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~ **Doubt in the Dungeons of Herod** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read the stories in Matthew 11:2-30 and Luke 7:18-35.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story from the New American Standard Bible and from the Easy Read Version

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Matthew 11:2-30 - NASB	Matthew 11:2-30 - Easy-to-Read Version
<p>² Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent <i>word</i> by his disciples ³ and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ <i>the BLIND RECEIVE 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.</i> ⁶ And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”</p> <p>⁷ As these men were going <i>away</i>, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft <i>clothing</i>? Those who wear soft <i>clothing</i> are in kings’ palaces! ⁹ But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written,</p> <p>‘ BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’</p> <p>¹¹ Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen <i>anyone</i> greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, 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 <i>it</i>, John himself is Elijah who was to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear.</p> <p>¹⁶ “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other <i>children</i>, ¹⁷ and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ ¹⁸ For John came neither eating</p>	<p>² John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, ³ “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”</p> <p>⁴ Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen— ⁵ the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.” ⁶ And he added, “God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.”</p> <p>⁷ As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. “What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? ⁸ Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. ⁹ Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. ¹⁰ John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say,</p> <p>‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.’</p> <p>¹¹ “I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! ¹² And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it. ¹³ For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. ¹⁴ And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. ¹⁵ Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!</p> <p>¹⁶ “To what can I compare this generation? It is like</p>

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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 drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁰ Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in *the* day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the* day of judgment, than for you.”

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*.”

²⁸ “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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.”

children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends,

¹⁷ ‘We played wedding songs,
and you didn’t dance,
so we played funeral songs,
and you didn’t mourn.’

¹⁸ For John didn’t spend his time eating and drinking, and you say, ‘He’s possessed by a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, ‘He’s a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!’ But wisdom is shown to be right by its results.”

²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where he had done so many of his miracles, because they hadn’t repented of their sins and turned to God. ²¹ “What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. ²² I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you.

²³ “And you people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. ²⁴ I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you.”

²⁵ At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. ²⁶ Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!

²⁷ “My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.

- Mt 11:19 – To call an adult a child was a put down and Jesus was seeking to humble that generation that refused to believe him.
- Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds – in a poor peasant society, a person’s deeds, if they benefited or detracted would be known and honored or shamed. People proved their worth by the fruit of their actions.
- Take my yoke upon you – a yoke in an agrarian society would be an easy object lesson. The Jews said that reciting the Shema was taking the yoke of the kingdom of heaven upon themselves. Whatever yoke you took controlled you.
- Jesus’ statement for John is from Isaiah 35:5-6 and 29:18-19; 61:1. “Jesus has not yet fulfilled John’s prediction that the Coming One would baptize the repentant in the Holy Spirit and destroy the unrepentant. He had not conformed to popular Jewish messianism by bring political, social, and economic deliverance or by coming in the wake of such a deliverance. His failure to do so caused disappointment. But his performing miracles was more than the Jews expected the Messiah to do. Jesus doing miraculously what only God was predicted and expected to do would more than counterbalance the disappointment. That is the import of Jesus’ answer to John.”
- “Cleansing lepers does not appear in any of these passages or others of similar kind. This surplus shows that Jesus’ deeds exceed the demands of John’s question and that the stories of Jesus’ miracles do not arise out of the OT texts.
- Reeds shaken by the wind would be weak plants making noise in the wind, but really being weak. A man dressed in soft clothes would be a reference to Herod.
- John was imprisoned in Machaerus, a fortified hilltop palace that included a prison. This was to the east of the Dead Sea and was to protect this part of Herod’s territory from Arabs in the south and east.

Insights from Social Science Commentary on the Synoptics by Bruce J. Malina

3. Answer these reflective questions.

It appears in Matthew 11:2-3 that John the Prophet expressed some doubt about Jesus. Do you think it was doubt? If so, how could a prophet have doubt, especially one who had seen and heard what he had seen and heard?

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Jesus said, “Blessed is the man who does not stumble over me.” What do you think this meant at that time? What would it mean to “stumble over Jesus?”

Jesus said John was the greatest of all born of women, yet the one who is the least is greater than John? How is this possible? In what ways are the lowly people of God greater than John?

Why did Jesus say the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force? How do suffering and God’s kingdom work together?

Why did Jesus preach judgment upon the villages of Galilee? In what way did judgment come to these villages? Does judgment still come today?

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Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened to come to him and find rest. Are there any burdens you need to give to Jesus?
