

Matt. 11:7-19 - Celebrate the Greater Kingdom

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 26 July 2009 13:00

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Body

1.

The Greater Kingdom. First, Jesus tells us several ways His kingdom is a greater kingdom than those that have gone before.

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A Greater Prophet vv. 7-10. It is a kingdom with a greater prophet. In vv. 7-10 He teaches that this kingdom is led by a greater prophet than those who went before.

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Text

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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?"

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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.

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

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10 This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

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More than a prophet. Jesus presses them by repeating the same question three times: "What did you go out to see?"

" He is not ridiculing his listeners, but He is showing they would be worthy of ridicule if they had a wrong reason for going out into the wilderness to listen to John. First Jesus proposes two wrong reasons—did you go to see something boring, or an outlandish spectacle? Both would have been a waste of time. Would you travel one or two day's journey on foot to watch reeds sway in the wind? To see a court jester dressed in outlandish clothing? A clown? I wouldn't. But the reason you did it was that John was a prophet

. But do you know he was more than an ordinary prophet? And do you know he was more than a special prophet? He was "

more

than a prophet.

" He was "

my messenger

," the Messiah's herald, sent to run ahead of the Christ to prepare the way before Him. Did you know that one of the books of the Bible is named "

my messenger

?" That is the meaning of the Hebrew name "Malachi"--"

my messenger

." God chose to make a man named Malachi His last prophet in the OT, and gave Malachi the message that God would send one final messenger before God Himself would come to His people. Now Jesus tells us that messenger is John the Baptist.

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Prepared the way. John the Baptist was more than a prophet not because of his humility or his strange clothing; not because of his riches or poverty, but because he prepared the way for Jesus Christ

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The greatest prophet. Who is the greatest prophet in the Bible? John the Baptist was greater than any other OT prophet, but his greatness was derived from the greatness of Jesus Christ. Who was the greatest OT prophet before John the Baptist? Moses, because unlike with other prophets, God spoke to Moses face to face. (**Num. 12:6-8**) Because a prophet's function is revelatory, his greatness derives from how directly he receives his message from God. In Christ " the Word became flesh " (**John 1:14**), making Christ God's greatest revelation of Himself. John the Baptist's proximity to Christ was greater than any other prophet's, but Christ Himself is the greatest prophet of all.

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The kingdom of God is led by the greatest prophet of all.

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A Greater Position v. 11. It is a kingdom with a greater position. Because they know Christ better than any in the OT, the citizens of Christ's kingdom stand in a greater position than even John the Baptist.

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Text

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11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John

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the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

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Least in the kingdom of heaven. Who is "least in the kingdom of heaven"? Calvin says it is the ministers; teachers, because Jesus compares John to other prophets here. While what Christ says is true of ministers in the New Testament, I cannot see why it is not also true of ordinary members of the church who thereby hold the general offices of prophet, priest, and king. It is more natural to take Jesus' use of the word "

least

" absolutely, meaning the person of lowest position in the kingdom of heaven is still in a greater position than was John. The New Covenant is founded on better promises (

Heb. 8:6

), so it is better to be in the New Covenant than in the Old Covenant, to come after Christ than to come before Christ. "A dwarf upon a mountain sees further than a giant in the valley."

Even the little children in our church have a privilege greater than John the Baptist.

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In Christ's kingdom you are in a greater position than any who have gone before.

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A Greater Power v. 12. It is a kingdom with a greater power.

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Text

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12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

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The meaning of Christ's words here is somewhat difficult to understand, because "has suffered violence" (which assumes the Greek verb is in the passive voice) could also be rendered "is pressing ahead with force" (taking the verb in the middle voice). But Christ's meaning is made very clear by the parallel verse in

Luke 16:16

, which says "

The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

" From the days of John the Baptist until Christ God powerfully advanced His kingdom through the preaching of the gospel, drawing men to Himself mightily so they even sought to force themselves into the kingdom, pushing, grasping, dying to get in. During Christ's ministry hundreds were brought to salvation; in the days of the apostles, thousands; in the history of the church, millions; in heaven an innumerable multitude. In Christ's kingdom there is a greater power than you have ever seen.

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A Greater Revelation vv. 13-14. It is a kingdom with a greater revelation.

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Text

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

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14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

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The "Prophets and the Law" are the OT. The whole OT "prophesied until John." But after John a new and greater revelation came. It was a revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth, in whom the fullness of deity dwells bodily; the image of the invisible God. And we have seen His glory. (

John 1:14; Col. 2:9; 1:15

) This revelation has been written down on the pages of the New Testament, which is a greater revelation than the Old.

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Other than John the Baptist, and other than Moses, who was the greatest prophet in the OT? You would think it was Elijah, because Elijah is so well-known, and appeared with Moses and Christ at His transfiguration. Elijah was truly a great prophet, standing out like a brilliant beam of pure godliness amidst the deepening darkness of the kings of Israel. But the power, and the works, of Elisha were greater than those of Elijah. Elisha asked for and received a "double portion" of

Elijah's spirit (**2 Kings 2:9-12**

). Elisha's miracles were greater. What is more, Elisha was a type of Christ. His name means "God saves;" Jesus means "the Lord saves." Both began their ministry at the Jordan river (2 Kings 2:14; Matt. 3:13-17), raised the dead, cured lepers (2 Kings 4, 5; Is. 35:5-6; 61:1; Matt. 11:2-6), fed multitudes with a few loaves of bread (2 Kings 4:42-44), and raised a dead man who walked out of his tomb alive! (2 Kings 13:21) Though Elijah was first and Elisha was second, Elijah prepared the way for the ministry of Elisha.

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God had promised to send another Elijah in **Malachi 4:5-6**, saying "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.

" Is this not what John the Baptist did? "

If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah to come.

" And that means the greatest prophet, the Lord Himself, and the greatest revelation

of God is now here in the person of Jesus Christ, inscripturated in the pages of the New Testament, proclaimed to you in the gospel of the kingdom by the church and powerfully at work among you by the Holy Spirit.

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A Greater Illumination v. 15. For that reason this kingdom has a greater illumination.

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Text

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15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

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Revelation is God's revealing Himself. Illumination is God taking His revelation and making you understand it by the secret working of His Holy Spirit. The only ones who can receive illumination are those who have "ears to hear"; those whose hearts and minds God opens to receive the saving revelation of His grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ. By giving you a new heart (Ezek. 36:26), so you are born again, God gives you eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand. (Deut. 29:4) "

Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

" (

John 3:3

) Because God does give believers today "

ears to hear,

" we can hear, and our hearts receive a greater illumination--"

the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

" (

2 Cor. 4:6

)

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The Right Response: Repentance & Celebration. What then shall we say to these things? The right response is to repent and to celebrate

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Illustrated vv. 16-17. Christ illustrates this response by comparing those who fail to respond this way to children singing a silly song.

1.

Text

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16 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

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17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

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When you play a happy tune it's time to dance, and when you sing a dirge, it's time to mourn. But nursery rhymes are the strangest thing. "Ring Around the Rosie" is a dirge about the terror of the bubonic plague, but children dance to it! "Rock-A-Bye Baby" is about a baby falling out of a tree. Isn't that crazy? That's the nature of silly songs for children—they are fun because there's something funny about them; something not quite right, and sometimes the kids know it! "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn." You're so silly! When the truth, and beauty, and grace of Christ is revealed, you should dance! When the lie, the ugliness, and evil of your sin is revealed, you should mourn! Do you do this? How do you respond?

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Taught by John's & Jesus' Example vv. 18-19. John's and Jesus' own example show you how you should respond.

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Text

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

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19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

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John taught us what repentance should be—humble yourself before God, fast and mourn, stop feeding your selfish desires, cast off every comfort and pleasure other than the grace of God alone. This is why he wore rough clothing, fasted in the desert, ate locusts for food. His lifestyle fit his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (**Matt. 3:2**) "The axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. " (**Matt**

. 3:10

) Because of the greater prophet, power, position, revelation and illumination of Christ's greater kingdom, do you repent of your sins? Or do you make light of God's command to repent, thinking those who call you to repent are unnecessarily obsessing over a prudish morality?

John's contemporaries said "

He has a demon.

"

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Jesus taught us what godly celebration should be—rejoice in God's grace in salvation and goodness in providence, eat and drink with Christ your Savior, befriend saved and unsaved sinners to bring them God's saving grace. Jesus' lifestyle fit His message: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

" (

Matt. 11:28

) "

Celebrate

the feast of the Lord

" (

Lev. 23:39

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); "
with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

" (

Neh. 12:27

) Out of God's people "
shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who celebrate.

" (

Jer. 30:19

) "
Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore
celebrate
the festival.

" (

1 Cor. 5:7-8

) Because Christ died for you, and for your brothers in Christ, the Prodigal Son's father's words
are for you: "

It [is] fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost,
and is found.

" (

Luke 15:32

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It is good to fast on occasion, but John's austere lifestyle is not the only pattern to follow.
Monasticism should stand up and take notice of this passage.

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Neither is the call to celebrate a license for the flesh to indulge its every desire. Christ's example
was not that He got drunk, but that He did celebrate with wine. He was not a glutton, but He did
rejoice to eat. His wisdom is justified by His deeds. By what He did.

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Conclusion

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He invites you to His banqueting table, and His banner over you is love. What will you do? Will you come? Will you take, and eat, as Christ commands? Will you do it because Christ's kingdom, and Christ, your Savior and your King, is worth celebrating? He says "Do this in remembrance of me.

" (

Luke 22:19

)

Calvin claims the parallel passage in Luke reads "not a greater Prophet than John the Baptist," which lends credence to Calvin's view. I have not yet confirmed whether Calvin follows a textual variant here, but the sources I have available at the moment do not provide this reading, removing the ground on which Calvin's view stands.

Matthew Henry, 152.