

## **Matthew 11:7-15 When God Speaks: Listen!**

Why don't people believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

I think this chapter in Matthews Gospel gives us **great insight** into that question.

Late last year we looked at the first 6 verses of this wonderful chapter.

We lingered over 2 statements in those verses.

One by John the Baptist in the form of a question & the other a declaration by Jesus.

**John's Question** was one his disciples asked on his behalf. He couldn't ask it face to face because he was in a prison. His question was a really important one. It was troubling him and perhaps it's a question that troubles some here today.

It's important because it **gets to the heart** of the Christian message - WHO IS JESUS?

*"Are you the one who is to come, or should we be looking for someone else?"*

**Jesus' declaration** was, *"Blessed is the one who is not offended by (or does not stumble because of) me."*

We acknowledged that people can & do stumble in many ways over **many things in life**.

Life can be pretty cruel at times.

But Jesus' focus was stumbling over **him** - finding **Him** offensive.

We considered this under 3 broad headings:

Who He **is**.

What He **said** &

What He **did**/ What **happened to him**.

We could have spent a lot more time on each of those.

I suggest **that's one reason**, a broad one, why people don't believe the good news – once they seriously learn about Jesus, they find in Him something **offensive**.

**For some people He offends their:**

**Intellect** – there is too much that goes against what they have been taught.

**Desires & plans** – God may not give me my dreams.

**Pride** –I'm the captain of my destiny. I'm as good as anybody else, in fact better than most!

**SELF!** – a summary of everything – I want to be my own god. Before we go to the next verses there is one other important thing to note.

**If someone stumbles** over Jesus, that's not the end of the story. The reality is, using John's words, they will **keep looking for another**. John knew that. That's why he said, "Are you ... or do we look for another?"

**Another what? Another who?** Another saviour, another messiah, another God, another gospel, another experience, another possession, another pat on the back.

Another '**something**' or '**someone**' to '**somehow**' give purpose, happiness & make sense of my life & existence the world we live in. There used to be the expression, "**a God shaped vacuum**" that only He can fill.

Being satisfied in Jesus is kind of opposite to finding Him offensive.

**This morning we move further into this chapter.** If those first 6 verses explain one reason why people don't trust in Jesus (they find him offensive), perhaps these verses help us see another reason.

**i.e. Even though God has given us 2 ears, and they only have to do one specific job that I can tell, we aren't always good listeners.**

**MAIN POINT TODAY:**

**When God Speaks – Listen!** (v 15\*)

(Be intentional & active **listeners** to God's Words, fight against being apathetic or superficial).

### **1. LISTEN TO WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT JOHN**

John was someone people went **out of their way** to listen to. We will find out why soon.

Jesus, having **comforted** JB & his disciples with **assurance** that He was indeed the Messiah, He now **vindicates** John as he speaks incredibly highly of him. It's quite remarkable what Jesus says of John.

V7. The disciples of John depart, and Jesus now addresses '**the crowd**'.

Throughout the Gospel Acc to Matthew "crowds" are mentioned some 29 times. Much more than any other Gospel writer.

Four times Matthew speaks of “**Great Crowds**” following Jesus, gathering about him, bringing the lame, blind, crippled, mute etc to Jesus.

These two simple words, “the crowds” **bring home just how public Jesus’ ministry was**. His was not a secret or hidden ministry. **Crowds of people** heard, saw, touched, spoke with, were healed by him & questioned him. Eyewitnesses were everywhere in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel.

So, what does he tell the crowd about John, his cousin?  
v 7ff

Jesus begins by asking the crowd a rhetorical question - “***What did you go into the wilderness to see?***” (see = observe, take in)

He asks the **same question** and then answers it 3 times.

To ask the same question 3 times suggests he wants them to give serious thought to it, focus their mind on it and at least mentally give an answer.

After a child does something really dumb a parent or teacher may ask: “Why would you do that?” (Not that dumb acts are limited to children).

**This is the point:** Crowds of people **don’t normally** go to the effort of walking into a wilderness or desert. If you did so, as **Jesus did** sometimes, you **go alone**. You seek quietness, isolation, you are motivated by a felt need to remove yourself from people.

You aren’t there to buy something or sell something, or to relax, have a coffee with friends etc.

There must be a reason for it.

Why go to the trouble? **What did you go out to see?**

**Option1. A reed shaken by the wind** - someone who bends to the slightest force.

Not a vacillating person. If you went out for that reason you got the opposite. John was someone who was gripped by the message God had given him. A man of great moral conviction as to truth.

So, was JB a flowing, flip-flopping reed?

No, not a chance!

He was not like **a politician** who checks what the polls are saying on a certain issue before he tells us, his position.

Nor is he **a pastor** who takes his cue from what's cool or least controversial.

I think it was Matthew Henry who said of John,

**“He neither feared their frowns nor coveted their smiles.”**

There is a very old anonymous, humorous poem called *“The Vicar of Bray”*.

It did not matter who was **on the throne** in England, he could **adjust his beliefs** accordingly and **always remain** the Vicar of Bray.

It did not matter if the reigning monarch was Roman Catholic, Church of England, High Church, Low Church, Whig (anti-monarchy), or Tory.

He would always be the Vicar of Bray.

There are 6 verses. I'll give you the first verse, so you get the idea.

*In good **King Charles's** golden days,*

*When loyalty no harm meant,*

*A zealous High-Churchman I was,*

*And so, I got preferment;*

*Unto my flock I daily preached*

*Kings were by God appointed,*

*And damned was he that durst resist.*

*Or touch the Lord's anointed.*

*And this is law, I will maintain,*

*Until my dying day, Sir,*

*That whatsoever king shall reign,*

*I'll be the Vicar of Bray, Sir.*

This verse referred to King Charles II and was followed by a verse about James II, William III, Queen Anne, & finally King George I. Each time adjusting his beliefs and teaching to perfectly fit in with the ruler of the day.

**A reed moving with the breeze.** That was not JB.

Think for a moment – who would you go out of your way to go and listen to? (This is in the days before recorders).

It should have to be someone we had **deep respect** for.

I would want to hear someone who moves me deeply with truth.

**Someone who tells me the good news of Jesus.**

Someone who spoke with authority and whose life was marked by integrity over many years.

Would you go to great trouble to listen to:

- Someone who was a crowd pleaser?
- Someone who had no substance?
- Someone who was all show, insincere, had no conviction, full of self, all show, one thing in public & another in private?

Who would you **lose a day's pay, give up time with your family, stand in line for 3-4 hours** to go & hear?

**Well, we get to hear Jesus words, so let's listen well.**

John had a very clear message & job description – all about Jesus.

**“Prepare the way!”**

He did that by:

- Calling people to get ready for the Messiah.
- Calling people to stop going in your current direction, do an about-face, get right with God, i.e. repent.
- Get your heart ready **to listen**. The Messiah is coming
- Get earnest. Get real.

That's a really important aspect of coming to church — listening TO GOD SPEAK THROUGH HIS WORD

JB knew what his **job** was, what his **message** was and he **who he was** in terms of the Messiah.

Remember when he was asked **“Who are you?”**

He knew better who he **wasn't** rather than who he was. Are you ... the Christ?. ... Elijah? No. The Prophet?

Well, **who are you?**

“I am a voice...” Pity the poor fellow - such low self-esteem! Just a voice! He needs some help.

***Option 2. V 8 A man dressed in soft clothing. –***

Did you go out to see a guy dressed in a suit from London's Savile Row

To see a guy wearing a Rolex watch

Prada Shoes

Versace Belt

Oochy goochy poochy sunglasses

That's clothes for a palace, a life of privilege. No, what you got was bare desert wear.

**Camel hair** and a leather belt was the go for John.

**It's not very often the Bible talks about** what people are wearing but with John it does.

It's more than just symbolising poverty - **What he wore linked him with Elijah the OT prophet.**

2 Kings 1:8 "*He (Elijah) wore a garment of hair, with a leather belt about his waist.*" ESV

Perhaps more importantly it symbolises **deep sadness** and a **public display of repentance.**

Camel hair is like sackcloth. It's rough, prickly and uncomfortable. It's coarse and inflexible.

**Think: wearing** a singlet made of hessian.

The wearing of sackcloth takes place numerous times in the OT.

**Jacob heard that Joseph** had been killed by lions

Daniel when he prayed for mercy

Kings: David & Hezekiah

Job, Mordecai

Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

Joel, Amos, Jonah

You wore this when you were distressed about something and the wearing of it was distressing.

One could say, what John wore, was a message in itself.

Q. Who goes wandering off into a wilderness to see fine clothes. If you wanted to see fine clothes hang around the palace, don't march off into the wilderness.

**NB.** His clothes & manner did not contradict or take away from his message.

**Option 3.v 9\* "A prophet? YES - that's the right answer! I tell you and MORE than a Prophet".**

John was the last of the line of OT prophets - even though we only read about him in the NT.

400 years had passed since a prophet spoke in Israel.

400 years of silence - no word from God for 400 years.

That's a long, long, long silence.

If you have ever been given the "silent" treatment you know it's not nice.

**Thus, the rush**, indeed the excitement to hear again a real prophet of YHWH.

Someone who could say, "Thus says the Lord."

*V 11\* Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared...*

***The greatest prophet to ever live! WOW! Double WOW!!***

I think we would all agree: *That's a pretty good reference! G.O.A.T. Lebron James v Michael Jordan & Federer v Djokovic*

John did **no miracles**, there's no book in the Bible "JB" – yet he is the greatest!

But Jesus does not leave it at just a prophet. Jesus says he is ***more than a prophet***.

He is a prophet who the other prophets spoke about.

**Leon Morris:** "*he is not just a prophet he is actually the fulfilment of prophecy!*" Mal 3:1 & Matt 11:10\*

**Be careful not to underestimate the importance of fulfilled prophecy.**

It's an important part of the authenticating who Jesus is & what he did esp. in Matt's gospel. The words, "***in order to fulfil the scripture***" c.14 times.

He is the prophet who had **the 'esteemed job' of preparing the way** for the messiah v 10

What an honour!

As surprising & superlative as the words Jesus says about JB what he says next is even more so.

## **2. Listen to what Jesus says about us! v 11b\***

Jesus is saying **what a great privilege** it is to be in God's kingdom. Get that? It is **a grand thing** to belong to God's Kingdom!

Jesus says that **the least person** in His kingdom is now greater than JB!

He is not saying we are greater than JB in **character or achievement**, but we are greater in **the privileges & knowledge** we have.

John pointed people to Jesus as best he could, with all he knew.

John was the first person/prophet to introduce people to Jesus and who can forget what he said!

*“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*

**We get to do the same thing (introduce people to Jesus) but with much more facts.**

John was looking forward to the Messiah’s coming, not fully knowing what he would achieve.

We look back knowing clearly who Jesus is, what Jesus did, said and the **history changing things he achieved.**

Our message is therefore greater & fuller than John’s.

We know the cross and the work done by God there.

We know it’s not what we do that puts us right with God.

We know the tomb was unable to hold him.

We know its Jesus’ righteousness imputed to us.

We get to tell our children, grandchildren, SS etc.

**What a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian!**

The ‘least’ person in Jesus Kingdom:

knows what Jesus **achieved** on the cross,

knows his/her **sins are dealt** with,

knows he **saves Gentiles**,

knows He **prays** for us,

knows Jesus was **raised** to life,

knows His death **atoned** for their sin.

**What a wonder it is to be in God’s Kingdom.**

**What a wonder it is to be adopted by God and call Him our Father.**

**He/she who is least in the KOG is greater than JB**

There is no reference anyone may write for you or me that comes anywhere near those words of Jesus.



### 3. Listen to what Jesus says about His Kingdom

**Esp:** It's advance and our response.

#### Verse 12

It is advancing forcefully, and believers grab it with both hands!

There are 2 main opinions when it comes to understanding what this verse means. [Cf margins]

It hangs on how one interprets the word "*Violently*."

Is it to be interpreted as:

**a. passive verb:** people being **violently against it** = the KOG *suffers violence* as in persecution or,

**b. as a middle voice verb** = the kingdom *forces its way*.

**Passive Voice:** The KOG has something done to it – here it is violence. Herod kills JB.

The Pharisees want to kill Jesus.

**Middle Voice:** When the KOG is said to be violently/ forcefully going forward.

It is when people hear the message and believe it, **their reaction** is seen as **like a violent person** in the sense that come what may, they must enter it.

So, out of the first two which is true? Do people attack it with violence or do people enter it with violence, or, if you are **Tim Keller** do you say both?

I **think** the second option is the correct one.

I think it's about **people being urgent** to enter, urgent to know God's forgiveness, get right with him.

I think that ties in **best with the context** here.

**Especially** when we think about the **character, ministry & message** of JB, and that people went to great trouble to go out to hear him.

They **weren't passive** about hearing him.

NB - in taking that position I'm agreeing with Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones.

Not a bad opening 4 batsmen or backline or mid-field.

It was preaching like JB's that aroused people out of **their apathy and lethargy**.

**They listened! They got it.**

**They became** aware of their real position before God. He laid it on the line.

**Lloyd-Jones** illustrates it a bit like this: Imagine a man at home resting in his armchair, he is a quiet chap, reading a book or newspaper at the end of the day. He is calmly resting. (Clearly his children have grown up and left home).

But suddenly he is aware that there is a fire taking hold of his home. What does he do?

Does he continue to sit there? Thinking, I'm halfway through this chapter I'll have to finish it, it so interesting! I'll just read the sport section then I'll check out the source of this smoke, most unusual.

Does he sit there saying to his wife, "Darling will you come and look at this. Those lovely curtains you made darling are all going up in flames, such a shame, I really liked them."

No! Of course not. Suddenly, this calm, mild softly spoken gentleman becomes urgent, 'violent' you could say.

He yells out, "fire!" He jumps out of his chair grabs his wife by the arm and runs for the closest exit, if fire blocks the way he rushes to another, he's prepared to smash a window do anything just to get away from life-threatening danger to safety.

He doesn't bother if a priceless vase or something gets knocked over on his way out. He doesn't turn back to get a dustpan and brush to tidy things up.

He doesn't think, I must have a tidy house if it's going to be burnt to the ground.

You would never normally think of him as a violent person, yet here he is - violent, urgent, anxious he must do all he can to get his wife and family to a safe place.

I have expanded a bit on Lloyd-Jones' illustration, but I think you get the point.

**The preaching of JB, Jesus and the Apostles** caused people to be like this.

Consider what **JB said Matt 3.**

- His strong call to repentance,

- His warning that judgment was surely coming (axe is already at the root of the tree)
- The urgent need to produce good fruit.

Consider Peter's preaching on the **Day of Pentecost**. How did people respond to Peter's sermon that day?

What did they say?

***What must we do to be saved?***

The **Philippian Jailer** takes Paul and Silas dresses their wounds, his whole household hears the gospel and come to faith.

The **Ethiopian Eunuch** having heard Isaiah explained by Phillip wants to get baptised immediately.

The whole message of the Gospel drives this forward.

- Look at **what it addresses!** Our standing before God!
- Look at the seriousness with which **God sees it**.
- Look at the **remedy God provides**. Nothing more, less or other than the death of His beloved Son.

When eternity is on the line – The Holy Spirit is at work - when someone feels the weight of their sin and the need to get right with God - what other response could there be?

Do they calmly go about their business, not thinking about it anymore?

Or are they like Boaz in the OT, he does not wait a few days to find out if he can legally marry Ruth.

**Here then** is another reason given by Jesus as to why people don't believe. **It's the opposite of urgency and violence... it's apathy, it's hearing but not listening.**

Apathy described the people of Noah's day, Sodom and Gomorrah. Apathy or carelessness could describe why Pearl Harbour was such a disaster for the US in WW2.

Apathy could describe why many unnecessary disasters have happened.

They have heard but have not listened, they have seen with their eyes but not believed.

**Take a quick glance over what's happened so far in the Gospel acc to Matthew & what do we see:**

Jesus has cleansed a leper,  
healed the Centurions daughter,  
healed Peter's mother-in-law,  
calmed a storm, cast out demons,  
healed a paralytic, raised a ruler's daughter to life, healed a  
woman of when she touched the fringe of his garment,  
given sight to 2 blind men and  
caste out another demon giving a mute man the ability to  
speak.

**Plus, the miracles not recorded.**

**As well as that** there has been his **teaching**: SOTM Ch 5-7, the cost of following him, Calling the 12, teaching on fasting, the plentiful harvest, teaching the 12 about persecution and how to face it and rewards.

**AND what has been the overwhelming response?**

Jesus is saying, even though John's preaching was powerful and straight and even though I have been performing miracles in your presence, even though the Kingdom of God is moving forcefully ahead you remain indifferent, apathetic.

You are attracted by the spectacular but when it comes to believing, you have stopped short.

For many it **was** apathy, but for others it **was urgency** or violence.

**Taking it by force.**

"I must get God's forgiveness; I must get right with Him.

He is holy and one day I will give an account of my life.

I'm not ready for that.

What can I do, what must I do, I can't keep going the way I am".

Another illustration: **Christian in Pilgrims Progress**. He is so burdened that he does not rest till he gets true relief.

**In vs 14 Jesus says yet another remarkable thing about JB. It** requires an acceptance by the crowd. JB is "Elijah who is to come"  
v14

Jesus refers to another passage in Malachi 4:5,6

*"Behold I will send you **Elijah the prophet** before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the*

*fathers to their children the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*

JB is **not a re-incarnation** of Elijah.

[Elijah has already said he is not Elijah.]

Jesus, in this final of so many positive things to say about JB he gives him the name “Elijah”.

**Not because** they had the same taste in clothes but because:

- **They shared the same zeal for God &**
- **The same ministry of calling the people of Israel back to God.**

Remember those words of Elijah’s on Mount Carmel.

*“How long will you waiver between two opinions? If the LORD is God follow Him. But if Baal be god follow him.”*

## **Conclusion:**

### **The Eternal Importance of Listening v15**

For John the Baptist the 400-year drought of God speaking through His prophets ended.

But when truth is spoken so powerfully and clearly the question remains, **will people believe?**

Will God win or Apathy?

So, Jesus says *“If you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come.”* V 14

If what Jesus said about John was believed, then what John said about Jesus would have been believed also.

“Anyone who has ears, **listen!**” csb

Most English translations say, “Let him hear”. But it’s more forceful than that. “Anyone who has ears **must listen.**”

The assumption is they all had ears.

BUT were they listening?

Not everyone has good hearing

- Sometimes we may hear **what we want to hear**
- Sometimes we don’t hear things because of **background noise**
- Sometimes, we are **concentrating** on other things and don’t hear a thing. [T-SHIRT - *My wife says I never listen... At least I think that’s what she says*]

- Sometimes what we hear we can't compute because it's **opposite to what we think is true**. JB was having trouble acknowledging Jesus as Messiah for this reason.

A person might grow up in a gospel church, hear the gospel for years yet never really listen. Then a visiting speaker comes along, says the same Gospel & they hear it as though for the first time.

It's **God's sovereign timing**.

So, we don't give up hope. We ask God to open our ears to hear.

Don't **carry those listening flaws** over to in our listening to God's words.

A good prayer: *Open my eyes to behold wondrous things out of your law.*

**MAIN POINT TODAY:** When God Speaks... Listen!

If **Jesus** put the question to us today, it **wouldn't** be,

Why did you go into the wilderness,  
but rather:

Why did you come to Church today? You could be sleeping in, at the beach, going for a drive

To be seen?

To catch up with friends?

Enjoy great music?

Or

**I come to hear again God's words.**

I want to listen & keep listening to what he says as we **sing** the gospel, **read** the gospel, **preach** the gospel and **pray** the gospel.

I want to be quiet enough in my own heart to listen, to hear again the good news – I need to always be hearing what God has done in His Son. "Tell me the old old story..."

I don't want to be told a moral gospel – I don't want to be told to try harder lest I trust in me.

I want to hear what God has done and trust him.

SO, Be violent: Grab hold of God's words, his promises & warnings: trust them, apply them, rest in them, obey them, be comforted by them.

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Read again Matthew 11:1-15**

1. What surprises you about Jesus' words about John the Baptist?
2. Is there anything that you stumbled over or found offensive about Jesus before you became a Christian?
3. Is there anything you may still stumble over?
4. How did it get resolved?
5. Do you think everyone has a "God shaped Vacuum" in them?
6. If you had the opportunity to go and line up for 4 hours to hear someone speak (or sing)... who would that be? In history past or Present day?
7. What similarities do you see between John & Elijah?
8. List ways you think the least in God's Kingdom is greater than John.