

July 5, 2020

“Vindicating Wisdom”
Lesson 1 of Unit

Matthew 11:7-19

Intro

Last week’s lesson ended with the choice to follow one of two hostesses: Wisdom or Folly. Today, that idea of choice continues.

It’s important that we recognize the difference between different categories of choices. Two common proverbs say “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”, and “One man’s meat is another man’s poison.” These statements are true when it comes to things where personal choice doesn’t matter. I can like Rocky Road ice cream, and you might never want to taste it again. I might dislike squash, and you might think it’s the most wonderful thing to eat ever. Choices like these really don’t matter in the larger, eternal view.

This option of “any choice is fine” doesn’t always work. In Jesus’ day, many people loved Him, but many also hated Him. The same was true of John the Baptist. The choice of accepting or rejecting their words and wisdom isn’t the same as our choices on what to eat, or watch, or where we go. Choosing to hate or disregard Jesus and John the Baptist’s wisdom is the same as choosing to hate and ignore God’s wisdom.

Read Matthew 11:7-19

1. In vs. 7-11, Jesus asks His audience about John, then supplies His perspective on him. In vs. 7, Jesus compares John to a “reed swayed by the wind”. What does that description suggest about someone, and how does Matt. 3:7-10 show John to be the opposite of that description?
2. What contrast does Jesus develop in vs. 8 about the clothing of John and others? What might Jesus be saying about lifestyle and how one’s clothes may not reflect one’s character?
3. For some personal thought and reflection, read Matt. 15:12-14 and 17:27. Question: How do you gauge when the offence caused by going against cultural expectations will do more harm than good?

4. Jesus in vs. 9 finally gets to the real reason why people went out to see John. In what way is John a prophet, in the same way as those in the Old Testament?

5. In vs. 9b-10, what does Jesus say about John as a prophet? If John is truly fulfilling the role Jesus says he is, then what does that imply about Jesus?

6. In vs. 11, Jesus says that though John is as great as anyone has ever been, the “least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” How can this be? What does Jesus mean by this statement, about John, and about those who are in the kingdom of heaven?

7. What is Jesus likely referring to when he talks about “the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it”? (If needed, look at Matt. 11:2, 14:3-4, 14:9, 26:50-56, 27:32-50, and 10:16-31 for some ideas)

8. What is Jesus saying about John in vs. 13-15? Why would he be emphasizing this point?

9. Verses 16-17 show Jesus giving an analogy. What do the first group of children in the marketplace do, and why are they displeased with the second group?

10. Jesus completes this analogy in verses 18-19. How are the people in “this generation” like the first group of children? How are John and Jesus like the second group of children?

11. This last phrase of vs. 19 says “But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.” What is Jesus saying to “this generation” about their actions and responses toward John and Himself?

(Note on vs.16-19 from J.W. McGarvey: “Wisdom is justified by her children (KJV phrasing) when they act as wisdom’s children should, thereby showing that she has trained them wisely. John’s life of Nazarite abstinence was wisely adapted to the special mission on which he was sent, that of preaching repentance. But Jesus, coming on a mission addressed not to one but to all the aspects of human life, assumed on peculiar personal habits, but preserved that evenness of balance and harmony of attributes which wisdom demanded in the Son of God. Wisdom was thus justified in both of her children; and she is justified in all of her children when they prudently adapt their habits each to the peculiar mission which God by providence assigns him.”)

Application: God’s wisdom is not universally accepted. Some hear clearly the message that God’s love and grace through Christ’s sacrifice meets their deepest needs. Others reject the message because what they hear is that someone wants to challenge their ability to rule their own lives. John was beheaded by Herod, and Jesus went to the cross. Even as we seek and follow the wisdom of the Scriptures, we too will likely face difficulties and challenges. Our faith and trust in the fact that Christ reigns both now and in the future will help us meet those difficulties and challenges. We have strength in Christ; we follow Him because in that path we find the wisdom of God.

Prayer: Father God, we know that we will have both good times and challenging times. Help us to continue learning your wisdom and trusting in it, practicing it faithfully in every situation we face, good or bad. We pray that we would be willing to hear your voice as it corrects our wrong ideas and practices. Thank you for the wisdom we currently walk in, and help us to seek and apply more. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.