

We Need Not Wait

Matthew 11: 2-11 (December 11, 2022)

Matthew 11:2-11

2When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” 4Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

7As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Historical Context

“Are you the one who is come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

We need to qualify the question from the perspective of the first century. Not all Jewish communities were oriented to the end-times, and not all anticipated a messianic figure. One Jewish community (Qumran) seemed to envision two messianic figures. Moreover, end-time Jewish communities debated the nature, identity, and activity of God’s final end-time agent. John was not the only one asking, with wider reference, “Are you the one?”

Theme: We Need Not Wait

Matthew provides evidence that Jesus is the one. People who have been unable to see can now see. People who have been unable to walk can now walk. People afflicted with leprosy are now cleansed. People who could not hear can now hear. People who live in poverty can look forward to economic regeneration.

Conditions such as the inability to see, walk, and hear are characteristic of the broken old age. In the realm of heaven, God will release individuals and systems from these curses so that all interactions and relationships take place according to God’s original purposes. Matthew interprets people regaining sight etc. as signs that God is already beginning to manifest, partially, the realm of heaven through the ministry of Jesus.

Yet, some Christians raise a searching question. “If Jesus is the one, where is evidence that a great transformation is truly underway? The world appears to be pretty much the same as it was before Jesus with respect to injustice, powerlessness, exploitation, scarcity, and violence.

The story of Jesus re-affirms the confidence (already present in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings) that God never gives up on offering the world opportunities to become more like the realm of heaven. We need not “wait for another.” Indeed, we need not “wait” at all. The story of Jesus has proven to be a reliable guide to restoration.