

**Matthew 11:2-11. "Prepare His Kingdom" (p.765)**  
Ajax Alliance Church. Sunday December 17, 2023.

**Matthew 11:2-11** [2] Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples [3] and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" [4] And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: [5] the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. [6] And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." [7] 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? [8] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. [9] What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" [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. (ESV)

Do you have **all your Christmas shopping done?** Some people finish their Christmas shopping during boxing day sales. In some ways **we admire** those who are so prepared that they finish all their shopping early. What kind of person is that organized? As we all know, the later you do your shopping, the less options you have. Delayed shopping has consequences.

**Expectations** can have a tremendous bearing on Christmas. We have expectations of particular gifts, events and even rewards. On these, if the outcome does **not** match our expectations, then we will be **disappointed**. But, if the issue resolves around eternal realities, then our expectations can have eternal consequences.

We see in **the Gospel of Matthew,** in terms of **expectations,** that **John the Baptist** is concerned because his present imprisonment does **not** match his understanding of the arrival of the Messiah which was to bring blessing on those who repented and judgment on those who did not (cf. Mt. 3:11). Jesus' ministry, however, is in line with prophetic promises about the time of salvation, as seen especially in these descriptions that recall the words of Isaiah (Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 1842). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.) In **Matthew 11,** the glorious character of the kingdom of (Heaven) comes into view and then in turn the reality of judgment for those who reject it (Hagner, D. A. (2002). *Vol. 33A: Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13.* Word Biblical Commentary (299). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.)

**Christmas season** reminds us about the reality of a Kingdom. John the Baptist's questions of Jesus help us to focus on the reality of meeting Christ face to face and if we are ready. Understanding who Jesus is, and being an obedient citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven is being a ready citizen of that Kingdom.

To "Prepare His Kingdom" John the Baptist inquires about Jesus' Kingship through **1) The Request** (Matthew 11:2-3), **2) The Reply** (Matthew 11:4-6), and **3) The Recognition** (Matthew 11:7-11)

**1) The Request** (Matthew 11:2-3)

**Matthew 11:2-3** [2] Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples [3] and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (ESV)

**King Herod**, also known as **Herod Antipas**, had **imprisoned John the Baptist** (4:12). Herod had **married his own sister-in-law**, and **John the Baptist** had **publicly rebuked Herod's blatant sin** (Barton, B. B. (1996). *Matthew* (pp. 218–219). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.). **John was expecting an imminent end of the age involving the judgment of the wicked** (Matthew 3:12). He had **heard rumors of messianic-like deeds performed by Jesus**. The phrase is comprehensive and is intended to summarize all of Jesus' activity in word and deed (4:23–9:35). While Matthew is quite definite about **the messianic nature of Jesus' deeds** (calling him **the "Christ"**=Messiah), **John's inquiry** indicates that Jesus' activity did **not immediately settle in his mind the identity question** (Chouinard, L. (1997). *Matthew*. The College Press NIV commentary (Mt 11:2). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.)

**John's expectations** are called into question because **his wicked captors** had **not yet been judged** and **he had not yet experienced the fulfillment of the messianic promise of "liberty to the captives"** (Isa 61:1; and even more vividly, Isa 42:7). He **continued to sit in the prison of Herod Antipas** (in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, according to Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.2) and thus could only **send his disciples** (cf 9:14; 14:12) to Jesus with his question (Hagner, D. A. (2002). *Vol. 33A: Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13*. Word Biblical Commentary (300). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.)

**He was now perplexed**, and he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, "Are You the one who is to come/Expected One, or shall we look for another/someone else?" In **Luke 7:19** we see that **John told two of his disciples to ask Jesus specifically, Are you the one who is to come/Expected One** Along with the Branch, Son of David, King of kings, and other such titles, **the one who is to come/the Expected One** (*ho erchomenos*) was **a common designation for the Messiah**. **Every Jew of Jesus' day would have known that to ask if He were the one who is to come/the Expected One** (Psalms 40:7 and 118:26). Even **John the Baptist**, God's special messenger, had **questions**. **To live is to discover**, and no one learns without **raising questions**. **Wonder about something said on Sunday? Ask. Wonder about something you read in Matthew's Gospel? Ask. How does faith relate to the problems you face this week? Keep asking until you make some solid discoveries.** (Barton, B. B. (1996). *Matthew* (p. 220). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.)

- **Never** be embarrassed when **asking a sincere question**. And **never** make anyone else feel ashamed to ask one. **Even John the Baptist**, God's special messenger, had questions. **To live is to discover**, and **no** one learns without **raising questions**. **Good questions indicate good listening.** (Barton, B. B. (1996). *Matthew* (p. 220). Tyndale House Publishers.)

**Humanly speaking the career of John the Baptist** had **ended in disaster**. He had been the **fiery, independent, dramatic, confrontational, courageous man** who **preached exactly what needed to be preached, to whom it needed to be preached, and when it needed to be preached**. **He was fearless, aggressive, and faithful to the Lord in every way**. **He called sin sin and sinners sinners**. **And now he was in prison** because of his **faithfulness**. **John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Christ**. Many speak of Jesus **Christ**, but do not realize that **the title Christ is in essence a confession of faith**. The word literally means "**the Anointed One**." In the Old Testament, forms of its Hebrew equivalent *messiah* were applied to **prophets** (1 Kin. 19:16), **priests** (Lev. 4:5, 16), and **kings** (1 Sam. 24:6, 10), in the sense that **all of them were anointed with oil**, the symbol that God had set them aside for their respective offices. But **the preeminent Anointed One** would be the promised Messiah, for **He would be anointed by God's**

### Please turn to 1 Peter 1 (p.953)

Although John had heard in prison about the deeds/works of the Christ, his information was secondhand and not complete. He had been in prison for a year; but even while he was preaching, He had no direct contact with Jesus after the baptism. John did not experience the full truth about the Messiah he was sent to proclaim. He was in a position not unlike that of the Old Testament prophets. A number of John's disciples had already been observing Jesus for some time, probably on John's instruction. After Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain, "the disciples of John reported to him about all these things" (Luke 7:18). The question from John's disciples in Matthew 9:14 suggests that John, like the Pharisees, may have found it hard to accept the free attitude of Jesus to religious propriety, and the company he kept. (France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (422). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.)

### Peter described this anticipation:

1 Peter 1:10-11 [10] Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, [11] inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. (ESV)

The information that John's disciples brought back to him was still not firsthand, but their report was based on confirming demonstrations of divine power that Jesus performed specifically for John's benefit. John's disciples had probably traveled on the main road northward from Herod's fortress Machaerus, where John was imprisoned, through Perea beside the Jordan, to cross into Galilee, where Jesus was teaching (Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Mt 11:2-3). InterVarsity Press.).

- In some ways it seems odd for others to consider that at this time of year we celebrate someone who we have never physically met. Yet we can celebrate who He is, what He has done, and what He continues to do.

The fact that John instructed his disciples to ask, as it says in Matthew 11:3 shall we look for another/someone else? seems to indicate that John's expectations about the Messiah were unfulfilled. John knew that what he preached was true, and he knew that Jesus was the one about whom he preached; yet Jesus had done none of those things. The Messiah was to come in judgment, and John therefore expected Jesus to display the blazing power of absolute, complete, and worldwide judgment (Matthew 3:1-12). John asked some direct questions in order to clarify his understanding. It is often through questions that we really grow in our faith. John must have thought, *If I am Messiah's forerunner and Jesus is the Messiah, why am I in prison?* John needed reassurance and clarification, for he had expected the Messiah to overcome wickedness, judge sin, and bring in His kingdom. (Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 43). Victor Books.)

- The moment we stop asking questions about the birth of Christ, His kingdom, mission and returning, it the moment we loose the wonder of Christmas.

## Illustration:

John doubted for two reasons: **First**, he had **misconceptions** about Jesus. **The solution for that**, as for all **misconceptions**, is proper teaching, and **Jesus** supplied that. **Second**, John apparently doubted because of the **miseries** of prison. **We can also doubt** when **dashed** hopes, physical **illness**, or even sleep **loss** bring us **low**. Then **we need** encouragement from a friend. **The issues raised here explain** why it is **so beneficial** to follow **the basic disciplines of Christian living**: to pray, to read the Bible, to have fellowship with the family of God, to go to church regularly and receive biblical teaching. We **forget** our **doctrines**: **reading and teaching remind us** of them. **Our moods shift**. **A friend** can lift that mood. **Jesus took both paths** with John. He answered John's questions, and he encouraged and blessed him as a prophet of God.

(Doriani, D. M. (2008). *Matthew & 2*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 462–463). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.)

To "Prepare His Kingdom" John the Baptist inquires about Jesus' Kingship through **1) The Request** (Matthew 11:2-3), **and now we see:**

**2) The Reply** (Matthew 11:4-6)

**Matthew 11:4-6**. [4] And **Jesus answered them**, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: [5] the **blind** receive their sight and the **lame** walk, **lepers** are cleansed and the **deaf** hear, and the **dead** are raised up, and the **poor** have good news preached to them. [6] And **blessed is the one** who is **not offended by me**." (ESV)

**Jesus** did **not answer** with a simple yes or no, **because He knew** that would **not** have satisfied John. He rather **told John's disciples to present their teacher the evidence**. **Go and tell/report to John what you hear and see**. Because **many of John's** disciples had **already been with Jesus** and heard Him teach and seen Him perform miracles, part of the **report to John would be a reminder** of what they had reported earlier. In addition to having heard accounts from his disciples, **John doubtlessly had heard from other sources as well**, because people from all over Palestine—from Syria, "from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan"—**had followed Jesus from early in His ministry**, largely on account of His miraculous works (Matt. 4:23–25). **Jesus' answer calls John's messengers' attention to what is heard (words) as well as to what is seen (works)**. (Turner, D., & Bock, D. L. (2005). *Cornerstone biblical commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (p. 158). Tyndale House Publishers.)

**Please turn to Isaiah 61(p.581)**

Although **Jesus** did **nothing** to relieve John's physical confinement and suffering, **He did send back to him special confirmation** that He was indeed performing messianic works. As it says in **Matthew 11:5: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news/the gospel preached to them—just as Isaiah had prophesied in chapter 61:**

**Isaiah 61:1-2** [61:1]The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; [2]to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; (ESV) (cf. Isa 35:5)

- **Jesus took Isaiah 61:1–2** as the basis for his first sermon in the synagogue at **Nazareth**. **(It speaks of a work of messianic judgment, the very thing John had been proclaiming, but which Jesus pointedly leaves out**. This was most obvious **in Nazareth** where Jesus stopped his reading of **Isaiah 61** just before

the words “and the day of vengeance of our God” (v. 2). Why did Jesus stop at this point? Obviously, because this was **not** the object of his ministry at this time. One day he would come in judgment and the second half of the prophecies *would* be fulfilled. But for now, his goal was to teach the Bible, preach the gospel, and heal the sick (Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (190–191). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.) The end of the old age has arrived, the new age is dawning. The eschaton, announced by the prophets, is not about to dawn; it has dawned (Is. 34; 61:5–7). The new age is being manifested by word and deed (Augsburger, M. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). *Vol. 24: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 24: Matthew*. The Preacher's Commentary series (18). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.)

Jesus said, in effect, “This, John, is but a preview a taste, a picture of the coming kingdom. You can see by what I am doing now that I care, that I heal, and that I have power over all things.” The blind have been healed in 9:27–31, the lame made to walk in 9:2–8, a leper is cleansed in 8:1–4. (The deaf) κωφοί are elsewhere enabled to speak rather than to hear (9:32–33; 12:22; 15:30–31) but Matthew probably thinks in terms of a single affliction affecting both speech and hearing (9:32), a dead person is raised in 9:18–26, and good news to the poor is echoed in 5:3. This final item in the list interprets and generalises the significance of the earlier items on the list. God's intervention is **not** restricted to certain categories of sufferers but is for all the afflicted who will welcome his action. John's circumstances did not improve; in fact, he was soon beheaded at the cruel request of Herodias. But it is safe to assume that Jesus' response was more than enough to encourage John and renew his faith and confidence. (Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text* (451). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.)

Jesus' closing beatitude in Matthew 11:6, was primarily for the sake of John: And blessed is the one who is not offended by/keeps from stumbling over Me. It was a gentle warning, a tender rebuke. “Don't doubt,” He said to John, “if you want to have the blessing of My joy and peace.” The warning did **not** take away from Jesus' esteem for John, as his testimony immediately afterward shows (vv. 7–11). The reference in **not** being offended/stumbling is from *skandalizō*, which originally referred to the trapping or snaring of an animal. It was used metaphorically to signify an entrapment or stumbling block and carried the derived meaning of causing offense. The term has been variously translated in expressions like “Fall away” ...cause to sin ..or be scandalized (Blomberg, C. (2001). *Vol. 22: Matthew* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (185). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.) Many were, and still are 'offended' by Jesus, when his style of ministry **failed** to tally with their expectations, and even offended against accepted conventions. ‘Good news to the poor’ was an offence to the establishment, while a mission of the relief of suffering and the restoration of sinners would be at best irrelevant to those who fought for national liberation. It took spiritual discernment not to be 'offended' by Jesus' divine messiahship and the gospel of deliverance from sin through faith in Him are great stumbling blocks to the sinful and unbelieving. Jesus did not want John to be affected by the world's skepticism and unbelief. (France, R. T. (1985). *Vol. 1: Matthew: An introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (196–197). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.)

**Illustration:** Sodium Chloride

Sodium is an extremely active element found naturally only in combined form; it always links itself to another element. Chlorine, on the other hand, is the poisonous gas that gives bleach its offensive odor. When sodium and chlorine are

**combined**, the result is sodium chloride—common **table salt**—the substance we use to preserve (food) and bring out its flavor. **Love and truth** can be like sodium and chlorine. **Love without truth** is **flighty**, sometimes **blind**, (can **abandon** truth leading to **error**). On the other hand, **truth spoken without love**, it can turn people away from the gospel. **When truth and love are combined** in an individual or a church, however, then **we have** what Jesus called “the salt of the earth,” and we’re able to **preserve** and **bring out the beauty of our faith**. (David H. Johnson as found in Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.)

**Finally, to "Prepare His Kingdom" John the Baptist inquires about Jesus' Kingship through 1) The Request** (Matthew 11:2-3), **2) The Reply** (Matthew 11:4-6), **and:**  
**3) The Recognition** (Matthew 11:7-11)

**Matthew 11:7-11.** [7] 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? [8] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in **soft clothing**? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. [9] What then did you go out to see? A **prophet**? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I **send my messenger** before your face, who **will prepare your way before you.**" [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.** (ESV)

**John's disciples did not** question Jesus privately, which is apparent from the fact that, as it says in **Matthew 11:7 they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds/multitudes concerning/about John.** The **crowds/multitudes**, as well as Jesus' own disciples, **surely were perplexed** when **they heard** that **John**, the symbol of boldness and certainty, **would publicly admit** to misgivings about the very Person he had been proclaiming. **John** had had a large and loyal following, and **many people** recognized him as a prophet with a divine message (**Matt. 14:5; 21:26**). They **most likely asked themselves** if **John** was **not** as trustworthy as they thought, and was **his message not reliable?** **John was immensely influential** among the people of Israel (3:1–6). The **crowds** may have heard of his questions about Jesus' messianic identity, and **if John was experiencing doubt, they** may be following his lead and be experiencing doubt as well. So, **Jesus compels them to recall** the tremendous impact that **John's ministry** had originally had among them. (Wilkins, M. J. (2004). *Matthew* (p. 414). Zondervan Publishing House.)

**To answer the questions in the minds of the crowds/multitudes, Jesus asked them a question: What did you go out into the wilderness to see/look at? A reed shaken by the wind? He appealed to their own experiences, asking, in effect, "Was the man you saw preaching and baptizing in the wilderness uncertain and vacillating, a reed shaken by the wind? Did you ever hear John change his message or compromise his standards?"** He asked. The **reed** to which Jesus referred was common along Near Eastern river banks, including those of the Jordan where John baptized. **They were light and flexible, waving back and forth with every breeze. The people knew** that **John** was **not** swayed like those reeds. If ever there had been **a man with unswerving convictions**, it was **John**. **He stood up to** the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and even to Herod himself—for which boldness he was **now in prison. The people knew John** was as far as possible from being spineless or irresolute. **As John Bunyan points out in his Pilgrim's Progress, Mr. Pliable does not** go to prison to be martyred for the truth. **All this because it was generally known** that Reeds were **fragile** (Is 42:3; 3 Maccabees 2:22), so **a "reed shaken by the wind"** was notoriously **weak** (1 Kings

14:15) and **undependable** (2 Kings 18:21; Ezek 29:6). (Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Mt 11:7). InterVarsity Press.)

- It is **so easy in polite Christmas gatherings** to keep the conversation light. But what greater **opportunity, and responsibility** do we have that to talk about why Jesus came than at this time of year. It **most likely** will be met with resistance, but **as Jesus said**: Blessed are you when this happens.

In **Matthew 11:8**, the self-indulgent **man dressed in soft clothing** does **not** live in the wilderness as **John did**. **He wore** “a garment of camel’s hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey” (**Matt. 3:4**). **His life-style** was a living, visual protest against self-indulgence and self-centeredness. John was **no** pampered prince or court prophet who might be tempted to prophesy for hire (Keener, C. S. (1997). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, Mt 11:7–8). InterVarsity Press.)

**Jesus now asked the crowd a third question in Matthew 11:9: What then did you go out to see/ why did you go out? To see a prophet? The answer to that question** is clearly yes. As already mentioned, **John the Baptist had developed** a large and dedicated following in addition to his disciples, and **most of the people did indeed** consider him to be **a prophet** (Matt. 14:5; 21:26). **The prophetic office** began with Moses and extended until the Babylonian captivity, after which **for 400 years** Israel had **no prophet** until **John the Baptist**. He was the valedictorian of the prophets, the most dynamic, articulate, confrontational, and powerful spokesman God had ever called. **As the last prophet**, he would not only announce that the Messiah was coming but that He had arrived. **In John the Baptist the greatest man and the greatest human mission** came together by God’s sovereign and providential direction. John not only prophesied (see, for example, Matt. 3:7–12) but was himself also an object of prophecy. **He was himself the predicted forerunner of the Messiah**. (Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Vol. 9, p. 486). Baker Book House.)

- **A person with much potential** will accomplish little if his or her talents are **not channeled into work that takes full advantage of those abilities**. **No person** can **fulfill their human potential** like a Christian can, because **God omnisciently matches** our talents, gifts, and calling.
- **As we spend so much time matching the right gift for the right person, remember that God gave you** the exact talents, gifts and calling to what you are exactly suited for. It is **not** like a gift we don’t want: it **can’t** be re-gifted. **The question must be asked**, what talent, gift or calling are you **not** using for God’s kingdom **the way** He intended you to?

**Please turn to Malachi 4 (p.754)**

**Jesus assured the people** that **John** not only was a prophet but **more than a prophet**. As such, **(John)** himself was **the object of prophecy**, **the one predicted in Mal. 3:1**, the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy of **Mal. 4:5, 6** (v. 14), **the herald** of the Servant of the Lord (3:3; **Is. 40:3**) (Whitlock, L. G., Sproul, R. C., Waltke, B. K., & Silva, M. (1995). *Reformation study Bible, the : Bringing the light of the Reformation to Scripture : New King James Version* (Mt 11:9). Nashville: T. Nelson.).

**Malachi explained in Chapter 4**

**Malachi 4:1-6** “For behold, **the day is coming, burning** like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall **set them ablaze**, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will **leave them neither root nor branch**.<sup>2</sup> But for you who fear my name, **the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing** in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.<sup>3</sup> And you shall **tread down the wicked**,

for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>4</sup>“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. <sup>5</sup>“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup>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.” (ESV)

- Just as **the sun** drives away darkness and clouds, bringing light and joy, so **the sun of righteousness** will appear to dispel gloom, oppression, and injustice. **This prophecy is fulfilled in Christ**, who is “**the light of the world**” (John 8:12; cf. John 1:4–6). **The promise to send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome “day of the LORD”** confirms... that **the promised messenger** is **not Malachi himself but some future prophet...** because the future messenger would have a prophetic ministry similar to that of the historical Elijah. **The NT identifies John the Baptist** as the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophesied **Elijah** (Matt. 11:10–14; 17:10–13; etc.). (Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 1779). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.)

**Quoting Malachi 3:1**, in **Matthew 11:10**, **He said**, **This is he/the one about whom it is written**, “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.” **The expression before Your face** means to be in front of, or to precede. **An expanded translation, as interpreted here by Jesus, would read**, “Behold, I, YHWH, send My messenger John the Baptist to be the forerunner of You, the Messiah, and to prepare the people for Your coming.” **Other men** had prophesied the Coming of Christ, but **John was the one chosen** to announce His actual arrival. It has been well said, “**John opened the way for Christ and then he got out of the way for Christ.**” (MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1243). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.)

- Sometimes we **worry** too much about **how to share Christ at Christmas**. The beauty of **the word of God** is that **God promises to bless it**. **Our job**, like John, is to **proclaim it and get out of the way**.

**John was both prophet and fulfillment of prophecy**. **He was the Lord’s messenger** who was to **prepare** [the] **way** for Messiah and who would even baptize Him. **He announced** the Messiah and ministered to the Messiah with his own hands-as **no other prophet had done or would ever again do**. **After thousands of years of God’s preparation and prediction**, **John was given** the unequalled privilege of being **the Messiah’s personal herald**. Not only was he, **like other OT prophets**, a direct spokesman for God to call the nation to repentance, but **he himself was also the subject of prophecy**—the one who, according to Scripture, would announce the Day of Yahweh (Carson, D. A. (1984). *Matthew*. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, pp. 263–264). Zondervan Publishing House.)

**Continuing His praise of John**, **Jesus said finally in Matthew 11:11**, **Truly/verily, I say to you**, among those born of women there has arisen no one/anyone greater than **John the Baptist**. **To emphasize the unquestionable truthfulness of what He said**, **Jesus prefaced His words with Truly/verily (amēn)**, a term of strong affirmation often simply transliterated as “Amen.” **Those born of women** is a Jewish idiom for ordinary human birth (cf. **Job 14:1**; 15:14; 25:4), and **Jesus implicitly contrasts this with the new birth into the kingdom of heaven** (Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1842). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.)



Jesus' point was that, as far as humanity is concerned, **there has arisen no one/anyone greater than John the Baptist.** John is **not** affirmed for his personal qualities and achievements, **but for his role** in the unfolding of the purposes of God. It is his **to prepare for and announce** at its threshold the visit which will fulfill **Mal. 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. (ESV) (Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text* (457). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.).

That John has **Arisen** is from *egeirō*, which means to rise up or to **appear on the stage of history** and was **often used of prophets**, both true and false (see, e.g., Matt. 24:11, 24). Not only **as a human being but as a prophet**, **no one had arisen** to equal John, **because he was sent** on the very threshold of the **kingdom** of the Lord Jesus. But **lest the people misunderstand the nature of John's greatness**, **Jesus added**, **yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.** John is in prison and is **not** yet a participant in the new state of affairs inaugurated by Jesus' ministry, and so the privilege of John pales into **insignificance** when compared to **the privilege of those who are now participating** in the **kingdom of Heaven**. John did **not experience the full work of Christ**, the meaning of His death on the Cross, His Resurrection and His Ascension (Luke 7:34–35; 16:16; Mark 9:11–13) (Augsburger, M. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). *Vol. 24: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 24: Matthew*. The Preacher's Commentary series (18). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.).

Therefore, **the least in the kingdom of heaven, the spiritual dimension, is greater than he**, that is, **than anyone in the human dimension, including John** (Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew : A commentary on the Greek text* (457). Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.).

- Do you understand what **a great position and privilege** that is? And how **highly valued** you are in God's sight because of that privilege? **If you really did understand it**, wouldn't you be **more active in telling others about the Lord Jesus Christ than you are?** (Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (192). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.)

**Quote:** But remember: **Your greatness is because of Christ and your opportunity this Christmas season to point to him, not** because of what you are yourself. **D. A. Carson wrote: "So often Christians want to establish their "greatness" with reference to their work, their giving, their intelligence, their preaching, their gifts, their courage, their discernment. But Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed that even the least believer is greater than Moses or John the Baptist, simply because of his or her ability, living on this side of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, to point him out with greater clarity and understanding than all his forerunners ever could. If we really believe this truth, it will dissipate all cheap vying for position and force us to recognize that our true significance lies in our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ".** (D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1985) p. 65.).

(Format Note: Outline from Wiersbe, W. W. (1997). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (45–46). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books., Some base commentary from MacArthur, J. (1989). *Matthew* (Mt 11:7–9). Chicago: Moody Press.)