

# Negative Responses to Jesus, Part 1: Doubt

Matthew 11:1-6

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## **Introduction:**

Today we begin a new section in gospel of Matthew that includes chapters 11 and 12.

- I have entitled this section “Negative Responses to Jesus.”

In the first 10 chapters of his gospel, Matthew has presented Jesus as the promised Messiah.

- In the first 4 chapters, he showed us His origins and His calling.
- In chapters 5-7, he gave us a full example of His preaching and teaching in the Sermon on the Mount...
- In chapters 8-9, we saw the miracles that He performed among the people that confirmed Him as Messiah...
- And in chapter 10, we saw how He commissioned His disciples to go out and proclaim the gospel, just as He was doing.

As we have studied these chapters,

- we have seen various responses that the people had toward Jesus—
  - some negative and some positive...
- But in chapters 11 and 12, we come to a section that focuses in on these responses,
  - and in particular on six negative responses:
    - In Matthew 11:1-6, we have the response of **Doubt**
    - In 11:7-19: Frivolous Criticism
    - In 11:20-30: Indifference
    - In 12:1-21: Rejection
    - In 12:22-37: Blasphemy
    - In 12:38-50: Shallow Curiosity
- Matthew does not present this information to us without purpose...
  - He uses it to exhort and encourage us to respond to Jesus in a better way.
    - All along the way,
      - Matthew weaves in both warnings against rejecting Him,
      - and hearty encouragements of blessing for those who trust Him.

- As we study these chapters, I want to encourage you to consider your own response to Jesus...
  - And my prayer is that all of you will respond to Him in ways that are appropriate to the One who is the very Son of God, sent from heaven to redeem us.

So with these general comments in mind, let us now turn to Part 1 of this series and consider the first Negative Response to Jesus: Doubt

- There are many different kinds of doubt—
  - Not all doubt is bad...
    - You can doubt your neighbour who has been promising for two years to cut the diseased tree in his yard that is about to fall on your house...
      - You have good reason to doubt him...
    - You can doubt the vitamin salesman who has a new supplement that cures everything from cancer to ingrown toenails...
      - You also have good reason to doubt him...
  - But the kind of doubt we are concerned about today is something quite different...
    - It is a doubt that is not warranted because it is a doubt of God...

**I. The kind of doubt we are concerned with in Matthew 11:1-6 is doubt that questions what God has revealed in Jesus Christ.**

- A. From prison, John the Baptist sends two of His disciples with a question expressing doubt about this, the most important matter of all...
  - Matthew 11:2-3 says:
    - And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”
  - By “the Coming One,” he means, of course, “the Messiah” or “the Christ”...
    - The One that God had promised to save Israel and the entire world!
    - The Jews knew that God had promised to send Him and they were anxiously waiting for Him to come.
      - The prophecies of what is now the Old Testament indicated that the time had drawn near.

TRANS> So John, being in prison, sends to ask Jesus if He is the Coming One.

1. It is rather surprising for John to ask such a question!
  - a. All his life, he had been set apart by God as the herald of King Jesus, the Messiah.
    - He was the voice in the wilderness that Isaiah spoke about that would say, “Prepare the way of the LORD.”
    - It had been his job to go before Him and announce His coming, in effect saying, “Make way for the King!”
    - And for this King, to “make way” was to “Repent and be baptised.”
  - b. And not only was John set apart to this work,
    - He had also faithfully performed it!
      - 1) Even while he was still in his mother’s womb,
        - he had been filled with the Holy Spirit.
        - When the Virgin Mary, also bearing Jesus, came to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was bearing John,
          - John leapt in the womb for joy of Jesus’ presence!
      - 2) Then in later years, John had faithfully told of His coming and had called the nation to prepare for His appearing...
        - He had gone into the wilderness as God had commanded Him,
          - and there He preached with great boldness,
          - denouncing the sins of both the rich and the poor.
      - 3) And when Jesus came to John’s baptism to be baptised, we are told that:
        - “John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’”
        - Immediately, he knew who he was...
        - But Jesus insisted upon it and so when John had baptized Him,
          - John saw the Spirit of God descend upon Him and remain, and he heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”
          - In this way, it was confirmed to John that Jesus was the coming one beyond all doubt.
      - 4) And so it was that when John saw Him again, He pointed to Him and said,
        - “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the Sin of the world!”
        - And then He added:

- John 1:30-34: “This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.” And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”
- This was a clearer fuller testimony of Christ than any of the apostles had until after the resurrection...
  - It was not until then that they understood Him to be Lamb of God, but John understood it from the start.

TRANS> Surely John knew that Jesus was the Coming One?

2. So why is that now, just a year and half after baptising Him, John sends to ask this question:
  - “Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?”
  - a. There is a furious debate about this among the commentators!
    - 1) Many say that John could not possibly have doubted the identity of Jesus.
      - He himself was the prophet who had declared it so faithfully.
      - It is preposterous to think that he did not believe his own prophecy.
    - Those of this opinion argue that John was surely asking for the sake of his disciples.
      - We know that some of John’s disciples were having a difficult time leaving John to follow Jesus!
        - In John 3, they are shown to be jealous because Jesus is baptising more disciples than their master...
        - In Matthew 9, we recently saw how they asked Jesus to explain why He and His disciples were not fasting as they and the Pharisees were.
    - These commentators would point out that John probably knew he going to die soon and was concerned for his disciples.
      - He wanted to encourage them to recognise that Jesus truly was the Messiah...
      - He though he had told them, they did not seem to accept it.
        - And so he finally tells them:

- “Go and ask Him, ‘Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?’”

TRANS> Many who hold to this position consider it extremely absurd to suggest that John the Baptist would doubt!

- Surely, they argue, he was asking for the benefit of his doubting disciples.
- 2) But others argue just as vehemently that John was surely asking for himself—
- a) There is no indication from the text that John is asking but for others...
    - The only reason he sent his disciples was because he could not go himself, being in prison.
    - What’s more, when Jesus answers the disciples that were sent, Jesus says, “Go and tell John...”
    - Jesus gives the impression that John is asking for himself.
      - It seems a bit of a stretch to say otherwise.
  - b) Those who hold this view point out that Jesus was not measuring up to John’s expectations!
    1. John had introduced Him as the One who would judge all His enemies with unquenchable fire:
      - In Matthew 3:12, John is reported as saying:
        - “His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
        - John had warned his hearers time and again that the Messiah would judge them,
          - yet when Jesus came, there was no such judgement.
    2. Instead there was John, the forerunner of the Messiah, rotting away in prison with no one to rescue Him!
      - And there was Jesus with a small band of insignificant followers.
      - What happened to the promise that kings would bow down to Him and serve Him?
      - When was Jesus going to start acting like the Messiah?

TRANS> And so you see that there are strong arguments on both sides.

- And though I have my opinion, that doesn’t really matter.

- I am not here to preach opinions, but certainties...
- b. And what is certain is that this question:
- “Are you the Coming One, or do we look for another?”
    - arose because **someone** was doubting!
    - Whether it was John, or John’s disciples, or both, the question is a question expressing doubt.
  - Jesus was simply not measuring up to what everyone was expecting the Messiah to be!
    - Doubts had arisen and they needed to be addressed!
- B. You need to recognise when such doubts arise in you—or in those around you!
1. They are there whenever you begin to question God’s truth!
- a. Ideally, we would never question God’s truth.
- As soon as something was revealed to us, we would immediately recognise it as truth and we would never again waver in unbelief!
- b. But this is simply not the way it is!
- Look at Abraham, the supreme example of faith!
    - Though God changed Abraham over time,
      - at first we find him full of uncertainty when Sarah is not able to conceive...
        - so uncertain that he goes into Hagar (Sarah’s maid) and has a son by her!
  - And we find Job and Habakkuk and Jeremiah struggling with God’s justice...
    - Wondering where He is and why He does not act!
  - And we have the godly man Asaph in Psalm 73,
    - entertaining the notion that it was vain to serve God!
    - The wicked seem to be getting along much better than the righteous!
  - And we have Elijah who loses all hope in God’s promise and concludes that it is best for him to die,
    - He supposes that he is the only one left in Israel who has not bowed the knee to Baal!

- And we have Peter,
    - the most outspoken of the disciples,
      - denying Christ,
      - and again, some years later, denying the gospel by refusing to eat with the Gentiles.
  - Even the strongest men can grow weary and faint in their service to God.
    - It is certainly possible that John the Baptist did...
      - the prophets often spoke things that they themselves did not yet understand.
      - Any fallen human being can begin to doubt.
2. Doubts arise from two roots:
- a. Rebellion and misunderstanding.
    - Rebellion being when you are unhappy with what God has said or with what is doing and begin to question him on those grounds...
    - Misunderstanding being when you simply do not understand what He is doing or has said because it seems to contradict what you believe to be true.
  - b. Probably it would be safe to say that when there is doubt about God's truth, it always arises from a combination of rebellion and misunderstanding—
    - through sometimes one is much more dominate than the other...
    - 1) If John (or his disciples) were bummed out with Jesus for leaving John in prison, **rebellion** was the dominate factor in their doubts...
    - 2) On the other hand,
      - if they were comparing Jesus with what they had always expected the Messiah to be,
      - then **misunderstanding** was a big factor in their doubts...
3. Doubts about God's truth can arise in many areas:
- 1) They can arise in this most important matter concerning the identity of Jesus:
    - "Are you the Coming One?"
    - a) There are many through the ages who look at Christ and are disappointed...
      - They look and they say,
      - "He has not delivered."

- “He has not done what we wanted Him to do.”
- “He is not done what He should have done.”
- And so in rebellion they say,
  - “He is not our Messiah.”
  - “We will not have Him to rule over us.”
- b) There are also many who have the same rebellion, although it is hidden in subtlety...
  - They like the idea of having a Messiah and so they say:
    - “Yes, Jesus is the Messiah...”
    - But then they start to define Him and describe His work according to their own ideas...
    - They refuse to submit to the word of God and what it says about Him and so make up their own Messiah.
      - And since Jesus is not here in the flesh to contradict what they are saying about Him,
        - their misrepresentations remain, in their minds, unchallenged.
  - This is a form of idolatry...
    - They are making up a Messiah according to their own desires.
    - Though they claim to accept Him, in fact they are only trusting in an idol.

TRANS> But understand, doubts about the identity of Jesus are serious business!

- c) If you have doubts about the One who is revealed in the Bible as the Messiah, you cannot be saved.
  - Yes, He disappointed a lot of people that were expecting Him...
    - And He disappoints a lot of people today...
    - He disappoints them because He does not do what they want.
  - They want Him to immediately get rid of all oppression, poverty, ignorance, war, and everything else that displeases them...
    - But instead, He went to the cross and told His followers that they would have to suffer for His sake.
  - The scripture shows that there are two comings—



- The first coming has to do with bringing us out of sin, and that involves death and the cross.
- The second coming will be to call us to judgement and those who believe to heaven...
- Heaven will come later, but now is the struggle and the cross.
  - Jesus calls you to trust in His death for the forgiveness of sin,
    - and then to live a life of self-denial,
    - dying to what you are that you might live for Him.
  - You must accept **this** Jesus if you want to be saved.
    - He is the Promised One and you need not look for another.

TRANS> This is the most important matter to settle...

- Christ Himself is God's most important revelation...
  - If you miss this, you miss everything!
- 2) But once you have believed, you will still have to wrestle with doubts.
  - Doubts will also arise about all sorts of things...
    - Sometimes, they may even arise about the most basic and fundamental truths...
    - Have you not found it to be so?
  - a) I remember struggling to accept the doctrine of Hell as a young believer...
  - b) Many struggle with the question of why children suffer
  - c) or with issues such as Sabbath keeping
  - d) or why God allows the unjust to flourish
  - e) or whether children should be baptised
  - f) or what the nature of Christ's return will be.
    - You need to understand that at bottom,
      - whether your questions about these things arise more from rebellion ("I don't like this") or misunderstanding ("This does not make sense").
    - Your doubts need to be dealt with!

## **II. And our text today shows you how to deal with your doubts.**

A. You need to do what John the Baptist does with doubt!

1. He sends the doubt to Jesus Christ!
  - a. Whether it was his doubt, or his disciples' doubt,
    - still he sends it to Jesus...
    - John did not try to resolve it on his own, whether for himself or for others, but He went directly to the One who could help.
      - “Are you the Coming One or do we look for another!”
      - This is what you should always do with your doubts.
  - b. Last week we looked at Psalm 73
    - The Psalmist was doubting God when he saw the prosperity of the wicked.
    - But do you remember how his doubts were resolved?
      - It was when he went to the sanctuary of God!
        - Then He saw their end!
        - I explained that we no longer have a sanctuary made with human hands,
          - but we go to the sanctuary when we go to Jesus!
          - We must get His divine perspective on all our questions or we will wander around everywhere in confusion forever!
2. But you might well say,
  - a. “How can I go to Jesus when He is no longer on the earth?”
    - “I would love to go and ask Him about spiritual gifts or about why children are born with birth defects...”
    - “but He is not here.”

TRANS> That is true as far as it goes...

- b. But you have direct access to Jesus in prayer and the Word!
  - Jesus Christ Himself and His entire will for us is fully revealed in the Bible!
  - Come to Him with your doubts by coming prayerfully to the Bible!
    - And yes, He has also given you other believers to help you—parents, ministers, Christian friends...
    - They can help you find in the Bible what you need to know...
      - It is in the Bible alone, preached and read, that you hear the voice of Christ.

- You will not find answers in philosophy or by chatting with your neighbours!
  - Everything must be referenced to God's Word!
- c. You must come to Jesus with eagerness and a willingness to search diligently until your doubts are resolved!
- Do not be indifferent about it, but search for wisdom as for treasure...
    - It is be valued above all gold and rubies!
  - Did we not read about this in Proverbs 2 this morning?
    - Listen again to the first six verses:
      - Prov. 2:1-6: My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, So that you incline your ear to wisdom, *And* apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, *And* lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as *for* hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding;

TRANS> Bring your doubts to the Lord Jesus, and He will help you.

B. But I want to show you what to expect when you come!

1. Jesus' answer to John's disciples is rather indirect!

a. Look at it in verse 4-5

- Matthew 11:4-5: Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: *The* blind see 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."
- He tells them nothing that they did not already know—nothing but what they had already seen with their eyes when they watched Jesus.

b. This is not quite what you want when you come!

- You would rather that He would just answer your question!
- Why didn't He just say:
  - "Yes, of course I am the Coming one"?
  - Wouldn't that be a lot easier?

c. Well yes, it would be easier, but not nearly as good.

- He wants you to search the scriptures...

- You see, you are wrong to think that if Jesus were here on earth and you could go and ask him if children are supposed to be baptised or if spiritual gifts have ceased, He would just say yes or no!
  - He would not!
    - Instead He would give you just what is in the Bible!
    - The Bible is complete—
      - we have everything we need to know revealed in it!
      - Jesus wants you to come to the truth through searching the scriptures because that is what is best for you.
2. Why is this indirect method better for you?
- a. It is better because it forces you to deal with the root of the matter and not just the form!
    - 1) It would have done John's disciples very little good simply to know that Jesus was the Messiah!
      - You remember that the demons were some of the first to know that!
      - They knew the facts, but that was all!
      - They knew Him but they did not worship Him...
        - And neither will you or anybody else until you come to know what the Messiah is—who He is!
        - Just to know that Jesus is the Messiah without understanding what the Messiah really is is just not good enough!
    - 2) It is much better to have to begin to look at Jesus and see what He is like!
      - To look at how His love and grace and power are revealed in His gracious works.
        - How He gives sight to the blind and preaches the gospel to the poor who have no resources to help themselves.
      - It is better to see that love and grace and power and *then* say,
        - “Surely, this must be the Messiah!”
        - Then you not only know Him to be the Messiah, but you know what He is like!
      - John had, in fact, already had it directly revealed to him that Jesus was the Messiah, and so had his disciples (having heard it from John).
        - They knew the fact, but this struggle deepened their true knowledge of Him.

- 3) Jesus usually brings the truth to His people in a gradual way like this.
  - Christianity that is nothing but formulas is often very shallow and barren.
    - It is not just asking him into your heart...
      - It is grasping that you are a desperate sinner who needs forgiveness and grace...
      - And then seeing that He is the One who has that forgiveness and grace for all who call upon Him...
  - The Old Testament said a lot about the cross, but even the men who wrote it did not fully understand it.
    - When Jesus went to the cross, everyone was shocked!
    - The Messiah did not do what they thought He ought to do!
  - But when they had to wrestle with the idea of the cross,
    - it made them understand the depth of the their sin...
      - just to think that He had to suffer like that for them!
    - And it caused them to understand the holiness and justice of God in a way previously unknown to them...
    - And it made them see the wisdom of God in dealing with their sins by that way...
      - And the love of God that He would make such a sacrifice for sinners.
  - This was all very good!
    - Much better than a mere factual knowledge that He would suffer on the cross!
  - The Lord knows what He is doing when He is indirect!
    - He knows that we will come to our conclusions in a very shallow, unhelpful way, if we do not have to wrestle for them.

b. Consider some of the doctrines that you might have doubts about.

1) What about the Baptism of Infants...

- Have you ever wished that the Bible had a simple statement so that we could all agree?
  - Something that said, "Every child who has at least one Christian parent shall be baptised within the first 90 days of his life."

- Well let me tell you that one of the best things you can ever do is search the Word on the baptism issue...
    - Because it is not given to you in a direct manner,
      - you have to study about God's covenant,
        - about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments,
        - about the place of children in God's kingdom,
        - and about all sorts of other things...
    - And after you do,
      - you come away understanding better than ever the love of God and the responsibility of parents and of children and the warnings and many other precious and useful things!
  - The reason infant baptism has fallen on such hard times in our day is because our whole society does not understand how God ties people together in covenant relationships.
    - And if we wrestle out the issue of baptism, we come to understand that better—
      - and so to understand our relationship with Christ and with our spouse and children.
      - We gain something that we need to gain and could not gain if we had a simple formula.
    - The sad thing is that there are many who baptise children out of tradition alone today.
      - At heart, they do not think covenantally...
        - in every way think about the family and covenant relationships the way our modern world does!
        - but still they baptise children because of tradition.
      - They miss the blessing that comes from really understanding it.
        - Yes, they are doing the right thing to baptise their children, but they are missing the glorious meaning of it all!
        - They are following the letter but not the Spirit.
- 2) The same thing can be illustrated with the doctrine of the Trinity.
- God could have spelled it out in plain creedal form...
    - but the way He did it is far better.

- When you go to study the Trinity,
    - you come away with a much better understanding of what divinity really is...
      - and a better grasp of the self-sufficiency of God,
      - and of what He has done for your salvation,
      - and many other things.
- 3) Time would fail me, but I could illustrate with many other questions that God gives us to wrestle through...
- The idea of eternal suffering in Hell...
  - The idea of spiritual gifts and whether they continue today...
  - The doctrine of perseverance of the saints...
  - How God wants to be worshipped...
  - If common law marriage is allowed in God's plan
  - What day the Sabbath should be observed...
  - Why God allows terrible storms and diseases in the world...
  - I could go on and on...
    - But the important thing to understand is that you must always come to Jesus with your doubts...
      - And that though He may not always resolve them the way you want,
      - He will always resolve them in a way that is best for you.

### **III. Jesus concludes by pronouncing His blessing on those who are not offended because of Him.**

- Matthew 11:6: "Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."
- A. There is an implicit warning in this statement against taking offence.
- presumably, the one who does take offence misses the blessing...
1. You need to realise that there is a danger and tendency in the human heart to be offended with Christ.
- a. The danger for John or his disciples (whichever was doubting), would have been to have these doubts and never come to Jesus to have them resolved!
    - The identity of Jesus is not something to be uncertain about!

- We are called to place all our trust in Him for eternal life!
  - If you just leave the offence you have with Him to fester, you will perish!
- b. Suppose, for example, you find that you cannot completely trust Jesus because you can't get over the fact that He allows children to suffer.
- 1) And so, because of this offence, you never entrust your soul to Jesus!
    - You always doubt Him and are unsure of Him.
    - Well I tell you, that offence will keep you from all the blessings of God for all eternity because the offence is keeping you from Jesus!
      - What a tragedy this is!
  - 2) But if you bring that offense to Jesus,
    - And you say, "Lord help me with this,"
      - and you search the scriptures with sincerity...
      - you will come away understanding more about sin and more about God and more about the gospel than you ever dreamed of!
        - I know it because I have had to bring this offence to Jesus too.
    - But you will never have the blessing until you first submit your rebellious and feeble mind to Jesus to be taught by Him.
      - If you are just looking for a reason to avoid God, you will never find the answer and you die without Christ.
      - I hope the Lord will change you before it is too late!

TRANS> Yes, in effect, Jesus says here...

- B. Blessed are you if instead of holding an offence against Me, you come to Me to humbly resolve it!
1. You will be blessed because the doubt or the question will cause you to seek Him.
    - And when you seek Him, you will find Him...
    - And when you find Him, you will delight in Him...
    - And when you delight in Him, you will worship Him with joy...
  2. Though the process of removing offences is painful and difficult, you will be blessed if you do it...
    - It is painful because it involves dying to your self.



- You have to bring all your thoughts and put them on the altar in order that you might replace them with God's truth.
  - Death is always painful, but it is blessed when it brings about new life that is conformed to the glory of God!
- Do not keep resisting Jesus,
    - Let Him deal with the offence
    - Entrust yourself to Him and you will be blessed.
3. Indeed, with these words, Jesus shows very certainly that He is the Messiah apart from whom there is no salvation.
- What higher claim can He make than to say, "Blessed is He who is not offended because of Me."
  - Your blessing is dependent upon what you do with Jesus...
    - He is the Messiah and you do not need to look for another...
      - Do not look for something else to save you and make your life good.
      - In Him there is eternal blessing,
        - outside of Him, there is only a curse...
        - See to it that you are not offended because of Him.