**Calvary Fellowship 8.14.2022 Matthew 11:1-30 “When Faith Doesn’t Make Sense”**

* **So a while back I was speaking at this conference that I was hosting in Orlando - we had pastors from all over the country there**
* B/c of the crazy schedule, I ate lunch & dinner every day at the same restaurant in the hotel (also b/c kids ate free)
* On the last day we were there, I get to the restaurant & order a Coke Zero like I had every day I was there
* 1st, I need to say that I love Coke Zero - I believe Coke Zero is a little taste of heaven - it tastes just like Coke, except there’s no calories & that my friends, it what heaven is going to be like
* Imagine biting into a Twinkie zero or french fries zero or enjoying a chocolate shake zero - it’s going to happen someday, but I digress
* All week we’re had the same server - super nice guy - So I get to the restaurant & order a Coke Zero & a new server says, “Sorry, we don’t serve Coke Zero.”
* I freaked out - I said, “Sir, I’ve been ordering Coke Zero’s all week. So what have I been drinking?”
* He said, “I don’t know what to tell U, but we don’t have Coke Zero.”
* Here’s the weird part - The day before, I was having dinner w/ a friend who was helping me at the conference & we both said, “This is the best Coke Zero ever.”
* So instead of enjoying the great taste of Coke w/o all of the unnecessary calories - I was drinking Coke 93 octane w/o evening knowing it
* I was so bummed out b/c I was trying to do the right thing - have U ever had that happen to U? You’re trying to do the right thing & U get in trouble for it?
* **The reality is, in the fallen world that we live in, sometimes doing the right thing has consequences**
* The question is, will we still do the right thing, will we still honor God in the face of trials & difficulties? That’s the point of the story before us today
* **So as we get going, let me give U a little bit of background:**
* John the Baptist is in prison - why? Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great - Herod the Great is the guy who killed the babies in Bethlehem
* Eventually Herod the Great dies & Caesar allows the family to rule in his place
* So they divided Israel up - His son Philip ruled the NE area of Israel (map)
* Philip had a wife named Herodias - who by the way was also his niece
* Herodias is the daughter of Aristobulus IV - Herod the Great’s oldest son
* He was supposed to be Herod’s heir, but Herod suspected him of treason & ended up having him killed in his late 30’s
* So Herodias decides to leave husband/ uncle Philip & marry his ½ brother Antipas - That would have made Antipas her 1/2 uncle - super creepy
* Antipas is ruling in Galilee, where Jesus spent most of His time
* Here’s what John the Baptist had to say about their marriage arrangement:
* “For Herod had arrested and imprisoned John as a favor to his wife Herodias (the former wife of Herod's brother Philip). John kept telling Herod, “It is illegal for you to marry her.” Herod would have executed John, but he was afraid of a riot, because all the people believed John was a prophet.” (Matt. 14:3-5)
* To marry her, Antipas divorced his wife, who was the daughter of King Aretas - the king of the Nabeteans (modern day Jordan) - whose capital was Petra
* Aretas was so angered by how his daughter was treated that he destroyed most of Herod’s army & would have killed Antipas as well, had not the Roman army intervened - so this was an International crisis
* So John the Baptist spoke out about this & had John arrested to garner favor w/ his wife/ niece Herodias
* So if you’re keeping score at home, we have 2 brothers who married their niece & the only getting punished is the man of God who’s saying they should do that
* **Scholars say John was in prison for 10 months – I can only imagine what he was thinking as this happened**
* Day 1: Jesus is going to bust me out of here. I’d hate to be U Mr. Niece romancer. Jesus turns H2O into wine U know. He’s going to turn U into matzo ball soup!
* **Day 2:** “He’s on His way by now. U know AM traffic. I’ll by out here by lunch.”
* After a month he’s starting to worry & after 3 months he’s depressed
* 6 months go by & he’s trying to figure it out like we all do - why things aren’t going our way even when we do the right thing
* So after 10 months, John’s disciples visit him & he asks them to deliver Jesus a message
* And the message is the same thing w struggle w/ when we’re waiting on God to do something - especially when we’ve been doing the right thing
* And if you’ve been waiting, there’s a powerful message here for us
* B/c just U don’t see God working, doesn’t mean God isn’t working
* It just means U don’t see it - and these moments of waiting as where faith is built & trust in God is established ‘’
* And our faith in God is seen by our trust in Him…

**———(v. 1-6)———**

**#1 - I Need to Suspend My Expectations**

* **Have you even been part of a conversation where you are speaking the same language, but you still don’t understand what’s going on?**
* That’s how I felt a while back when meeting w/ 2 architects & they started talking their lingo – Do you prefer CAD or by hand? What kind of pencils do you use? What can I say?
* “I appreciate both forms, but I leaned towards #2 pencils myself. But that’s b/c I was a student of the Brady Bunch & Mike Brady was an architect.”
* No. I didn’t say anything b/c I was clueless – I hadn’t gone to school for that
* It might be how you feel when I read these verses, they are speaking in code
* They are but since everyone went to school to learn the Torah, they understood
* **Jews had a system of teaching & learning called “Remez” or hint**
* That’s why Jesus asked so many questions – it was part of His teaching style
* But the “Remiz” would be a question pertaining to a Bible passage
* So the rabbi would quote a text, but the answer was in the verse before or after
* If question was, “What color is the sky?” Rabbi would say, “Well, roses are red”
* If U don’t realize that, the Gospels might seem a little odd at times
* B/c there are moments when Jesus says something to the Pharisees & the next verse says, “And they decided to kill Jesus.”
* And you’re thinking, “Did I miss something? B/c man these guys uptight.”
* No – if U understand the remez, U know that He’s saying something against them & they were very bothered by that
* “But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise’?” (Matthew 21:15-16)
* To us that seems harmless enough - but not when U understand Remez
* “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” (Psalm 8:2)
* So what is Jesus really saying to the religious leaders? Basically, shut up
* **So what was John asking Jesus & what did Jesus’ response mean?**
* John was asking, “Are you the Messiah?” Why would he ask that? B/c of a Bible verse - it’s the verses that begin Jesus’ ministry
* It was a passage that referred to the Messiah that was to come
* “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound…” (Isaiah 61:1)
* So what does the Rabbi Jesus do? He quotes the verse John is thinking of, but he omits the 1 thing John is looking for
* Why? B/c Jesus is sending John a message - What’s the message? It’s “You’re not getting released from prison.”
* That’s why Jesus says, “Blessed is the person who isn’t offended b/c of Me.”
* He’s saying, “Will you still follow Me even if I don’t meet your expectations?”
* And this is the challenge that we all have - will we follow Jesus & trust Him or will only follow if He does exactly what we want
* The reality is, if the only way we’ll follow Jesus is if He does exactly what we want, then we’re not really following Jesus, we’re following a result
* That’s treating God like vending machine - I prayed, I read the Bible, I gave, I served, & now God owes me - so I push the button b/c God owes me
* Do U know why we do this? B/c we think we know as much as God does
* But we have such a limited perspective & there’s rarely a moment when we’re seeing everything - that’s why we do dumb things
* **So it took my wife & I 10 years to have our 1st child - that in & of itself was challenge in our lives trying to figure out why it wasn’t happening**
* But I remember the day Mia was coming into the world
* But a friend of ours was there & she said, “Bob, you’re about to become a dad, how do U feel?” I said, “I feel like vomiting.” I was so nervous - I had no idea how to be a dad - I thought for sure I was going to mess this up
* **But when Mia was born, it was so amazing - it was 1 of the most important moments of my life**
* So when she was born, I stayed w/ Mia while the doctors took care of my wife
* She was just a few minutes old & she grabbed my finger & I’m crying b/c we’ve waited for 10 years to have a baby
* There’s a guy next to me & his wife just had a baby as well - we got to talking & it was his 3rd baby & he congratulates me & says, “Having kids is the most important thing that can happen to U. It’s amazing.”
* I’m soaking in this guy’s wisdom when the guy’s mom comes in & congratulates him & he says to her, “I’m glad you’re here. I need to go get a meatball sub.” & leaves - I’m like, “What! Who eats a meatball sub at a time like this?”
* It’s the birth of his girl & U leave her to go hang out at Jimmy Johns
* But here’s the thing - do U know how often we’re in the middle of what we need to be doing & we’re asking God for a meatball sub? All the time
* And I know that we think what we want makes total sense, but the truth is, if we knew what God knows, we’re answers our prayers in the exact same way
* The problem is, we don’t know what God knows, & the gap between our wisdom & God’s wisdom is where trust fits in

**———(v. 7-19)———**

**#2 - I Need to Embrace My Convictions**

* **So let me explain this passage b/c it is 1 of the more difficult passages in the NT to understand b/c we don’t understand the culture**
* What is Jesus saying when He says in verse 11 that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, but the violence take it by force?
* Let me explain it this way - think about how U react to Bible teaching
* Do U listen & think, “Oh, that was nice. That made me feel so good”
* Or do U listen & something happens inside of U & the changes that start happening in your life, the transformation is almost violent in nature?
* This is what Jesus is talking about - that’s why another translation says
* “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.” (Matthew 11:12 NLT)
* The point that Jesus is making is that the kingdom of God moves when people are active & not passive - it’s not a call to physical violence
* Instead, it’s a call to allow the kingdom of God to grab U
* It’s like giving someone the Heimlich maneuver - is it a gentle hug? No
* It’s an almost violent squeeze b/c you’re trying o save their life
* That’s how the kingdom of God works & that’s how it worked in John the B’s life
* He was the son of a priest & was expected to go into the priesthood
* But the kingdom of God got a hold of him & he ended up in the wilderness wearing camel’s hair & preaching that the Messiah was coming
* The kingdom of God grabbed him & transformed his life as it were, almost violently jarring him - and that’s what the kingdom of God does to us
* U should be looking back & seeing that your life is changing radically as U walk w/ Jesus - the more U apply God’s word to your life, the more U change
* **And that’s why Jesus says John the Baptist was the greatest man ever**
* But that didn’t start when John entered ministry - it started before he was born
* “But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord…” (Luke 1:13-15)
* Think about that - how do U handle that news? That you’re going to be the parents of the person who Jesus will deem the greatest man ever born
* Here’s what I believe - the angel said the kid would be great & his parents told him that story & John started believing that he was born w/ great purpose
* **When I was 7, my dad took me to Meadow Glen mall in Somerville, MA**
* There was a shoe store that sold kangaroos & my dad told me he’d buy me a pair - My dad had a friend named Russell – he worked at the shoe store
* He was really tall & for some reason, I thought he was Bill Russell - for those unaware, Bill Russell is 1 arguably the greatest NBA player of all-time
* He & my dad were talking about training athletes & Russell pointed at me & said, “U see this little man?W/ the right training I could turn him into NBA star!”
* Now aside from fact that this was a guy in a shoe store selling me kangaroos, I thought this was 1 of greatest NBA players ever telling me he could make me a great player & it affected me
* Not that long after, I joined a basketball team for my school & started playing
* All b/c a guy in a shoe store who I thought was a great basketball player said I could be great
* **Here’s the point - maybe John’s greatness started w/ parents who spoke words of life into him & when U hear it so many times U start to believe it**
* So what could happen in your kids’ lives if U started telling them that they are created by God & put on this planet for a purpose?
* Do U know what would happen? They’d start to believe it, b/c it’s true
* And it’s true for U as well - do U know what I love about Jesus saying that John was the greatest man ever? It’s that he was a regular guy
* He wasn’t bitten by a radioactive spider - he wasn’t given a super soldier serum
* He just accepted the call that God had on his life & he allowed God to transform his life in such a way that U can’t tell the story of Jesus w/o telling the story of John
* B/c while all of the Gospels have differences in the stories they tell - they all start in the same place - there was this guy named John
* And it gives us hope - that we can each live a life of greatness if we submit ourselves to what God wants to do in our lives & walk in it…

**———(v. 25-30)———**

**#3 - I Need to Find My Rest**

* **This is a beautiful passage, but we really only see the beauty in it when we understand what Jesus us actually saying**
* So the 1st question have to answer is, “What’s a yoke?”
* 2nd question is, “Why are people feeling burdened?”
* 3rd question is, “Why is what Jesus offering so different than what people had been experiencing?”
* So, what’s a yoke? In that culture, a yoke was something that was put on a pair of animals so they could carry a heavy load or plow a field
* The idea is that the yoke kept both animals going in the same direction
* So a rabbi’s yoke was his interpretations of the law of Moses that he passed on to his students
* And b/c the law of Moses contained 613 laws, the rabbi would explain how to follow them in a way that honored God most
* So if the Bible says to honor the Sabbath, how do U go about that? Not working
* OK - so what constitutes work? Your rabbi would give U his yoke, or his interpretation of the law
* So your rabbi would teach U how to pray & when to pray - how to fast & when to fast & how long to fast - how to keep Shabat & how to rest on Shabat
* But the religious leaders in Jesus’ day made their yoke, their interpretation of the Law of Moses so impossible it weighed people down
* “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” (Matthew 23:4)
* **Here’s the thing that we miss - we sometimes think the commands of God are causing us to miss the fun we want to have - the opposite it true**
* Walking w/ God & obeying God are the greatest source of joy in your life
* B/c everything good in your life whether U realize it or not has come from waling w/ God & experiencing the blessing of obeying Him
* “The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living.” (Psalm 19:8)
* **Isn’t that a beautiful promise? That following God’s commands brings joy & wisdom for living**
* If you’ve been around here for any length of time, then U know that I believe the thing that should mark us as different in this world is the joy we have
* And if we don’t have real joy, then we’re not doing it right b/c Christians should be the most joy-filled people in the world
* **When Jesus says, “My yoke is easy & my burden is light”, He’s saying that His teaching aren’t going to weigh U down, they’re going to set U free**
* Does that mean His teachings are always simple to accomplish? No
* Forgiving your brother 70x7 times when he commits the same offense isn’t simple, but it will set U free when U do it
* B/c people who forgive are people who are filled w/ joy
* Is loving others the way He loved us simple? No - but ask any married couple who live like this if they have joy in their marriage & they will tell U yes
* B/c loving like Him set U free from expectations & when 2 people decided to live for the other’s joy, they found overwhelming joy themselves
* Listen, some of us are burned out & we’re carrying heavy burdens b/c we haven’t committed to living life the Jesus way
* And that’s the invitation that Jesus is giving us - that even when we do the right thing & we don’t get the result we want in the moment, we can still have joy
* **1 of the most powerful verses in the Bible is in Daniel 3 where these 3 young Jewish men are going to be thrown into a fiery furnace**
* The reason? They won't bow down to an idol - they say something that reveals the kind of faith they have - not just a faith that wants goodies from God
* But it's a faith that has experienced God & knows that the only way that life works is when we trust God - even when we don't see the immediate benefit
* "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.'” (Daniel 3:16-18)
* **“But if not” - This is the kind of faith that is unshakable - This is the only kind of faith that will stand up against the pain of this world**
* And a “but if not” faith is only seen in moments when things aren’t perfect
* Living w/ joy doesn’t mean life is perfect - to means that what happens in me impacts me more than what’s happening around me
* B/c the moments when we’re standing before the trial & we say, “God can deliver us, but if not, we still won’t let this break our faith & trust in U.”
* That’s where an unshakable faith is born: when we decide to trust God anyway, b/c we believe He’s still working even when we can’t see it…