

# Have You Ears?

Reformation 2018

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Matt. 11:12-19

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Book of Concord, in the Apology, or explanation, of the Augsburg Confession, our text from Matthew chapter eleven is brought up. But before we get to its quotation, we must first understand the context. In writing an apology, or explanation, to the emperor, we realize that there was a disagreement over what the truth of God's Word was—with opponents to the Confession and those who maintained it. The opponents had raised several objections to the Augsburg Confession, and in the place where we find our text mentioned, Philip Melancton and those maintaining the Confession were writing how the opponents wanted to keep all the traditions of their bishops, even though they had not been commanded by God.

“They also,” Melancton wrote, “raise an objection on the basis of public offenses and commotions that have arisen under the pretext of our teaching. We shall respond briefly. *In the first place, it is evident that by the blessing of God our princes have an obedient populace in their realms. The very kind of teaching that we follow increases respect for rulers, because it crowns their authority with the fullest praises...* Originally these declarations gained for Luther not only our favor but also that of many others who now most atrociously oppose us....*For whatever rebellions have already arisen, the opponents can justly be blamed. They first caused a schism by the unjust condemnation of Luther and broke up the churches, and now they exercise incredible cruelty toward good people, and those who teach godly things. They arouse the minds of people also in other ways we are not inclined to review here. Nor are we so hard-hearted and so without feeling that public offenses in no way bother us. But we remember that Christ said [Matt.11:6], ‘Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.’ For the devil tries both to suppress and to distort the gospel in countless ways. In some places he inflames tyrants against those who confess the gospel; in other places he ignites wars, in other places seditions, in other places heresies—all in order to render this kind of teaching odious, as if it afforded occasion for such commotions. Indeed, it is easier for discriminating people to ignore personal dangers than these scandals of public commotions. But it is necessary for the Christian mind to be fortified against these, too, lest on account of them it may cast away the Word of God (BoC, pp.292-293).*”

With those thoughts in mind, we turn to our text from the Gospel of Matthew.

## Verse 1

We find our text in Matthew chapter eleven. John the Baptist has been thrown in prison for speaking God's Word in regard to King Herod Antipas taking his brother-in-law's wife as his own—John had told him that it was against God's Law. After spending some time in prison, John sent messengers to Jesus asking if it was He they were to await or if they should expect another. Jesus points John's messengers to His works, but then continues: “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

John the Baptist had experienced violence for the sake of the Gospel. We heard earlier this month at our Council and Voters' Meetings that Ignatius of Antioch had done the same. Today we remember Martin Luther's work for the Gospel, which nearly got him killed for its sake.

These days, Christianity continues to be under attack—but we find the battle in a new place: our own country. We had lived for years in the luxury of Christianity as the dominant religion, but now others have risen up to challenge and put aside that dominance. We are being called once again to speak up for God's Word. Yet we may find ourselves running out of zeal. Did not John the Baptist have the same problem as he

was waiting in prison? Some say that John had not begun to doubt but that he had sent the messengers so that they themselves might hear Jesus' Words and believe. Others hold that yes, John had begun to have some doubt so he sent the messengers for his own conscience. While not certain, it would not surprise us for John to have wavered, having been arrested for being in the right.

When we compare what we have done for the Gospel to what John has done, we might recall the words of Hebrews: "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood (Hebrews 12:4)." This is not to say that every time Christianity comes under attack that we will suffer violence for it; but it is also not to say that we won't. We don't know the future.

What we do know is God's Word—the very Word for which John the Baptist was imprisoned, for which Ignatius was martyred, and for which Luther had had to be kidnapped by his peers, so that he might not be put to death. Do you believe that same Word? Are you willing to bleed, or even die, for it if you need to?

### Verse 2

Jesus continued speaking to the crowds: "(T)o what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

In every generation, there are those peers who do not listen to the Word of God. Herod opposed John the Baptist, others opposed Ignatius, and still other opponents challenged Luther, Melancton, and the Confessions. The opponents of the Confessions were not satisfied with the Word of God as it was expressed in the Augsburg Confession. They desired the human traditions of the bishops rather than the Word of God.

So, too, Jesus' own generation did not want to hear the Word of God. They were like children who did not want to play "either happy or sad games...(because they) were dissatisfied with both John and Jesus (ESV Study Bible, p.1602)."

For this reason, Jesus had said, "He who has ears, let him hear." Jesus did not mean literally. He knew that the entire crowd had physical ears and that they could literally hear Him. He meant that hearing the Word of God meant more than just physical hearing—it meant believing that Word and living it.

### Verse 3

Jesus concluded: "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

It didn't matter if His own generation believed Him or not—Jesus was still going to go to the cross to pay the price for all sin. Yet the only way to receive that forgiveness is to believe Jesus—to believe His Word. The power to believe Jesus' Word comes from the Holy Spirit, who works through the hearing of His Word to create and sustain faith in hearts.

As we've heard several times this fall already, to believe in Jesus does not mean living perfectly. Jesus came—not because we were perfect, but because we were not. He came to pay the price for sin. From this teaching about John the Baptist as the Elijah to come, Jesus would be the Messiah to follow by allowing Himself to be nailed to the cross. Upon it, Jesus would suffer hell—separation from God the Father—in your place. And now that He has paid for every one of your sins, He has justified you freely by His grace.

So it is by grace that you have been saved, and not by works, so that neither you nor I nor anyone else can boast. We have been justified by Jesus so that we might become children of God, and so we are. As you leave church this morning, believe that you are saved by Jesus' death in your place; and then live as a child of God as you fulfill your God-given vocations. And if, as you are going about your vocations, you are inclined by the Spirit to speak up for the Word, do not fear; God will give you the words to speak. In Jesus' Name. Amen.