

Bible Study Guide: Week of 12-5-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 11:2-11

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ⁴Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

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This is the third time John the Baptist has come up in Matthew’s gospel. The first time we witnessed in last week’s gospel reading from Matthew 3. This passage describes John’s wilderness appearance and ministry. In Matthew 4, Jesus hears that John has been put in prison. John’s being removed from public life marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Interestingly, Jesus’ ministry begins with the same proclamation John made: “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” Here is the third time John comes up in Matthew’s account. Despite John’s imprisonment and Jesus’ much more widespread public ministry, John evidently still has disciples. Those folks come to question Jesus at John’s request to discover Jesus’ identity and mission. Rather than answer the question directly with a “yes” or “no,” Jesus points to the signs of the coming Messianic age (see passages such as Isaiah 35:5-6 and Isaiah 42:18, for instance). John’s initial preaching about Jesus seemed to anticipate a fiery and fierce messiah. Perhaps John is disillusioned given his imprisonment and Jesus’ seemingly tame and mild ministry so far. Therefore, Jesus says, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me”—in other words, blessed are those who are able to accept Jesus as messiah despite their preconceived notions of what a messiah should be.

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When John’s disciples depart, Jesus turns his focus away from John’s understanding of the Messiah to the crowds’ understanding of John. Reeds blown by the wind were a common sight in the region. So too were palaces—King

Herod and other rulers had several fortified palaces in the region including the famous desert fortress known as Masada. In essence, Jesus is reminding the people, “You didn’t go to the wilderness to admire the scenery or to gawk at wealth and fame. Rather, you came to see a prophet.” Also, John was not timid or wavering like a wind-blown reed, nor was he living in luxurious comfort like a king. Rather, he was resolute in completing his mission of preparing the way for the Messiah.

Jesus says that John is the greatest person to be “born of women,” yet even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. The contrast Jesus draws here is between temporal greatness and eternal greatness. John is great insofar as he points others toward the kingdom of heaven. This is not meant to disparage John, but rather to show how important his role is in helping others enter into the kingdom Jesus has brought about.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. Why do you think John began to doubt Jesus?**
- 2. Do you imagine John found Jesus’ answer to his question satisfying? Why or why not?**
- 3. How do you think the crowds regarded John the Baptist after Jesus’ teaching?**