



World Christian Fellowship

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Criticism!

Matthew 11:15-19

Matthew 11:15-19, *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*
¹⁶*“But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, ¹⁷and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’ ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹The 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.”*

Our Lord expected people to respond to His message, and to properly respond.

One of the things that our Lord commonly said appears in verse **15**.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

We find that in several other places in the gospel of Matthew. We also find our Lord saying that even from heaven in

Revelation chapters 2 and 3, when in the letters to the churches.

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; & 13:9.

Our Lord wants men to properly listen to what He says.

The revelation of God is given with a response in mind.

Jesus asked the people to listen to John the Baptist. If they will listen to John then they will listen to Him, for John speaks of Him.

- If they had received John, the forerunner, they would then have received the one of whom John spoke.
- If they had received the one of whom John spoke, they would have received in their hearts the Kingdom.
- If the nation had received Him, they would have received the earthly Kingdom as well.

Our Lord has called for them to hear, but while calling, He recognizes that most do not hear.

They do not listen.

It is basic to biblical truth that men must respond that men must react, that men are given a choice when confronted with the truth of God.

- To hear it,
- To believe it,
- To act on it, or
- To reject it.

By the time we come to chapter 11 of Matthew, we have had ten chapters of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, in **chapters 11 and 12**, Matthew records for us the various kind of responses to Christ.

Last 2 weeks we have seen the first response is honest doubt.

Honest doubt was really that response that characterized John the Baptist. He believed, and yet he had some doubt, and so, the Lord dealt with that. Honest doubt can occur even in the case of a believer, as it did with John.

Now Matthew is listing the other responses.

But He is going to go on to talk about rejection, a superficial kind of amazement and fascination.

He is going to speak of two other responses to Christ that are very common.

V 16-19

V 20-24

- Criticism, and
- Indifference.

- What men do, and
- What men don't do.

A man or a woman can be damned to hell just as much by what they do not do as by what they do.

When you look ahead to the ultimate great white throne judgment, it is certain that some people are going to say as a defence, "I never did anything." That will be their condemnation.

They never did anything.

V 16, *"But to what shall I liken this generation?"*

Most of them were not interested in listening to Jesus Christ, though His miracles were, beyond question, convincing that He was from God.

He launches in to these two chapters, describing all the negative ways in which His generation responded to Him.

The first one He talks about is **criticism**.

One of the things that characterized them was they were just critical.

No matter what He did or what He said, they criticized it.

There was no validity in the criticism.

They were just looking for something to pick on, and there are people like that today.

No matter what the message is, no matter what is said or what is done, by the church or those who represent Christ, they will always criticize it.

Because they are not seeking truth.

They are not open to truth.

They will not acknowledge their sin.

They are not interested in a Saviour.

They just sit back and criticize.

V 16, *“But to what shall I liken this generation?”*

That phrase is a very interesting phrase.

That question is a very interesting question, for in Jewish literature in the **Midrash**, the compilation of Jewish traditional teaching is the most common formula for introducing a parable.

Now, all good teachers know that you must teach in word pictures, or in analogies, or similes, or metaphors, or figures of speech, to make people understand things.

It was true with the rabbis as well. So they would commonly say this phrase, “To what is the matter like?”

The most common phrase in Rabbinic teaching for introducing a parable.

Jesus is, then, in a very traditional rabbinic way, launching Himself into a parable.

V 16, *“But to what shall I liken this generation?”*

How can I illustrate what this generation is like?

V 16-17, *“But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,¹⁷ and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’*

In the centre of every town and village was a place called the agora in Greek, means marketplace. On the market days people would gather together.

They would fill up that open space in the middle of town.

Their carts,
Their little stores,
Their wares,
They would sell everything in the marketplace.

It was a favourite place for the children to play when they had free hours or when their parents were milling around in the marketplace. Children would inevitably be scurrying through the marketplace.

Of course, they knew each other, and so, eventually they would all come together, and games would begin to take shape.

This would be very much like a public park, or a town square, on the days when the market wasn't there, it was a great wide-open space. There would even be more room for the children to play.

Children commonly, as children today, then would play the games that sort of mimicked the life of their elders. They would copy what their parents did.

One of the popular games they played was wedding, and another favourite was funeral. A little harder to imagine but they liked to play wedding and funeral.

Why?

Because those were public social events.

Whenever a wedding occurred, there was always a parade through town, a great processional. The bride, the bridegroom, the friend of the bridegroom, and all the ladies who were waiting on the bride, and everybody else in the wedding, they would come through town.

There would be a band comes along playing pipes and flutes. People would be skipping, hopping, and dancing with joy, as they went through the town in this procession.

So, the children would always see this, and they would know it was a part of life. Very likely they would get together, and somebody, that very fortunate little girl, would get to be the bride, and perhaps she would dress herself a little bit fancy, and she would take the role of the bride.

Some little fellows would get to be the bridegroom, and somebody else the friend of the bridegroom, and some of the ladies who would be attending the bride, and they would get the whole game going.

They would be going through town, and somebody who could blow a whistle or play a little flute would be playing. They would be calling to their friends, and say, "Come on and join the procession."

Then, after they played wedding a little while, they decided to play funeral which is just as inevitable as wedding, and it was also public.

For whenever there was a funeral, they would lift up the body, and carry the body through the city. All the people involved with the family would come along.

They would hire certain Jewish women who were paid wailers, and they would come in and wail, moan, lament, and the kids would see this.

So, after they played wedding a while, they got tired of that, and they decided to play funeral. They would wail, scream, and they would beat on themselves.

The term that is used means to strike yourselves, and it was very common in funeral processions that the people would beat on their chest, heads, and hit themselves all over their bodies.

The little kids would just pick this up. They maybe put on some black clothes, pound on themselves, and as they were playing funeral, they would cry to their little friends.

“Come on and play funeral with us.”

Do you know what?

There were some kids that didn't want to play.

V 17, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.'

There were a bunch of kids in the parable that were just spoilsports.

"We don't want to play your dumb game."

"So, we will change our game. You don't like wedding. We will play funeral" that's the opposite extreme.

We don't want to play that, either. We don't want to be involved at all.

Grumpy children.

The sad game is opposite the glad game, but they aren't going to play either game.

They just stubbornly don't want to play.

They just want to kind of sit on the side-lines and criticize.

The sheer perversity of human nature. Now, the principle of the parable is very clear.

There are some people who just don't want to play, no matter what the game is!

No matter how you approach them, they don't want to play.

They will criticize the wedding.

They will criticize the funeral.

Nothing satisfies them.

They will always find fault because they are unwilling to participate and be satisfied.

Now, Jesus says, "That is like this generation. You just don't want to play. No matter what the game is, you will not be satisfied.

You are like the children who, when called by their little friends, had no openness, and no interest, just a bitter, critical, contrary spirit.

V 18 the application.

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

John came in a funeral mode.

- John came sombre.
- John came dressed in a camel's hair cloak, which would have been black.

- John came eating locusts and wild honey, having no normal social relationships.
- John lived in the desert.

By all human definitions, he was a loner and a hermit.

He came pounding away the message of judgment and fiery condemnation.

He talked about an axe chopping at the root of the tree. He cried out for repentance, and the demonstration of the fruit of repentance.

Matthew 3:10, *And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

John came in a funeral mode.
He came serious and austere.

He lived apart from the normal relationships of life. He never entered into social activities at all. He was a voice crying in the wilderness.

Do you know what they said of him?

“He has a demon. He is possessed. Anybody who acts that weird is possessed.”

At first, they rejoiced in John's light for a season. They hadn't had a prophet in 400 years, and they could see that he was great. John was absolutely the greatest prophet up until that time, according to the former passage of last week, that he was without equal.

He had the power of personality to attract them. They basked in his light for a little season. But the critics among them finally just said that he has a demon.

They equated madness, with demon possession, and they did that.

The demon possessed maniac of Gadara, who was possessed with all the legion of demons, was also deranged mentally. He was cutting himself, running around naked, living in caves and tombs.

So, they simply reasoned that anybody who was as deranged as John, to live like he lived, must be possessed of a demon. This would be the worst thing they could say about him as demon possessed.

When they said, "He's possessed," they just pushed it as far as they could push it.

Instead of seeing his lifestyle as a rebuke to their indulgence, they just ridiculed him.

Following John came the Son of man Jesus came.

Jesus uses the title as Son of Man, His human title here.

He came in His humanness.

V 19, *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."*

"Eating and drinking."

Jesus was the opposite of John.

He came and got into the flow of social life.

He came and had meals with people, and dwelt in their homes, and attended the social activities.

- ✓ He was at weddings,
- ✓ He was at funerals,
- ✓ He was at special events,
- ✓ He was in the synagogue,
- ✓ He was in the temple.
- ✓ He walked from village to village
- ✓ He was by the sea with the fishers,
- ✓ He was in the boat.
- ✓ He was there where they were,

- ✓ He was a part of their life,
- ✓ He shared food and drink with them.

He came in a wedding mode!

The disciples of John, who were used to this funeral mode, came to the disciples of Jesus.

Matthew 9:14, *Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"*

The answer was you don't fast at a wedding.

In other words, the Messiah is here, this is a celebration.

The Lord, in a sense, came in a very different way than John did, and look what they said.

V 19, *they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*

Jesus mingled, they criticized that.

Because John didn't mingle, they criticized that.

The phrase a gluttonous man uses the term person doesn't have any dignity at all.

He was a glutton of a person. It's a nondescript term.

He was a glutton of a person, one who ate in excess, one who just sat around and stuffed food in.

They said He was a winebibber, which simply means He just drank all the time. One who drank in excess.

Jesus came in the normal flow of life, and they said He was a drunkard and a glutton. They went beyond that, and they said "Publicans" or tax collectors "and sinners, He befriends."

Because He came mixing with all kinds of hurting, needy people, sharing their sorrows and their joy, they said He was a rounder.

Because John came living in the desert, fasting, despising food, and isolated from people, they said he was mad and demonic.

They were just critical, that's all. There was nothing that could be done that could please them.

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening.

They do not even try to be consistent in their criticism. They will criticize the same person and the same institution from quite opposite grounds and reasons.

if people are determined to make no response, they will remain stubbornly and sullenly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them.

Our Lord points out that “no matter what we did, you just wouldn’t play. It was just your peevish, contrary, critical hearts.” It’s a bad response, because “*Wisdom is justified by her works.*”

Luke 7:34-35, *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’* ³⁵*But wisdom is justified by all her children.*”

You sit back and you criticize no matter what I do, or John does no matter what our message is, you criticize.

But in the end, the truth will justify itself by what it produces. You can criticize Christ, but where you are going to run into trouble is when you run into the people whose lives He’s changed.

You can criticize the church, but where you are going to have problems is when you must explain why the church has had the impact it’s had on the world.

You see, truth or wisdom ultimately is justified by what it produces, and that is an unanswerable argument.

The wisdom of John the Baptist, which insisted on repentance, and the wisdom of Jesus, which insisted on salvation, was shown to be justified by what it accomplished in the hearts and the lives of the people who believed.

They rendered the right verdict, they who believed, and they become the testimony to the truth. Some people are just critical, and you meet them, and I meet them. They are not even looking for the truth.

They just want to find everything wrong with Christ and Christianity, and that's a tragic response, because in the end, the truth will be justified by what it produces. You see, these people had a smugness that made them sit in condemning judgment, and they were wrong.

Now, in those verses there's a certain gentleness. The rebuke there is mild.

"Wisdom is justified by her works,"

He doesn't really crash down on the generation of critics.

Application:

1. Discerning Ear

In order to conquer criticism, we must listen with a discerning ear. Although Moses faced constant criticism, he was often startled and surprised from where the criticism came.

Numbers 12:1-3, *Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.² So they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the Lord heard it.³ (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)*

Numbers 16:1-2, *Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men;² and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.*

His criticism came from those who were respected, but also from those who were relatives.

The great lesson here is just because someone is close to us does not guarantee they are close to God!

When we listen to criticism from those, we have trusted with influence in our life it is easy to allow their selfish interests to overshadow our spiritual instincts.

There is a great question to ask ourselves when trying to discern the legitimacy of criticism.

Does the criticism embrace the will of God or exclude the will of God?

A heart persuaded of God's will can never be dissuaded of it by criticism.

- Long before Noah heard the ridicule of the crowd, God had told him the rain was coming.
- Long before Nehemiah saw the winks of disbelief, God had showed him a wall of defence.

When God is directing the ship of a man's life, the waves of His calling are always mightier than the winds of criticism.

2. Learn from good example.

We must learn from a dependable example.

Exodus 18, Jethro the Father-in-law of Moses saw that he is being weary under the weight of judging the people whole day.

Exodus 18:14-23, *So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"*

¹⁵And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

¹⁷So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. ¹⁸Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. ¹⁹Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of

thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²²And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”

Moses was going to be an effective leader and Jethro gave a stern and gracious warning.

Constructive criticism helps you to correct not to condemn.

We should never fear criticism when we are right.

We should never ignore criticism when we are wrong.

- **Esther** wanted to play safe, but Mordecai gentle rebuke made her to risk her life the sake of her people.
- **Martha** was so busy performing but a loving rebuke from the Lord altered her priorities.
- **Apollos** was a talented preacher but had a limited knowledge, Aquila and Priscilla graciously took him aside and explained the scriptures to him.

Never be afraid of honest criticism. If the critic is wrong, you can help him. If you are wrong, then he can help you. Either way someone is helped!

3. Limit the damage.

To conquer criticism, we must limit all the damaging effects.

After years of handling the criticism so well, in Numbers 20, we find a breaking point in the life of Moses.

Once again, the people were thirsty and criticized Moses' leadership. In a moment of frustration and weariness, Moses strikes the rock twice to get water rather than speak to it as God commanded.

The contagious nature of criticism had spread to unbelief and disobedience in Moses.

The longer we allow the words of a critic to linger in our minds, the greater the chance exists of developing a cynical and critical spirit our self.

A wounded man is just as dangerous to himself as he is to others.

- As **Elijah** pondered Jezebel's threats, the more cowardly and sceptical he became.
- As **John the Baptist** pondered Herod's threats, the more discouraged and doubtful he became.

It is as much a Christian's duty to avoid taking offense as it is to avoid giving offense.

When verbal javelins are hurled in our direction, the decision then becomes ours as to whether or not we return the javelin.

It is worth remembering that in a single decision a man can quickly move from the critical to the hypocritical.

Romans 13:11-14, *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. ¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.*