

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

MATTHEW 9:14 – 11:15

Did you hear about the blind guy who walks into the pharmacy with his seeing-eye dog? He picks up the dog by the hind legs and starts swinging it around.

The storekeeper runs over and shouts, “*What are you doing?*”

The blind man replies, “*No big deal. I’m just looking around?*”

In Matthew 9:27 we run into two blind men who are looking for Jesus...

Verse 27, “*When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"*”

These two men were blind physically but spiritually their eyes were wide open. They knew *who it was* they were dealing with, and *what it was* they wanted...

They call Jesus “*Son of David*” – another name for the Messiah of Israel.

And they plead for “*mercy*” not justice. They aren't trying to barter their good works for God’s blessing! Their only hope is for Jesus to “*have mercy!*”

It reminds me of the blind guy at the ballgame. He yells to his buddy, “*Want to hear a blonde joke?*” His friend whispers, “*You need to know, three 250 pound blonde X-football players are behind us. And the two women in front of*

us are blonde, black belts in karate... *Do you still want to tell that blonde joke?*"

He replies, "No, not if I've got to explain it 5 times." Here's a blind man in need of mercy... Our relationship with God is all about mercy. These blind men saw it!

"And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Here's *the declaration of faith*. Here are two words that'll transform a life. "Yes, Lord." Say "Yes Lord" to Jesus tonight, and you're eyes will be opened.

Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened." Once they believed, Jesus gave them their sight.

Spurgeon put it, "He touched them with His hand; but they must also touch Him with their faith." The same is true spiritually. Our spiritual darkness to God's truth is the result of our unbelief – not its cause. Trust God and you're eyes will be opened.

"And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "See that no one knows it."

This is what Jesus told the leper in chapter 8... He tries to muzzle a miracle.

The miraculous can produce a mass hysteria. Jesus didn't want the crowd to turn into a mob and violate His intentions. This is an attempt at crowd control.

Yet verse 31 tells us. "But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country." When Jesus

opens your eyes you got to tell somebody!

“As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed.” Notice, physical disease can be caused by demonic forces.

You've heard the expression, "the cat's got his tongue" - here “a demon had his tongue.” Usually disease is caused by germs, or bacteria, or viruses, or congenital defects - but in this case the man's speech impediment was the result of a demon.

And the Great Physician had the right diagnosis. “And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke... And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!" The *many* and *might* of these miracles overwhelmed the people who witnessed them. The power of Jesus was unprecedented.

“But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons.”

This is the first time the Jews try to discredit the miracles of Jesus as the work of the devil - *but it's not the last*. Jesus addresses this argument in chapter 12.

Verse 35 “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom...” Here's an entry out of Jesus' Outlook. He was a very busy man. He was tirelessly on the move.

“And healing every sickness and every disease among the people...”

Notice, Jesus healed “every sickness and every disease.”

No disease was beyond His ability to heal. No person left His presence disappointed.

In 1994 four winners of the Wisconsin state lottery bought their ticket in the same town. All four winning tickets were purchased on Main Street in the tiny northeastern town of Fond du Lac. The winnings totaled \$256 million.

The next year the shops on Main Street experienced a huge surge in business. People were driving from all over Wisconsin to buy a lotto ticket on Main Street.

This was the kind of atmosphere surrounding Jesus. Folks from all over Galilee were flocking to Jesus - seeking the big prize - everyone was leaving a winner!

Verse 36 “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd...”

Jesus wasn't *put out* by the crowds - or *put off* by their immaturity.

When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion. Jesus *put Himself* in their shoes. He had love and empathy. He wanted to help them.

“Then (Jesus) said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” This is still an accurate analysis. People today are hungry for God. Opportunities abound. The harvest is still ripe - both at home and abroad.

The reason for the low yield is not a slim crop - but the lack

of laborers.

We need pickers - who see the multitudes through the eyes of Jesus – not just folks with compassion, but people “**moved with compassion.**” We need Christians in this church – with a heart for the harvest – who are willing to get involved.

Chapter 10, “**And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.**” Notice, whom *Jesus calls He equips.*

We’re never sent out unarmed. We’re always *deeded* what’s *needed*.

For this particular mission the disciples needed supernatural power to heal and deliver. When we need the same – Jesus will make such power available to us.

Remember at the end of chapter 9 Jesus prays for people to work the harvest – *pickers*. Now He *picks* them. He chooses 12 men who've been walking with Him.

Don't overlook this point. When Jesus has a special mission He doesn't call in outside experts. He picks from among people who've been walking with Him and spending time with Him. Here He chooses 12 men from among His followers.

And note the disciples are listed in pairs. Jesus will send them out two by two.

“**Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James**

the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”

Notice in verse 1 when these men are picked Jesus calls them “disciples,” but when Jesus sends them out He calls them, “apostles.” “Disciple” means “learner.” Whereas “Apostle” means “sent out one, or emissary, or ambassador...”

No matter how long you follow Jesus you never stop being a disciple.

We're all learners, but you can be a *learner* and never become an apostle. You can learn, learn, learn... and never step out and use what you've been taught.

Once, a Spanish galleon was adrift at sea. Another ship spotted it and boarded what they thought was a deserted boat. Once on board a man was found. He was unconscious and dehydrated. Over the next several days his rescuers fed him and nursed him back to health. When he revived, his lips began to move.

They heard him whisper, “There is another man. There is another man!” The saved man’s first thoughts were about the other man in the same predicament.

This should be the case with every Christians. There’s another man in the same boat. He lives on your street, or works in your office. It’s not enough for you to go to heaven. Will you take someone with you? *Disciples* need to become *apostles*.

Of the 12 disciples, the leader of the pack was **Peter** - the fisherman. This was the guy with the foot-shaped mouth... Peter's philosophy was: "ready, fire, aim..."

Three times in the Gospels we see Peter's little brother, **Andrew** – and each time he's bringing someone to Jesus... He brought Peter to the Lord.

James and **John** "the sons of thunder" were the guys with the short fuse. They both had an explosive temper. They wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans.

Philip was the inquisitive disciple. He was not afraid to express his doubts.

Bartholomew, who's other name was *Nathaniel*, was cynical by nature. He was the man who wondered out loud, "how can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Matthew was a tax collector – a Roman collaborator - a traitor to the Jews.

James the son of Alphaeus - and *Lebbaeus*, whose surname was **Thaddaeus**, are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. They're the biblical unknowns.

Simon was a zealot. He was a political radical who hated the Romans. He advocated violence and murder in the Jews resistance to Rome.

Finally, **Judas** is the man who later betrays Jesus.

What an odd collection of leaders to lean on. Jesus picks them from all ends of the spectrum. Teaming up Matthew, a Roman collaborator, with Simon, a Jewish patriot was like putting a Black Panther and a KKK member together.

Jesus picked fishermen, common-folk. There's no VIP or rich kid in the bunch.

And speaking of odd collections, just look around. We too come from all ends of the spectrum – we too are simple folk - yet Jesus wants to use us together!

In the next verses Jesus gives instruction to those He picks and empowers. He teaches His disciples *how to conduct ministry* and *what to expect from the world*.

Here's chapter 10 in 5 "Ps" – **pairs, priorities, persecution, protection, passion.**

Verse 5 **"These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.**

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Here are their priorities. They need to reach out to the Jews first. Paul tells us in Romans 1 the Gospel is to be preached first to the Jew, and then to the Greek.

Here's a riddle, **"How do you eat an elephant?"** Answer, **"One bite at a time."**

The same is true when it comes to winning the world for Jesus. The world has vast spiritual needs – where do we start! Our mission can seem overwhelming – that's why we need personal vision for what we're to do. We have to prioritize.

Verse 7 **"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"**

The Greek word translated “preach,” is the word “caruso.” One of the all-time great opera singers was a famous tenor named Enrico Adams (I mean “Caruso”).

Enrico Caruso could stand 15 feet from a glass, and shatter it with his voice.

Of course, I can stand 15 feet from a congregation of people and damage their hearing for life. “Caruso” is the name of a famous tenor - and for the quality of our preaching. We should *preach* like Caruso sang! *Clearly, beautifully, forcefully!*

Jesus tells the 12 disciples in verse 8, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Every Christian ministry should be supernatural *charged* – and never *charge*.

The purpose of the church is not to make money. It’s to preach, heal, cleanse, resurrect, and cast out demons! This is why we’ve never charged for CDs. Clearly, money is needed - but our goal is to *cover costs* - not *make a profit*. Sadly, the attitude, “freely receive, freely give” - is the real miracle in some ministries.

“Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.”

Jesus is telling us, we don't need to take a lot of stuff with us when we serve Him. We should travel light and trust Jesus for the provisions we need.

Rather than charge, a pastor should depend on the generosity of the people to whom he ministers. “A worker is

worthy of his food.” If a pastor is faithful to preach *the Bread of Life* then a congregation should be faithful to provide *his daily bread*.

Verse 11, “Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.” Don't go bouncing around looking for the best deal.

Say you're on a mission trip to Mexico. You stay at the Gomez house one night, but you hear the Rodriguez' have a hot-tub – so you move to their house the next night. Hey, when you're on a mission for God, be content with what He provides.

“And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.” Shaking the dust off your feet is a way of relinquishing responsibility. It's a sign that you're moving on.

Jesus is saying don't waste your time with a person who doesn't want to listen.

There are plenty of people who do. There are times for persistence, but there are other times when we need to move on – and not get bogged down.

Verse 15, “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” It's a sober statement, but those who reject our witness of Jesus will be judged by God.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves." In the animal world wolves are natural predators of sheep. "A wolf likes *nuttin'* quite like *mutton*."

And the same is true in the spiritual realm. If you're one of God's sheep you'll be despised and attacked for no reason. The hatred is inbred. There's no winning them over. There are spiritual wolves who like nothing more than to devour sheep.

Thus Jesus says, "Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Every Christian should be harmless, but heads-up – savvy, but unthreatening.

It would seem snakes have a horrible disadvantage - no arms or legs. They crawl on their bellies. They're always shedding skin... yet they do a good job of survival. A snake knows how to hide and stay out of the way of danger.

A Christian also needs some street-smarts. We can't be gullible and survive.

And it helps to be harmless. Hostility only draws hostility. Certainly, don't be a coward, but if you're as harmless as a dove you'll avoid unnecessary conflict.

Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, broke baseball's color barrier, when he signed Jackie Robinson as the first black major leaguer.

Before he signed Jackie, Branch Rickey spent 3 hours describing to him the abuse and threats - the cursing and shouting - he would receive. Then he said, "I want a ballplayer with guts enough NOT to fight back. You will symbolize a crucial cause. One incident, just one incident,

can set it back twenty years."

Jackie Robinson promised there would be no incident. He played as smart as a serpent, but was as harmless as a dove - and he won a great victory. Jesus has called you and I to use our heads – to fight evil with good and hatred with love!

“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.” His men should expect persecution from both religious and civil authorities – in the synagogues and before governors.

And here's the reason God allows us to be persecuted: **opposition produces opportunity!** The disciples will be scourged and suffer for Jesus' sake, but in the process they'll have some amazing opportunities to declare the Gospel.

When Paul went before the Roman governor of Palestine he could've been set free, but he appealed his case to Caesar. He wanted to preach to the Emperor.

Paul was given an all-expense paid trip to the capitol of the world - courtesy of the Roman government. It was a scary proposition, but a marvelous opportunity.

To the disciples the *cause* was more important than their *comfort*.

What about us? Are we willing to be opposed if it creates opportunity to speak for Jesus? What's more important, your *relaxation* or someone's *salvation*?

Jesus continues, **“But when they deliver you up, do not**

worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

This is a tremendous comfort! We should always be as prepared as possible to speak for God, but in moments when it's impossible to prepare the Holy Spirit will provide us supernatural recall. He'll be there with the right words at the right time.

“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.”

Persecution will become fierce. It'll cut across family lines. “And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”

Tradition tells us what happened to the twelve disciples.

Only one, the Apostle **John**, died of natural causes. And that was only after the Emperor Domitian tried to boil him in boiling oil. God miraculously delivered him.

Peter was crucified in Rome on an upside down cross.

James was beheaded in Jerusalem.

Andrew was crucified in Greece on a cross in the shape of an "X".

Philip was hanged in Asia Minor.

Bartholomew or *Nathaniel* was skinned alive and beheaded in Armenia.

Matthew was slain with a sword in Ethiopia.

Thomas was impaled with a lance while he was preaching

in India.

The other **James** was thrown from the Jewish Temple and stoned to death.

Thaddaeus was shot with arrows in Mesopotamia.

And **Simon** the Zealot was attacked by a mob near the Persian Gulf.

Jesus tells them, “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.

For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” There’s an urgency to reach the cities of Israel.

Israel will be ravished and Jerusalem sacked by the Romans in 70 AD.

Jesus knew of this coming judgment, and He encourages His disciples to make the cities of Israel their priority. They won’t have until the end of the age to reach their own villages - only a few short years. This is why in verse 5 Jesus told His disciples not to go to the Gentiles on this mission, but only to the Jews.

Verse 24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” The word “Beelzebub” means “lord of the flies”.

It was the name of a Philistine god. The Philistines lived in an area that is known today as the Gaza strip, an area that is still heavily infested with flies.

By the time of Jesus “Beelzebub” had become a name for Satan.

Since Jesus' enemies refused to acknowledge that His power was from God they had no other alternative than to say it was from Satan.

Jesus warns His disciples, *"If the Master has been slandered, you can be sure those who follow in His footsteps will receive the same treatment."* If they crucified Jesus don't think they're going to *coronate* you... *Don't expect a bed of roses.*

Did you know, *"The life expectancy of the average American male is 72 years-old - whereas the life expectancy of a former NFL lineman is 54 years old..."*

Life in the trenches takes its toll. The constant pounding makes for early exits.

Likewise, many saints through the centuries have spent lifetimes of suffering and persecution for the sake of Jesus – and have died premature deaths.

In light of the sacrifice of Jesus, and the apostles, and the saints through the ages, we should be ashamed when a little persecution comes your way - and we whine and sniffle. Its time we grew up. Persecution is part of the Christian life.

“Therefore do not fear them.” It’s been said, *“The man who fears God has no other fears. The man who refuses to fear God is frightened by everything.”*

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.” When persecution occurs – and you’re falsely accused – and insulted and slandered - don't start squawking, "It's unfair. It's unfair." Of course it's unfair.

All persecution is unfair. The cross of Jesus was certainly unfair.

But in the end all that's hidden will be known. Your reputation will be vindicated, evil will be exposed, truth will be told - in the meantime be patient and courageous.

"Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. The truths Jesus taught them around the campfire - that were learned in private – are now the message He wants broadcast to the world.

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Fear God – not man.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.” A Roman "assarion" was about 1/16th of a "denarii." And a "denarii" was a day's wage for the poorest worker.

In other words, one “copper coin” – the price of two sparrows – amounted to a half hour's wage at a minimum salary. These sparrows sold for pennies, yet they were of incredible value to God. Jesus tells us, *heaven monitors the smallest sparrow's flight pattern*. When it drops to the ground – God is served notice.

Here's the point, if God takes such interest in sparrows how much more is He concerned for us. He'll be with us if we're persecution. He'll never forsake us.

“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Did you know a redhead has approximately 90,000 hairs? A brunet has 110,000 hairs - a blonde 140,000 hairs.

The lighter the color the more individual hairs...

The average woman loses 100 hairs a day.

The average man shaves a layer of beard about 1/64th of an inch in length.

That might not seem like much, but it adds up - between the ages of 20 and 65 a man shaves 23 feet of beard. Yet Jesus says God keeps track of every strand.

God is aware and interested in the minutest details of our lives.

He loves us intimately and personally. When persecution comes don't assume you've been abandoned. To the contrary, God loves you. He watches over you!

“Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." We all should go public with our faith.

Fail to speak out for Jesus and Jesus will refuse to speak out for you.

There are different ways to deny Jesus... You can deny Him by what you say - by what you don't say - by what you do - and by what you don't do. If we stand up for Jesus He'll stand up for us - but if you deny Jesus, He promises to deny you!

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' There is great unity *in Christ*.

But there's great division *over Christ*. The call to follow Jesus is a knife that severs allegiances and relationships – it pierces families and friendships.

The cross becomes a line in the sand that divides the closest families.

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” If we want to follow Jesus our love for Him has to transcend our deepest natural affections.

Do you love Jesus more than you love your parents? But Jesus gets even more challenging... *Do you love Him more than your own child?* You should.

“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”

The cross was invented by the Romans as a sign of complete subjugation to the authority of Rome. The cross was a tool of humiliation. The sight of a cross spoke of Rome's

mastery over people. Everyone bowed to the will of Rome.

This is what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus... I'm bowing all that I am – giving all that I've got – to the will and authority of Jesus the Lord.

Each decade seems to have its own theme... the **60s**, was **find yourself**... the **70s**, was **improve yourself**... the **80s**, **indulge yourself**... the **90s**, was **excuse yourself**... but Jesus says to every decade, and all ages, **“deny yourself.”**

I hope you'll deny yourself tonight – take up your cross and follow Jesus!

Verse 39, **“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”** Lay down *your* life and you'll take up *the wonderful life of Jesus*.

Hold on to *your* life and you'll empty it of any sense of joy and goodness.

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Jesus is sending His disciples out two by two. When someone shows them a kindness in a sense they're showing Jesus that same kindness.

“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.” Support someone's ministry, and you share in their reward.

“And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” It doesn't take much to

win heaven's reward. Just a cup of cold water – served in a way that brings glory to God – wins an eternal reward.

Chapter 11, “Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His 12 disciples that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent 2 of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

At the time John was a jailbird in the Alcatraz of ancient Israel – the iron fortress of Marcherus. This was a maximum security, lock-down prison - surrounded by the scorching heat of the Dead Sea basin. It may've been the worst prison in history.

John had been arrested for exposing the adultery of King Herod.

John knew that Jesus was the Son of God.

On the banks of the Jordan he'd pointed to Jesus, and declared to his disciples... "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

But now John is in prison. His faith is being tested. If *Jesus* is the Messiah why is *John* in jail? The Old Testament said Messiah will set the captives free. John starts to wonder, if Jesus is the Messiah, why he doesn't arrange a jailbreak.

This brings up an important observation... *Where we're at* often influences our view of *who Jesus is!* It's easy to believe Jesus is King of kings when we're on top of the world, but what about when the world is kicking the stuffing out of us?

The same doubts and questions that tortured John may've swirled through your mind from time to time, "Is Jesus the One, or do we look for another?"

“Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Jesus is saying, "Don't let your pain distort the facts." Pain has a way of creating confusion, and clouding our perspective, and obscuring the truth.

When we're hurting it's hard to look beyond our own pain, and see God clearly - Who He is, and what He's done. Jesus' solution for John is Scripture. He reminds John of Isaiah's prophecies – “the blind see and the lame walk...” He's saying, "Look beyond your own situation. Examine what I'm doing in light of Scripture."

Here's good advice. The cure for *my doubt* is *God's Word*. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Focus on *His Word* – not *your pain*.

Just because Jesus isn't busy with what you think He should be doing, doesn't mean Jesus isn't who He says He is! Pain - and the self-pity it produces - warps our perspective and causes us to jump to the wrong conclusions.

Jesus adds, “And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” Some folks follow Jesus - *just as long as He jumps when they say jump*.

A blessed and happy person accepts that Jesus has His

own agenda. *He calls the shots.* You shouldn't feel letdown or disappointed when Jesus takes a right, and you expected Him to turn left. We're following Him. He's not following us.

Verse 7 “As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? Jesus reminds the crowd of John's courage. *He was a wind that shook the reeds.*

“But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? John was rough and rugged compared to the pampered Pharisees. “Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.” John came out of the wilderness.

“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: (And here Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1)

'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.' John was the Messiah's forerunner who was predicted by Malachi.

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist..." What a testimony to John's character, and love for God... What a boost to a dejected John suffering in the belly of a prison...

Look back in verse 7 - Jesus spoke these words, “as they departed.” John's disciples took these words back to John. Jesus loved him, and encouraged Him.

Jesus didn't condemn John for his honest doubts - rather He reinforced John's faithfulness. This is how Jesus treats all His

servants in moments of doubt.

Jesus also says in reference to John, “**he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**” John lived under the Old Covenant. He was a moral man, an honest man, a sincere man - more so than any other man born of a woman - but he was a miserable sinner compared to a man who is born again of God’s Spirit.

Under the New Covenant we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit - we’re given a new nature - we have God’s righteousness and the mind of Christ. Such blessing elevates the lowest Christian above the greatest Old Testament saint. Amazing!

Verse 12 “**And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.**” The Gospel is not a gentle dew that settles on the ground and leaves it undisturbed. It’s a torrential rain that cuts gullies, and floods lowlands, and chips away at mountain peaks. It alters the landscape completely.

God kingdom produces reaction in men. Some hate it, attack it, and violently oppose it - while others see its beauty, and value, and aggressively pursue it.

They do whatever it takes to obtain the kingdom. They take it by force.

But no person enters the Kingdom of God passively. No one just drifts in. No one becomes a Christian by osmosis. It always involves a decision!

Jesus adds a cryptic comment in verse 14, “And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

This is a confusing verse. In John 1:21 when John was asked, "Are you Elijah? He said, "I am not." But here Jesus says that John is the Elijah who is to come.

Understand the Old Testament spoke of two forerunners. In Malachi 4:5 Elijah is leads the way for the Messiah. An unnamed forerunner is spoken of in Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1. There are two forerunners because Jesus comes twice.

The unnamed forerunner in Isaiah 40 was John the Baptist who paved the way for the first coming of Jesus, but Elijah will pave the way for His second coming.

I believe Elijah is one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

The Jews didn't understand Messiah's dual comings. They believe He comes once. Thus, in their minds his only forerunner was Elijah. To the Jews the coming of Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah. To this very day at a Passover Seder the Jews drink the "cup of Elijah" which anticipates the coming of Elijah.

At the time of Jesus, the Jews weren't looking for Isaiah's unnamed forerunner. They looked for Elijah. Jesus didn't want them to miss the Messiah. Thus, He said, since Elijah is the only forerunner you'll accept - then in a sense, John is an Elijah.

What if you asked to use my hose to wash your car? I said, "Sure here's my garden hose." Then you said. "*I want a car*"

wash hose not a garden hose."

To pacify you, I'd hand you the same hose, and say, "Okay Picky, here's a car wash hose." That's what Jesus did in these verses. If all you'll accept as Messiah's forerunner is an Elijah - then here he is... here's an Elijah... His name is John.