



**Matthew 11:7-15**

**"The Violent Take it By Force"**

**7** As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"

**8** "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

**9** "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

**10** "For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.'

**11** "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

**12** "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

**13** "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

**14** "And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

**15** "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

When someone is disappointed in something or someone, we often ask the question "Well, what did you expect?" Because our disappointment is usually the result of our expectations not being met by what we actually encounter. Sometimes that disappointment is legitimate. When you go out to a restaurant you expect decent food and service, and if the service is slow and the food is undercooked you are disappointed. But often the problem is that you had the wrong expectations. For instance, one of my favorite exchanges in a comedy program occurred on a British comedy series between John Cleese, playing hotel owner, Basil Fawlty, and Mrs. Richards an irritating guest:

Mrs. Richards: And another thing. I asked for a room with a view.

Basil Fawlty: ... Uh, this is the view as far as I can remember, madam. Yes. Yes, this is it.

Mrs. Richards: When I pay for a view, I expect something more interesting than that.

Basil Fawlty: [going to window, indicating] Well, that is Torquay, ma'am.

Mrs. Richards: Well, it's not good enough.

Basil Fawlty: Well, may I ask what you were expecting to see out of a Torquay hotel bedroom window? Sydney Opera House, perhaps? The Hanging Gardens of Babylon? Herds of wildebeasts swinging majestically...

Mrs. Richards: Don't be silly. I expect to be able to see the sea.

Basil Fawlty: You CAN see the sea. It's over there, between the land and the sky.

And it goes on like that, Mrs. Richards was disappointed but the problem wasn't what she saw, it was with what she had expected to see.

We'll discuss this in greater depth next week, but a lot of people had that problem with Jesus, they are disappointed because He doesn't meet their expectations. To a certain extent, John the Baptist was suffering with that problem. The Jesus that John had expected was the Jesus of ***Rev. 19: 11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.***

***12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.***

***13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.***

***14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.***

***15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.***

***16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.***

And that of course is a picture of Jesus at His Second coming when He returns as the judge of the nations. But the Jesus whom John encountered was the Messiah who had come as the gracious redeemer of his people, the Jesus who says things like, ***Matt. 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

***29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.***

***30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

John was expecting a Messiah who is a righteous judge, so he is disappointed with the gracious redeemer. Jesus is of course both them, the savior and the judge, both are aspects of his work as the Messiah but one comes first, just as the appetizer and the desert are both aspects of dinner, but it's unreasonable to expect the desert to be served first. So in the message that Jesus sent back to John he points out to John's disciples that he is performing the signs that the prophets said he would perform and then counsels him to be patient, don't doubt, endure, everything is coming to pass as the Father intended.

But then Jesus turns his attention back to the people he's been addressing. Some would be thinking, "John said Jesus is the Messiah, but now it looks like there's a division between John

and Jesus” maybe John wasn’t reliable if he’s beginning to doubt! Jesus wants to explain that isn’t the case. And he wants to make a point to them, because as we’ll see, even though multitudes had come to hear him, we read Matthew 3:5 that ***“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him”*** but ultimately John didn’t meet their expectations either.

So Jesus asks when you went out into the desert to hear John the Baptist what **did** you expect? Did you expect to see a reed shaken by the wind? What does he mean by that? Well, if you’ve ever been by a pond on a windy day, you’ll have seen how the reeds on the bank bow with the wind. There are lots of people like that. Politicians for instance, most of them simply bend in the direction of popular opinion. If it’s popular, they’re for it, if it isn’t they’re against it. I was listening to one politician for instance, trying to explain why she was once against gay marriage, but is now for it. She said ***“the evolution hadn’t occurred, and my statements were very much in that way. This was something that society in a way, the arc of history, as it were, needed to get there, and the arc of history has clearly arrived.”*** In other words, **before the polls showed people weren’t in favor of it, so I wasn’t in favor of it, but now the polls show they are, so I am too.** I’ve evolved.

John wasn’t like that at all. He was brusque, he was abrasive, but he didn’t tell people what they wanted to hear or what they already believed, he told them the truth, he gave them God’s word regardless of whether they wanted to hear it. And sometimes people hated him for it. He called the Pharisees a brood of vipers who needed to repent, he told soldiers to stop stealing, and why was he in prison? Because when he preached before Herod, he’d pointed to Herodias, His brother’s wife whom Herod had run off with and said, ***“It is not lawful for you to have her.”*** Like a good servant of God, he told the truth no matter what!

Did you expect to a soft man? Who wore soft clothes and preached smooth words. The kind of man who would always tell people what they wanted to hear so they would shower him with gifts? The kind of toadies you’d find in a king’s court? Or the soft TV preachers today who wear expensive clothes and who tell people, ***“At the start of each new day, remind yourself: I am talented. I am creative. I am greatly favored by God. I am equipped. I am well able. I will see my dreams come to pass.”***

That wasn’t John either. He dressed like Elijah, he wore an itchy camel’s hair tunic with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he called people “brood of vipers” and told them to repent before it was too late.

No, says Jesus, when you saw John you saw a prophet, indeed you saw the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, because it was John whom God had sent to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. It was John who was being spoken of in the last verses of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. ***Mal. 3:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.***

John got to do something that all the other prophets longed to do, John had actually seen the Messiah, the other prophets just pointed forward to the day of his coming, but John had pointed directly to him and said ***“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”***

Then Jesus says something remarkable about John in verse 11, ***“among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”***

Jesus is saying He may not have impressed you, or the Pharisees and the Saducees. But John was great where it counts. He was great in His zeal for God, he was great in His zeal to serve Him. Like the original Elijah, who ran away from Jezebel, he may have wavered. But he pressed on. He’s the greatest of the prophets, the greatest up to the coming of Christ, the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. The greatest of the Old Covenant Saints, but the least of the New Covenant saints is greater than he. How can that be? Jesus is saying that there is a sense in which the least of you is greater than John the Baptist!

How can that be? Because of your greater privileges. John died before the crucifixion. He died still unsure about how God’s grace and God’s judgment work together. He died before hearing of the resurrection. He died without the complete testimony you have in your hands. Brothers and Sisters, can you imagine trying to figure out how God would save His people if all you had was the OT? There’s a reason that it is often said that “what is in the old concealed is in the new revealed.” Even the disciples of Jesus needed Christ’s help to understand how the OT spoke of Him. Turn with me to Luke 24:13

***Luke 24:13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem.***

***14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.***

***15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.***

***16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.***

***17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"***

***18 Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"***

***19 And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,***

***20 "and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him.***

***21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.***

***22 "Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us.***

***23 "When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive.***

***24 "And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."***

***25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!***

***26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"***

*27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*

You have the bible and you have the illuminating grace of the Holy Spirit, the comforter dwelling in you helping you to understand these things. By grace you have ears to hear the entire message of the word. And so now armed with the full armor of God, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; he speaks of the Spirit that his people will have. The followers of Jesus are not soft and vacillating about salvation. No God's elect press forward with violence to enter the kingdom of heaven. The word translated violence is *biazō* {bee-ad'-zō} to use force, to strive,

There is a picture of that violence and zeal given in Pilgrim's Progress

"I also saw that the INTERPRETER took him again by the hand, and led him into a pleasant place, where a stately palace stood, beautiful to behold. CHRISTIAN was greatly delighted at the sight of it: he saw certain persons walking on the top of it, who were clothed all in gold.

Chr. Then CHRISTIAN asked, "May we go in there?"

Then the INTERPRETER took him and led him up toward the door of the palace; and behold, a great company of men stood at the door, desiring to go in, but dared not. A man also sat at a little distance from the door, at a table side, with a book and his ink bottle in front of him, to take the names of those that should come in: he also saw that in the doorway stood many men in armour, to prevent anyone entering, being resolved to do to any that would enter what hurt and mischief they could.

Now CHRISTIAN was somewhat amazed: at last, when every man started back, for fear of the armed men, CHRISTIAN saw a man of a very stout appearance come up to the man that sat there to write, saying, "Write down my name, sir"; When he had done this, he saw the man draw his sword, and put a helmet upon his head, and rush toward the door and the armed men, who laid upon him with deadly force; but the man not at all discouraged, fought on, cutting and hacking most fiercely. So, after he had received and given many wounds to those that attempted to keep him out, he cut his way through them all, and pressed forward into the palace;

"strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'" Acts 14:22

at which there was a pleasant voice heard from those that were within even of those that walked on the top of the palace, saying,

"Come in! Come in!

Eternal glory you shall win."

So he went in, and was clothed with garments like theirs. Then CHRISTIAN smiled and said, "I think, truly, I know the meaning of this." – Bunyan

Does that describe your Christian walk? Have you ever thought about how all the ways that our sanctification are described are active? We are told its' never safe in the Christian life to be asleep or not using the talents God gives to us. It's never a nap, or a sitting still and navel gazing. It's A race, A good fight, or here a battle? We're called upon to be active. As John was active and vigorous throughout his life. Spurgeon said ***"Thus the King sets forth the spirit demanded in these who would take part and lot in his great cause and kingdom. Lord, wake us up! Suffer us not to be using dead formality, where living violence can alone avail."***