

# Matthew 11:1-19 & Isaiah 35: Expectations

Expectations about the army.

## Jewish Expectations – Jesus, are you the One?

Expectations drive a ton of what we do in our lives, the situations we find ourselves in. How we respond to people, how they respond to us, how we interpret events and the different things people say. It all comes back to the expectations that we have in these situations. This means that our interactions with each other are actually really complex because there is so much context behind each action.

Have you entered into a conversation half way through and you have no idea what is going on? It can be dangerous to draw a conclusion from just the section you heard right?

What is important about our passage today is that while this may seem like a single conversation about miracles and John the Baptist, this is actually a much bigger conversation that is being had and so for me it only made sense that we have a look at what this bigger conversation is and then we see how our passage fits into that. We need to try and understand what these people questioning Jesus might be thinking in their context so we can understand why Jesus responds in the way he does. That's why we are starting in the Old Testament.

Israel in the past, the Israel that the Jews would have all had in mind was a one point a great nation under David which you can read about in 2 Samuel. When there was prosperity for God's people. When the people were close with their God through the tabernacle and then through the first temple under Solomon. But something happened. The people of Israel overtime forgot their God, they forgot the great things he had done for them and they turned to false Gods.

600 years before the time of Jesus the Kingdom of Judah (the southern kingdom of Israel) fell to the Babylonian Empire and the Jews, God's people were taken into exile from their homeland this means that the kingdom was destroyed and the people enslaved. This was God's punishment for their idolatry, for their refusal to turn from their wicked ways and it had been predicted by the Prophets. This is when we get texts like the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament set during this time. After 70 years as predicted by the Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 25:11 they returned from exile when the Babylonian Empire was destroyed by the Persians.

But things were not like they were before. They have returned in the hope of rebuilding the kingdom like it was under David. A hope that the kingdom would be restored and they would be a great nation again. This hope and expectation was fuelled by passages from Isaiah such as 61:4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Yet we know from Ezra and Nehemiah that this doesn't happen. We have the nation continually finding itself under the rule of foreign nations which by the time of Jesus is the Romans. You see the Jews who are cruising around in the time of Jesus have all this

tension wrapped up in the way they view the world, the future, and any teacher who comes their way. They are desperate for things to return to how they were before the exile and they expect that it will be greater, a time when those who oppressed them will be judged by God, that he would send a King who would lead them to victory over these foreign oppressors.

But then they see Jesus in Matthew 4-10 and they are confused by what they see. They see a man claiming to be the messiah, to be the one who will save them, the son of man. And he doesn't look like what they were expecting. You see the people are expecting a warrior King. A mighty leader who will gather them and lead them to war against the oppressive powers of the Romans. And so people are confused. John the Baptist, who himself identified Jesus as the Messiah when he baptized Jesus, is confused. So much so that he has sent messengers to ask Jesus, mate, is it you or someone else? Because what you are doing right now doesn't really meet our expectations. They are expecting the coming of God's Kingdom but they are expecting it to come through a warrior Messiah who would judge sinners, not eat with them and take them as disciples. We are waiting for the fulfillment of the hope that we have, the hope that we cling to that things will be good for God's people again. <sup>2</sup>When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus, are you the one?

### Jesus fulfils expectation

<sup>4</sup>Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

I'm hoping that you noticed a distinct similarity between our two Bible readings when this part was read out. Matt 11:4-6 sounds suspiciously similar to Isaiah 35:5-6. Isaiah 35 is a beautiful passage. Jesus is saying to John's messengers and to the other Jews who are there. You remember the promised restoration of the Kingdom in the prophet Isaiah? Look around you, what do you see. You see the promises of God being fulfilled you see the indication that the restoration is beginning all around you, the Kingdom of Heaven is coming, repent and believe. Except he wouldn't have needed to say Isaiah, in response to his words they all would have thought of it instantly because this prophecy was so wrapped up in their culture. Jesus is explaining that the proof is in what they can see around them.

But if the crowd is not convinced Jesus turns to them and continues. In spite of the doubts he held, John the Baptist himself is a further demonstration that the Kingdom is coming. Jesus quotes from the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi. Malachi 3:1 says 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' John the Baptist, himself probably not even realizing, was a fulfillment of Prophecy. Matthew continues in verse 12 <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. To the crowd Jesus is saying, all the violence that has occurred, the despair of God's people, you know it was predicted to come to an end when the messenger came ahead of the Messiah, well there he

is John the Baptist and now I have come. Look at the prophecies and look at my actions. The kingdom is coming now.

Jesus makes an observation of his own Matt 11:18-19 says <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.' Just as the people have rejected John the Baptist so too people will reject him. Just as those in the Old Testament rejected God at the cost of the exile, people now will also reject him. They see Jesus reaching out to those who they think are beneath them, who they think are worthy of the judgment of God not his salvation and they think there no way that the coming Messiah would do this. And its so frustrating to watch. I look at this part of Matthew 11 and look at the Old Testament and I'm like what are you doing Jews, isn't it so clear to you that the Kingdom of heaven is coming to you through Jesus. He is even pointing it out to them, in scriptures that they all have a deep knowledge of. Anyone else frustrated?

## Jesus Corrects Expectations

This stuff is important for us because it not only explains what the Jews are thinking but it demonstrates to us that Jesus is the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture written hundreds of years before he was born. But this passage isn't simply about saying Jesus is here hooray. If you were looking closely at our first reading you would have noticed that before all the parts about the blind and deaf there is some solid stuff about divine retribution and vengeance. This is the part that John the Baptist and others like him are focused on. Jesus first explains through his actions of healing the deaf and blind that this passage is coming to fulfilment but he also corrects their expectation of judgement.

Look at the last half of verse 5 and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. That part isn't from Isaiah 35 it is from Isaiah 61 which is up on the screen now. The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. Jesus also uses this passage in Luke 4 to refer to himself. Before judgement comes on sin Jesus has come to proclaim the good news but not to those who they expected. Not the rich and religious, but the poor, the broken hearted, those who are being held captive to sin. That the Kingdom of heaven is coming repent and believe. Radically Jesus does not bring down the hammer on those who are far from God but instead extends the hand, brings the Good news and sharing a meal which in Jewish Culture was a hugely intimate thing. Vs 6 sees Jesus affirm to John the blessing that will come on those who accept him as Messiah even though he does not look as they expect.

In response to this I want to encourage us and I want to challenge us as we live to be and make disciples of Jesus.

## Encouragement

Just like those in the passage we need to think about what we make of Jesus.

If you are a Christian I want to encourage you, this passage is fantastic because as Jesus reassures John and the other Jews who were there he is simultaneously reassuring us and demonstrating who he is through the use of Old Testament Scripture. He is saying look this prediction, these prophecies they are coming true, I am the promised one I am here now. Rejoice. The Son of God has come to save and restore the world. Be his disciples. Follow him, he has proven who he is, that he is the King worth following. Therefore, all the predictions that come through Isaiah of restoration of the kingdom of heaven are coming true through him as he deals with judgment by paying for our sin with his life.

If you are not a Christian just yet, this passage is telling you that Jesus has come to set you free from sin and that judgment is not for you if you would accept his message and repent and believe. Judgment instead would be carried by Jesus later in Matthew on the cross as he himself takes the judgment as a substitution for those who believe. He came first to teach and provide the opportunity for us to repent before then acting on the judgment himself. That's what Isaiah 61 was talking about but they didn't know it until Jesus did it. The restoration of the world comes through a Messiah who sacrifices himself for his people. That is the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus in this passage by identifying himself through Isaiah is providing us with the assurance that if we follow him we are on the right side. He is the one who wins the victory and who leads us into the Kingdom of Heaven.

### Challenge

There are a couple of challenges for us in this.

Can our expectations of Jesus lead us to be like the Jews in that we have this box that we want Jesus to fit in and then we get annoyed when he doesn't? The problem is when we take our expectations to Jesus and try and put him in a box we are never going to like the outcome. Jesus criticizes the Jews in vs 16-19 for not taking him or John seriously in their preaching despite the fact that sometimes they were doing opposite things. John would excessively fast as a way of delivering himself from the temptations of gluttony, instead of being challenged by him they hated him for being different. The fact is Jesus just couldn't win with some of the Jews, they would criticize him for not eating like John or as was the case they instead criticized him for eating too much. They are childish and demanding, which I think we are at risk of in our expectations of Jesus when we try to force them onto him. They weren't interested in the teaching they just wanted him to be what they wanted. And that is a big problem we need to make sure we avoid. We can't take some of being a follower of Jesus but not the rest. We all have the things that don't fit into the box, maybe its generosity, sexual purity, maybe its Jesus call to love those who you find difficult or awkward, maybe its sharing your faith with your friends and family? Jesus teaching challenges us and we need to meet that challenge and follow his teachings. Not reject the teachings that we don't like or don't meet our expectations. That's what being a disciple is.

The second challenge comes from his speech about John. <sup>11</sup> 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. Jesus is saying that up until this point John is the greatest of the prophets but now that the Kingdom has come and we see the truth of the Messiah, which we know will be fully demonstrated through his death and resurrection, our message is greater than his could ever have been because we

are able to share the truth of the Gospel in its fullness and therefore have a strong responsibility to do so. We have the advantage of seeing the full truth, the completeness of how Jesus fulfills the promises of the prophets and therefore have the greatest message that could be shared. That's why here at Churchatthepeak we share the good news of Jesus because it is the greatest message anyone could receive. That's what making disciples looks like.

Today we have seen the beautiful way that the Bible hangs together as Jesus calls upon the Old Testament to prove his identity and to correct expectations of his mission. We see that he is the one we should follow, that he deals with the judgment deserved by sinners, and that the Kingdom of God is for all who accept it. I'd like to end with the final verse of our first reading today, and the image of the Kingdom of heaven it gives us.

They will enter Zion with singing;  
    everlasting joy will crown their heads.  
Gladness and joy will overtake them,  
    and sorrow and sighing will flee away.