

Study Notes: Matthew 11:1-6
January 18, 2026: "Jesus Speaks to Our Doubts"
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After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

- Chapter 11 begins a section of Matthew's Gospel, which will highlight the opposition to Jesus' ministry that was forming and growing.
- This verse serves to close the content of chapter 10 and transition into the next section of Matthew's Gospel. It reminds us that Jesus' primary activities were preaching and teaching. His main message remained the same as it had been, "Repent for the Kingdom of God has come near" (Matthew 3:2).

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

- Later in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 14:3-5), John was imprisoned for speaking out against Herod's immorality. John's imprisonment was a difficult time, and in the midst of it, John began to have doubts about Jesus and His Messiahship. John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah, or simply another forerunner.
- Scholars have suggested several ways to understand John's question (and doubts). Some have wrongly suggested John was asking this question not for himself but for others. This seeks to minimize John's own struggles, which is unhelpful. Instead, John's question probably stemmed from his difficult circumstances, and a misunderstanding of how Jesus would operate as the Messiah. John heard that Jesus was working, but he did not see the immediate freedom and judgement on the wicked (Herod) that he initially preached, and rightfully did not understand why Jesus hadn't done these things.
 - The New American Commentary explains, "Most likely John also wondered why there were no signs of the imminent judgment of the wicked that he had predicted (Matt 3:10). In fact, Jesus' 'messiahship' little resembled the political and military program of liberation many Jews anticipated (cf. John 6:15)."
 - The Expositor's Bible Commentary explains, "Not only may the Baptist have become demoralized, like his namesake Elijah (cf. Keener), but the Baptist had preached in terms of imminent blessing and judgment (3:12). By contrast, Jesus was preaching in veiled fulfillment terms and bringing much blessing but no real judgment, and as a result the Baptist was having second thoughts."
- A crucial application from this passage is how John handled his doubts. Rather than bury them or renounce Jesus, he brought these doubts (and questions) to Jesus directly.

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

- In response to John, Jesus simply pointed him to the evidence of what He did. All these actions were allusions to the work of the Messiah that was prophesied in Isaiah, reminding John that Jesus was, in fact, at work to fulfill the prophecies, just not in the time or way that John expected. The call was for John to see not his circumstances, but to focus on Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.
 - The Expositor's Bible Commentary adds, "There is a second, more subtle level to Jesus' response. All four of the Isaiah passages refer to judgment in their immediate context: e.g., 'your God will come ... with vengeance; with divine retribution' (35:4); 'the day of vengeance of our God' (61:2). Thus Jesus was allusively responding to the Baptist's question: the blessings promised for the end time have broken out and prove it is here, even though the judgments are delayed."
- Jesus's last statement was a call to all those who have doubts. The New American Commentary explains, "In beatitude form Jesus encourages John, and everyone else with similar doubts, to remain faithful to him no matter what may come." The Pillar New Testament Commentary adds, "John [and those who doubt] is being exhorted to trust Jesus and not be tripped up by preconceived ideas of what the Messiah should be like."
- The New American Commentary also provides a reminder of how this passage should be applied to our own doubts, "We should recognize that 'open and inquiring doubt was taken very seriously' by the early church and that 'if faith is not simply assent to a proposition but life with God, then it can live only by increasing and decreasing, in experiences that strengthen or endanger it.'"