

#awkward

Group Study, Week Three

Greater Than John the Baptist

CATCHING UP

Welcome any new members. Go around the group and answer the question, *how has your week been going?* And *what did you take away from the last lesson, and how has it made a difference in your life this week?*

DIVING IN

We're going to tackle another difficult teaching of Jesus in this group session, and it happens in Jesus' life right after the sending of the twelve, during which Jesus said He came not to bring peace but a sword.

Read Matthew 11:1-19. Here are some explanatory notes...

- In verse 3, it is most likely that John is asking, "are you the **one and only** or will there be a **second** person to fulfill the promise of the Messiah?" This is because John saw some of the prophecies of the Messiah from the Old Testament being fulfilled, but not all. As an *Old Testament* prophet (John died before the crucifixion of Jesus), John was not aware that Jesus would come twice, a fact hidden until later in Jesus' ministry. In other words, John wasn't *doubting* Jesus. He was simply looking for confirmation.
- In verses 4 and 5, Jesus replied by reminding John of the prophecies concerning Himself. The assurance Jesus gave was from God's Word itself. John would be re-assured by the signs Jesus was performing.
- In verses 7 through 11, Jesus vindicates John. He's basically saying, "Don't question John because of what seems like doubt. There isn't anyone greater." This sets us up for the end of verse 11.
- In verse 11, Jesus says something crazy and #awkward. "He who is least in the kingdom is greater than he." What did He mean? He just finished saying John the Baptist is the greatest man ever born of a woman. What Jesus is saying is that the person who comes to know the **kingdom Jesus is ushering in** has an even greater privilege than John the Baptist, who died **before Jesus' kingdom was initiated** with His death and resurrection. In other words, we'll never be better than John, but we have a greater position in history than John because we get to see what John didn't – Jesus' resurrection.
- In verses 16-19, Jesus expounds on the differences in personality between John and Himself. Kids loved to play two popular games in Jesus' day. One was "wedding." They would imitate the wedding processions they had often seen parading through town with loud music and great celebration. The other game kids played was "funeral," in which they would imitate the somber, melancholy parades of funeral processions carrying their coffins through town. John's personality was like a funeral, and Jesus' was like a wedding. Jesus essentially says, "some of you just can't be made happy. You don't like serious John or fun Jesus."

There are a few phrases that jump out of this passage that have a lot to say about how we receive Jesus.

- In verse 6, we are told, "blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of Jesus."
- In verse 14, He tells us that if we're willing to accept it, John is "the Elijah" who was to come.
- In verse 19, Jesus says that "wisdom is proved right by her deeds," meaning that those who accept Jesus bear a fruit that testifies to His Messiah-ship.

Talk It Over

1. Why do you think people had a hard time receiving Jesus in His day? Even many of those who liked Him for a while turned back from following Him after some of his tough sayings.
2. Why do you think people in our culture today still have trouble taking Jesus at His word about Himself? How do we "tweak" Jesus' message about Himself to make Him more acceptable?
3. "Blessed" means *filled with joy*. Jesus said, "blessed" are those who are not tripped up by Him but receive Him as the Messiah. How does receiving Jesus for who He is and claimed to be bless us?
4. How does this story cause you to be more impressed with Jesus?
5. What started in verses 4 and 5 doesn't end with Jesus. The entire New Testament age (in which we now live) is a time when lives are radically being changed by Jesus. How have you seen lives changed by Him (your own, or lives of those around you)?

SERVING TOGETHER

Talk about how your group might be able to serve together, within the church or within the community once or twice during this study.

STAYING ON MISSION

It's very important for every group to remember our big mission of reaching people who are far from God and bringing them closer to knowing Jesus. **Who do you know that you could invite to the group?**

PRAISE AND PRAYER

What prayer requests are there within the group? What is there to praise God and be thankful for? Are there any stories of how God has been at work in someone's life? One person can lead in prayer or multiple people can lead, but no one should feel pressured to do so.