

Matthew 11:11-19: Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who 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 suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁶ "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ "'We played the flute 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, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Intro: Last week we saw John the Baptist had doubts & questions about the true identity of Jesus. Jesus reported evidence to John's disciples showing **Who He is**, the Messiah, the very LORD & God that John prepared the way for. **Who is Jesus?** Is the most important question we could ever ask & answer. Jesus spent some time in our text last week defending John, & declaring John's true identity. Jesus continues to speak to us about John the Baptist today, but in a way that points to Himself as the greatest of all. Again: **Who Christ is, is the main thing!**

1. John The Baptist Is The Greatest Man Born Of Women

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

John was greater than Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha, All Prophets! John was greater than Mary!

John MacArthur: John was great in 6 ways: 1) He obeyed God's Word; 2) He was filled with the Holy Spirit; 3) He was self-controlled; 4) He was humble; 5) He preached God's Word; 6) He won people to Christ

But others before John did acts like this too. So what makes John the greatest man born of a woman?

D. A. Carson: He is greater in that he alone of all the prophets was the forerunner who prepared the way for Yahweh-Jesus and personally pointed him out.

John is the last prophet before the final prophet came – Who is more than a prophet! John is the prophet who is prophesied about because he's announcing that the One Who fulfills all prophecy has come! **John 1:29!**

2. The Least In The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Greater Than John

Matthew 11:11: Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

How is the least in the kingdom greater than John? France: The issue here is not John's personal salvation, but his place in the scheme of salvation history. For all his crucial role as herald of the kingdom of heaven, John (together with all the prophets & godly people of the OT) belongs essentially to the old era, not the new.

D. A. Carson: [John] was the greatest of the prophets because he pointed most unambiguously to Jesus. Nevertheless, even the least in the kingdom is greater yet because, living after the crucial revelatory & [end time] events have occurred [death/resurrection], he or she points to Jesus still more unambiguously than John the Baptist.

The apostles and you have seen Jesus' ministry! You have seen His death and resurrection! You have not just foretold it, you have seen it accomplished! You have Christ dwelling in you by His Spirit!

D. A. Carson: Even the least in the kingdom points to Jesus Christ more clearly than all his predecessors, not excluding John. For they either live through the tumultuous events of the ministry, passion, and beyond, after which things are much clearer; or they enter the kingdom after these events, with the same clear understanding.

Greatness is determined by how much you know and see clearly about Jesus and how clearly and immediately you point to Jesus! In other words, it's all about Jesus! Jesus is the greatest! Greatness revolves all around Him!

You are greater than Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Ruth, Esther, Deborah, Daniel, Elijah, Elisha, All Prophets! Because you know more about Jesus, are closer to Jesus, and **can point to Jesus!**

James Boice: Your greatness is because of Christ and your opportunity to point to him, not because of what you are yourself. D. A. Carson wrote: "So often Christians want to establish their 'greatness' with reference to their work, their giving, their intelligence, their preaching, their gifts, their courage, their discernment. But Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed that even the least believer is greater than Moses or John the Baptist, simply because of his or her ability, living on this side of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, to point Him out with greater clarity and understanding than all His forerunners ever could. If we really believe this truth, it will dissipate all cheap vying for position and force us to recognize that our true significance lies in our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Matt. 13:16-17: blessed are your eyes, for they see, & your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets & righteous people longed to see what you see, & did not see it, & to hear what you hear, & did not hear it.

3. The Kingdom Of Heaven Has Suffered Violence (Force) Or It Advances Violently (Forcefully)

Matthew 11:12: From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

There are two ways interpreters understand this verse: 1) The ESV translation: "Suffered violence" is a passive verb. The kingdom of heaven has violence done to it and the violent who try to take it by force are wicked men who persecute those who trust the LORD and follow Jesus. (D. A. Carson & Leon Morris prefer this view)

This is certainly true. Jesus has told us a lot so far in Matthew's Gospel about His people suffering for His sake. In the context, John the Baptist is in prison for his faithfulness to the LORD – violence is being done toward him.

2) But notice there is a footnote in the ESV: "Or has been coming violently" So "suffered violence" can be taken as a middle verb with an active tense, meaning the kingdom of heaven has been violently coming (or coming with force) and the violent are those who are righteous and are striving, fighting, and laboring to enter into the kingdom. This is how the NIV translates the verse: **Matthew 11:12:** From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. (Hendriksen, Ligon Duncan)

Biblically speaking, this is also true: **Matthew 13:45-46:** Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Luke 13:24: Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

The world, the flesh, & the devil don't want you to enter the kingdom! It's war! Think of how you came to Christ!

William Hendriksen: The kingdom, says Jesus, ever since the days of John's first appearance upon the scene has been pressing forward vigorously, forcefully. It is doing so now, as is clear from the fact that sick are being healed, lepers cleansed, the dead raised, sinners converted to everlasting life, all this now as never before. Still, by no means everybody is entering. Many, very many, even now are refusing and resisting. But vigorous or forceful men, people who dare to break away from faulty human tradition and to return to the Word in all its purity, no matter what be the cost to themselves, such individuals are eagerly taking possession of the kingdom; that is, in their hearts and lives that kingship or reign of God and of Christ is being established. What Jesus here emphasizes is that one cannot sleep his way into the kingdom. On the contrary, entrance into the kingdom requires earnest endeavor, untiring energy, utmost exertion.

Daniel Doriani: I believe it best to see the passage as a riddle that uses word play to present both messages. We know Jesus is fond of riddles and word play. Further, Matthew 11:14-15 implies that the passage is a riddle (“He who has ears . . .”). Therefore, Jesus lets one family of words have two distinct meanings – violence or force – even though they stand in close juxtaposition.

4. John The Baptist Is The Elijah Who Is To Come

Matthew 11:13-15: For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John,¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

a. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John: 1) All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John and they too were violently attacked: Matthew 23:29-30: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'

2) All the Prophets and the Law prophesied and went forward forcefully proclaiming God's truth until John, and the faithful remnant seized God's truth and believed it: Jacob seized God's truth – the Angel of the LORD – and would not let Him go until God blessed him. Elijah seized God's truth: **1 Kings 19:14, 18:** “the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” . . .¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.

b. All the Prophets and the Law prophesied: Luke 24:27, 44-45: beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself . . .⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures

c. V. 14: and if you are willing to accept it, [John the Baptist] is the Elijah who is to come: Malachi 3:1: Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. **Luke 1:17:** in the spirit and power of Elijah

Context: Israel has been faithless and rebellious. There is a messenger coming who will prepare Israel for the day of the LORD. He will prepare them for that day by purifying sinners and by judging sinners.

- **Malachi 4:5:** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.
- **Matthew 11:14:** . . . and if you are willing to accept it, he [John the Baptist] is Elijah who is to come.

Prepare the way before me: who's the “me?”: God! John is coming to prepare the way for God in the flesh: Jesus

Isaiah 40:3: A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the **LORD**; make straight in the desert a highway for **our God**.”

Context: Israel is in captivity because of their sin, & in Isaiah 40-55, God is telling Israel there will be a new Exodus out of the Babylonian captivity & out of their idol worship into a restored relationship with God Himself!

If God does not dwell with us, we have no hope! We need the presence of God with us: **Exodus 33:15:** And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

John the Baptist prepared the way for God to come to be present with His people: for Jesus to come! Jesus is God!

d. V. 15: He who has ears to hear, let him hear: Acts 16:14: One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

5. The Spiritual Blindness Of Jesus' Generation

Matthew 11:16-19: But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ¹⁷ "We played the flute 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, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

a. Jesus compares this generation to fickle, unsatisfied, discontent, stubborn children: This generation (those alive to receive the Messiah – **John 1:11:** He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.), they are like children who refuse to accept anything. Let's play wedding and dance for joy! "No!" OK, Let's play funeral, and you can be the dead person! "No!"

God sent John the Baptist, calling people to repent: the people said no! God sent Jesus, going to a wedding, turning water into wine, eating with tax collectors and sinners, preaching grace, mercy, and forgiveness – and repentance: the people said no! It doesn't matter what form God's message comes – the people say no! Unbelief says no!

Luke 16:27-31: And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house - ²⁸ for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Jeremias: But all you do is to give orders and criticize. For you, the Baptist is a madman because he fasts, while you want to make merry; me you reproach because I eat with publicans, while you insist on strict separation from sinners. You hate the preaching of repentance, and you hate the proclamation of the gospel. So you play your childish game with God's messengers while Rome burns!

b. Unbelievers will lie about and slander those who live and speak the truth: V. 18-19: 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, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ("Are you gay friendly?" question)

c. The Son of Man: Reveals (The God-Man Messiah, Daniel 7:13-14); **Conceals** (Truly man, humble)

d. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds: Those who have true wisdom (fear the LORD) are shown to be truly wise by their actions. Both John and Jesus are vindicated by their own good works. Jesus is the very wisdom of God! **1 Corinthians 1:23-24:** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Craig Blomberg: 1) The joyful message of forgiveness should be freely celebrated and not dampened by legalistic restrictions; 2) The solemn message of repentance should not be ignored but taken with seriousness; 3) The truth of both of these principles will be demonstrated by those who implement them.

Jesus is the King of the Kingdom Who suffered the greatest violence from the most evil men. And He is the King Who forcefully advanced & took the kingdom by force: the force of laying down His life. & He rose & will return!

Christ Jesus Makes The Least The First
John's The Greatest He Immersed
The King Of Glory Heaven Burst
Yet Those Who Know Christ As The Cursed
Who Died And Rose And Death Reversed
Are Greater Still Than John Who First

Announced The Lamb Of God Outburst
To Mock And Slander Is The Worst
Let Every Hindrance Be Traversed
And Come To Christ And For Him Thirst
In All His Ways And Words Be Versed
For He's Our All And Always First!