

Matthew 11.

Verses 16 – 19, 25 - 30

Written in 1905, opera enthusiasts might be familiar with the opera Salome” in which a performance referred to as the “dance of the Seven veils is performed by Salome before Herod II. It is an elaboration of the biblical story of the execution of John the Baptist.

Yes, an important event, but even more importantly is the historical account of his warnings to the children of Israel to repent from their sins.

Repent, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ You brood of vipers, bear fruit worthy of repentance. Fiery and Fearless, he spoke to power calling out Herod’s immorality and was put in prison for this.

Jesus is poetic about the contrast in their styles.

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

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

*<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’*

*<sup>19</sup> 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.’*

And as far as the eye can see, you would argue that their means of engagement were very different, so much so, that in verse two and three, in his frustration, John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, and I quote “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another”

*We could almost rephrase this as “Hey Jesus” Why are you not doing more?*

Now I do not know, and I cannot know if John was speaking for himself or was reflecting on a bigger picture, but there was a clear gap in what he expected of Jesus.

Here we see a man, whose brother is the supposed Messiah, yet he is under duress, frustrated, a man whose freedoms have been taken away unjustly, arguably oppressed, and impatient with the children of Israel for not turning to God, repenting of their sins, for the kingdom of God was at hand.

I imagine that John’s disciples were just as frustrated at the pace of events, and we must not forget that this sub plot sits within the larger main plot of a national hope in the arrival of a Messiah, probably in the likeness of Moses who would speak to power and deliver them from the oppression of the Romans.

I have sought to highlight the spectrum of feeling that John must have had, that we can identify in our own relationships with each other as Christians (sub plot) and with our society at large. (main plot).

Frustration and pain at sickness, the loss of a loved one, the suffering of physical and emotional abuse.

Yes, you committed a crime, Yes you have done the time, but still would not be accepted into a community, No, you did not commit a crime, but conform, yet by virtue of a system, you are excluded from that community

Christians who are willing to share their gospel with you, but not eat with you.

The unfair exchange, classification and valuation of labour.

Being the vulnerable in corrupt societies that have stripped communities of basic amenities.

The exploitation of our vegetation and our seas, the abduction and exploitation of young men and women for sex, labour

The children who will be born in refugee camps dependent on the mercy of gift aid in exchange for their dignity

And bringing it right here to St Simons, the amount of sore feelings amongst this body of Christ. I personally feel sad and shocked at the manner of Andy's departure. I wish it could have been different.

The list goes on. We should be frustrated at the currency of these conditions.

Jesus answers in verse four – Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and ***the good news is preached to the poor.***

I can only pretend to perceive that this was not the answer they wanted to hear. Jesus even reaches out to them in verse 6: Blessed is he who is not offended because of me. Jesus know that the focus of his ministry was offensive to the expectation of many.

But Jesus wanted to assure both John and his disciples that He was the Messiah. He wanted to remind them that his power would be displayed mostly in humble acts of service, meeting individual needs and getting to the spirit of the matter – something that only the transformational good news of the gospel can accomplish.

Genesis 6 verse 5 says And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually

Jerimiah 17 verse 9 says "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and <sup>[a]</sup>desperately wicked; **Who can know it?**

We see improvements in technology, in the discovery of new medicines, in farming techniques, educational systems, monetary systems, healthcare systems, and despite all this

growth, the rational economic man cannot comprehend “love thy neighbour as thyself”

Jesus says “Go and tell him, that “we preach the gospel to the poor”.

What must we do?

Verse 12 highlights the spiritual battle going on for heart of man. It says that the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. You see there is nothing physical about our existence.

1 Corinthians 2:14

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised

2 Corinthians 4:16

Verse Concepts

Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

We are spirit.

We are SPIRIT and any CHANGE which we cry to God for MUST take place in the spirit. You see this battle ground for the heart is IN THE SPIRIT. Our incessant words of prayer dig at the foundation and the roots of the problem in the SPIRIT. Abuse, sickness, relationships between husband and wife, relationships between parent and children, can, should and how do I forgive?

By consecration, by fasting, we hear GOD clearly, we get better at knowing WHAT to pray for, WHO to pray for and HOW to pray so that as we march around and engage with the spiritual and physical walls of Jericho, the list of frustrations earlier highlighted start to fall down, because the work of SALVATION is working its way through the heart do unto others as you would want done unto you becomes as simple a concept as your breathing in does not negate mine or vice versa.

This method of engagement/REVELATION would have been difficult/and is still difficult to relay to the intellectuals who had too much of their own experience of this world.

Verse 25 says that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes – to the those who had the heart of children to trust and respond to his message of the kingdom.

It also reminds us that if we do respond to Jesus, it is because the father has revealed these things to babes like us.

Verse 28 says come to me, all you who labour and heavy laded, and I will give you rest. Come unto me. To Jesus himself we must come, by a personal trust Not to doctrine, ordinance, or ministry are we to come first, but to the personal saviour. Rest does not mean submission and acceptance of one's fate. On the contrary, REST is JESUS saying let me the GENERAL in whatever you are STRUGGLING with. Like a General, he speaks with AUTHORITY. He says COME! COME!

He says, take my yoke and LEARN from me. Nothing new about the burden of discipline in learning a new skill. The discipline of learning to depend on JESUS and his manner of engagement in the spirit that yields ACTION yet still in the PHYSICAL – but guided by the HOLY SPIRIT.

The yoke/process/learning curve starts to flatten as one progresses as we gain sight of the revelation of how his ways are higher than ours.

There is hope. The Psalmist in Psalm 42 says deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. We recognise that human needs are great, but do not despair. The riches of God are greater. Our wisdom is shallow, but his knowledge and judgements are unsearchable. His love is as deep as his immense heart, as he proved when he gave his only begotten son to die for us. The height, breadth, and depth of God's resources are without measure.

From the depth of his despair, the Psalmist found help in the depth of God's goodness and he was able to say in conclusion, "Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again – my saviour and my God!