had to say. But what about the others? Jesus said, I'll tell you a parable, he said, which would illustrate the condition of this generation.

They're like children, verse 16, sitting in the marketplaces, calling out to the other children and saying, We played the flute for you. You did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.

What's the meaning of that? In other words, we want you to dance according to our tune. When we play the flute, we want you to dance. When we sing a dirge, we want you to mourn.

This generation was like that. In other words, it was a generation that told God's prophets, You prophets must dance according to our tune. You must preach what we want you to preach.

When we want you to dance, you must dance. When we want you to mourn, you must mourn. But God's prophets are never like that.

John the Baptist was not like that, and Jesus was not like that. They had a message from God, and they didn't dance according to the tune of the generation. They didn't dance according to the tune of the people in the the people needed.

And that was not very palatable. Very often people got offended because they did not have years to hear. But Jesus said, This generation is like this.

They want these false prophets who will say what the people in the synagogue want to hear because they want to get their salary. And they dare not speak the truth. They dare not speak anything that will offend particularly the rich people in the synagogue, because then they will not get their salary.

The false prophets in the Old Testament were like that. But John the Baptist and Jesus and the true prophets like Elijah and Elisha were not like that. He says, When you are like that as a generation that wants God's people to fit into your understanding of what a servant of God should be and what he should speak about, you're like children who expect others to do exactly what you want them to do.

And then when they don't do what you want them to do, whatever they do, you will criticize them. If they go left, you'll criticize them for going left. If they go to the right, you'll criticize them for going to the right.

They'll never do what is right in your eyes, because they don't dance according to your tune. For example, he says, John, he was an ascetic. He was a part of the Old Covenant.

He was a Nazirite. He came without eating or drinking. He was eating locusts and honey out in the deserts, living in the wilderness.

He came neither eating nor drinking. He wore a dress of camel's hair, rough in appearance and in his food habits, an ascetic. And the people looked at that.

They didn't like that. He was too extreme. And they said, he must be having a demon.

And then came Jesus, who inaugurated his miracles by making an abundance of wine in Cana. And he came eating and drinking. Jesus was not a Nazirite.

He was not a Nazirite. He would drink grape juice, which Nazirites were not supposed to drink. His hair was short, not long like the hair of the Nazirites.

This is why all the pictures that we see of Jesus are false. Jesus was not a Nazirite. His hair was not long.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking. And they say, behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard. Jesus was different from John the Baptist.

And they would criticize him because he was eating and drinking. They criticized John for not eating and drinking like them. And they criticized Jesus for eating and drinking.

They say, oh, a man of God shouldn't be like that. A friend of tax collectors and sinners. And so we see that Jesus was trying to point out that a true man of God can never be appreciated by those who are not spiritually minded.

And this generation was not spiritually minded. They wanted God's prophets to dance according to their tune. But neither John the Baptist nor Jesus would do that.

And we also see that Jesus did not imitate John the Baptist. None of us are called to imitate another man of God. We are to be ourselves.

Jesus did not imitate the habits of John the Baptist. He didn't go out into the wilderness or dress like him. Each of us is individual.

We are all called to follow Jesus, but we're not called to imitate the ministry of another man of God. That's the way you can destroy your own special contribution to the body of Christ. Having said that, Jesus said, yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

In other words, the wisdom of God will finally be vindicated by the actions that have come out of that wisdom, which a foolish generation cannot understand. John was wise according to his calling. Jesus was wise according to his calling.

And in the final day, when God judges all men, we will see that these actions of John the Baptist and Jesus are vindicated. They were the result of divine wisdom. But a foolish generation that could not understand this would only criticize.

It is exactly the same today. A true prophet of God is never accepted by the majority of Christians. He's too much of a stumbling block to them, just like John the Baptist and Jesus were.

But one day, the wisdom of God will be vindicated by the words and actions of the true prophets of God, even in our generation. Then Jesus began, verse 20, to reproach or rebuke the cities in which most of his miracles were done because they did not repent. They were under the old covenant.

The Holy Spirit had not come. Miracles had to be done in order to authenticate the ministry of Jesus. And the thing which he rebuked them for was that they did not repent.

It was repentance that he sought through his miracles. Notice that. What was the purpose of those miracles? That's clear if you read verse 20.

It was in order to bring those people to repentance, not just to bless them. It was in order to authenticate the message with which Jesus had come, a message of repentance. Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

That's what John the Baptist preached. That's what Jesus preached. Even though in external appearance they were different, their fundamental message was the same, a message of repentance, of turning from sin.

That is the message of every true prophet, turn from sin. He said, Woe unto you, Chorazin, woe unto you, Bethsaida, for the miracles that occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Tyre and Sidon were ungodly nations in the Old Testament.

They didn't have the privileges that Israel, God's people, had. Jesus said, If they had this privilege which you people have today, they would have repented long ago. But since you people have a greater privilege, having had the Son of God in your midst, in the day of judgment, the people of Tyre and Sidon will be judged by a lesser standard than you people, and it will be more tolerable for them, which teaches us that not all are going to receive the same judgment in the day of judgment.

It depends on the measure in which God has given us privileges and the opportunity to hear His word. And you, Capernaum, He said, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades, for the miracles that occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. In other words, though the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were so evil, if they had seen the miracles that Jesus did, they would have repented.

But the people in Capernaum were worse than the more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you. It's amazing that when we hear the message of Jesus, if we do not repent, our condition is worse than the condition of people in Sodom and Gomorrah. That's a serious thing.

Repentance is what God is calling His people to even today. That's the only adequate response that we can make to the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ.

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