

**Bible Study on St. Matthew 11:
Novices and Initiates Wavered on Christ not St. John the Baptist.**

¹ And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. ² Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, ³ And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? ⁴

Comments: St. John the Baptist, practicing sound pedagogy, sends his reluctant disciples to see for themselves from the Works and Words of Jesus that He is in fact the Messiah. St. John the Baptist did not doubt, but rather some of his disciples. It is only reasonable to conclude that the tried, true, and tested teacher would not waver, but rather his disciples, who could be classified as initiates or novices, were fuzzy in their understanding of Christ.

St. John correctly preached that Christ was the Messiah when he earlier said, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” St. John the Baptist teaches the people that the world’s sins would be taken away not be sheer Divine Decree and Power but through the Suffering and Death of the Messiah because he says the Lamb, not the Sovereign Almighty God, but the Lamb of God because the Lamb, from the Law of Moses, refers to sacrifice, hence, the Lamb slain (Revelation 13:8); i.e. sacrificed, suffered, and died.

Luther: “Even John could not persuade all his hearers to give credence to his testimony, to accept Christ and acknowledge that He is the Light and the Life of mankind and the Savior of the world. At first not even John=s disciples could be brought to believe. Therefore he had to send two of them to the Lord Christ with the question: ‘Are you He who is to come?’ (Matt. 11:3) he wanted them to hear Christ with their own ears, to behold with their own eyes the miracles He was performing so abundantly, and then to report their experiences to others.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 48, 49)

St. John Chrysostom writes¹: “For what intent then did he send to ask? John=s disciples were starting aside from Jesus, and this surely any one may see, and they had always a

¹“**Chrysostom, John.** Patriarch of Constantinople; b. 345 or 347; d. 407. His name ‘Golden-mouthed’ [Chrysostom is derived from the Greek words *chrysos* {gold} and *stoma* {mouth}; hence, ‘Golden-mouthed’] was not applied to him till after his death. Member of a rich patrician family, he studied rhetoric and philosophy, intended to follow law, but turned to the Scriptures instead, leading the life of a strict ascetic in the first years after his baptism; labored as priest in Antioch for twelve years; became patriarch of Constantinople in 398. He immediately inaugurated certain needed reforms and laid the foundation for systematic charitable work. But his position became increasingly insecure on account of the enemies which he made by his rigorous rules and by his fearless attacks on the luxury of his day. Theophilus of Alexandria finally succeeded in having a synod called under the auspices of Empress Eudocia, the Synod ad

jealous feeling towards Him. ... For the matter indeed of John=s disciples has been ordered well, and they were gone away assured by the miracles which had just been performed; but there was need after that of remedy as regarded the people. For although they could not suspect anything of the kind of their own master, the common people might from the inquiry of John=s disciples form many strange suspicions, not knowing the mind with which he sent his disciples. And it was natural for them to reason with themselves, and say, ‘He that bore such abundant witness, hath he now changed his persuasion, and doth he doubt whether this or another be He that he should come? Can it be, that in dissension with Jesus he saith this? That his former words were spoken vainly, and at random?’ It being the natural for them to suspect many such things, see how He corrects their weakness, and removes these their suspicions. ... And in correcting the people, He doth not publish their suspicion, but adds only the solution of the thoughts that were mentally disturbing them: signifying that He knew the secrets of all men. For He saith not, as unto the Jews, ‘Wherefore think ye evil?’ Because if they had it in their minds, not of wickedness did they so reason, but of ignorance on the points that had been spoken of. Wherefore neither doth He discourse unto them in the way of rebuke, but merely *sets right their understanding, and defends John, and signifies that he is not fallen away from his former opinion, neither is he changed, not being at all a man easily swayed and fickle, but steadfast and sure, and far from being such as to betray the things committed unto him.*” (**Homilies on Matthew, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, Vol. X, pp. 239, 243, emphasis added)

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt² writes: “And now John sent two of his disciples to Jesus who asked Him: ‘Art Thou He that should come,’ the promised Messiah, ‘or do we look

Quercum, in 403, by which Chrysostom was deposed and banished. After his recall a second synod, held in Constantinople, once more condemned him, whereupon he, yielding only to force, was banished to Asia Minor. The hardships of the last journeys were too great for him, and he died before reaching his final destination, at Comana, Asia Minor.”

²“**Stoeckhardt, Georg**; b. February 17, 1842, at Chemnitz, Saxony; received his preparatory education in the Lateinschule at Tharandt and the Fuerstenschule at Meissen; studied theology at Erlangen and Leipzig 1862- 6 In 1878 he became pastor of Holy Cross Church, St. Louis, and, having since 1879 lectured on Old and New Testament Exegesis at Concordia Seminary, was elected professor in 1887. In 1903 Luther Seminary, Hamline, Minn., created him a Doctor of Divinity. D. January 9, 1913, Stoeckhardt was an exegete of the first rank. Coupled with his great learning, his familiarity with the original languages, etc., and his logical mind was his firm belief in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and his childlike acceptance of all the teachings of Scripture, his great love of the revealed truth. He permitted nothing but the text to influence his thought. Concentrating all the powers of his believing heart and mind on the written Word, he obtained a wonderful grasp of the deep thoughts of the Spirit, and he had the rare gift of unfolding them in concise, clear, convincing language. ... The Missouri Synod owes much to him; his exegetical ability and love of the truth of Scripture made him one of the leaders with Walther, in the controversy on election and conversion and in the other battles the Church was, and is, engaged in, such as for verbal inspiration. In line with the article written on his accession to the chair of Exegesis: "How Can and Should Each Individual Lutheran Lend His

for another?’ It is hardly believable that John himself was doubting that Jesus is the Christ. Had he not so clearly and definitely pointed to Jesus as the Stronger One who was to come after him, who as the Lamb of God would carry the sins of the world? And immediately after this Jesus boasts before the people of his steadfastness. ... But with the disciples of John, who as yet were not following Jesus, although John himself advised it, they still would not believe that Jesus is He that was to come. ... Therefore their master sent them directly to Jesus, who would remove their doubts. ... After the disciples of John had left, Jesus gave a glorious testimonial of His faithful servant John. He was not a reed shaken with the wind, but was a steadfast confessor and now would seal his confession of the truth with his martyrdom.” (*Wisdom for Today Volumes II & III*, p. 109)

Jesus answered and said unto them, **Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:** ⁵ **The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.**

Comment: Here Christ directs them to the fulfillment of Messianic passages Isaiah 35:5-6, Isaiah 61:1.

⁶ **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.** ⁷ And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?**

Comment: Lest the crowd get the idea St. John the Baptist was wavering, Jesus reminds them that St. John was a resolute, unwavering preacher of the Gospel. Chrysostom: “And in correcting the people, He doth not publish their suspicion, but adds only the solution of the thoughts that were mentally disturbing them: signifying that He knew the secrets of all men. For He saith not, as unto the Jews, ‘Wherefore think ye evil?’ Because if they had it in their minds, not of wickedness did they so reason, but of ignorance on the points that had been spoken of. Wherefore neither doth He discourse unto them in the way of rebuke, but merely sets right their understanding, and defends John, and signifies that he is not fallen away from his former opinion, neither is he changed, not being at all a man easily swayed and fickle, but steadfast and sure, and far from being such as to betray the things committed unto him.” (**Homilies on Matthew, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, Vol. X, pp. 243, underscore added)

Aid toward the Preservation of the Pure Doctrine by the Church?" he labored, by word and pen (his doctrinal articles in *Lehre und Wehre*, in *Lutheraner* and in the synodical reports), to conserve this most precious treasure of the Missouri Synod; and he admirably succeeded in impressing upon both his students and his readers his exegetical method, his loving reverence for the written Word.” *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, pp. 729, 730, s.v. “**Stoeckhardt, Georg**”.

⁸ But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses.

Comment: The Lord had trained St. John the Baptist in an ascetic (severe, austere) life, living in the wilderness and dining on locusts and honey, something akin to Army Ranger training, though much more difficult. (St. Luke 1:80, St. Matthew 3:4) Prison life would have been an improvement – three hots and a cot -- for St. John the Baptist and would hardly dampen his spirits because of its hardships.

⁹ But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ For this is *he*, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

Comment: St. John the Baptist was prophesied by the prophet Malachi as one who would prepare the way of the Messiah (Malachi 3:1). Doubt, misunderstanding, and turning people away from the Messiah would hardly constitute preparing the way for the people and would violate the prophesy of Malachi. Rather, St. John the Baptist faithfully and resolutely prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah through the remission of their sins. St. Luke 1:76-78.

To say St. John taught otherwise would violate the consensus of the prophets on the Gospel. The Lutheran Church confesses: "But Peter also here cites in our issue the **consensus of the Church:** *To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins,* etc. The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal. [I verily think that if all the holy prophets are unanimously agreed in a declaration (since God regards even a single prophet as an inestimable treasure), it would also to be a decree, a declaration, and a unanimous strong conclusion of the universal, catholic, Christian, holy Church, and would be justly regarded as such.] We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against the consensus of the prophets." The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII.[V].66, 67, *Triglotta*, p. 271, Acts 10:43.

¹¹ Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:

Comment: St. John the Baptist ushers in the Great Tribulation. For this reason he had to be a man of great stature and constitution because he was the immediate forerunner of the Messiah, ushering in the Great Tribulation. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble [tribulation], such as never was since there was a nation [Israel] even to that same time" Daniel 12:1, amplification in brackets and underscore added. The Great Tribulation is the Crucifixion and Murder of God (I Corinthians 2:8) and its wake, the news of this and its consequences resounding throughout the world down through the ages through the Gospel. What greater tribulation can there be than the murder of God?

Consequently, God prepared St. John the Baptist and honed his strengths through the ascetic life in order to prepare the way of the Messiah and to usher in the New Testament era, i.e. the Great Tribulation.

notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Comment: Christ is the least in the Kingdom of Heaven because He undertook to bear our sins. “But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.” Psalm 22:6. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid his face from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Isaiah 53:3. “What is man, thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him [to do without God for a little while], and hast crowned him with glory and honor.” Psalm 8:4-5, translation from the Hebrew in brackets is mine.

Christ, however, remains greater than St. John the Baptist because He is the Messiah, the Son of God (St. Matthew 3:17).

Soli Deo Gloria!

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