

Who You Say I Am

Matthew 11:7-19

Intro

*In the worship song, **Who You Say I Am**, we find the following words...*

***Who am I that the highest King
Would welcome me?
I was lost, but He brought me in
Oh, His love for me***

***Who the Son sets free
Oh, is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am***

***Free at last, He has ransomed me
His grace runs deep
While I was a slave to sin
Jesus died for me
Yes, He died for me***

***Who the Son sets free
Oh, is free indeed
I'm a child of God, yes, I am
In my Father's house
There's a place for me
I'm a child of God, yes, I am***

***I am chosen, not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me, not against me
I am who You say I am***

Now, I recommend that you take some time to *listen to* and *sing along* with this song...

- I believe this song is so helpful because it proclaims the truth that our identity is based on what God says...

You are who God says you are — I am who God says I am...

And this is a vitally important truth because He is the only one with *perfect perspective* — He is the only one who sees things as they actually are...

- This is a vitally important truth because identity is absolutely essential to our lives as human beings — we live our life based on what we believe our identity to be...

But it is all too easy to create a false identity — an identity that is based on something other than who God says I am...

- And I believe that every false identity starts with a *false view of God* and then leads to a *false view of self*...

This is the place that John the Baptist found himself in as he languished in prison — his unfulfilled expectations led to a false view of God and this false view of God led to a false view of self...

- I do not believe it is a stretch to say that John the Baptist was experiencing an identity crisis — *if Jesus wasn't the Messiah then what in the world had John's life been about?*...

You see, when it comes to our identity — we need an unchanging reference point — we need immovable ground to which we can be anchored...

- And that unchanging reference point is God and what He says I am...

Then and only then will we be able to continue to move forward through the difficulty of unfulfilled expectations...

Now, before we move into our passage, let's remind ourselves of the verses that we worked through last week...

Matthew 11:1-6 (NKJV)

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

2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples

3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:

5 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.

6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Now that we are caught up, let's read the passage that we will be studying this week...

Matthew 11:7-19 (NKJV)

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?

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

**10 For this is he of whom it is written:
'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'**

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers 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 receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

16 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

**17 and saying:
'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.'**

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 winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children.”

Let's move into our first section...

1) Who John Is (vs 7-15)

7 As they departed,

The disciples of John the Baptist head back to give him the message from Jesus...[expand]

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John:

Here is the big moment — what will Jesus say about John?...

John publicly doubted Jesus by sending disciples to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah or if they should be expecting another...

- John was confused about Jesus' identity and therefore confused about his own identity...

And how would Jesus respond? — Would Jesus mock or disparage John?...

As we will see, the Lord Jesus did what He always does — He simply told the truth...

- Jesus revealed John's true identity to the crowd — John was who Jesus said he was...

REALITY — We may be confused about our identity — but Jesus is never confused about our identity...

If we want to know what our true identity is, we must *turn away from who we say we are* and find out who God says we are...[expand]

Continuing on in vs 7, the Lord Jesus addresses the crowd regarding the identity of John the Baptist...

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

Did they go out into the wilderness to see a morally weak man who was swayed by public opinion and by changing circumstances?...

- [expand — John's unflinching rebuke of false teachers...]

8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Did they go out to see wealthy guy in fancy clothes, living in luxury?...[expand — this is a shot at Herod]

- *John was not a man who wore soft clothes and sat in king's houses...*

Instead, John the Baptist was dressed in a camel hair garment and ate locusts and wild honey...

- Because John was a Nazarite, John didn't cut his hair or beard and he never drank alcohol...

John was not a man who led a comfortable life — his was a life of extreme self-sacrifice because that is what God had called him to...

9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

The people went out to the wilderness to see a prophet — the first true prophet among the Israelites for many, many years...

*But Jesus says that John is **more than a prophet**...*

**10 For this is he of whom it is written:
'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'**

John was **a prophet and more than a prophet** because John *not only prophesied* — *John was also the subject of prophecy*...

- Here Jesus refers to **Malachi 3:1** and lets His listeners know that *John was the messenger who was prophesied*...

Now, as we consider what the Lord Jesus had to say about John in vs 7-10, we understand that Jesus is the One who had the true perspective on John's identity...

APPLICATION — It is not up to us to create our own identity — it is not up to others to give us our identity — our true identity is found in who Jesus says we are...

Now, we know that John was also **more than a prophet** because John was the forerunner of the Messiah — no other person in human history had that privilege...

And I believe that this privilege is what the Lord Jesus is referring to as we move into vs...

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist;

Up to that point in human history, no one greater than John the Baptist had come on the scene because no one had a greater privilege than to be the forerunner or the Messiah...

With that said, the Lord Jesus says something very interesting at the end of vs 11...

but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

This is a radical statement — John the Baptist was the herald of the Messiah and of the kingdom of heaven — but John did not get to experience the New Covenant

You see, it seems clear to me John the Baptist was the last of the Old Covenant prophets...[expand]

- But whoever is **least in the kingdom of heaven** — whoever is a believer under the New Covenant — is greater than John because we get to experience things that he never did...

We understand that ministry of the Lord Jesus — we experience relationship with the Holy Spirit in a way that John did not...

- We are blessed with gifts of the Spirit — we bear the fruit of the Spirit — we can experience the Spirit overflowing us like rivers of living water...[expand]

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

This is a difficult verse to interpret...

Some believe that this verse refers to believers aggressively entering the kingdom of heaven...[expand]

Matthew 7:13-14 (NKJV)

13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

- [expand — Parables about the Kingdom (Pearl of Great Price, Treasure in a Field, etc)...]

Others see Matthew 11:12 as referring to unbelievers who actively oppose the kingdom of heaven and persecute those who bring it near...

This is what I understand Jesus to be saying here and I think it makes the most sense in context...

You see, John the Baptist was a man sent by God to announce the availability of the kingdom of heaven through relationship with the Messiah...

- John fearlessly shared that truth and because John was obedient to his calling, John was persecuted by Herod Antipas and was imprisoned...

But as we think about it, we see that John's imprisonment was simply the beginning of this violent persecution...

Jesus would be crucified, Stephen would be stoned to death, all of the Apostles would be martyred except for the Apostle John who was exiled on the island of Patmos...

- And on and on it has gone until our day — the kingdom of heaven suffers violence as believers are persecuted for their faith and unbelievers seek to seize the kingdom by force...

Now, the good news in all of this is that the kingdom of heaven cannot be conquered — not by force or by any other means...

Believers who are killed for their faith enter into the manifest presence of God and are freed from the sorrows of this life...

- And God's eternal kingdom is unshakable, unconquerable — fallen mankind is powerless to stop it...

Continuing on in Matthew 11 to vs...

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The phrase **all the prophets and the law** is a reference to what we call the Old Testament...

- So, what I believe the Lord is saying in Matthew 11:13 is that **all the prophets and the law** — all of what was written before — was prophesying — was predicting — was pointing to — what John came to share...

In other words, all of what God had shared in the past through the prophets and the law was leading up to John because John was the forerunner of the Messiah...

- Now, John could not see the reality of this as he sat in his prison cell — but it remained true...

LESSON — My identity is what Jesus says it is — even if I cannot see how it could be true — and I am to simply trust that I am who He says I am...

Moving on to vs...

14 And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

What is Jesus talking about here? — I believe that this is a reference to...

Malachi 4:5-6 (NKJV)

**5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.**

**6 And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”**

And the Angel Gabriel said the following to Zacharias, John the Baptist’s father, in...

Luke 1:16-17 (NKJV)

16 “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

So, as we put the pieces together we realize that John was prophesied by Isaiah, Malachi and Gabriel and that John conducted his ministry in the spirit and power of Elijah...

Now, John the Baptist seems to have been confused about all this as he sat in his prison cell — he seems to have adopted an identity that was based on his circumstances...

- But that is simply because he didn't have the proper perspective — he wasn't elevated enough to understand who he really was...

[expand — maps give you a view from above so you can get a proper perspective...]

- In a similar way, if you and I are going to understand our identity, we can't do it from street level...

We need to go to the one who has the perspective from above — the One who sees all things — who perfectly understands all things — and by faith we are to trust in who he say we are...

And this is what we see in vs...

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

The Lord Jesus encourages His hearers to listen to Him...

- If they want to know the true identity of John the Baptist then the Lord Jesus is the One they should listen to...

And if we want to know our true identity then we too must listen to what the Lord Jesus has to say...

Now, as we move into our final section we will see once again that the Lord Jesus always tells the truth about a person's identity — even if that truth is not flattering...

2) Who the People Are (vs 16-19)

16 "But to what shall I liken this generation?"

Here the Lord Jesus turns His attention away from *the identity of John the Baptist* to *the identity of the generation* that He is seeking to reach with the truth...

And Jesus compares them to children who are gathered to play games as their parents shop in the marketplace...

But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

17 and saying:

**'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.'**

Now, it is interesting to note that when children play role-playing games, it is usually focused on something that adults do...

Children pretend to be mothers or fathers, pretend to be police officers or firemen, pretend to be nurses or soldiers...

And here the Lord Jesus references children who imitate the two most common adult ceremonies that they would have been familiar with — *weddings* and *funerals*...

To play wedding, the children would rejoice and dance...

To play funeral, the children would mourn and lament...

But the Lord Jesus is identifying **this generation** with children who could not be satisfied — *they were not willing to play wedding or funeral*...

And as we move into vs 18 we see that Jesus identified John the Baptist with playing funeral...

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

John's ministry was like playing funeral in that it was very serious...

John's ministry was primarily a call to repentance...

- John lived a life of rigid self-discipline in which he denied himself the normal pleasures of life...

And yet, like dissatisfied children, the majority of that generation refused to play funeral with John and dismissed him as demon-possessed...

And as we move into vs 19 we see that the Lord Jesus played wedding...

19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking,

In other words, Jesus' ministry was starkly different from that of John the Baptist...

John lived out in the wilderness and Jesus spent much time in cities...

- John was mostly solitary and Jesus spent lots of time with people...

John never went to a dinner party and Jesus never refused a dinner party...

But still, this generation was not happy — we see this in the rest of vs 19...

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

The generation that dismissed John as *too extreme* also dismissed Jesus for being *too extravagant*...

- They accused Jesus of over-eating and of being a drunk — and worst of all, Jesus was a friend to the lowest people in society...

Jesus played wedding and the generation refused to rejoice and dance...

The key to all of this is that **this generation** could not be satisfied — no matter how God tried to reach them — they refused...

- Their true identity was that of ***the rebel*** — of those who refuse to follow God — those who always find an excuse for disobeying...

They are the people who always have a reason for why they do not believe the truth...

- But in the end, all will be revealed — everyone's true identity will be shown for what it is...

The Lord Jesus makes this clear at the end of vs 19...

But wisdom is justified by her children."

In other words, you know whether or not something is wisdom by the children it produces — by the kind of people it creates...

- [ex. study communism — Karl Marx — see the kind of people it produces...]
- [ex. study the life of those who practice others-centered self-sacrifice — Amy Carmichael — see the kind of person that is produced...]

If we want to live a life of wisdom then we must submit to the wisdom of God — we must listen to the Lord Jesus as He reveals our identity to us...

Conclusion

We will stop here for today — but before we move into our time of communion, I want to encourage you to understand your identity in Christ...

- Seek to understand who He says you are...

And a great start would be to read and reread **Ephesians 1 & 2** [expand]...

But before you do that, ask yourself the following questions...

Do I really want to know who I am? — Am I ready for the Lord Jesus to reveal my true identity to me? — Am I ready to live in the reality of my true identity?...

- Because the only way to finding out who we really are is to submit to the Lord Jesus and say to Him, “*I am who You say I am*”...

Let's pray...