

Title: So much light, so little sight
Text: Matthew 11.7-19
Theme: The damning danger of exposure to truth
Series: Matthew #62
Prop Stmtnt Exposure to truth that is not combined with faith is fatal.

Michael Lindsay is the president of Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts (just north and east of Boston). He and his wife, Rebecca have been married for 19 years and have 3 daughters. Michael has earned and enjoyed a great reputation not only with his students, and faculty, but with the greater Boston community and has been granted interviews with some of our nation's top political leaders. Some of you may be aware of the fact that this man, learned, degreed, honorable, and respected has almost overnight become a villain. People who days before would have sung his praises have become venomous critics. Do you know what his crime is? Let me explain. President Obama has announced that he is planning on signing an executive order that bans any discrimination of any employees on the basis of sexual orientation of organizations that do with business with the federal government. So, if students at your Christian college have received Pell grants or funding from a G.I. Bill, this would prevent the school from being able to hire people who believe as the school does regarding a biblical sexual ethic. Michael Lindsay was one of fourteen leaders who signed an open letter to the President asking him to add a religious exemption to this planned executive order. The Boston Globe and other news outlets went apoplectic simply because Michael does not want the government to force him to hire people at his Christian college who are not Christians and who reject the schools code of ethics for its employees.

This is hard to accept, but it is important that you recognize this. No matter how much charity we provide for our community, no matter how many deeds of kindness we perform, our love for people will be interpreted as hate. Our care for and concern for the lostness of people, and the blight that is on their souls because of sin will be perceived by many as being judgmentalism, discrimination, prejudice, intolerance and hateful. The truth is, we are not being hateful. We care about people. We care that people do not die and go to hell. We also care that people do not waste their lives in bondage to sins that rot them and destroy them. So, when we are accused of these things, we hurt and we hurt deeply. But, while we hurt, we should not be surprised. The world will hate us and misrepresent us because they hated Christ and they misrepresented him. This is the issue that Jesus is addressing in this text, except that he is pointing out the fact that the people respected, but ultimately rejected the message of John the Baptist, just as they were beginning to reject the message of Christ. As I said last week, we are witnessing the initial stages of how Christ began to fall out of favor with his own people.

Read Text:

John the Baptist is in prison and his cousin, Jesus is not doing anything to get him out. Life is not going along as John had thought. He sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus if he really is the Messiah or if there is another one who is the real deal. The question itself

seems to me to be a veiled attempt at goading Jesus into action on John's behalf. It is as if John is saying, "Look, if you aren't going to be bring about the changes that most of us thought you would, then maybe the real guy will." Even John does not realize that the Kingdom that Jesus is bringing is first a kingdom that begins in the hearts. Until Christ is everything to you, he is nothing. Everyone is on a learning curve on this one, including John. The disciples of Jesus do not yet realize that Jesus has come to die first, then conquer. He must address the problem with who we are, before he addresses our circumstances. So, Jesus assures John that he is the Messiah and gently admonishes him to stay the course. But then, after the disciples of John take their leave and go back to John, Jesus turns and addresses the crowd and in essence he is saying, "If you did not accept John's message, you are not going to accept mine."

1. **Do you realize what you have heard?** (7-10)

Jesus asks a series of rhetorical questions. What did you go out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? No! A reed is a tall grass, or a papyrus reed that grows in the marshy area next to a lake or pond. These plants bend in the wind. Jesus is asking, did you go all the way out into the wilderness to listen to a politician tell you things that you wanted to hear? Did you make all of that effort to listen to someone talk who was unsure about what he believed and stuck his finger up into the air in order to find which way it was blowing so that he could "go with the flow"? No! Did you go listen to John because he was sophisticated and dapper? Was his clothing a reflection of the latest trends coming out of Athens or Rome? No! Was he this hip, cool, trendy dude that everyone wanted to hang out with? Actually, the guy looked a little unhinged wearing clothes made from the skins of camels. So, think about it, what was so interesting and arresting about John? And notice, 3 times (vs. 7-8) Jesus says "go out to see". If you wanted to hear John the Baptist preach, you could not download a podcast of his latest sermon. You had to go out and see. You had to make an effort to go. There were no bus tours or helicopter rides leaving from Jerusalem and Capernaum at 9a everyday and returning at 4p complete with sack lunches, souvenirs and photos of you and your family with the prophet. It was not easy and convenient to go and hear John preach. So, why did so many people go?

A. You heard a prophet.

For the first time in 400 years, God was speaking a fresh Word to the nation of Israel. We call those 400 years, the intertestamental years because it was the time between the testaments. But, it was a time of silence because the children of Israel had failed to listen to what God had already said. When you do not hear God's Word with your heart, that is, if you do not respond to God's Word with faith and obedience, then God will eventually remove his voice from your life. Why were you so interested in John? What was so captivating about his speaking? Why was Herod Antipas so interested in hearing John? It

was a novelty of sorts. He was saying things that were authoritative and true. Seriously, this guy spoke the truth! That is both refreshing and dangerous.

By the way, do you realize the opportunities that we have right now? Do you realize the opportunities that you have right now? Our culture has attempted to put a gag order on God. Since we do not want to offend anyone by disagreeing with them, or by identifying sin as sin, or "hurting someone's feelings" we have attempted to remove certain words and even categories of right and wrong from public discourse. And, as I explained in my opening story, our culture is hell-bent on shaming and silencing anyone who speaks with biblical clarity about matters of sexual ethics and related matters. But, look at the opportunity this presents. Many are afraid to speak up. And without moral absolutes, everything is gray, "whatever, sort of, how I feel, my perspective, I'm just saying, don't mean to offend, blah, blah, blah". We talk all around matters, but according to culture's rules for public discourse we are no longer permitted to call sin what it is, and to label sinners as what we are. If we do that, we can expect to be labeled as haters. Which of course, sounds very judgmental and hateful by the people who accuse us of being judgmental, but that's a topic for another day. My point is, we live during a time when people use thousands of words to say nothing of substance other than to describe how they feel at the moment. The result is that people have nothing to die for. There are no absolute, foundational, moral principles, no truths to which we can anchor our lives, no ideas that are bigger than ourselves because each person is the biggest category. Our culture is so narcissistic. Most people live wholly for themselves which is why they are so empty, banal, boring, miserable and lonely. Why with all of this emphasis on being me, do so many people sound alike? And I look at this and go, "What an opportunity!"

Look, I know that so many churches are drinking the coolaid and have put a gag order on saying anything that is offensive. That is theological and eventually organizational suicide because there is nothing compelling about a message that has no conviction. There is nothing convicting and therefore nothing compelling about a message that does not use the language and the categories of the Bible. The Bible uses language and categories that the Spirit of God has designed to pierce the heart. We cannot improve on the categories that God created. Psychological terms may sound learned, but they are powerless to change hearts and give hope. Emotive terms may create empathy, but they do not arrest souls. Do you realize what is going on? The culture has given up on truth but they have nothing to replace it and therefore they have nothing that will ever satisfy. They are hungry. Many, (praise God not all, but many) churches are capitulating. They refuse to touch anything that is controversial out of fear that it causes people to be offended. The result is that in an effort to be relevant the church is irrelevant. It has nothing to say. So, when you stand up in this culture and say something with clarity, conviction and compassion, it is stunning! It is captivating! It is refreshing! And yes, it is controversial. We cannot change that. That is the nature of the message and that is the role of the prophet. So, what was John doing? He was saying things that people needed to hear and because he feared God more than he feared people, he was saying them outloud

and people were going out to listen to him. The problem was, they did not really believe him. They were impressed, but they were not changed. John was not only a prophet...

B. You heard a prophet who fulfilled prophecy. (9b-10)

Jesus is quoting the Bible (v.10). Jesus is quoting Malachi 3.1. Jesus, with his own words, as the Word in flesh is referencing the words of another prophet and affirming that this prophet (Malachi) spoke with authority. Here is Jesus, the ultimate prophet underscoring the truthfulness and the authority of the Bible and is pointing out that not only is John the Baptist a prophet who has spoken the Word of God, but that even the ministry of John the Baptist is a fulfillment of a prophecy of another prophet of God. All of this just makes the point even more prominent. When the men of God speak the Word of God, it is not only true, but because it is true, it must be embraced by those who listen.

In John's case, he was not just another prophet, he was the final prophet before the ultimate prophet. He was the prophet who paved the way. As a construction team would prepare the roads in anticipation of the travel of an important dignitary, John prepared the way for Christ. He prophesied even as he was a fulfillment of prophecy.

2. Do you realize what is going on? (11-15)

Jesus is saying that John the Baptist is the greatest person of his time. Even though John was discouraged, even doubting, Jesus knew that he would not continue to doubt. But, then Jesus says that the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Whoa! What does he mean by that?

A. You are witnessing a transition from the old covenant to the new covenant.

John was the last prophet of the old covenant and his ministry marked a transition to the new covenant. That is what Jesus is saying in v.13. All of the prophets and the law prophesied until John. It all comes to an end in him because it is all going to be fulfilled in Christ, whom John points to. The old covenant refers to the OT which was both the written constitution by God (the law) that set forth the terms of how the people of God were to relate to God, to each other and to their world. This covenant was good, but it was incomplete. This covenant was helpful in forming a nation, providing organization and setting forth clear categories of sin, holiness, guilt and sacrifice. But, the old covenant could not provide any final forgiveness or salvation. The old covenant was the foundation for the new covenant. The old covenant pointed to the new covenant. Jesus is now talking about a new order. He is saying that as great as John was (and he was the greatest until that time) that someone who is in the kingdom of heaven (the term that Jesus uses to identify life in the new covenant) is going to be greater than John. Why?

B. The benefits of the new covenant are amazing.

Any follower of Christ, who is part of the new covenant experiences more benefits than even John the Baptist. John helped inaugurate the new covenant, but John did not get to experience it. We have access to God through Christ that John never had. We have a salvation that was secured once and for all by Christ. We do not have to go to a temple and offer a sacrifice over and over and over. We have a wide open door of prayer and the sealing of the Spirit, the adoption of the Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit and the church, that John did not have. We have the guaranteed and clear promise of a resurrection that again, John did not have with the clarity and understanding that we have. But, in spite of these people living and observing a pivotal moment in God's redemptive history, there was something sadly similar that was taking place.

C. You are witnessing a rejection.

John is the Elijah who is to come. Malachi promised that a prophet like Elijah would come as the forerunner to the Messiah, and John was that prophet. Even from that prophecy and fulfillment, we get an idea of what Jesus meant in v.12. Elijah was a prophet who declared God's Word to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry was marked by some dramatic miracles, none more amazing than the confrontation he had with the 850 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Baal worship, the god of weather, had overtaken the northern kingdom of Israel and was the official religion of the country having supplanted the worship of God. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, who were on the payroll of the palace to a duel. They would meet and would each call on their god/God to send fire from heaven as a demonstration of power and authority. The terms of the challenge were accepted.

On that occasion, Elijah was vastly outnumbered, yet he stood his ground and God answered his prayer with a demonstration of power by sending fire from the sky that devoured the sacrifice that Elijah had set forth. The people who witnessed this amazing miracle responded with amazement and declared the obvious, "Yahweh is God! Yahweh is God!" In their state of emotional fervor, they even killed the prophets of Baal, but the emotion of the moment did not last and there was no returning of the people to the worship of the true God. Elijah became a wanted man and he ran for his life. It was a dangerous thing to be a prophet for God.

What Jesus is saying here in verse 12 is that, like Elijah, John the Baptist has also been a prophet during a time of violence. The inauguration of the kingdom of heaven has been received with violence. John is in prison and will be executed. Jesus is going to be arrested and will be executed. James will be imprisoned and executed. Peter will face a similar fate, as will most of the disciples. All of this flavors what Jesus is saying about the cost of discipleship. The greatest news comes at the greatest cost.

Then this statement – v.15. Jesus is saying, if you can hear with your heart, then hear and follow. It is the same thing that Jesus says in 13.9, 43. Do you get his point? There are

many people who hear with their ears, but few that hear with their heart. But, if you only hear with your ears and you do not hear with your heart, you are in serious danger.

3. **Do you realize the danger you are in?** (16-19)

Jesus makes a very powerful and compelling point in verses 16-17 and then, as if he has heated the sword in the blacksmith's fire, he drives it, burning, twisting and searing into the hearts of his hearers. He says that this generation is like the children who refuse to play with their friends because... well... they don't feel like it. Here is the scene. There are some kids in the marketplace and their friends come up and say, "let's play wedding." Daniel and Rachel will play the flute and we will dance. But the kids say, "Naaa, we don't feel like dancing." So, the kids stop for a second and go and confer with Daniel and Rachel and then come back and say, "Ok then, if you don't feel like playing wedding, let's play funeral. Daniel and Rachel will play dirges and we will mourn." But the kids say, "Naa, we don't feel like being sad." So, what do you want to do? You refuse to be satisfied. You refused to participate. You are a full time critic and refuse to be pleased. You found fault with John the Baptist because he was a little eccentric and you found fault with Jesus because he wasn't.

A. People who are impressed with their own words are not impressed with God's.

This has been the history of Israel's relationship with the prophets. You see it in Psalm 78.36-37; Isaiah 29.13-30.14; Jeremiah 12.2 and Ezekiel 33.31. The Ezekiel passage is very clear. The people are saying to each other, "Hey, let's go hear the prophet! It is not because they want to hear the Word of the Lord, but because he is a form of entertainment. They are going to judge his performance. They have no intention on paying attention to what the prophet says, but have come to be entertained and amused.

What makes a person think that he/she can come and listen to the Word of God and sit in judgment on the Word? It starts when we fail to take to heart what we hear. We then view the hearing of the word as a duty to perform or a chore to endure, or a task to complete. We think of what else we could be doing, or what else we will be doing, and we dismiss what is actually going on. If we do not address this, it becomes a pattern and the Word begins to harden our hearts instead of softening them because we do not take it to heart.

We will never be impressed with God's Word if we are impressed with our own word. Do you see what is happening here? These people who have so much light pass judgment on the Light of the World! They accuse Christ of being satanic. They reject and execute the Word, himself! What is so fatal about this, is the fact that the Father authenticates the Word of the Son. There are only 3 times that God the Father speaks audibly in the NT. In

each case He is authenticating the authority of His Son. (Matthew 3.17; 17.5; John 12.28) On the Mt. of Transfiguration he says about His Son, Hear Him!! Listen to my Son! But, if you are impressed with your word, you will not be impressed with God's. If you take your Word to be authoritative, you will not take God's Word to be your authority.

Let me give you an example. Let's say that you are frustrated with your marriage and you make up your mind that you are going to get a divorce. You do not have biblical grounds, but you are going to do it anyway. And you say, "I love God, I love Jesus, but I just can't do this anymore." Do you know what Jesus is saying here? Stop! Stop saying you love God because you don't. You want to believe that you love God. You want others to believe that you love God, but you don't. You love yourself. You love your word and are placing your word above God's Word. "But, hey, I go to church! I listen to the sermons. I sing the songs." But, do you believe the Word in your heart? Do you obey the voice of God? You cannot live in disobedience to God and claim to love God. When you live in disobedience to God, you think that you have the right to sit in the critics' corner.

B. People who are impressed with themselves find many opportunities to be critical.

Like the children who could only find fault with the other children are those who refuse to be impressed and impacted with the Word of God because, they are too impressed with themselves. Proud people do not sing the songs of the church with affectionate abandon. Proud people do not listen with open hands, but rather listen with crossed arms and impatient spirits. Even if the delivery of the sermon is not as smooth as it could be, if the Word is read and its truths are explained, God is speaking and I need to hear and be moved. I need to confess my need of the Word. I need to listen with hunger. I need to listen. I need to hear the Word. I need to clear my Sundays so I can hear the Word with my church family because there is nothing more important for my soul than the Word of God. But, if I am impressed with myself, then I can find plenty of reasons why I don't need it. But, what is so grievous is to realize that...

C. People who are critical tend to be critical of God.

The people who were critical of what and how John the Baptist spoke were being critical of God who gave John the words to say. The people who were critical of how and what Jesus spoke were guilty of placing themselves as judges of God.

- a. This is a result of the judgment of God.
- b. This is arrogance at its worst.

How do I protect myself from being a critic of God?

- 1) Recognize that the Bible is the very Word of God. (realize what you have)
- 2) Recognize that you are under the authority of God's Word. (humble yourself)
- 3) Recognize God's goal is to use His Word to change your heart.
- 4) Recognize that it is easy to be complacent and bored. (war for affections)
- 5) Ask God for grace to hear with your heart (apply, obey, not just get more)
- 6) Teachers: we have greater danger if we teach without hearing.