

SERMON: Matthew 11:2-19
“IT’S THE MESSAGE, NOT THE SHOW”

Vv. 2-6 *And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see 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. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*

Imagine that you own a supremely attractive and appealing dog, but on the inside that dog is a “beast.” What good is it? The same is true of people. Beauty is only skin deep. And popular songs too--the tune might be ever so delightful, but if the words are atrocious and ungodly, bad song. We often judge matters only on how they treat the eyes or the ears, and go no deeper. It’s a mistake. And that’s the point of this text: It’s the Message, Not the Show.

John the Baptist was thrown into prison by King Herod because he had dared to speak against Herod’s marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. John’s words did not suit their ears. They locked him up—bad man! While in prison, John heard, with his ears, reports of the ministry of Jesus. What he heard must not have agreed with his idea of what the promised Savior should be. Sitting there in prison, he must have been seeking some sort of political power and kingdom from the Messiah. John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus straight out, “Are you the One?” Some Bible scholars feel John himself could hardly have doubted Jesus’ role. They offer the alternative that it was John’s disciples who were unsure. It’s possible. At any rate, Jesus sent the two back to John, pointing to His miracles of power and love. He says, ponder again these things that you see and hear—the astounding miracles of healing for the blind, the deaf, the lame, the leprous, and the dead! But there was more—even the special healing for the soul—*The poor have the gospel preached to them.* That phrase really hits the point. Jesus’ kingdom would not be political or physical at all. He would bring the Gospel—the Good News!—to the hearts of the poor. The poor? Not the outwardly poor, but the inwardly poor—sinners! We say, “Those poor people!” They might be ever so wealthy, but if they are “in a bind,” particularly, on the road to hell apart from Christ, those poor people!

In life too, do not expect your church membership at St. Luke’s, or your Christianity in general, to be a ticket to a life that pleases your eyes, ears, and all other senses. Do not think, “If I go to church, then I’m guaranteed a good week.” Church and Jesus will not automatically give you physical success and prosperity. In Christ you are safe for eternity! pardoned from all sins and misdeeds. You are pardoned before almighty God —!—pardoned through Christ. Trust the message of salvation! Forget the show. Jesus, says, *Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*”

Vv. 7-15 *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

When John’s disciples had left, Jesus made the same point to the crowds regarding John Himself. John was, umm, well, different. He lived alone in the wilderness near the Jordan River. He wore a garment of camel-hair fastened with a leather belt. He ate locusts (big grasshoppers) and wild honey. He was different. Was John simply an interesting *phenomenon*—something to be seen? an unusual “reed” at the river’s edge?—taller? of different shape? strong against wind and storm? That would be a sight all right. But people hadn’t gone out to him just to see a natural wonder. They hadn’t gone out to him because He was a high-life celebrity, decked in finery and fashion. No. John was a prophet of God, a messenger with a very special message.

John was the most privileged and greatest messenger/prophet of all. In Isaiah the Lord said concerning his particular role, *Behold, I send My messenger before Your [Jesus'] face, who will prepare Your way before You.* John came to announce the arrival of the Savior of the world. John's "draw" was not his show, but his message. "*Repent and be baptized! The Kingdom of God is at hand!*" In other words, "Before God above, receive a clean slate, a fresh start, forgiveness and God's declaration of righteousness-through-His-Son!" Jesus said, *Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.* His role and his message made John special: *Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).* No one has ever had a higher position than John. He introduced the world the world's Savior! Does that make you feel like a nobody, a loser and a cast-away in comparison with John? Jesus comforts with a tender word, *But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* In God's eyes there's no assessment of greatness. Indeed, a comfort for all. Do you ever say—as does the pastor—"Am I a simpleton or what?! How could I mess this up?" Yet even you, through Jesus, are as great as John the Baptist. In fact, Jesus says, *greater!* That was John's comforting message for the heart, beyond any outward "show" for eyes and ears. "In Christ the Savior, you belong to God!"

The next verses are unusual. *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.* Violence never overpowers God's Kingdom, *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18)!* The verse, therefore, mean something to the effect that John's message of salvation by faith in the Messiah was so great, that it began a time of great upheaval in this world—turning things upside down, turning "sure things" into things that are not. Through John's message of Christ, the individual soul and the church advances, not by human effort and works, but by faith alone! Whether lowly or not, yet those who are mighty in faith, are "in"! John was the Elijah-to-come, the one prophesied by Malachi as the forerunner and the announcer of peace and safety by faith in God's Son! Great things were/are proclaimed by John. Be aware. Don't miss the message, because you are too busy looking for the "show!" *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Vv. 16-19 *"But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."*

Jesus then uses that same principal for those who assess Him. Jesus may not fit your "fancy" or your eyes and ears, but He fits your needy sinful heart! It's so easy to be dissatisfied with Jesus. He doesn't give you "outwardly" what you want. It's easy to become complainers--like children who are invited by friends, but don't want to play "wedding" or "funeral" or anything in between. We want what we want—whatever satisfies our craving and desires, whatever dotes upon us and puts us at the center. Jesus says, "People found fault with John for his food and drink. He's too eccentric, odd, different. *He has a demon.*" They likewise were finding fault with Jesus because He ate regular food and drink and associated with regular people. *He's a glutton and a winebibber. He eats and drinks too much. He associates with people who are beneath us—tax collectors and sinners.* It's easy today to find fault with church, religion, the Bible, with St. Luke's, the CLC, or pastor-whoever-he-is. It becomes easy to look for church to be something that is pleasant to the eyes and ears and helps one on the road of sin! Jesus says, *Wisdom is justified by her children.* Fools never understand the value of wisdom. "Why do I have to learn to speak politely? Why do I have to learn to drive correctly? Why do I have to learn to handle money wisely?" Why? Without it, disaster awaits, and the he sooner you see that, the better! "Why do I have to learn about God and the Bible and sin and salvation in Jesus alone? Why can't religion, and God, and the Bible, just be fun, something that suits my eyes and my ears?" Because without Jesus and trust in Jesus for forgiveness, disaster awaits. The sooner you see that, the better. *Wisdom is justified by her children.*

External appearance and "show" misses the point. The internal message of Christ the crucified and risen Savior is the point!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---