

4/26/26

Sermon Title: John and Jesus, and a Stubborn Generation

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 11:1-19

Jesus and John the Baptist

11 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples

³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see:

⁵ 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.

⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

⁷ 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?

⁸ 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.

⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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.

¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

¹⁵ Whoever has ears, let them hear.

¹⁶ “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷ “‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

¹⁹ 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.”

After sending His disciples out to preach in the regions around Galilee, Jesus Himself also went through the nearby towns of Galilee, teaching and proclaiming the gospel.

¹ After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

At that time, John the Baptist, who was in prison, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask whether He was truly the Messiah.

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples

³ to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Who was John the Baptist?

He was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the forerunner of the Messiah.

In the wilderness of Judea, he called people to repentance and proclaimed that the One coming after him was mightier than he, and that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John himself even baptized Jesus.

Yet this same John, while in prison, sent his disciples to Jesus with this question.

The reason John the Baptist began to doubt Jesus was as follows.

John had been imprisoned for criticizing Herod Antipas, the tetrarch, for taking Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, as his own wife. (After being imprisoned for about a year, John was eventually beheaded at the wicked request of Herodias). While in prison, John heard about the works Jesus was doing—His fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, His healing of the sick and weak, and even raising the widow’s son at Nain from the dead.

Yet regarding John himself—the Lord’s forerunner and even His relative (John’s mother Elizabeth and Jesus’ mother Mary were relatives)—who had been unjustly imprisoned, Jesus seemed to take no action.

Not only that, John had expected the Messiah to bring powerful judgment, but he could not find such actions in Jesus' ministry.

For these reasons, John began to question whether Jesus truly was the Messiah.

In response to John's question, Jesus did not simply say yes or no.

Instead, He told John's disciples to go back and report what they had seen and heard: that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see:

⁵ 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.

Jesus' answer was concise and full of authority.

Instead of defending whether He was the Messiah, He testified through His ministry that He was indeed the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

The signs Jesus told John's disciples to report were the very things the prophet Isaiah had foretold would happen when the Messiah came:

(Isa 35:5) Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
(Isa 35:6) then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

These Messianic miracles were not only clear evidence of Christ's great power, but also symbols of His work of salvation.

In a spiritual sense, the blind represent those whose eyes have been darkened by sin so that they cannot find the truth or the way of salvation.

The lame represent those who cannot walk in the path of righteousness.

Lepers symbolize those corrupted by sin who spread sin to others.

The deaf are those who cannot hear the Word of God.

The dead represent those who, because of sin, are separated from God, the source of life.

There is no way for such people to be saved except through the power of Jesus Christ alone.

The “poor” refers to those who are impoverished both spiritually and physically. Therefore, “the good news is proclaimed to the poor” means the good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. This is in the same context as the “beautiful news” prophesied by Isaiah.

In fact, the miracles Jesus performed were miracles that prophets had also performed before.

However, the difference between the prophets’ miracles and Jesus’ miracles was this: the prophets performed miracles through the power given by God, but Jesus performed them by His own authority and power.

For this reason, Jesus believed that when John heard what the disciples had seen and heard, he would realize that such works could only be done by the Messiah, and thus become assured that Jesus truly was the Messiah.

Jesus wanted John the Baptist to understand that His coming was not yet for judgment, but for love, salvation, and restoration.

He also wanted John to realize that the time had not yet come for Him to openly reveal Himself as the Messiah.

Jesus urged John not to stumble because His appearance and ministry were different from what the Jews expected the Messiah to be.

⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

As mentioned earlier, John the Baptist and the Jewish people were longing for a redeemer who would bring political and material liberation, along with dramatic change and visible judgment.

However, the Christ who actually came appeared in a lowly form and carried out a Messianic ministry that was vastly different from what they had expected.

(Isa 53:2) For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

Because of this, the Jews rejected Jesus, and as a result, they ultimately lost the blessing of salvation through Him.

Jesus' words teach us that, in the process of God fulfilling His revelation, we must not become disappointed or deny the truth simply because it does not fit human thinking or logic.

Rather, we must have spiritual eyes that can perceive the will of God, which surpasses human limitations.

Those who believe in Jesus and His ministry, and who accept Him as the true Messiah, will become blessed people who inherit eternal life and the kingdom of God. Because of their distorted view of the Messiah, the Jews failed to recognize the true Messiah.

Instead, they stumbled over Jesus' gospel ministry, which transcended their rigid way of thinking, as well as over His humble appearance and lowly manner.

In doing so, they lost the blessing that could have been theirs.

After John's disciples departed, Jesus spoke to the crowd about John the Baptist.

These words were meant to restore John's authority, which may have seemed weakened because of the question his disciples had asked.

Jesus then spoke to the crowd about John's mission.

When John the Baptist cried out in the wilderness, many people went out to hear his message.

First, Jesus asked the crowd what had motivated them to go out to John.

⁷ 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?

⁸ 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.

⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

The reason they went out into the wilderness was because they wanted to see a prophet of God and hear the word of God from him.

However, many of them only had a temporary and impulsive interest and did not go on to deeper spiritual truth.

Jesus then asks the crowd whether they went out into the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind, or to see someone dressed in fine clothes.

In other words, they did not go out to see instability or outward appearance, did they? John was not like a reed shaken by the wind.

He firmly proclaimed the truth and, dressed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, lived a simple life.

Jesus declares that John was qualified as the forerunner of the Messiah—more than a prophet, the last prophet of the Old Testament and the forerunner of Christ.

Jesus thus affirms John the Baptist's outstanding prophetic authority by appealing to the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures.

¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written:

The phrase “as it is written” refers to the words of the prophet Malachi.

(Mal 3:1) Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

Jesus speaks decisively about John the Baptist's status and the great contribution his role made to the message of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus was teaching.

¹¹ 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.

John the Baptist personally prepared the way for the Messiah and directly encountered Christ, introducing Him to all the people.

In this sense, he was the greatest among the prophets of the Old Testament.

However, those who belong to the kingdom of heaven—that is, the supernatural realm in which the Messiah's reign is realized, referring to all believers in the New Testament church after Jesus—are said to be greater than John the Baptist, who only prepared the way for Jesus.

The expression “those born of women” is a phrase used in the book of Job, referring to all humanity under death and suffering.

Jesus teaches that in order to take hold of the kingdom of heaven, a deep and earnest desire is required.

¹² 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.

This means that in order to obtain the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy—there must be a decisive break from sin, along with fervent conviction and courage.

Jesus then confirms that John the Baptist is indeed the Elijah prophesied in the book of Malachi.

¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

This is a passage from Malachi:

(Mal 4:5) Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Because John the Baptist strongly criticized them and called them to severe repentance—urging them not to boast in being Abraham’s descendants—and because he was now in prison, the Jews were unwilling to accept that he was Elijah.

As a result, they were also unwilling to accept that Jesus was the Messiah.

However, when John’s father Zechariah entered the sanctuary to burn incense, the angel of the Lord appeared to him and announced John’s birth, prophesying the following:

(Luke 1:16) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

(Luke 1:17) 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 1:18) And Zechariah said to the angel, ‘How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.

(Luke 1:19) And the angel answered him, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.’

The coming of Elijah prophesied in Scripture should be understood not as a literal, physical return, but as a ministerial fulfillment—that is, the role of a forerunner of the eschatological Savior.

After the 400-year period of silence following the prophet Malachi, the Old Testament period had not yet fully ended.

However, through the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, the Old Testament was brought to its final conclusion.

From this point forward, a new era would begin through Christ, the fulfillment of revelation.

The author Matthew thus marks a decisive turning point in salvation history, declaring that the age of Christ foretold by the Law and the Prophets has now begun.

Jesus then urges His hearers to be certain about what He has just declared.

¹⁵ Whoever has ears, let them hear.

¹⁶ “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷ “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

At that time, the Jews showed no response either to John the Baptist, who strongly emphasized repentance and mourning, or to Jesus, who proclaimed the gospel of salvation and deliverance.

They despised both and completely ignored them.

Jesus compares this situation to children sitting in the marketplace calling out to their companions, trying to make them respond: they played the flute, but no one danced; they sang a lament, but no one beat their chests in mourning.

In other words, there was complete indifference.

The Jews slandered John the Baptist—who lived an ascetic life according to the Nazirite rule, preparing the way of the Lord and preaching a message of repentance—as if he were possessed by a spirit of sorrow and living a dark, gloomy life.

On the other hand, they accused Jesus, who associated and ate with tax collectors and sinners, of being a glutton and a drunkard, and they condemned Him as being in close association with sinners.

This generation had neither joy in the grace of Christ nor sorrowful tears over their own sinfulness.

Nevertheless, Jesus declares that even so, John and Jesus both lived rightly according to the wisdom of God, and in the end their actions will be proven and vindicated as right.

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

¹⁹ 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."

Beloved members of the Church of Godly Dreams,

Today, we see the hardness of the human heart through the response of that generation toward both John the Baptist and Jesus.

People did not respond either to John, who preached a message of repentance, or to Jesus, who proclaimed the gospel of salvation.

Like a generation that had become numb to both sorrow and joy, they closed their hearts to the work of God.

However, Jesus clearly declares that the wisdom of God is never in vain, and that both the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus will ultimately be proven right in accordance with God's will.

At this time, let us take a moment to examine our own faith.

Have we perhaps become indifferent like that generation?

Do we fail to rejoice when we should rejoice in the Word, or fail to mourn when we should mourn over sin?

Let us also ask whether there is any spiritual dullness within us that keeps us from responding faithfully to the Word the Lord is speaking to us.

Let us live as those who rejoice in the grace of the Lord, mourn over sin, and trust in God's will to the very end.

May each of us be blessed in the name of Jesus Christ.