

AN UNRESPONSIVE GENERATION (Matthew 11:16-19)

Israel wrongly responded to both the ministry of John (the prophesied forerunner) and to Jesus as the promised Messiah. The evidence was clear, but they rejected the obvious truth right before their eyes and consequently were especially responsible for it.

Matthew 11:16 (NKJV)

16 “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

The word “generation” can refer to a people group bound together by a common origin, or it can refer to people born within the same time period. The latter is what is in view here. Jesus is addressing the people of His day in Israel who were alive at the time His ministry took place on the earth.

The word “generation” (Gk. *genea*) is found 16 times in the NT. It comes with many negative adjectives such as “wicked”, “adulterous”, “sinful”, “faithless”, “perverse”, etc.

“With only one exception (Matthew 24:34), the expression describes the generation that rejected the Messiah. In all cases it refers to a literal generation.” – ***John Phillips***

Jesus illustrates the spiritual condition of the people of His day in this way. It was common for Jewish children to play various pretend games while their parents shopped in the market. Jesus says the people of His generation are like children in the marketplace who refuse to play when they are called to do so.

Matthew 11:17 (NKJV)

17 and saying: ‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.’

When called to play the role of dancing for some sort of celebratory event, they are unresponsive. When called to role-play the part of those at a funeral, they likewise are unresponsive. They refuse to respond to the flute by dancing, and to the sound of mourning by lamenting.

The illustration pictures this generation as being passive, indifferent, and unresponsive. All you have to do to go to hell is NOTHING. And one is especially responsible when the evidence is strongly presented to them.

Billy Sunday was right when he said, “A man can slip into hell with his hand on the *door-knob of heaven*.”

Hebrews 2:3 (NKJV)

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

All you have to do is NEGLECT it – to passively not respond to the truth.

John 3:18 (NKJV)

18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And then Jesus further explains what exactly He is illustrating, as seen in the following verses.

Matthew 11:18 (NKJV)

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

John the Baptist came with an austere type of ministry, living ascetically. And for a season the people rejoiced in the light he brought as seen in John 5:35. However, evidently, when John was taken off to prison, the people came to view him as just a crazy, demon-possessed man shouting in the wilderness.

Fickle people can be so brutal when you are down. It doesn’t appear that this defamation of his character took place until after his arrest and imprisonment. In this context, the phony supporters become evident. Instead of supporting John, it became evident what they really thought of him as they said, “He has a demon.” That is total rejection of John and his entire ministry.

They did not see him as a man of God introducing the Messiah, but rather as Satan’s man. On the other hand, Jesus had a different kind of ministry, and they didn’t respond properly to Him either.

Matthew 11:19 (NKJV)

19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.”

In contrast to the ascetic type ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus came eating and drinking. It's like John came to fast and Jesus came to party. And they didn't appreciate either one. They accused Jesus of being "**a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!**"

There was no pleasing this generation. They didn't like the austere ministry of John and they didn't like celebratory ministry of the Son of Man either. There is no pleasing the spirit of unbelief. It is consistently CRITICAL. A critical spirit of unbelief defines rebellion.

Not only were they unresponsive, but they were also blasphemously critical about it. They claimed John had a demon and that Jesus was carrying on with a sinful party lifestyle with the proof being His sinful associations with tax collectors and sinners.

Note the title "**Son of Man**" is a Messianic designation based on the OT reference in Daniel 7:13-14 (cf. Mt. 8:20).

In response to this Jesus gave this proverbial saying: "**But wisdom is justified by her children.**" Some manuscripts have here "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." However, in the parallel text of Luke 7:35 it also says "children".

Luke 7:35 (NKJV)

35 But wisdom is justified by all her children."

Whether understood as "deeds" or "children," the concept is basically the same, referring to what is produced. The wisdom of God, as seen in both the ministry of John and Jesus, would be proven true.

The idea of wisdom being justified means that it is VINDICATED or proven right. In the end, the wisdom of God will be seen in both the ministry of John the Baptist and that of Christ in several ways. It would be shown in that they both would accomplish the objective of God. They both had a part in the fulfillment of prophecy. It would be seen in the fruit of true converts who serve as a vindication of the wisdom of their ministries.

Although the ministry of John and that of Jesus were very different, in the wisdom of God they both had a specific role in fulfilling the all wise plan of God. Thus, they complemented each other perfectly.

Fittingly, John the Baptist's ministry corresponding with lamenting was in keeping with his call to repentance. And fittingly, Christ's ministry

corresponding with celebrating was in keeping with Him as the Messiah offering the good news of the kingdom. It all fit perfectly together in keeping with God's wisdom. And wisdom bears fruit – the fruit of true followers.

“The Lord Jesus, of course, is Wisdom personified (1 Cor. 1:30). Though unbelieving men might slander Him, He is vindicated in His works and in the lives of His followers. Though the mass of the Jews might refuse to acknowledge Him as Messiah-King, His claims were completely verified by His miracles and by the spiritual transformation of His devoted disciples.” – ***William MacDonald***

And by deduction, the blasphemous response of the majority of this generation is shown to be a complete lack of true wisdom. Indeed, it was pure folly!