

Matthew 20-06-14b

We are ready now to resume our study in Matthew chapter 11, looking at Jesus' words to John the Baptist. And as we continue picking up in verse 7, you see that the disciples that John sent are now going away. As these now were going away, and this is from the verb that means to travel or journey, and it's a present participle.

So they are in the process of going, it's not an aorist participle. I reviewed that sort of on purpose in the first session. Remember, what's the rule? The action of the aorist participle precedes the action of the verb.

This almost by way of expectation should be an aorist participle. After they had gone, Jesus said, but it's, they've said, okay, we've gotten the answer. We're going to go back and see John.

And as they're sort of getting ready to leave, and as they're in the process of leaving, Jesus is still talking. He's not finished and they are still there. It's extremely important to understand that these guys have not left yet.

And in English, it says, as they departed, but it's more as they were departing. And this is a fair hike. The Mekiris prison is at some distance from where Jesus is.

So you know how it is when you're preparing for a trip and you're running around the house, getting this and keys here, sunglasses there, suitcase, purse, food, snacks. Is there water for the cat? You know, all these different things that you do. You're, you're departing, but you're not gone.

Right? Well, that's the idea here. It's, it's really important and you'll see why. So as they were departing is the way I would write this into the margin of my Bible as they were departing, but they're not departed.

They're not gone. Jesus began to say to the multitudes. And the, the word began here is an heiress and it, it, it gets set into the middle of the departing, the straight heiress indicative.

And, and this is a middle voice because Jesus, when you begin a thing, you, you sort of do it yourself. You do it for your own interest, but it's an error. So you've got this background of the two disciples in the process of departing Jesus in the middle of it.

And that's the heiress. He began, he began before they left. In other words, in the middle of the departing, Jesus began to speak.

To the crowds concerning John. And the idea is, okay, I have finished directly addressing the two disciples. Jesus seems to be almost in private conversation with them.

And as they are maybe retreating, Jesus turns to the crowds, but the two guys are still there. They're still within earshot. And so Jesus began speaking to the crowds.

It's actually an infinitive began to speak to the crowds, Perry Uwanu concerning John about John. And he says, he's going to ask three questions. What did you go out into the wilderness to see in the next verse? What did you go out to see in the next verse? What did you go out to see? And into the wilderness is implied in the second and third questions.

It's the same going out. It's the same desire to see there's a common pattern. We've seen it other places in scripture where it's a set of three.

And the answer to the first question is no, not that the answer to the second question is no, not that the answer to the third question is yes, that, and that's, that is the pattern here. We have two negatives and then a positive. So let me read these three verses.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind. But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments. Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in King's houses.

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. Now, what is our context? John, not only answering the theological question, is the coming one and the Lamb of God a co-identity for a single individual? The answer is yes, based on scripture. Jesus says, match up these things that you've seen and heard with what Old Testament scripture foretells and claims and assures people about.

But this is primarily tacked onto verse six. Happy, blessed, favored is he, singular, who is not caused to stumble in by, with me. This is not by in terms of cause.

This is by in terms of associated with, in me. So as they're getting ready to go, Jesus turns to the multitudes. But you know how this is.

Sometimes you're talking to one group, but you've really got somebody else in mind as a, as a target. And Jesus speaks before they go because this is something else they are going to convey back to John. If you want to talk about some encouragement and some comfort for John, not only does he get the answer to his question, but Jesus is going to bless him with a favorable evaluation that these guys are going to take back.

So what did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? The answers to both of these questions are no. Yes? No. Right.

A lot of speculation has been aimed at the reed shaken by the wind. A reed shaken by the wind is something that moves. This is not a fence post.

This is not a tree trunk. It's a reed. What happens to a reed in the wind? It waves.

It moves. It is influenced. It is bent over.

It is bowed down often by a strong wind. Did you go out in the wilderness to see that? The implied answer is no, you didn't. Here's the thing.

There is a reed in the context that is bowing to the prevailing winds. It's not John. If there was ever a counterculture, counterreligious, counterintuitive figure, somebody who defies expectations and is strong and immovable in the winds that blow around the Jordan and the winds of religion and politics and culture that were blowing in his day, John is a rock.

He's the opposite of a reed blowing in the wind. So when people went out to see John, they didn't go out to see a reed blowing in the wind. However, this is not just an apt metaphor that alludes to John's strength.

Who is the king that has locked John up in Machairus? This is Herod Antipas. You can actually look up online at a particular coin that was minted in the days of Herod Antipas. Herod is pictured on the obverse of the coin with a reed in his hand.

This was his symbol. One of the common coins of the day is Herod Antipas with a reed. Go to the second question.

Did you go out to see a man clothed in soft garments? If you go to the Luke parallel, Luke adds dwelling in luxury, you know, in the palace, clothed in fine garments and dwelling in luxury. And Matthew alludes to that. Those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses.

Who is the man wearing soft garments dwelling in a king's house? Reed boy. Herod Antipas, Reed. That's who is being alluded to here.

Now, what does Jesus say? Did you go out in the wilderness because of Herod Antipas? Was he the guy that motivated you, that interested you, that had something important to say to you? This guy who shifts his position and his politics and his decisions based on popular opinion. You know, this is the guy who's going to bow to the pressure of his guests when he makes Salome a promise that she's done such a fancy dance, she can have whatever she wants. And she says in concert with her mother, Herodias, I want the head of John the Baptist on a plate.

And he's going to be the reed bent in the wind and is going to grant that request. Who has who temporarily in his power? John proclaimed the sinfulness and the bad precedent set by the king of the region with his dumping of his wife and moving in with his brother's wife and all the rest of this literally scandalous behavior in the English sense of the word. John talked about it and he got locked up for it because Herod didn't want bad

press.

He's the reed that blows in the wind. He's not fixed. He's the opposite of John.

But people didn't go out in the wilderness to hear Antipas. You get the idea that he might have had some kind of a big event and it was sparsely attended because he wasn't particularly popular in the Jewish community. And you know, did you go out? Did you even bother to go around the corner to see Herod Antipas parade himself around? You went all the way out into the wilderness to see John, who is the farthest thing from a reed bent in the wind.

This is a direct contrast, I believe, between Herod, who is the most powerful man in the region, and John, who is locked up by him. You can be a faithful believer and be enclosed by circumstances. It can be financial, it can be social, it can be related to employment or education, some limitation that hems us in and we think, but my gift, my calling, even before the Lord, I'm trying to be a faithful believer here, but where is my avenue? Where is my field white for harvest where I can go reap that grain of righteousness by faith? I'm constricted.

Jesus, in the hearing of the two disciples, so that this message will go back to John, says to the crowds, he could have said, go back and tell John, these people didn't come out to see Herod, the guy that has locked you up, but it's the Jesus way. He talks to the crowds in the hearing of the departing disciples that are going back to John. And he says, you people who are out here listening to me, what did you go out in the wilderness to see? It wasn't this reed blowing in the wind.

And he doesn't just say you didn't go out to see Herod. He describes him by his characteristic bending to whatever prevailing wind blows. A reed shaken, bent, easily swayed by the wind.

What did you go out to see? Verse eight, a man clothed in soft garments where you're impressed with his finery, with his affluence, with his influence, with his, you know, did he inspire in you ambitions to bigger and better things because of the way he dresses and the way he lives? Dwelling in a king's house? What did you go out to see? Here's the right answer in verse nine. You went out to see a prophet? Yes. And more than a prophet.

Even locked up in prison. John is the man who people came out to see when he was in his active ministry by the Jordan. That was his faithful execution of his gift, his calling, his function.

He did it. He did it to the very best of his ability. And it mattered.

It made a difference. You crowd, Achloi, you went out to see a prophet and more than a prophet, more than a prophet. Now, how can John be more than a prophet? If he's

fulfilling a prophetic function and you on the leads owing the kingdom to this crowd, how is he more than a prophet? Well, he, Jesus explains it in verse 10, for this is he of whom it is written.

Is Herod Antipas predicted in Old Testament scripture? No, he is not. He's seemingly powerful. You look around today at the power that the government has, however, misguided or well-intentioned or whatever else it may be to shut down, you know, churches didn't meet on Easter Sunday for crying out loud.

And we say, well, how can we function? How can we do the things that God has called us to do when circumstances have hemmed us in? Jesus is communicating to the crowd and in reality, addressing the disciples who are going to tell John and notice the indirect nature of this. A lot of God's communication to us is indirect. It is by example.

It's by thinking through what we know from scripture. And so Jesus is indirectly addressing John crowds. You went out to see a prophet? Yes.

I say to you in more than a prophet, this is he of whom it is written. And you say, wow, how many people are predicted in the Old Testament to exist in a later day? I can only think of a very few. You could possibly posit Cyrus, but Jesus and John are prominently forecast in the Old Testament.

More than one place. I will send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you. My messenger, Malachi, Malachi, my messenger.

I send my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you. And this is God in essence, talking to the Lord Jesus. He is God, the father's messenger, who is going to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus before him.

And so you have this beautiful picture of God, the father, God, the son, and John the Baptist right in the middle. I don't care what prison cell they lock you up in. If God, the father is talking about you to his son and saying, he's mine and I'm going to use him to prepare your way.

That honor transcends almost anything you can imagine. Don't stumble, John, just because circumstances seem to be against you. From a human point of view, it looks like your time has passed and your ministry is over.

You are God, the father's messenger. You have prepared, you are preparing, you are going to prepare. Remember, John's ministry is recorded in scripture and every generation gets its benefit.

He didn't just minister in one place and time. The ripples and the outworking of that go on generation after generation. Millions, hundreds of millions of people are blessed by John's faithfulness, his consistency, his refusal to compromise.

And even when he's locked up, Jesus says, John, just keep walking. Don't stumble. Don't trip.

You're with me. You're in me. You are by me.

And you're blessed. You're happy. You're on the right track and in the right place.

If you just don't trip, don't stumble at this point. You've done such a good job. Watch your feet.

Watch your path. My messenger who will prepare your way before you. Verse 11, Assuredly, this is verily in the King James, truly, I say to you, this is the Lord Jesus Christ talking to the crowd.

I say to you, among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist. There is a judgment seat of Christ upcoming for us. Wouldn't it be great if Jesus had a high opinion of us, our faithfulness, our willingness, our obedience, our consistency, our watching out to not stumble like John.

Jesus says, there's nobody greater. Now there may be some others that are as great. You have to look at Daniel and Joshua and Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada and Caleb and Ezekiel and Hananiah and Michelle Azariah and Samuel and so many greats in the Old Testament day.

Elisha, Elijah, Moses himself, David, people can have their failures, but the pattern of their life is fidelity, loyalty, faithfulness, obedience, perseverance, enduring to the end. But those born of women, there is not risen one greater than John the Baptist. He is unsurpassed, but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

What does this mean? Everybody in the kingdom is greater than John. First thing to ask yourself is, will John be in the kingdom? That's future John. That's resurrected John.

Everybody that's in the kingdom, in the future kingdom is resurrected, sanctified, given a whole new set of opportunities and being in the kingdom. John, man born of woman. What do you know about the average person in the kingdom isn't really born of woman.

They're raised from the dead, right? There's going to be some people born along, but in this view, man born of woman, we're talking about the current age. John has done an unsurpassed job in this age, but to be in the kingdom of the future, anybody who's in there has more opportunities, even a greater Makarios situation than John. The kingdom is where you want to be.

As great as the evaluation is, we look ahead. It's our blessed hope and confident assurance. When Jesus comes, we want to be in the kingdom, however it pertains to us.

There's one aspect of the kingdom for Israel. There's another aspect of the kingdom for

the church, but we're looking forward and we want to be in the kingdom, not looking at it from the outside. All of those who are in the kingdom are going to be possessed of even greater advantages than John.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. What does this mean? We talked about this before, going all the way back to the progenitor of this nation himself, Jacob. On the occasion where he is renamed Israel, what is he doing? I will not let you go until you bless me.

I am wrestling with God's representative until I get a blessing. I will do it by my might and main. And God says this at the point that he touches the hip and the socket withers and Jacob is going to walk with a limp the rest of his life because God basically tells him and reminds him forever after on a daily basis, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.

It's not your efforts. It's not your labors. It's not your humanly engineered activities by which we receive blessing.

Those who think they have capabilities are trying to use those capabilities to enter the kingdom. And the kingdom itself is misidentified, misrepresented, misdefined. And people who are bent on doing it by their own efforts, the nation of Israel and the Jews in Jesus day being primary example, the Pharisees, I will force God to let me in by my manifest over righteousness.

I'll tithe the cinnamon in my spice cabinet. I will drop big bags of money in at the temple. I will do these things.

I will force you to bless me. I will not let you go until you bless me. And this does violence to the kingdom of heaven because it misrepresents it.

It misdefines it. It miscommunicates it. It makes it hard for people to see what it really is.

It suffers violence and people who are trying to achieve it in their own efforts, Paul is going to say later on, you know, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge and not having the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness. Well, I know what I think is right. I'm going to do that.

And I'm going to expect God to bless that and to enter me into the kingdom because of it. We have in our modern day people who have decided what they think is right should happen. And how are they accomplishing it? Is it dialogue? Is it prayer? Is it appeal to God? Is it walking in the ways of Christ? No, it is by force.

It is by violence. I will make you agree with me. I will force you to implement what I see as righteousness.

Well, it's far more dangerous when it happens in the spiritual realm, even than what happens in the social and political realm. It's an awful thing to pervert, corrupt, distort, and obviate the genuine church of Jesus Christ, the genuine body of Christ by misdefining it, misrepresenting it, and doing violence to it because I really want to feel like I did this. There's some program on TV and they have these little blurbs at the end, some little funny signature line for the people who produce it or create it.

And I have no idea what it is. I just remember there's a little kid's voice that comes at the end of some program and he says, I did this. I did this.

Well, that is very apropos. I did this. Man born of woman, none greater than John.

Why? John did what he did in the power of God's spirit. He didn't dress nice. He didn't bow to the prevailing social winds.

He was a rock. He was in rough clothing. He was the opposite of Herod Antipas.

And people went out to see him anyway, because they were drawn to the message. Now, once you have the message, what are you going to do with it? That can be a separate question. But what did the crowds go out in the wilderness to see? They didn't go out to see a guy that was Herod bowing to any wind.

They didn't go out to see Herod in luxury and finery. Who did they go out to see? A prophet and more than a prophet. It is effective when it is done in the power of God.

And that's how John did it. And nobody surpasses him in that. But anybody who is qualified to be in the kingdom of heaven in the future has done and is doing and will do even more.

That's just the starting place. All the prophets and the law prophesied until John. God's will, God's word, God's opportunities, God's way, God's deliverance have been communicated throughout Old Testament days.

They all prophesied. John the Baptist is the culmination. He's the exclamation point at the end of that prophetic communication.

And if you are willing to receive, he is Elijah who is to come. If you are willing to receive, you can circle that. We can be those who are in the kingdom with greater opportunities, greater potential, greater avenues of service, greater makarios than John.

If we are willing to receive. Remember those entais up above? The lepers receive cleansing. It's a passive.

It comes from the outside. Remember the necroi who are egerontai? They are raised. We receive the power.

We receive the guidance. We receive. John is a receptive guy.

Jesus is going to give a few clues to these disciples and an encouragement in this section that they are going to take back to John. John is going to receive it. He's going to be comforted and encouraged and strengthened by it.

He's going to say, you know what? When God looks down and sees the king in the palace in his finery, and he sees me in the dungeon in my what's left of my rough clothing in God's evaluation, there is none greater than John. Herod, he's a reed blowing in the wind and he's going to get blown away literally. So John being faithful is Elijah.

He is the fulfillment of the old testament expectation for announcing the kingdom. Jesus is the fulfillment of the kingdom itself as the king. He is the coming one.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. And that's a great note for us to pause on until next week. Have we got ears? We do.

But do we have ears to hear? Do we have hearing ears? What did he say up here? The deaf hear. The blind see. The deaf hear.

If you have ears, can you hear this? We have ears. Do we have ears to hear? If you are willing to receive it, do you have hearing ears? God gives us assignments. Sometimes they're very counterintuitive.

None more so than John the Baptist sitting in a dungeon, unable to function like he did before. But if you're willing to receive it, John is unsurpassed. Doing what he's doing right now, he is still unsurpassed and he's waiting for God's further use, further reliance on his faithfulness and his obedience and his consistency.

John's not going to stumble. He's not going to trip. These words of encouragement from the Lord Jesus himself telling him his evaluation.

The evaluation of our lives doesn't happen at the point that we die. Even though we can eulogize, we can summarize, we can appreciate. We certainly miss those in our family, in our circle who go before us.

But it's not until the judgment seat that the full evaluation is made because the ripple effects continue to expand in ways you could never foresee, could never know. Generation after generation, there is a momentum and it's like breaking on a billiard table. The cue ball goes down and hits that first ball and the cue ball says, well, I'm done.

But the energy that got transmitted to all of the rest of those billiard balls continues to operate and to bounce and to hit pockets and to interact long after the cue ball has done its job. And you can't say how effective that break was until everything quits moving. Well, nothing's going to quit moving until the Lord Jesus comes back and we go to the

judgment seat.

That's when the final tally will be taken. That's when the final effect and you think, well, but it was so small. It was so insignificant.

It wasn't necessarily visible. It only maybe lasted for a season or, you know, are there few who are being saved? Lord, we've left all and followed you, but it looks to me like our business is falling off and our family's getting frustrated and we're out here, you know, pretty sacrificially. And Jesus says, you wait till the kingdom.

Just wait. What you think you have sacrificed in this life is nothing compared to the glory that is about to be revealed. This momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal heaviness, momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory.

What you have now that you can't keep anyway, you can invest and trade in for something permanent and kavod, glory, heavy. It's what kavod means in Hebrew. It's heavy weight of glory eternally.

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the father. That's our example. John is a wonderful illustration of that.

Don't worry about the reeds that are blowing in the wind. Don't worry about those who seem to be ahead, living in finery and doing well. John's gift was profit.

And he's more than a profit because the power of God is active within him. What's your gift? What's my gift? Whatever it is, it can be more than it is when the power of God is at work in us. If you're willing to receive it, John is Elijah.

If you're willing to receive it, your gift is more than a gift. Your life is more than a life. Your opportunities are more than you can understand, more than you can appreciate.

If you've got ears, do they hear? That's Jesus' challenge. If you have ears to hear, then listen, pay attention. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the truth of your word. We thank you for the powerful way it communicates to us. Like the green pastures and the still waters, it restores our souls.

We pray that as we reflect on these words of the Lord Jesus Christ, that God the Holy Spirit will implant them deeply so that they will grow and bear fruit, not just 30, not just 60 fold, but a hundred fold in our lives so that we as the representatives of the Lord Jesus in this time and in this generation can shine his lights and provide the opportunity for those who have ears to hear, to hear us speak the truth in love, and to partake of the wonderful potentials that the Lord Jesus Christ died to give each one of us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.