

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 96

March 5, 2021

Welcome to another edition of The Mind of Christ. We are making our way through the life of Christ in the four gospels and we have been looking at a section concerning John the Baptist. The first part of this section had to do with some disciples of John coming to Jesus and asking Him if He was the “expected” one. The second half is really a eulogy with Jesus anticipating the death of John as he is imprisoned in Machaerus, a fortress prison in the desert region on the other side of the Jordan. We are about halfway through this particular section. We are following A. T. Robertson’s plan for the chronological sequence of the life of Christ in his “A Harmony of the Gospels”. If you are following along with that, we are in section 57. Last time I read the account given in Matthew 11 and today I thought I’d start by reading the account in the book of Luke.

You would need to read both of these because there are some slight differences in the two accounts. It says in verse 18 of Luke Chapter 7 that “the disciples of John also reported to him about all these things” so that gives me the indication that they had observed some of the things that He had just previously done like raising the widow’s son in Nain, and also perhaps the Centurion’s servant who was healed. They may have observed some of those things as well as some of His other healings.

Luke 7:18-35 NASB

The disciples of John also reported to him about all these things. ¹⁹ And after summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are You the Coming One, or are we to look for another?” ²⁰ When the men came to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, ‘Are You the Coming One, or are we to look for another?’” ²¹ At that very time He cured many people of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many who were blind. ²² And He answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: people who were blind receive sight, people who were lame walked, people with leprosy are cleansed and people who were deaf hear, dead people are raised up, and people who are poor have the gospel preached to them. ²³ And blessed is anyone who does not take offense at Me.”

We talked quite a bit about that in the last session.

²⁴ When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see, a reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! ²⁶ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is the one about whom it is written:

‘Behold, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.’

²⁸ I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” ²⁹ When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

³¹ “To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?”

³² They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a song of mourning, and you did not weep.’ ³³ For John the Baptist has come neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a heavy drinker, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

³⁵ And yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

Matthew 11:11-19

¹¹ Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently, and violent men take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.

¹⁶ “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call out to the other children, ¹⁷ and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a song of mourning, 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, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a heavy drinker, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ And yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

We’re going to pick up in **Matthew 11:11** and **Luke 7:28** where Jesus is going to talk about the greatness of John the Baptist; and also of those who are in the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God. There are some minor differences in the two statements that are found here.

Matthew begins with “Truly” or “Amen” often used by Jesus to put emphasis on His mission to testify to the truth. Both Matthew and Luke say, “I say to you”; a frequent phrase of Jesus again used for emphasis. And now that Jesus has the attention of his listeners, they both use the phrase “among those born of women”. So He’s going to talk about the person that He believes is the greatest of those who were born among women (**Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28**). It’s just a way of saying ‘everyone’, because that’s the only way we get into the world is to be born of a woman. The only persons not born of a woman were Adam and Eve. Even Jesus was born of a woman according, of course. Jesus had to exclude Himself. Was Jesus trying to make sure *they knew John was born, and not a reincarnation of Elijah* miraculously come back from the dead, because they did equate John the Baptist with Elijah? Maybe He wanted to make sure they understood that he *was born*. Well, I’m not sure, but Jesus is on record that John was, indeed, born; there is much testimony of this in the records. John’s mother did ponder what manner of child he would be. Did she live to see what he might be? Of course, they were quite old in age when they had John.

Matthew uses the word “arisen” ... there has not a risen one greater than John. Luke leaves this out. I’m not sure that this is significant. Matthew also says “John the Baptist” and Luke only says “John”. Matthew, Mark and Luke all use the phrase John the Baptist. John the apostle does not in his book. (Don’t get the two John’s confused. There’s John the Baptist

and then there is John the Apostle.) The designation was used by Jesus, the disciples, Herod, by Salome, and the gospel writers. It was a common designation based on what he did ... he baptized. Literally, it was “John the baptizer” or “John the immerser”. I wonder how many people he actually baptized, and what were the long term effects and implications of his actions. Did those early Christians who were also baptized by John enjoy any special status or notice in the kingdom? Of course, in Acts 19 this created a little controversy for Paul over some who did not connect baptism with the resurrection of Jesus who had sent the Holy Spirit. Now John had certainly left his mark on the people of Israel. He would not be soon forgotten.

The phrase, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of *heaven* is greater than he” is what Matthew says. Luke says “... kingdom of *God* is greater than he”. So even though he’s the greatest among those born, even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. So John is the greatest man who has ever been born but not greater than the one who is least in the kingdom. How can that be?

The explanation that I grew up with was that ... *Since the Kingdom and the Church were the same, and since John died before the church was established, he was not a member of the church, so the least person in the church is greater than John*. Well, there is a lot that is wrong with this explanation, I believe, but that’s what I grew up with.

First, the kingdom of God did not exist until after Acts 2, then what does **Matthew 11:12** actually mean? “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently (suffering violence), and violent men take it by force.” When Jesus said this, John was still alive, so the kingdom had to exist in some sense during John’s lifetime. Second, surely Jesus in not saying a saved person is greater than John because John is not saved. Of course John was saved. Perhaps the answer lies in Hebrews Chapter 11, of all who lived and died under the law but not saved by it, but by Christ whose sacrifice reached to the past to cover those who lived by faith. These were only made perfect through us, because we who live on this side of the cross and the resurrection could be baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the one who had come to fulfill the terms of the gospel.

John’s role was to introduce the Bridegroom. Ours is to be the bride. Of course, John is of the bride as well. But like all the prophets, he, being in a special role, could only see dimly what we can see now more clearly because of the gospel proclaimed in its completeness. Surely the one who knows Jesus crucified and resurrected is in a greater place than one who died without seeing it. How great it is to live on this side of the cross.

Another way to look at this statement is to challenge the worldly thinking of the Jews. The people did look at John as a great prophet, but not through the spiritual discerning eyes of the kingdom. They weren’t looking at the greatness of John through the eyes of the kingdom. They looked at him through more worldly eyes. John was just ‘the next big thing’ to them. They saw him as great in some natural sense as born of a woman, but they missed the substance of his birth and ministry; a ministry to announce the kingdom of God. These same people would not even turn their head at some people in the kingdom; especially those who they considered to be ‘least’ in the kingdom.

Gideon was considered *least* in his family but chosen by God, **Judges 6:15**. Saul said the same thing in **1 Samuel 9:21**, that he was the *least*. David was the youngest of his family. **1 Chronicles 12:14** the sons of Gad were the captains of the army and the *least* of them was equal to 100, and the greatest one to 1,000. **Isaiah 60:22** says ‘the least’ will become a thousand; the smallest, a mighty nation. **Jeremiah 31:34** regarding the New Covenant, “all will know the Lord from the *least* to the *greatest*. **Matthew 2:6** Bethlehem was the *least* among the cities of the tribe of Judah, but the place where Jesus was born. Then, in **Matthew 25:40** when we serve the *least* of these, we serve Jesus. In **Luke 9:48** the *least* will be the *greatest*. In **1 Corinthians 15:9** Paul was the *least* the apostles according to his testimony ... see **2 Corinthians 11:5**, though not inferior to them. Then in **Ephesians 3:8** he describes himself as the *least* of all saints.

A very curious statement to reconcile with our present text is **Matthew 5:19** where in the text, the *least* is a good thing. But in **Matthew 5:19**, the *least* is the one who teaches one to annul even the *least* of these commandments. The great is the one who teaches others to *keep* the commandments. Of course, the context determines the interpretation. The *least* can become *great*; the *greatest* in the kingdom is the servant of all. The point is that “the person who grasps the substance of the truth and puts this into practice although *appearing to be least*, actually is *great*; but the one who discourages substance is least”. It’s a paradox. That’s the way Jesus often talked.

Back in **Matthew 11:12** it is an interesting, thought-provoking statement. “[And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been treated violently, and violent men take it by force.](#)” Luke does not have it. What is Jesus saying and how does this fit contextually? Let’s investigate that.

Because of men’s misconception of the kingdom and its nature as it pertains to the Messiah, there is a mindset that says ‘an opportunity has arisen and we must seize it’. It is like a group who might do a *corporate takeover*; some are friendly and some are hostile. Jesus did not need anyone to take over His Kingdom. I have been reading a book called simply “Jerusalem: The History of the Holy City”. It is the history of hostile takeovers. Remember Jesus is living during the times of the Herods who will do almost anything, including killing their own family members, to hold onto their kingdoms. There is no lack of examples of kingdoms *suffering violence*, and now the King of the Jews, the Messiah, the Anointed One is here and people have ‘**their**’ idea of what His Kingdom should be or shouldn’t be. The clearest place might be in **John 6:15**, “[So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.](#)” This is the exact same phrase that is used in **Matthew 11:12**, so I think we’re pretty close here to understanding what He means in.

First, *suffer violence*, the word *suffer violence* is “Biazo” (βιάζω) meaning to force, to crowd oneself into, to be seized, to press, to suffer violence. It is used in the ‘middle voice’ in **Luke 16:16**, it’s the equivalent of **Matthew 11:12** but a totally different context. It says, “[The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; and since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it](#)”. It’s the same idea there. It’s the laying siege or storming the gates of a city to be able to enter.

The crowds at Wal-Mart on black Friday or soccer fans trying to get into a game; there is no need for force one's way into the Kingdom. It comes with an invitation to enter! What is the motivation? It's usually a profound sense that my life will be different for the good if I can just "get in", and perhaps, "sit in the best seat" or "be in the most advantageous position". Sometimes people would think they could force their way into the Kingdom. They would get to be first in line; they could get in on the ground floor, have the best seats or something like that. So taking the best seats because one loves the 'place of honor' was something Jesus spoke about in **Matthew 23:6**, **Mark 12:39**, **Luke 11:43** and **Luke 20:46**.

In **Luke 14:8ff** "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, *do not take the place of honor*, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him,⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." The transaction of the Kingdom is to serve, to receive, it's giving, but does this mean we should not be aggressive in our business? Surely we need to do excellent work and allow our work to speak like Joseph who was diligent where he was and left the reward to someone else.

Second, it says that *violent men will take it by force*. The word here is *harpazo* (αρπάζω) meaning to seize, to take by force, to catch, to pluck or to pull. It is used of beasts of prey in **John 10:12** talking about the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. It is that which is snatched suddenly away as in **Matthew 13:19** about the Word being snatched away by Satan or by the birds. In **Jude 23** it is used of snatching people from the fire. These are dramatic actions that we take. In **John 10:28-29** Jesus says no one will snatch them out of My Father's hand. God has such a hold on us that someone cannot just come along and snatch us out of the hands of the Father. In another place, it means to carry away, to hurry off as in **John 6:15** when it says they were trying to make Jesus a king by force. Then, in **Acts 8:39**, after He had baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch it says, "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him." Then in **Acts 23:10** Paul was taken away by force by the troops in order to save him. In **2 Corinthians 12:2** Paul was 'caught up' to the third heaven; or to paradise. In **1 Thessalonians 4:17** it says that those alive at the coming of Jesus, "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". In **Revelation 12:5** says, "... the child was caught up to God and to His throne." It sounds a little bit like the rapture. Actually the Latin word for this Greek word is the word from which we get "rapture".

Clearly the idea is of an outside force acting on one to move them along to either completely without their will, or with it as in hurrying them along. It reminds me of the secret service grabbing the President's arm and forcefully ushering him into a safe place. Contextually, as we will see, there are many who simply want to be in control of the kingdom to direct its affairs, but there is only one King, one Lord and one Master. The Kingdom is about following; not leading, about submitting, obeying, being led, and responding to Jesus. It is not about us taking control of His Kingdom. God is in control of His plan and His agenda. He does not need nor want man, any man, to co-opt his work. It is not my church. It is not my Bible. It is not my Gospel. It is not my anything!

This is akin to usurping authority as in **1 Timothy 2:12** regarding a woman over a man. The word here is “authenteo” (αυθεντεω) meaning to act of one’s self, to dominate, to usurp authority over. *The point here seems to be that man and woman are interdependent and need to cooperate and work together, and not dominate.* He points back to the creation where Adam and Eve should have cooperated and worked together as they were designed to do. But Eve made a critical decision independent of Adam; *she ignored his co-authority*, his wisdom, his responsibility and *took control* and was deceived. We avoid deception when we cooperate and make decisions in unity. If this is true of men and women, husbands and wives, then *how much more* regarding our relationship with God? We have decisions to share in but they are purely in relationship to all the critical decisions God has already made.

Jesus taught His disciples that they were not mere servants or slaves, but friends in **John 15:15**. Jesus *shared* with them what His Father was doing. He *communicated* with them. He didn’t lead in a vacuum. He led in yoke with them in **Matthew 11:29-30**. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

In the discussion about who is the greatest in the Kingdom of God, (in **Luke 22:24ff**) Jesus begins with the contrast between the worldly model and the Kingdom model of authority. In the world, ‘*might makes right*’; gentiles lord it over others. These are benefactors and they control the agenda through money. But not so with you; the greatest should be the youngest and the leader, the servant!

The Kingdom Jesus grants is one where we each have a place at the table with Him. No one is in the kitchen and we will have a responsibility. For His apostles, it was to join in the judgment with the twelve tribes of Israel. This is a completely new model than what they’re used to. Luke gives the response of all the people ...the tax collectors, the Pharisees and the lawyers. There were two very different responses. One group acknowledges God’s justice. These are the ones who have been baptized by John. The other group rejected God’s purpose for themselves. This was the un-baptized group. These were the Scribes and Pharisees who would not be baptized by John. This is an important observation. What were they responding to exactly? In general, the way God’s Kingdom works is compared to man’s kingdoms; it’s a different way of responding. Some responded in regard to the way worldly kingdoms work, but they didn’t understand how God’s Kingdom worked.

The word ‘justice’ here in **Luke 7:29** is the word ‘dikaioo’, (δικαιωω) meaning to reduce or to show, to regard as just or innocent. It can even mean to free or to justify or be righteous. The same word is used in **Matthew 11:19** as we will see later where wisdom is vindicated, or proved right, by her deeds.

To the people and the tax collectors, the ones who had been baptized by John, Jesus’ words rang true. They sounded right. A kingdom must have some standard of justice. Our symbol for impartial justice is “Lady Justice” who holds a scale and is blindfolded. This symbol has origins in Egyptian and Greek and Roman mythology. The Greek goddess is Dike (Δικε); the Goddess Maat and Isis are of the Egyptian origin. But dike is the one carrying the scales. Rome called her Justitia. Here the sword and the blindfold were added. Some modern depictions leave off the blindfold.

Common people would know power could easily see the need for a kingdom where the *least* could be as great as the *greatest* and each person can be equal under the law. We readily see this as right, but in practice, we all want some advantage under the law.

How did the tax collectors seem to ‘get it’? Jesus ate with them. Matthew was one of them. Zacchaeus is famous for his conversion. Perhaps the people who have to look the oppressed in the face and see the burdens placed on them, and the choices they are required to make can have more sympathy than someone in the ‘ivory tower’ who never really see how their decisions affect people. Even though tax collectors had some power, they were not respected by either the people or their bosses.

In **Luke 7:30** Luke says the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purposes. To ‘reject’ (αθετησις) means to displace, to set aside, to abrogate, to annul, to violate or to sever. This word is used in **Hebrews 7:18** and in **9:26**. It is something that you place or you set aside. So when he says you reject God’s purposes, you negate them; you make them negative. In **Luke 6:48** it is of the man who lays the foundation on a rock. In **Hebrews 7:18** it is the setting aside of a weak and useless former command. It’s a rejection of it. All of these are words that are connected here.

In **John 15:16** Jesus said He appointed the apostles to go and bear fruit that would last. Imagine the negative; to disappoint. In other words, he appointed them; but imagine Jesus *dis-appointing* them, to remove them, to reject the apostles as not ‘being fit’ for such fruit!

The phrase “lay down” as in **John 10:11** and **15**, “[I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep](#)”; imagine the opposite of that. Imagine Him *not* laying down His life. The Pharisees and the lawyers would not lay it down; they *rejected*. There would be many illustrations of this kind in the negative. So, to *accept* something is the opposite of to *reject* and that’s how He’s using it here. We’re talking about *rejecting God’s purposes*. So, what did they reject?

It says they rejected the purposes of God. **Luke 7:30**: “[But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.](#)” The rejected the counsel of God. That’s another way to translate this. They rejected the volition of God, the advice or the will or determination, the decision, the decree or the things spoken of God. In **Acts 2:23** the word is used there as the *predetermined plan* of God. ([This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.](#)) In harmony with His foreknowledge was to deliver Jesus up to be nailed to a cross. In **Acts 13:36**, “[For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay.](#)” In **Acts 20:27** Paul to the Ephesian elders said, “[For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose \(or the whole counsel\) of God.](#)”

In **Ephesians 1:11** Paul said, “...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to [His purpose](#) who works all things after the counsel of His will”. **Hebrews 6:17** says, “[In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath](#)”. This is what these mere men were rejecting. The *audacity of these men!*

In **Acts 4:28**, often associated with pre-destination, (to do whatever Your hand and *Your purpose* predestined to occur). Gamaliel, later in **Acts 5:38-39** said, “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for **if this plan or action** is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹ *but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.*” Gamaliel warned them “don’t reject the plan, purpose or the counsel of God.” In **Acts 27:42**, “The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape”. This is the word counsel, the word ‘boule’ (βουλη). The “plan” was to kill the prisoners.

In **1 Corinthians 4:5** says, “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts (or the plans or the counsels); and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.”

Luke makes the point that a distinguishing difference between the two groups is the first were baptized with the baptism of John, but the others were not baptized by John. Luke is emphasizing that John was trying to bring people in line with the *purposes of God* for their lives. To do so, *people have to acknowledge God’s justice. This is why John preached the baptism of repentance.* He called people to bring fruits of repentance and told them about the One who has a winnowing fork in His hand. Jesus threshes out justice separating wheat from chaff!

These are two huge principles or truths that go together; **justice** and **purpose** ... **justice** and **purpose**. The ones who *accepted* Jesus accepted His justice and the ones who *rejected* Jesus were the ones who *rejected the purposes of God*. Such is so profound! If a person does not acknowledge that God is *just*, and the *justifier* of those who have faith in Jesus, then they will never enter the purpose of God for themselves.

Matthew picks up at **11:13-15** when he said, “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Jesus was referring to the **two** sections of the Old Testament; the Law and the Prophets. There is a third called “the Writings” or “the Psalms”. Jesus is saying that the entire Old Testament spoke of Him and His coming, in many ways and in various forms.

The stories often mirror the life of Jesus or His teaching. Many feasts and remembrances parallel the work of Christ. And then there are the direct prophecies of the expectant One. Jesus is showing the continuity of all the revelation of God from the beginning of the days of John. John is the bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament! What a bridge he was.

This is Luke’s comment; not in red, but typifies Jesus’ pattern of either / or when it comes to salvation. I’m talking about **Luke 7:29-30** where Luke says, “When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.” This is Luke’s comment. Luke is commenting on this; these are not the words of Jesus, but Luke is commenting here.

In **Matthew 11:14**, Jesus said, “[And if you are willing \(care to\) to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.](#)” Literally, if you are willing to receive it, or Him, He is Elias, the one about whom is about to come. This reinforces my point on John being a prophetic bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This is because of **Malachi 4:5-6**, the last words of the Old Testament. “[Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 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.](#)”

Much has been made about **Matthew 11:14** regarding reincarnation, for instance. Was John a reincarnated Elijah; since Elijah did not die but was whisked to heaven in a chariot of fire? Remember Elijah departed on the banks of the Jordan River. Having struck the water, Elijah and Elisha crossed over to the east bank which is modern Jordan where Elijah departed. ***This is said to be the site where Jesus later was baptized and where John was baptizing!*** Just imagine this; that John is baptizing in almost the same spot where Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot. So there are a lot of connections here between John the Baptist and Elijah! Now, here is John at the very spot of Elijah’s departure. No wonder folks would associate John with Elijah; and even wonder if he might literally ‘**be**’ Elijah returned. But there is no reason to believe in reincarnation or some miraculous reappearing of Elijah except on the Mount of Transfiguration. Surely John was a key figure indicating that this is the dawning of a new era. A new day has dawned and he is introducing the new Bridegroom to the world.

In **Matthew 11:15** Jesus says, “[He who has ears to hear, let him hear.](#)” This appears to have occurred four times in the Gospels: here, **Mark 4:9**, **Luke 8:8** in the ‘parable of the sower’, and in **Luke 14:35** after talking about the cost of discipleship and salt being thrown out because it has lost its saltiness. Of the four places, there are three circumstances. There’s the sower, there is the cost of discipleship and then there is the coming of John. All of these are connected to fundamental decisions that people have to make.

The next section of Jesus’ response concerning John is nearly identical in Matthew and Luke except for one phrase that I can see; at least in the New American Standard Bible. Actually in **Luke 7:31** the question is longer. He says, “[To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like?](#) Matthew merely says, “[To what shall I compare this generation?](#)” There’s not much difference. The key word is “**generation**”. The word means age, generation, nation or time; those alive at the time he spoke. So in **Matthew 12:39** Jesus speaks of, “[An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and \[yet\] no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet](#)”. **Luke 11:32** says “[the men of Nineveh will stand up with His generation at the judgment and condemn it.](#)” So shall the queen of the South, in **Matthew 12:42**; “[The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.](#)” In **Matthew 12:45** he says, “[This generation is like a person who gets rid of one demon only to have seven take up residence.](#)” In **Matthew 17:17** Jesus even includes His disciples in an evil and perverse generation. In **Matthew 23:36** Jesus says the sentence of Hell will come upon this **generation** after a vivid description or prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. “[Truly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation.](#)”

You can see this in Josephus when he talks about the destruction of Jerusalem. This is all talked about in **Matthew 24:34** where Jesus says, “**This generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.**” What a warning!

Jesus’ focus on His present generation is understandable. We all do; but there was something extra significant about this generation that He’s talking about. It’s unique. No other generation had the Son of God in their presence, and the opportunity to personally or visually to accept Him. **John 1:11** says, “**He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.**”

Jesus is looking for a good illustration to get His point across. He makes a comparison; something one knows to help them understand something that they do not know. So Jesus often used this method to teach. He painted word pictures. This is how His mind operated. He took spiritual concepts and translated them into illustrations or stories; containers of the message. Did He struggle as to how to get the message across; how to be understood?

Well, could we exchange “generation” for the word “culture”; could we say, “current age”? Any age seems to have much in common. Sin is sin. There is nothing new under the sun according to Ecclesiastes, but only one generation had the Messiah in its midst, and for the generation of Jerusalem, no generation experienced the depths of destruction that she did.

The comparison to children in the marketplace would be commonplace to everyone. Children are social and they seek to draw one another into group play; to step into a common or shared imagination and ‘make it up’ as you go. They write, they direct and they act on the fly to create a drama where each one is the star. However, they also compete for roles and can get oppositional ... ‘I don’t want to play that. Let’s play this.’

He talks about the ‘agora’, (αγορα) the town square, the gathering place, talking about children playing in the marketplaces. We also get “agoraphobia”, fear of open spaces or gathering places from this word. There is something about trying to get people to cooperate with one another; getting organized, being persuaded, joining or grouping. Often the hindrance to organization is “who is in charge?” and “whose idea will be followed?” But here are God’s messengers, John and Jesus, in total harmony but different styles. **John** seems exclusive, isolated, separated, strict, and **Jesus** seems inclusive, social, involved, and lenient. They have very different styles, it seems, but both representing the Father! How do we understand this?

Our disagreements are often about styles and emphasis and perception. Many stumble over either John or Jesus **because** they did not seem to represent what **someone** thought of God. Our own biases are filters that cause us to stumble on this or that.

In churches we become critics of preachers and song leaders and elders and one another! We don’t like this or that. I don’t want to play that; let’s play this. We sound like children; immature children, and **the message, work and person of Jesus gets lost in our shuffle**. Nothing has really changed.

Again, Jesus is describing the impulsiveness and the indecisiveness of children. *The flute should have been the signal to dance but many were oppositional. The funeral dirge should have been a signal to mourn.* Can you see the children doing this? They're merely imitating the adults who celebrate and bury their dead; normal acts of life.

Jesus was the flute player and John sang the dirge, although Jesus could also sing the dirge when appropriate, like He did over Jerusalem that was destined for destruction. The 'dirge' is a word that means to bewail, lament or mourn. It's used in our context and also in **John 16:20** where Jesus tells His disciples that they "will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy." In **Luke 23:27** the women who followed the cross lamented Jesus. "And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were *mourning and lamenting* Him. ²⁸ But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me but weep for yourselves and for your children."

When describing John, Matthew merely says, he came neither "eating nor drinking", but Luke says "neither eating bread nor drinking wine". Obviously this did not mean literally except He may have abstained from fermented wine. John was not a "partier"; he was a "loner". He was serious; all business. We might say he just needs to lighten up a little bit.

The people associated this with a *demon*... at least some did. Most thought him to be a prophet. But the Jewish leaders (**Luke 7:30**), had to find a way to discredit him. "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John." They did this to Jesus as well. In **John 10:20** some of these Jews said of Jesus, "He has a demon and He's insane. Why do you listen to Him?" Others said, "These things are not sayings of a demon-possessed man. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?" Man seeks to "explain" or "explain away" what is disturbing to him. "Demon-possessed was a convenient label. It ended the conversation for many.

Jesus did spend time socially with people; even the Pharisees but also the tax collectors, and allowed sinners to attend and touch Him. For this, some *labeled Him a gluttonous man*. It's only found in this context... an abuser of food. Perhaps He didn't fast enough for them. Remember His disciples were accused of this (**Matthew 9:14** and **Luke 5:33**). The second charge against Jesus was that He was a drunkard; He was a wine-bibber. Jesus imbibed too much, they said. So *He eats too much and He drinks too much*. He must have enjoyed eating and drinking socially to even be criticized but certainly not to excess. These charges and their implications cannot be true; they are certainly exaggerated.

The third charge is that He is a friend of sinners and tax collectors. The word here is "philos" (φιλος) and means 'brotherly affection'. If He were going to have any friends on earth, *they would have to be sinners*. This is who He came to save. In **Matthew 10:37** Jesus says, "If we more love "phileo" for family than for Him, we are not worthy of Him.

The Pharisees loved to pray to be seen of men and to have their places of honor at banquets and in the synagogues. Judas used his love, his 'phileo', his *kiss* to betray Jesus! How do you use your brotherly love; brotherly affection?

John, in his book, uses the word ten times:

The Father *loves* the Son, showing Him what He is doing in **John 5:20**.

Lazarus is referred to “as the one Jesus *loves*” in **John 11:3**.

After Jesus wept for Lazarus the Jews recognized how much Jesus *loves* him in **John 11:36**.

A basic teaching of Jesus is “the one who *loves* his life will lose it” in **John 12:25**.

Those of the world will be *loved* by the world according to **John 15:19**.

But the Father *loved* the disciples because they *loved* His Son and believed God sent Him in **John 16:27**.

The disciple who Jesus *loved* probably referring to John himself, (John the apostle), in **John 20:2**.

And in **John 21:15-17** in the talk with Peter, He uses the word “phileo” at least twice. He asks, “Do you “agape” *love* me”, and then the third time, do you “Phileo” me, and then the times of course, when Peter uses the word of Jesus. The words ‘philos’ or ‘phileo’ is used twenty one times in the Gospels, mostly by Luke, and in **12:4** Jesus calls the disciples “friends”. In **Luke 14:10** those invited to the banquet should take the ‘least place’ but may be considered a “friend” by the host and asked to move up. All of these are places that are found in the book of Luke. I am not going to read all of those places.

In **John 3:29**, John himself is the “friend” of the Bridegroom. He is the ‘best man’ rejoicing at the Bridegroom’s voice. In **John 15:13-15** Jesus tells us 1) the greatest love is to lay down one’s life for our “friends”. 2) We are “friends” if we do what He commands. 3) A “friend” is in contrast with a slave and 4) a “friend” knows his master’s business. Jesus revealed His Father’s will to Him. He’s talking about Jesus being a friend of sinners so we’re showing the statements where the word “friend” is found. If we compare these last statements with our own context here, Jesus was making friends with tax collectors and sinners; those He was willing to die for; those who were indeed to obey His commands; those who He would release from slavery and those to whom He would reveal His Father’s business bringing them into His confidence.

The final words, in this section, is “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds”, **Matthew 11:19** or as **Luke 7:35** says, “wisdom is vindicated by all her children”. The word ‘wisdom’ in both texts is “sophia” (σοφία). The word for ‘Vindicated’ or ‘justified’ is the same in both “dikaioo” (δικαίωω). Wisdom is treated as female, a feminine noun, wisdom is always referred to as ‘her’, as it is in the book of Proverbs. The difference is ‘her works’ or ‘all her children’ is talked about. We might ask, “What justifies Jesus’ hanging out with tax collectors and sinners?” How can He be vindicated for doing that? How can He be justified; how can He not separate Himself from them as the Pharisees did?

Jesus says, ‘look at our outcomes’. If the goal is to make converts or to help people be saved, or freed or liberated, then what works; isolating from them or spending time with them? Both John and Jesus were successful with different styles, but both had this in

common; *they were real, they did not play games or pretend or wear two faces*. They were willing to engage sinners and offer them what they needed. Jesus says, ‘look at our outcomes’, our works, our children, to see what is justified. In other words, *the proof is in the pudding*. What is our goal? Why would Jesus hang out with sinners; ... because He came to *save* sinners. I suppose we should be careful how we apply this truth. Does Jesus mean the proof is in the pudding? How do I understand this?

In ministry we often try to evaluate quality by quantity. Success is hard to define in ministry. I just don’t believe this is what Jesus is getting at. Jesus was about “right”; not about “works”; hanging out with sinners, or demonstrating the heart and nature of God to them. He came to seek and save the lost.

Jesus is vindicated or justified because it is simply right to befriend sinners; *even if they don’t respond!* This is difficult to explain. Jesus is about “what it is”. We too often, judge things on the surface, by appearances instead of “what it is”. *To see, to really see, what we really see is important.*

Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians about seeing Christ at one time from a worldly point of view. But he learned to see Jesus for who He is, with new eyes. It is an art, a spiritual art to be able to recognize the *fake* from the *authentic*. How do we train our eyes to see and our ears to hear? *How do we learn to see right from wrong?*

The Hebrew writer says solid food is for the mature, who because of practice, have their senses trained to distinguish good from evil? How could anyone look at pure good and say, “He is a glutton and a winebibber and a demon-possessed person?” *Boy, did they miss it!* Their distinguishers were way off!

This is also about fruit! Actions are truer than words! If someone’s words are confusing, look at their actions! See what a person does. “By their fruits you shall know them” in **Matthew 7:16**. But fruit is not always easy to judge. Either it might take some history to see what actions mean, too. And we must not jump to conclusions.

But ultimately, God looks at the heart. Not words and not actions, but deeper. How do we mere mortals ever hope to get it right? This is really, really deep.

Well, that concludes that section ... section 57, and like I say, this is deep stuff. We start digging into the very words of Jesus and try to understand exactly what He meant, so that we can learn to *think* like Him and therefore we can *become* like Him in our way of life.

There is a transcript that will come out on this in a few days. If you want to get that manuscript and don’t know how, go to our website at: <https://www.centralsarasota.org/> and there is a place you can E-mail us and we’ll make sure that you get on the list to be able to receive this information.

Thank you for joining us and I hope you’ll join us next time. We will be in section 58 and we will talk about some “woes” that came upon some cities who were missing ‘recognizing’ Jesus. So that will be next time, when we return to The Mind of Christ. Thank you again and God bless.