



Matthew 11:7–19

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one

about whom it is written:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been raiding it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 Whoever has ears, let them hear.

16 'To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others:

17 “We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.”

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, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.’

Reflection

(Today's talk is given by Craig Tubman)

In the French movie *Amelie*, the lead character is sent on a scavenger hunt to find a person she has been looking for. Clues are left along the journey and at one stage she is standing before a huge statue of a man, arm outstretched and pointing.

Amelie stares at the statue until a little boy comes along and says; "When a finger is pointing up at the sky, only a fool looks at the finger". She realises the wisdom, shifts her gaze to where the statue is pointing and finds her next clue.

Here in Matthew chapter 11, this same advice could be given. Verses 7–18 occur

in the context a discussion about John the Baptist. Yesterday we heard that his disciples came asking Jesus whether he was the one John had been prophesying about. And as the disciples leave, Jesus continues to talk to the crowd around him. He affirms that John the Baptist was indeed a prophet from God. Not just any prophet, in fact more than a prophet, for he was the one Malachi predicted would come to prepare the way for the LORD. Many of the Old Testament prophets spoke of a day when God would intervene in his world through his king or Messiah. Only one prophet got to see this King – that was John the Baptist.

And yet, this passage is not about praising John the Baptist. When a finger is pointing up to the sky, only the fool looks at the fin-

ger. And when a prophet says that God's king has arrived, only a fool focusses on the prophet.

Jesus goes on in this passage to say that with his arrival, God's kingdom or the kingdom of Heaven has broken into the created order and has been forcefully advancing. I take it this is a reference to the miracles Matthew has recorded coming from the power of Jesus. Evil is being put in its place as diseases are healed, demons are cast out. Jesus does not bring physical force, but he brings overwhelming spiritual force showing that he is the promised king of God.

But his criticism is aimed at the people of his day who refuse to admit that God's king has come. They can hear the tune, but

they aren't dancing appropriately. This is the little parable that Jesus throws in here. Children in a market place; on the first occasion they are talking about music being played for a wedding or celebration, on the second occasion they are singing a song of mourning – a dirge; but their frustration is that people aren't responding to the music as they ought.

Jesus notes that John the Baptist was an ascetic. He had very little possessions, did not drink alcohol or socialise with the masses and they, whom we could assume is a reference to the religious leaders, said he was demon possessed. Jesus comes eating and drinking, sharing his life with people and offering them a way into the kingdom of God and they reject him as a 'glutton and drunkard'. God's kingdom

has come into our world through Jesus and yet it is possible to find reasons not to respond.

John the Baptist was indeed the greatest prophet, but his role was to point to the one who had arrived! In calling us to repentance, John was asking us to change our dance. There is a tune played throughout history that tells humans to look out for themselves, to ignore God and live a self-glorifying life. But now a new tune is being played. One that leads us to God and asks us to live a new life, dance a new dance to the tune of love. Love for God and love for others. It's a much better tune and this is what Jesus makes available as God's chosen king.

But the question is, what tune are we

dancing too? Are you like the religious leaders who see the life of Jesus, understand what he is doing and teaching but refuse to change their dance? Have you been part of Christian faith or the church for a long time but are still dancing to your own tune, not letting Jesus be both saviour and lord of your life? Jesus doesn't want admirers he has come to claim followers and see lives changed.

John the Baptist was the finger pointing to God's king Jesus. And Jesus calls us into a new life, a new dance with him calling the steps.

There was a strange line from Jesus in this section. He said that whilst John was the greatest prophet, the least in the kingdom of Heaven will be greater than he. It

is such an odd line but I wonder whether Jesus is alluding to the fact that even in his prophetic role, John the Baptist could not see that God's great king would achieve his mission by dying on a cross and defeating death on the third day. He knew the king had arrived, but how that king would secure our salvation was still a mystery.

God calls us this day to repent of self-glorifying living and give our lives to the one who has died for our sins and defeated death – Jesus Christ.

Think

Take some time today to consider what tunes you hear in the world around you. What are the voices and instruments playing in your work place, in advertising, in

your friendship circles that are asking you to dance a certain way.

And take some time today to consider what your life may look like if you let Jesus be the sole tune. If you trusted him to call you into a new dance, a new life of love, honouring him, loving others, seeking the good of those around you.

Pray

Perhaps spend some time in prayer seeking God's guidance on how to hear and dance to the to the tune of his kingdom.