

Dance or **Dirge?**

Matthew 11

Introduction

Preaching the Kingdom has two effects. Jesus is calling Israel to repent, and so accept the gift of new life and restored blessing. Some respond positively. But those who hear the message and reject it are left with no excuse. In Matthew 11 and 12 we see a range of responses to Jesus... which one are you?

Is it you... or not?

Israel had been waiting for generations for the "Messiah", the great "anointed King". The Old Testament had prepared them for his coming. John the Baptist had been bold in his claims that one more powerful than himself would follow him and bring both blessing and judgment on Israel. Now he's in jail... and he sends his disciples to ask Jesus an important question...

a) What's the question?

b) Look back at Isaiah 35:4-6, and Isaiah 61:1. From these Old Testament passages, what do you think the miracles of Jesus were designed to do?

Given John's circumstances, and the promise of Isaiah 61, can you see why he asks?

c) The "coming of God" in Isaiah 35 is both good news and bad news. Why, and who for?

d) Could it be that John has to re-assess the way the "coming one" would fulfil his mission? How?

Interesting Historical Note (v7-8)

What did you come to see? A reed swayed by the wind? A man dressed in fine clothes? "Herod the Tetrarch" (*aka Herod Antipas*) who is holding John in prison, had as his royal symbol a swaying reed. Jesus is having a dig at Herod here!



*coins of Herod Antipas, "Tetrarch.
Note the bending reed symbol.*

e) Read Malachi 3:1 (right at the end of the Old Testament). If John was the "Elijah" spoken of here, what is Jesus claiming about himself?

f) What do verses 16 to 19 show about the response to John and Jesus? Who "played the flute" and who "sang a dirge," and how did Israel respond to either option?

The Unrepentant Cities

Read verses 20 to 24.

- a) Look back to 10:1,8,11,14-15. What warning had cities like Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum had?
- b) Sodom was an Old Testament city (Genesis 19) which God destroyed for its absolute wickedness. How does Capernaum rate against Sodom?
- c) What future awaits these cities of Israel that failed to repent?

The New Deal - Israel Unyoked (11:25-30)

Read verses 25 to 30.

Remember these words from Deuteronomy 28: “Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity,⁴⁸ therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put **an iron yoke on your neck** until he has destroyed you.”

Jesus has been reversing many of the other “unfaithfulness curses” described in Deuteronomy 28. What is he offering in Matt 11:29-30?

Talk through the implications of what Jesus says in verse 27 and 28. How can a person get to know God?

Jesus offers Israel, on the one hand, release from bondage and a “light yoke”... or alternatively, the full force of God’s judgement. According to verse 25, what type of people are best equipped to respond rightly to these two options?

Which Deal for You?

It’s hard to comprehend. Jesus is saying that he alone knows the Father, and that nobody can know God unless Jesus introduces us to him! As Israel - confident in their own religious “best efforts” - rejects his offer of a new start, the invitation is extended to people like us. And yet maybe, the exclusive claims of Jesus are a little unsettling?

What steps would a person need to take to respond to the invitation of Jesus in verse 28?

Have you done that? What sort of life, and lifestyle, should result? Has it?

Why, or why not?