

BIBLE STUDY GROUP (14 November, Mt 11:2-12)
THE DILEMMA OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

• v.2.

- In his prison, John heard all about the activity of Jesus, whom Matthew calls ‘the Christ’ in order to state that these ‘works’ revealed who he was, the Messiah.
- John longed for more news about Jesus.
- The fact that he continued to have disciples after his imprisonment shows that he continued his work of preparing the way for Jesus. He led his disciples and his new followers to Jesus...

v.3.

- It is intriguing: why did he send disciples to make this enquiry? Was John doubting?
- **The fact that John sends to Jesus for an answer proves John’s faith in Jesus!**
- Why? It is not enough to pay attention only to the first part of the question: ‘Art thou the Coming?’ (or shall we be expecting someone else?) → The first has lots of Biblical references as a background. The Coming One was both understood and used by the Jews (Luke 3:16, Psalm 40:7).
- The coming characterises this person, the Messiah, that is why they are asking about his coming.
- ‘Or shall we be expecting someone else?’ → The question means, ‘someone like you.’
- If John had had doubt, he would not have sent his disciples to Jesus. He would not have directed this question to Him.

– He wanted to **clarify an important thing**. Namely, to answer the difficulty that his faith encountered. God had pointed out to him that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus, then, was to do all the great Messianic works, both those of grace and those of judgement. Thus John believed, preached, expected.

→ But as Jesus carried on his work, it seemed to be nothing but grace without one single act of judgement!

- This is what perplexed the Baptist ‘*when he heard in the prison the works of the Christ.*’
- Where were the works of judgement, the swinging of the fan, the crashing blows of the axe?
- There were not being done! How, then, was this to be explained? Would another One follow, another who would perform these works of judgement? J

• For we must remember that throughout the prophecies, just as in the Baptist’s proclamation concerning Jesus, one feature is not revealed by God. The interval of time between the first coming with grace and mercy and the second coming with judgement.

– The prophetic picture is without perspective as to time: grace and judgement are simply predicated, and the point of time when they will occur is left with God.

• v.4.

- The answer is typical of Jesus: decisive in substance yet not direct as far as the form of the question is concerned
- ‘Report to John’: it shows that John had no doubts. It was not on his account but on the disciple’s account that he sent the disciples to Jesus. John sent them to Jesus. The question was asked by his disciples. Only the disciples were in doubt.

v.5

- It is a masterful answer because it takes John back into the very Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah.

- While the Gospel is preached to all, only those who realise their need of it receive it. The poor are being evangelized!
- In his answer Jesus says nothing about the ‘vengeance’ (isa 35:4) and the Judgement. **This omission is significant.** John is to leave that in the hands of him who is so gloriously fulfilling the prophecies regarding the Messianic works of grace.

v.6.

- That is why the gentle touch of warning is added at the end. It is a beatitude, ‘Blessed is’.... Jesus does not want John to lose the treasures and the joy that make up this blessedness.
- Blessed is the one ‘who is not trapped in connection with me’. *‘Happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.’* → Trust that in due time the other works (judgement) will follow just as these are now being done.

v.7.

- At once, after John’s disciples have left, Jesus addresses the multitudes concerning John.
- Despite John’s perplexity in his understanding of the Messiah’s work, Jesus highly esteems John.
- It is a comforting thought for us who today may have perplexity in understanding of the Scriptures...
- What do you really want to see?
- A ‘reed swayed by wind’ is symbolic of a man who yields to popular opinion, and has no solid convictions of his own.
- He is rebuking the people who having had John and now having Jesus himself, found fault with both and gained nothing from either.
- The shores of Galilee had plenty reeds... which were swaying hither and thither in the wind.
- The fact that Jesus is referring to John is evident. **What drew the people out to him was the fact that he was the very opposite of such a reed.** The entire Jewish land was filled with men who were unstable, were like reeds swaying with the wind of the opinions of the day. But here in the wilderness there was a man of a different type.
- At this very moment he was in prison because he would not compromise regarding one of God’s commandments. Herod’s sin was passed by in silence by all the Jewish authorities and the whole Jewish nation but never for a moment by John.

v.8

- Irony, it goes further: they reward a man who yields to popular opinion, who bends to the will and the world of the influential and the mighty.
- You went out to see a man who dared to rebuke even a king, who could be bought by no royal favours, who showed absolute fidelity to God and to his Word. Yet Jesus asks, ‘Did you really go out to see such a man?’ Again, he leaves the answer to them/us.
- Did they really to see a prophet?...
- Genuine call for decision: **Did they really intend to regard John as a prophet of God?**

v.12.

- Jesus points to the events now being in progress.