

Matthew 11A

- One of the challenges of studying verse-by-verse through books of Scripture is maintaining a view of the big picture
 - When you move a verse or two at a time, it's easy to become myopic; to miss the forest for the trees
 - Focusing on one thought at a time can mean overlooking where the story is going, missing the main point
 - And when we divorce an individual verse from the larger context, it can lead to mistakes in interpretation
 - So we need to keep the overall narrative in mind so we can understand the details within
 - I say this by way of transition, because today we're leaving Chapter 10 of Matthew behind and moving into new things in Chapter 11
 - And yet the things we're going to study in Chapter 11 are a direct result of the events we studied in Matthew 10
 - And they will lead us into some of the most important events of Matthew's Gospel in Chapter 12
 - So as we move ahead tonight, let's try to connect these dots in Matthew's story

Matt. 11:1 When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

Matt. 11:2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples

Matt. 11:3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

- Chapter 11 opens with a brief look back at Chapter 10, which gives us an opportunity to review what we learned over the past several weeks
 - In a nutshell, Chapter 10 was Jesus preparing His disciples to minister in His place following His death and ascension
 - I told you that in Chapter 12, the religious leaders of Israel will formally and irrevocably reject Jesus' claims to be Messiah

- And when they do, that generation of Israel loses their opportunity to receive the Kingdom in their day
- Jesus will withdraw the proposal of the Kingdom for that time
- And He refocuses His earthly ministry on preparing His disciples to carry out the program of recruiting Kingdom citizens
- So Chapter 10 saw Jesus teaching the disciples how to carry out that program, after which He let them loose to give it a try
 - Jesus instructed the apostles to travel to the cities of Israel with the message of the Kingdom
 - And that wasn't just a temporary assignment...Jesus was commissioning those men for a lifetime of evangelistic ministry
 - But they began their work even while Jesus was still on the earth
- As we reached the end of Chapter 10, Jesus warned the men about the trials and difficulties they would face in the conduct of that program
 - They would be hated and opposed by powerful men and family members alike
 - They would be persecuted, harassed, lives would be lost
 - But in the end, many would be saved by their faith
 - That's not a very encouraging way to begin a mission, is it, but nonetheless the apostles went out as instructed on that day
 - Matthew doesn't tell us about their adventures, but Luke gives us just a little insight on how things went
 - In Chapter 9 of Luke we learn the apostles went to the cities of Israel preaching the Gospel
 - And as they went, they used the apostolic power Christ gave them to validate their message
 - When they returned, they told Jesus of all they had accomplished
 - So what came of the apostles' first mission trip?
 - Was there a great revival within Israel? Did their Jewish brethren run to embrace Jesus as Messiah?

- The text doesn't tell us, but we know the answer indirectly
- Like all short term mission trips, this exercise was less about reaching the lost and more about training the disciples
- They went out, they did what they were told, they gained some experience and they came back home to relate their adventures
- But there is a powerful subtext building in Matthew's narrative...a dark cloud gathering on the horizon
 - Because while we can be sure some Jews received the apostles' report and accepted Jesus as Messiah, most did not
 - By and large, the nation of Israel in that day did not recognize that the Messiah had arrived and the Kingdom was at hand
 - And this reality begins to trouble Jesus' supporters and confuse His disciples
 - They knew He was the Messiah sent by God in fulfillment of the covenants promised to Israel
 - So how could Israel reject their own King sent to her? Impossible!
 - And yet, that's exactly what is happening, as we'll see later in this chapter and into Chapter 12
 - Meanwhile, Jesus' inability to convince the Jewish people to embrace Him leads some of Jesus' earliest followers to question His identity
 - In v.2 we hear that John the Baptist sends representatives to Jesus with a question
 - John doesn't go himself because by this time he's been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great
 - Mark tells us that Herod imprisoned John after John publicly condemned Herod for marrying his brother's wife
 - Later Herod has John beheaded as a gift for his wife's daughter
 - For now John is still alive, and from prison he sends his disciples asking is Jesus the Expected One or should they be looking for someone else?
 - In other words, John is asking Jesus to confirm He is the King, the Messiah appointed to rule His people

- John's question has puzzled Bible students for centuries...we all ask ourselves how could John doubt Jesus' claims?
- Earlier in the Gospels John saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus and he heard the voice of God affirming Jesus' claims
- So how can John doubt in Jesus, we wonder?
- First, we have the problem of Jesus' unpopularity among religious leaders and the indifference of the general population
 - If Jesus were truly the King, and the Kingdom were about to appear, why wasn't the nation accepting their king more readily?
 - No doubt this was a source of confusion for John
 - As he languishes in prison facing certain death, he had to wonder if perhaps he got it wrong
 - Maybe Jesus isn't the King, maybe He wasn't the One appointed to rule over Israel
 - On the other hand, John did see what happened in the water that day he baptized Jesus
 - He declared Jesus is the Lamb of God, the One who takes away the sins of the world
 - So how can John believe that Jesus is the Messiah Who came to save Israel and yet doubt that Jesus truly is the King to rule His people?
- We find our answer from an understanding of the teaching and circumstances of Jesus' day
 - In Jesus' day rabbis taught that as God brought this age to a close and set up His Kingdom, certain messengers would appear to Israel
 - First, the prophet Malachi promised the prophet Elijah would return back from the dead prior to the end of the age

Mal. 4:5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.

Mal. 4:6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

- Back in his day, the prophet Elijah performed 8 major miracles including raising the dead
- So the rabbis taught that one day Elijah would return to Israel, and when he did, he would perform great miracles again
- This would be a sign to Israel that the end of the age had dawned and the Messiah was about to appear
 - But as the rabbis studied their Scriptures concerning the Messiah's arrival, they noticed a two-sided nature to those prophecies
 - Some passages in the Bible spoke of the Messiah as a suffering servant who would die for the sins of Israel, notably Isaiah 53

[Is. 53:4](#) Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
 And our sorrows He carried;
 Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
 Smitten of God, and afflicted.

[Is. 53:5](#) But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
 He was crushed for our iniquities;
 The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
 And by His scourging we are healed.

[Is. 53:6](#) All of us like sheep have gone astray,
 Each of us has turned to his own way;
 But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
 To fall on Him.

[Is. 53:7](#) He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
 Yet He did not open His mouth;
 Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
 And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
 So He did not open His mouth.

- But then other passages taught the Messiah would be a conquering king who would rule over the whole world with power, notably Psalm 2

[Psa. 2:6](#) "But as for Me, I have installed My King
 Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

[Psa. 2:7](#) "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
 He said to Me, 'You are My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

Psa. 2:8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

Psa. 2:9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"

- These passages appeared to contradict one another, and the rabbis searched for an explanation that could reconcile them
 - Eventually they determined that in addition to sending Elijah to Israel, the Lord would also send not one but *two* Messiahs
 - And the rabbis invented terms for each to help keep them straight in their teaching
- The first Messiah they called the Prophet, who would come to fulfill the prophecies of suffering and dying to atone for Israel's sins
 - This Messiah would be a sacrifice like a lamb for the sake of His people
 - For that reason, the rabbis called the suffering Messiah the "son of Joseph", mirroring how Joseph suffered in Egypt to save his brothers
- The second Messiah they called the Christ, which means Anointed One
 - The Christ would be a King who would fulfill the prophecies of ruling with a rod of iron over a Kingdom for Israel
 - The rabbis also called the Christ "the son of David", because He would follow David's example of ruling over all Israel
- We know John the Baptist grew up hearing this explanation of two Messiahs and we know he accepted it
 - As John was baptizing by the Jordan, the Pharisees come to question him

John 1:19 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"

John 1:20 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."

John 1:21 They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

- The Pharisees ask John if he was one of those three men
 - They ask are you Elijah, the Prophet or the Christ?
 - John answers no to all three because John was actually a fourth character prophesied by Isaiah
 - But notice, John doesn't correct the Pharisees' assumptions about two Messiahs, he simply denies being either of them
 - So like the Pharisees, John assumed two Messiahs would come for Israel – not just one
- Of course, we know that there aren't to be two Messiahs, but rather two arrivals of one Messiah: Jesus
 - The first time Jesus appears on earth, He comes as the son of Joseph; the suffering Messiah dying for the sins of the world
 - The second time Jesus appears, He will come in glory as the conquering King to rule His Kingdom
- But as we learned in Chapter 10, even at His first appearance Jesus offered the Kingdom to Israel
 - But because His offer was rejected, the Kingdom's arrival was delayed for centuries
 - That's what the prophets told Israel...that they would reject their King when He came to rule them just as Joseph's brothers rejected his ruling over them
 - And when Joseph's brothers rejected him, it led to Joseph's suffering in Egypt, just as Israel's rejection leads Jesus to the cross
 - So one Messiah, two appearances
- But back up a minute...put yourself in John's place...as he sits in prison he knows Jesus is the Messiah
 - And he knows Jesus and the apostles are preaching that the kingdom was at hand
 - So naturally, he assumes Jesus is the Christ, the son of David, the One sent to rule over Israel

- He expects the Kingdom is about to appear, he will be released from prison and Jesus will rule the world
- But then John begins hearing disturbing reports from the Galilee that Jesus' offers wasn't being met with acceptance
 - In fact, the religious leaders were actively opposing Jesus, persuading the crowds to reject Jesus' claims
 - So John begins second-guessing his conclusions. Did he get it wrong? Maybe Jesus wasn't the son of David?
- So in v.3, John's disciples ask Jesus are you the Expected One or will there be someone else?
 - The Expected One is a reference to the Christ, the son of David who rules
 - John wasn't asking *if* Jesus was the Messiah, he was asking Jesus *which* Messiah are you...the Christ, or was the Christ still to come
- There's something reassuring about John's confusion, isn't there?
 - John knew Jesus very well...he was Jesus' cousin after all
 - Yet he grew up not knowing his cousin Jesus was the Messiah
 - And now we see that John didn't even understand the ministry of the Messiah properly
 - Look, if a prophet can misunderstand Scripture, then certainly we shouldn't be surprised when our understanding falls short too
 - And for that matter, we shouldn't get too upset with our brothers and sisters when they struggle with the Bible
 - Everyone falls short to some extent, because we're trying to understand the mind of God
 - If this were easy to do, then it means we've got the wrong god
 - Do you want to know how common misunderstanding of Scripture is? Even the apostles themselves struggled to understand each other
 - Listen to what Peter says about one of his contemporaries

[2Pet. 3:15](#) and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

[2Pet. 3:16](#) as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

- Peter said that some of the things Paul wrote were difficult to understand...for Peter
- To which we all say Amen!
- The point to remember is that misunderstanding Scripture or being ignorant of some truth is not unusual...it's common for all of us
 - Each of us know some things and each of us are ignorant or wrong about some things
 - Knowing this, we can't make knowledge of Scripture a litmus test of godliness – not in and of itself
 - None of us are approved by God on the basis of our knowledge of the Bible, so we should not look down on any in the body on that basis
- Instead, like a rising tide that lifts all boats...we want to cultivate an atmosphere that appreciates and values study of God's word
 - And from that culture, we seek to do what Jesus did for John
 - He answered John's misguided question while maturing John's understanding of the bigger picture
 - Look at Jesus' answer

[Matt. 11:4](#) Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see:

[Matt. 11:5](#) the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT 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.

[Matt. 11:6](#) "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

- First, Jesus tells John's disciples here's what I want you to report to John...tell him what you see me doing
 - Specifically, Jesus said tell John six things

- The blind receive sight, lame walk, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached
- At first glance, it seems as though Jesus were simply telling John, “My miraculous works prove my identity”
- That is, “you may not understand the whole picture, but you know what your eyes tell you”
- But we know John already believed Jesus was the Messiah, so how does Jesus’ answer settle John’s concerns?
 - John hasn’t doubted Jesus’ power or claims to be sent by God
 - He’s wondering if Jesus is the Prophet or the Christ?
 - So why did Jesus just point to His miracles?
- Jesus wasn’t simply saying trust me or believe in my power...Jesus was answering John’s specific question
 - Jesus quotes from two passages in the book of Isaiah
 - The first part of Jesus’ statement is a quote from Isaiah 35
 - And the second part of Jesus’ statement is taken from Isaiah 61
- To understand how Jesus just answered John’s question, we have to know something about how the Jews organized the book of Isaiah
 - In the 66 chapters of the book of Isaiah there is a distinct division that occurs at Chapter 40
 - The first 39 chapters of the book read very differently than the last 27 chapters
 - In fact, the division is so pronounced that the rabbis typically divided the book into First Isaiah and Second Isaiah
 - The prophecies of first Isaiah focus on the suffering servant Who comes to save His people Israel
 - Jesus quotes from that section in Chapter 35

Is. 35:4 Say to those with anxious heart,

“Take courage, fear not.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance;

The recompense of God will come,
But He will save you."

[Is. 35:5](#) Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

[Is. 35:6](#) Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.
For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah.

- So Jesus is saying to John, I'm fulfilling first Isaiah
- I am the suffering servant sent to save His people
 - But then Jesus also quotes from Second Isaiah, from Chapter 61

[Is. 61:1](#) The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;

[Is. 61:2](#) To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,

[Is. 61:3](#) To grant those who mourn in Zion,
Giving them a garland instead of ashes,
The oil of gladness instead of mourning,
The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting.
So they will be called oaks of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

[Is. 61:4](#) Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins,
They will raise up the former devastations;
And they will repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations.

[Is. 61:5](#) Strangers will stand and pasture your flocks,
And foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers.

[Is. 61:6](#) But you will be called the priests of the LORD;

You will be spoken of as ministers of our God.

You will eat the wealth of nations,

And in their riches you will boast.

- So by His second quote, Jesus is saying to John I'm also the ruling Christ sent to give Israel the Kingdom
- I am both of whom you await
- Do see where Jesus sent John? Back to Scripture
 - And not to some strange corner of the Bible, but to the most important prophet in the Jewish Bible
 - It's likely that John the Baptist had memorized the book of Isaiah like many rabbis
 - This was meat-and-potatoes teaching for any Jew of that day
 - So we can be encouraged to see that great men of God can be confused about God's plan
 - And now we can be even more encouraged to know that the answers to what we don't know are sitting here waiting for us
 - John had read those passages countless times and each time he left the book believing that he saw two Messiahs
 - Why did he believe that? Maybe because someone told him that first, and then he interpreted the Bible through a lens of prior teaching
 - Or maybe he simply lacked the perspective to understand what God was at work doing
 - Either way, his mistake was easy to make
 - But for that reason, it was just as easy to correct...it just required the revelation of God at the right moment
 - When the time was right, the Lord simply had to reveal Himself to John in a new way, and all the pieces clicked together
 - I imagine when John heard Jesus' response he pondered it at first, running those verses through his mind, over and over

- Until he noticed that Jesus' miracles were fulfilling prophecies from both First Isaiah and Second Isaiah
- And from there, I assume he understood that Jesus was saying He was both Messiahs
- Even still, perhaps John didn't understand how that could be true...he probably didn't know that Jesus was about to die
 - Which is why Jesus adds that the one who does not take offense in Jesus will be blessed
 - Jesus was reassuring John that Jesus would not be universally accepted, and that too was part of God's plan
 - So don't doubt my identity simply because I am not being embraced by all, Jesus was saying
 - The blessing of the Messiah was reserved for those in Israel who accepted Jesus' testimony
 - Perhaps John understood all that Jesus tried to explain
 - But regardless, we know John gained a perfect understanding when he left this earth and entered into Jesus' presence
 - That's the encouragement I want us all to have this evening...
 - First, know that misunderstandings and confusion about spiritual truth within the body of Christ are to be expected as long as we live here
 - We hate to see it, and we strive to avoid disagreements
 - But there's only so much we can do, because we are all dependent on the Lord's revelation to us
 - And some of us are further along a path of learning than others, and some of us receive more revelation than others
 - And maybe some of us are listening more intently than others
 - But whatever the cause, when we leave this earth and enter into the Lord's presence, we all leave ignorance behind
 - As Paul says, we all come to know Jesus plainly even as He knows us plainly now

[1Cor. 13:12](#) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

- So there is a day coming when Jesus will give us everything we need to know
- But in the meantime, be encouraged to know that the answers are here – in your Bible
 - They have always been here, and as you devote yourself to understanding them, the Lord will delight to reveal Himself to you
 - And the journey of discovery is well worth your effort, because as you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, you grow in His grace
- Think about John once more...how much did his outlook on life change when he came to understand that Jesus was both Messiahs?
 - He went from doubt and worry, to joy and contentment
 - He could face death knowing that the Lord had been faithful to His promises to Israel
 - And even if John didn't understand the whole plan, he knew what he knew
 - And what he knew gave him comfort
- We make a priority of studying the Bible not because we want to solve riddles or fill our heads with knowledge, but because we want to grow
 - We want to grow in our knowledge, yes, as the Lord may reveal Himself to us by His grace
 - But we want that knowledge because it brings us comfort and assurance and joy
 - Because what I know guides how I live, and how I live matters to Jesus
- I hope you take some encouragement from John's example and from how the Lord responded with the answer
 - Don't be afraid to ask Jesus the hard questions

- But when He answers, expect Him to point you back to Scripture...where the answers always were