

## TRUTH OR TRADITION

MATTHEW 11



## 23: TRUTH or TRADITION (Matthew 11)

Some *man-made traditions* actually stand in opposition to *God's truth*.  
When *that* happens, we must make a decision, and answer the question...  
**Will we trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions**  
...even when it doesn't fit our preconceived expectations?

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### teachingnotes

#### ***BIG QUESTION: Will we trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions?***

...even when it doesn't fit our preconceived expectations?

- When we realize our beliefs don't match what the Bible teaches, will we bend our beliefs to fit the Bible?
- When we expect the God who loves us to heal us or keep us from going through tough times, *and He doesn't...* will we still trust Him *OR...* will we turn from Him?
- 🕒 Today we see how Jesus graciously answers disciples struggling to trust God's truth over man's traditions and we will see how Jesus pronounces judgment on those who refuse to bend their beliefs to fit what the Scriptures teach.

#### ***Is Jesus Who We Thought He Was?***

**Matthew 11:1-3** (NIV) After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "**Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?**"

John the Baptist had been arrested for calling King Herod an adulterer (Mt 14:3-5). Before his arrest, John had earlier proclaimed Jesus to be "**the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**" (Jn. 1:29,36). John even **heard about the deeds of the Messiah** - Jesus (This is the first time Matthew has referred to Jesus as **Messiah** since the beginning of his writing (see Mt. 1:1, 16-17; 2:4). *But now John seems to be wavering on that.* John, now in prison, is questioning what he told others about Jesus. This great man of faith...was struggling - just like YOU and I have/will.

❓ Have YOU ever wavered in *your* faith? Have you ever wondered whether what you believe is actually *TRUE* or not?

✓ It's okay to *BE* there, *but it's NOT* okay to *STAY* there.

**John needs to know** - is Jesus **the one who is to come** - the long awaited Messiah, *OR...should we expect someone else?*  
*Is there any greater question about Jesus that needs to be asked?*

- Maybe John was struggling with His preconceived idea of the Messiah, and **Jesus didn't fit into his box**. If Jesus *was* the Messiah, **why would He allow His greatest advocate - John** - to be captive in prison.
- Israel expected a political liberator, a King who would bring Israel back to preeminence. Why hadn't that happened yet?

❓ Has God ever done something different than what YOU expected or wanted? Did your faith falter *OR* were you willing to trust despite the struggle?

#### ***Jesus Graciously Answers Honest Doubts***

**Matthew 11:4-5** (NIV) Jesus replied, "Go back and **report to John what you hear and see**: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."

**Why does Jesus respond with this instead of just saying, "Yes"?**

Beyond demonstrating His incredible power, Jesus points to the prophecies littered through the Scripture.

**Isaiah 35:4-6** (NIV) Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; **your God will come**, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution **He will come to save you.**" Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Jesus read Isaiah 61 in a synagogue and told them: "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (Lk 4:21)

**Isaiah 61:1-2** (NIV) The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD [YaHWeH] is on me, because the LORD [YaHWeH] has anointed me to **proclaim good news to the poor**. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

You can see why John might be struggling - he expects freedom for the captives and release from the darkness for the prisoners. Instead, John sits in a mountain fortress prison near the Dead Sea (*Machaerus*)<sup>1</sup>, about 100 miles away from Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and he sends them on the long journey to get an answer to this most important question.

### An Encouragement & Warning

**Matthew 11:6** (NIV) Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Jesus said that some would **stumble** - get tripped up - because of Him, *precisely because* Jesus didn't fulfill all their preconceived expectations. Besides wanting Jesus to free him from prison, **John** expects Jesus to bring justice & judgement against his enemies right now, as he spoke of before his arrest.

### Judgment & Justice from the Messiah

**Matthew 3:10-12** (NIV) **The ax is already at the root of the trees**, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes **one who is more powerful than I**, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

- **Many Jews** would stumble on account of Jesus because they expected their Messiah to trample the Romans and lift Israel to prominence over all nations immediately.
- The apostle Paul later writes that Jesus tripped up Jews who thought righteousness was attained by keeping the Law rather than by truly trusting Jesus.

**Romans 9:33** (NIV) As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion **a stone that causes people to stumble** and **a rock that makes them fall**, and **the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.**" \* [Combining Isaiah 8:14; 28:16]

🔍 For John not to stumble on account of Jesus, he had a decision to make: **Trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions?**

Many in our culture will **APPLAUD** the build-a-bear Jesus of social justice and inclusivism, who never judges anyone, yet be **APPALLED** that you will trust the God of *Scripture* - the One who judges sinners and forgives the repentant. It is becoming more and more obvious in our culture, that the biblical Jesus causes many to stumble.

🔍 Get your face in the Scriptures and see if your version of Jesus is the biblical version of Jesus. If not, bend your beliefs to fit the Bible instead of doing the reverse.

### Jesus' View of John

**Matthew 11:7-11** (NIV) As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: " 'I will send **my messenger** ahead of you, **who will prepare your way before you.**' Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The people didn't go to **John** because of his talk of health, wealth, & temporary prosperity. He was NOT a **reed swayed by the wind** (a man who bends to popular opinion).<sup>3</sup> John wasn't a man who was worried about impressing other people. **John was like a STIFF reed** that refused to bend to man's will.

### 3 Incredible Insights About John:

1. John *is* the guy Isaiah (Is 40:3) & Malachi (Mal 3:1) spoke of hundreds of years beforehand - the one who would **prepare** people for Jesus. John the Baptist never performed a miracle, but his task was more important than all other prophets before him.
2. John is the greatest prophet of them all! Greater than Moses or Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Malachi, or Jeremiah! To many of the religious leaders who thought John was a quack, this was a stick in the eye!
3. **The least**, the most insignificant person in the eternal **kingdom of heaven** is **greater** than John the Baptist on earth.

<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 484.

<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 412.

<sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 409.

- **A Seat in Eternity is better than a Pulpit on Earth.** As great as John was - the greatest prophet with the greatest task - pointing to the Messiah's entrance to Earth - *John would quickly be willing to exchange his great role on earth for the lowest position in eternity.*
- Further, we have the complete message - to reveal Jesus to others! John wasn't able to tell others about Jesus' death to pay for sins, His resurrection, and His coming judgement! We do!

**Matthew 11:12-15** (NIV) From the days of John the Baptist until now, **the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence**, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until **John**. And if you are willing to accept it, **he is the Elijah who was to come**. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

John had been persecuted verbally by religious leaders, and now was imprisoned by King Herod (shortly to be beheaded). John was the last Old Testament/Covenant prophet, pointing to the New Covenant King! **The kingdom of heaven** has been under attack, and that would continue, but would not change the truth.

**John - he is the Elijah who was to come.** The Jewish people were awaiting the return of Elijah before the coming of the Messiah. That's why Orthodox Jews, with this prophecy in mind, still leave a place for **Elijah** at their Passover feast, expecting his return. But, according to Jesus (God in skin who rightly interprets Scripture) it is not the Old Testament prophet Elijah who would return, but **John** the Baptist - the one who resembled **Elijah** - and who pointed people to Jesus.

\* See the attached paper called, "**The Second Coming of...Elijah?**".<sup>4</sup>

### **John & Jesus Not Meeting Man's Expectations**

**Matthew 11:16-19** (NIV) To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: " 'We played the pipe 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, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

This is a picture of **children** playing in the **marketplace** after hours. *At first they want to play 'wedding'* and when they **played the pipe** everyone was expected to celebrate & dance...*but SOMEONE would NOT play their game*. Instead, **John** and his disciples were playing '**funeral**' - fasting, praying, & calling people to repent - and the people of **this generation** didn't like it.

*Later the children decided to play 'funeral'*. When they **sang a dirge**, everyone was expected to cry & drag their feet in the dust...*but SOMEONE would NOT play their game*. Instead, **Jesus** and His disciples were playing '**wedding**'. Religious leaders scolded Jesus & His disciples, because while John & his disciples *fasted*, Jesus and His disciples *feasted* (Luke 5:33).

Neither John nor Jesus could satisfy the fickle people of their **generation**, who could not manipulate either one of them.

**John** and **Jesus** didn't fit into a preconceived tradition of Elijah nor the Messiah. Despite the evidence that these men were fulfilling the Scriptural prophecies, that generation refused to bend their beliefs to fit what the Bible taught. Instead, they **trusted Man's Tradition over God's Truth**.

**But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.** Those who had the **wisdom** to weigh the evidence of Jesus' **deeds** (blind see, lame walk, skin diseases cured, deaf hear, dead are raised, & good news is proclaimed to the poor - Mt 11:4-5) - **will choose to... Trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions**.

### **Coming Judgment for Those who Reject Jesus**

**Matthew 11:20-24** (NIV) Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in **Tyre** and **Sidon**, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, **Capernaum**, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

**Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum** were all places where Jesus spent a lot of time doing ministry. But, despite the evidence proving Jesus was the Messiah, most of the people there refused to repent of their sin and turn to Him.

**Tyre & Sidon** were towns mentioned in the Old Testament, full of pagan people known for their Baal worship & pride. (Is. 23:1-17; Jer. 25:22; 27:3-7; Ezek. 26:2-9; Joel 3:4-8; Zech. 9:2-4). **Chorazin & Bethsaida** were more accountable, having heard the Messiah and seen His miracles. They will face harsher eternal punishment than the pagan nations of **Tyre & Sidon**.

**Capernaum** became the home base for Jesus and His disciples for their ministry around the Sea of Galilee. Yet, despite Jesus living among the people and doing incredible miracles, most people did not repent. Therefore, they would be held more accountable than **Sodom** on the day of judgment and **go down to Hades** - the place where the dead are tormented.<sup>5</sup>

**WARNING!!!** If God has used His people and His Scripture to reveal His will to you...and you stiff-arm Him...**you are MORE ACCOUNTABLE** and will face a harsher judgment than those who don't know what you know.

<sup>4</sup> <https://bit.ly/2ndComingElijah>

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 290-291.

## Wise & Learned OR Little Children?

**Matthew 11:25-27** (NIV) At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

When you consider the apostles Jesus chose **to reveal** God to, most weren't highly educated or have extensive religious training. Many of Jesus' own disciples were like **little children** - needing to grow, willing to listen & trust the Father rather than rely on their own wisdom.

**Kent Hughes** - "*We must not think a child cannot come to God until he is like a man, but a man cannot come until he is like a child.*"<sup>6</sup>

## Jesus Extends an Invitation

**Matthew 11:28-30** (NIV) **Come to me**, all you who are weary and burdened, and **I will give you rest**. Take my yoke upon you and **learn from me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

**Can you imagine a preacher saying THAT about himself?** "Come to ME...and I will give you rest?" You would likely and rightly think, "Just who do you think you are?" Jesus is inviting people to follow HIM, to seek HIM for their ETERNAL REST. This is no mere prophet or preacher - this is God, the Son!

A **yoke** was a wooden frame that fit on the shoulders of animals (like oxen or donkeys) to pull heavy loads or plow fields. This image became **symbolic for laws or teachings** that others submitted to. Jesus used this symbolism to show the difference between Him and many religious leaders who:

- 1) didn't practice what they preached
- 2) refused to help their disciples with the heavy load they put on them (see [Mt 23:4](#)).

By contrast, Jesus was offering **rest** to anyone who is **weary and burdened** - including daily difficulties, sin struggles, & unrealistic expectations.

*This rest is not retirement. This is NOT a ceasing of work.* but a changing WHO you're working for! We find rest for our souls when we submit to a Master who is **lowly and humble**, a Master who has modeled what obedience looks like; a Master who won't put too heavy a load and leave you to fend for yourself; a Master who lays down His life for His servants.

## BIG QUESTION: Will we trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions?

When Jesus & the Scriptures say something different than our culture, family, or friends say, *WHO* will we choose to TRUST?

## FEET TO FAITH

1. **READ the Gospels**. Put in on your schedule now! Set an alarm or write a time to read from 1 of 4 gospels every day this week.
2. **WRESTLE with Tough Teaching**. You're going to run into tough stuff and it's okay not to like it...to struggle with it. Ask mature believers to help you understand it. And ask yourself this question: **Will I trust God's Truth over Man's Traditions?**
3. **RESPOND in Obedience**. Don't just read it, live it!

## heretoserveyou

Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- \* Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- \* Or call our **deacons & wives**: Alan & Christy Androski (850-464-1428), Steve & Debbie Bass (850-673-7952), Freddy & Joyce Howard (850-973-0047), Tim & Joni Hughey (850-464-1156), Mark & Dot Mancil (850-253-5405), Boss & Amelia Mulkey (850-464-6717), or Tom & Martha Waddail (850-973-0011).

# discussion questions

Take some time to discuss these questions with your family, friends, or group.

1. Share a tradition you have believed that has been challenged by the Scriptures. Was that confrontation difficult for you to deal with, and how have you come to bend man-made traditions to God's truth found in the Scriptures?
2. **Read Matthew 11:1-5.** How does it help you to know that John the Baptist had a moment of doubt about Jesus? What does Jesus' gracious response to John say about how Jesus might respond to your questions? What ARE some of the questions you have that your small group, family, or believing friend might be able to help you find an answer to?
3. **Read Matthew 11:6.** Share a time when Jesus didn't meet your immediate expectations, but later came to find Him worthy of your life, despite the difficulties.
4. **Read Matthew 11:7-15.** How is it that Jesus considered John to have fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah coming back? Take a few minutes to read Jackie's paper entitled, "The Second Coming of...Elijah?" for some more insight.
5. **Read Matthew 11:20-24.** What is the warning for those who have heard the truth about Jesus multiple times who choose to reject His claims?
6. **Read Matthew 11:25-30.** What encouragement do you find from the invitation Jesus extends here? **Read Mark 10:14-15.** Why must we come to Jesus like a little child? Explain how an adult can do this.
7. What challenged or encouraged you *most* from today's teaching? What does God want YOU to do with what we studied today?
8. Share prayer needs and pray for one another.

## The Second Coming of...Elijah?

By Jackie Watts

Rightly interpreting prophecy is a tricky process. While we understand our own English metaphors like, "It's raining cats and dogs", we don't so quickly understand when other cultures use metaphors that are foreign to us. But what happens when there doesn't seem to be metaphoric language? Thankfully, we have the advantage of being able to view Old Testament prophecy through New Testament interpreters.

One of the most interesting passages that should demonstrate the importance of too quickly & assuredly interpreting Old Testament prophecy, can be found in **Malachi 4:5-6**.

"Behold, I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." (Mal. 4:5-6)<sup>7</sup>

Orthodox Jews, with this prophecy in mind, leave a place for **Elijah** at their Passover feast, expecting his return. But is this what we should expect? The New Testament demonstrates this would be an incorrect interpretation. First, Zechariah is told of his son's birth. That son, John the Baptist, would fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6.

<sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and **you shall call his name John**. <sup>14</sup> And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup> for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> and **he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.**" (Luke 1:13-17)

At this point some would argue that Malachi doesn't say "someone *like* Elijah", but says that "Elijah the prophet" would return. Of course, this was how the Jews of Jesus' day thought too. And here's where it gets interesting. Look how Jesus Himself interprets this prophecy.

<sup>7</sup> As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> **This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."**...

<sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup> and if you are willing to accept it, **he is Elijah who is to come.** <sup>15</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matt. 11:7-10, 13-15)

Note that Jesus calls John the Baptist "he of whom it is written" referring to who is spoken of in **Malachi 3:1**.

"Behold, **I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.** And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal. 3:1)

Further, Jesus tells those who are willing to receive what He says, that "he" - John the Baptist" - "he is Elijah who is to come". In other words, this isn't something future that must occur, but something that had already come to pass. Indeed, Jesus, "the Lord whom you seek" did "suddenly come into his temple". To make this claim about John the Baptist even more clear, when coming down the mountain from the transfiguration event, look how Jesus responded to the disciples' question.

**Matthew 17:10-13** <sup>10</sup> And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" <sup>11</sup> He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. <sup>12</sup> But I tell you that **Elijah has already come**, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." <sup>13</sup> Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of **John the Baptist.** (see also Mark 9:9-13)

If, according to Jesus, **Elijah has already come** and restored all things, then we must press *our concept* of what "restore all things" means to fit what Jesus intends. John had prepared people for the coming of Jesus, calling people to repent and seek the Lamb of God who was soon to take the sins of the world (John 1:29-30). Listening to John's prompting, many left his ministry to follow the Messiah (John 3:25-30). John's humility, purity, & obedience to fulfill his calling, led Jesus to say these powerful words.

**Matthew 11:11** Truly, I say to you, among those born of women **there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.** Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

So, according to Jesus, John the Baptist was even greater than Elijah the Prophet. Yet the restoration Jesus was bringing makes the least in the kingdom even more righteous than him. This is one of many reasons why we should be living like Jesus - *not Elijah* - is returning!