

Confronting Doubts

JESUS DEMANDS DECISION.

Matthew 11:1-6,16-24

1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he **moved on from there** **A** to teach and preach in their towns. 2 Now when John heard **in prison** **B** what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples 3 and asked him, “**Are you the one** **C** who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” 4 Jesus replied to them, “Go and report to John **what you hear and see**: **D** 5 The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the **good news**, **E** 6 and **blessed** **F** is the one who isn’t offended by me. [. . .] 16 To what should I compare **this generation**? **G** It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children: 17 We **played the flute** **H** for you, but you didn’t dance; we sang a lament, but you didn’t 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, a **glutton and a drunkard**, **I** a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is **vindicated** **J** by her deeds.” 20 Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent: 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. 22 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the **day of judgment** **K** than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will go down to **Hades**. **L** For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today. 24 But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** Jesus resumed His preaching and teaching. It can be presumed that the disciples were also ministering in various towns around Galilee.
- B** Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) had put John the Baptist in prison. He would later order John’s execution (Matt. 14:1-12).
- C** The Messiah (see Ps. 118:26; Heb. 10:37). Despite hearing about Jesus’s works, John’s time in prison caused him to doubt.
- D** Jesus urged John’s followers to evaluate His words and actions. Miracles were performed, and people were set free (vv. 5-6).
- E** “Gospel” (KJV). Jesus proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom, which offered healing and hope to the marginalized and oppressed.
- F** Greek, *makarios*. The word suggests joy and contentment, particularly for those who put their faith in Christ despite their challenges.
- G** The rejection of John and Jesus reflected a spiritual blindness among first-century Jews.
- H** Children would play in public spaces, pretending to be at a wedding (playing a flute) or a funeral (singing a lament).
- I** Some condemned both John’s austerity and Jesus’s liberty. Neither accusation was valid.
- J** “Justified” (KJV; ESV); “proved right” (NIV). An honest evaluation of John and Jesus would validate their ministries and messages.
- K** God will hold people accountable for their rejection of Jesus. Cities in Galilee faced a higher standard because they had witnessed the Messiah’s works and message.
- L** The realm of the dead is often associated with judgment or separation from God.



Uncertainty (Matt. 11:1-6)

- When John the Baptist heard in prison what Jesus was doing, he sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was indeed the Messiah.
- Jesus confirmed His identity as the Messiah. He reassured John by pointing to the evidence of His miraculous works.

Cynicism (Matt. 11:16-19)

- Jesus's generation rejected John the Baptist because he came neither eating nor drinking. They said his asceticism was demonic in nature.
- Jesus compared them to children who got mad when others wouldn't play their games in the marketplace. They played the flute for John, but he refused to dance; and they sang a lament for Jesus, but He refused to mourn.
- Many also rejected Jesus because He came eating and drinking. They complained that He acted like a glutton and a drunkard because He fellowshiped with "sinners."

Denial (Matt. 11:20-24)

- Jesus pronounced a series of woes on unrepentant cities.
- Though they had seen Jesus's miracles, the residents of these cities denied the evidence and refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.
- He said it would be more tolerable for sinful cities that had not witnessed His works than for supposedly godly cities that had experienced Him and still turned away.

Summary Statements

Jesus demands decision.

- We may experience honest doubts, but confessing our doubts to God is a step toward genuine faith.
- We are to be sensitive to the fact that God sometimes works in ways that contradict our expectations.
- Take seriously the fact that all people will bear responsibility for how they respond to Jesus.

Memory Verse

Matthew 11:5-6

Key Doctrine

Last Things

The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord. (See Luke 16:19-26; 2 Peter 3:7-13.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

ENGAGE

What are some things you encounter that lead to doubt and skepticism? (PSG, p. 97)

- Skepticism abounds! It has been almost fifty-seven years since Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, yet there are still people who believe it was a hoax.
- Nearly every news story elicits skepticism. That can be good if it forces us to investigate the truth, but it's disastrous when it leads to a denial of truth.
- Such was the case with Jesus. Skepticism led many to miss the life He offered.

Bonus: Why would a person be skeptical about Jesus and His claims?

EXPLORE

UNCERTAINTY (MATT. 11:1-6)

Bonus: When have you been tempted to doubt Jesus? What caused those doubts?

- After Jesus sent the disciples on their mission (Matt. 10), He moved on to the area surrounding Capernaum. Capernaum lay on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee and was the headquarters of much of Jesus's ministry.
- In prison, John the Baptist heard about what Jesus was doing. But he still had questions. So, he sent his disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come?"
- John's time in prison, along with the common belief that the Messiah would be a military hero, may have led to his confusion. Jesus simply pointed John to His works. Jesus's message and miracles affirmed His identity.

How would John have understood Jesus's reply in verses 4-5 based on his knowledge of the Old Testament? (PSG, p. 101)

- Jesus also spoke a blessing on those who embraced Him and refused to be offended by Him. This likely was meant as a personal encouragement to John not to doubt.

How should we respond to our honest doubts about Jesus? (PSG, p. 101)

CYNICISM (MATT. 11:16-19)

Bonus: What does "cynicism" mean? How can it be good? How can it be dangerous?

- Many following Jesus were cynical. He compared them to children pretending to attend either a wedding or a funeral. Inevitably, some of the children would get upset if the others refused to play the game they chose.
- Like disagreeable children, some criticized Jesus for the joyful way He interacted with sinners. Meanwhile, others criticized John's strict lifestyle. Neither approach was acceptable to those who were skeptical of both men.

- "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds" means that both John's austerity and Jesus's joy were appropriate in God's sight. Each man had a role to play in His kingdom.

How do people's preconceived notions about God cause them to miss what He is doing? (PSG, p. 103)

DENIAL (MATT. 11:20-24)

Bonus: When have you been accountable for some task or responsibility? How did that affect your approach to that job?

- Jesus moved from mildly chastising skepticism to denouncing unbelief. People around Capernaum had witnessed many of Jesus's works, yet they remained mired in their indifference toward Him.
- He pronounced "woe" on Capernaum and nearby cities like Bethsaida and Chorazin. These villages had seen Jesus's power and heard His call for repentance, but they largely ignored it.
- Jesus then stated that if cities like Tyre, Sidon, or even Sodom—cities synonymous with evil—had seen what the residents of Galilee had seen, they would have repented and embraced the kingdom. As a result, it would be "more tolerable" for the pagan cities on the day of judgment. Greater opportunity calls for greater accountability.

Jesus pronounced a warning to the cities that had the greater opportunities to witness His miracles. How does this warning apply to you? (PSG, p. 105)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss some ways even Christians can struggle with doubt.

Discuss with your group ways to respond that will not alienate or condemn those struggling with honest doubts. (PSG, p. 106)

Challenge individuals to examine the doubts in their lives honestly and prayerfully.

Identify a strong Christian in your life with whom you can discuss doubts as they arise. (PSG, p. 106)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 105)

Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary (print version or on the internet) to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.

Find the location of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in a Bible atlas or map. Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about these locations. ***What are some significant facts about these cities that Jesus emphasized?***

Encourage adults to work in pairs to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 105 of the PSG. Provide Bible dictionaries, Bible atlases, and other Bible study tools. After a few minutes, allow some volunteers to respond to the question in the activity.

Highlight contrasts between the Jewish cities in Galilee that had been apathetic toward Jesus and the Gentile cities that would have repented if they had seen Jesus's works and heard His message. Challenge adults to reflect on how this applies to their walk with Jesus.

OBJECT LESSON: COLLECTOR'S ITEMS

Bring a collector's item, such as an old coin or book, to show the group. Point out that the collector's item is authentic and valuable because of its age or rarity. Direct adults to raise their hands if they believe your claim.

Tell the group that the item also has a legendary reputation for wielding a magic power. Again, direct them to raise their hands if they believe that claim. Ask: ***Would you change your mind if you saw a demonstration of that power?*** Affirm that humans are cynical by nature.

Highlight Jesus's comment that true wisdom is validated by how people live each day. Share that both John's strict lifestyle and Jesus's openness to everyone who came to Him were powerful tools God could use for His purposes. Discuss how showing wisdom by living out God's plan each day can disarm the arguments of cynics who question Jesus as the Messiah.

WISDOM WILL BE VINDICATED

Jesus said that wisdom will be vindicated (proven right) in comparison to the apathetic response of first-century Judaism toward the message of God's kingdom (Matt. 11:19). In Jewish tradition, wisdom (*sophia* in Greek; *chokmah* in Hebrew) represented much more than intellectual knowledge. It referred to a deep understanding that motivates righteous action. In Proverbs, wisdom is personified and connected to God's creative and sustaining power (Prov. 8:22-31). Jesus embodied divine wisdom and expressed wisdom through His ministry and miracles.

"Vindicated" (Greek: *dikaioō*) refers to being declared right or justified. Jesus asserted that God's wisdom is validated by the results it produces. Though Jesus and John were misjudged, their works bore fruit, confirming their divine commission (see Matt. 7:16-20).

Jesus criticized the hypocrisy of "this generation" by drawing an analogy with children in the marketplace. Sometimes, children would refuse to play the games suggested by other children. Likewise, John the Baptist was dismissed as being controlled by a demon, while Jesus was labeled a glutton and a drunkard.

These false charges highlight the Jew's misunderstanding of how a prophet or Messiah should look or behave.

Jesus rebuked these unjust judgments. He emphasized that true divine wisdom is confirmed by the results of God's work, regardless of human objections or their tendency to make excuses for their unbelief.

Jesus's statement continues to challenge believers to discern truth—not by appearances or societal expectations, but by evaluating the outcomes of actions. It also reassures believers that God's purposes will prevail, even when misunderstood or opposed. Faith in divine wisdom encourages perseverance in the face of criticism, trusting God's work will be vindicated.