

It's Not What You Know Mathew 11:16-30

Those are some of the most challenging words in all of Mathews Gospel. It is not often in the Scriptures that we find the words “denounce” and “woe” associated with Jesus. And, since Jesus is God, and God is love, how is it that woe and love are connected? Even more troubling, since wisdom is a Biblical virtue, how are we to understand Jesus publicly thanking His heavenly Father for hiding significant spiritual truths from the wise? Those are valid questions and concerns, and in order to answer them truthfully, we will have to do some spiritual digging!

One of the things we will need to know is who Jesus was referring to that day in 11:16 and why. The answer is found earlier in 11:7 where Matthew gives us this golden nugget. Jesus was speaking to the crowds regarding John the Baptist, and the next few verses reveal that those crowds were not exactly John’s biggest fans. You might remember his message was repent for the kingdom is at hand, and even back then it was something few people wanted to hear. Today that crowd would be made up of people we typically see at the grocery store, gas station, graduation party, or sporting event. Typical people doing typical things on a typical day. You get the picture.

Jesus refers to them as “this generation”, perhaps like some of us do on occasion when we ask each other what is wrong with our generation? What shall I compare them to? There are several contrasts and comparisons in the remaining verses of the chapter, but His illustration of children sitting in the marketplace is perhaps the most foreign to our 21st century ears. In the day before smartphones, televisions and Ipads, kids used to play games like house or school, or church or pretend they are getting married. Children in Jesus’s day did something similar. They would play wedding and funeral, pretending they were grown ups experiencing the greatest joys and sorrows of life. And much like kids today, there would be playground arguments and disputes among themselves. There will always be a few who just like to stir up trouble and others who are never happy.

Reading the parallel passage in chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel we learn that Jesus was also addressing the Pharisees- the religious bullies of the day, when He asked His pointed question. Maybe you are wondering what a story about children playing in the streets of Galilee have to do with the Pharisees? Even more importantly, what does it have to do with us and others living in the 21st century?

In a nutshell, Jesus was telling those in the crowds that they were like little children playing in the streets arguing with each other. You know how kids are-the ones making up the rules of the game will get mad at those who refuse to go along with them and then some sort of disagreement will result. Those playing the game have hurt feelings because everyone is not willing to play along with them, while those who refuse to play along want to do their own thing without being made to feel guilty about their choice to do something different. Much like adults in real life situations, the two groups are at odds with each other.

However, this is so much more than some kids arguing on the playground. It has to do with hardened hearts. Can you hear Jesus? God sent John the Baptist to warn you of coming judgment, he came preaching in the spirit of the prophet Elijah, wearing coarse clothing, and eating nothing but bugs and wild honey, and you made fun of him. He came speaking the truth and you accused him of being possessed by a demon and refused to heed his message. And now the Son of Man comes, bringing you a message filled with grace and good news of joy and peace, and you accuse Me of being a glutton and a drunkard. Like your ancestors who refused to heed the words of the prophets, you are living in a dangerous world of pretending and make believe. You think you are wise, but you are oblivious to what is going on around you. John was the one singing the funeral dirge and Jesus was the one playing the flute that they refused to dance to.

Eugene Peterson, the author of the Biblical paraphrase "The Message", says John came fasting and they called him crazy-Jesus came feasting and they called him a lush. The long-awaited prophet whom they knew would come in the name of Elijah was right in their midst, and they refused to acknowledge him. Then Jesus came, and in His presence the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the Gospel preached to them and they rejected Him as well.

Their problem is apparent. They were wise but only in their own minds. They didn't need to hear any preaching because they were quite capable of figuring things out for themselves. They weren't about to be lectured to by some bum from the desert or some stranger who made a habit of hanging around with the wrong people. Can you hear them? Just who do these guys think they are anyway, telling us we need to repent? They are the ones who need to repent.

So much for the crowds and the Pharisees. What does this have to do with you and me? Sometimes we too can act like little children, stuck in a world of make believe. We think we can say and do whatever we want, make up our own rules of life and if we don't get our way, we take our ball or our dolls and go home. If we don't like what we hear, we search elsewhere for something less challenging and more pleasing to our ears. It is only by the grace of God that we may eventually mature in our faith and discover this basic truth. **It's not what we know about God or the Bible that matters. It's not even who we know that matters. It's what we believe and who we choose to follow and serve that will make a difference in the end.** The "what" must be the Scriptures and the "who" must be Jesus Christ. All of those high-profile sinful cities that Jesus mention are a graphic warning that judgment will come to people that mock God and His Holy Word. At the end of the day and the end of the age, wisdom will be justified by her deeds.

Even so, like every other church in history, there are people on both sides of the pulpit who have fallen short of the glory of God. There is no perfect church, at least not here on earth. The difference is that you and I recognize our need for a Savior, we happily sing and dance to the tune that Jesus is playing. Some of us have fallen more than others, yet we remain chosen people. We have chosen to be forgiven and choose to live our lives in a way that serves and honors Jesus.

We know from the Scriptures that those who love God are chosen to be made into the very image of Jesus. And those that God has chosen, God has called. And those that God has called are justified and sanctified- made righteous through Jesus and set apart for service to Him. We are a chosen people, forgiven people, called by name and equipped by God to be the body of His Son Jesus Christ, and at the same time a fallen people that can leave us scratching our heads at times wondering what God is up to.

We are approaching our fifth year together here at Millcreek serving Jesus as forgiven and chosen people. I can say without hesitation that we have grown closer to Jesus along the way. True love, the love of Christ does work here at Millcreek, and it continues to work in a powerful way. As we continue in our journey and seek perfect love of God and perfect love of neighbor there will be more victories and setbacks along the way. When those times come that we seem to think that the load is too great to bear, those times when it might seem that we are losing the battle for holiness and righteousness, let us remember who connects us to the caissons we are pulling. His name is Jesus. Let us continue to learn from Him with childlike faith through His Word, and in His grace and mercy find rest for our souls.

I thank you for affirming my call to ministry and for allowing me the privilege to share God's Word with you from this sacred place. By God's grace I pray that we will grow even closer to Jesus in our faith and inch ever closer to our elusive yet enticing goal of Christian perfection. I pray we will reach it together. Amen