

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU OBEY THE KING

BY DR. JERRY VINES

By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
2295 Towne Lake Parkway
Suite 116 #249
Woodstock, GA 30189

Let's Begin

Jim was 27 years old. He'd just joined the church through baptism after professing his faith in Christ the week before. He was excited about the new life in Christ he'd found. And why wouldn't he be?

Jim came from a terrible home. He never knew what a peaceful environment was. When he heard the pastor preach on "the peace of God that passes all understanding," he knew he lacked that peace. So he raced down the aisle and gave his heart to Christ.

On the Friday after Jim was baptized, he received a short letter along with his paycheck. It read: "Dear Jim, Thank you for your hard work. We will not need your skills any longer. Signed, The Administration."

On Sunday, Jim said to his pastor: "I thought following Jesus meant I'd have a life of peace. I just lost my job. Is that the peace I should expect when I obey God?"

How many people have you known that believe obeying God means living in an impregnable shelter from life's difficulties? The reality is, even God's children face tough times. Matthew reminds us of this when we recall his profile of John the Baptist.

He also insists that even though tough times come, Jesus' promise is a life of peace. The following outline will assist us as we make our way through Matthew.

I. The Possibility of Pain in Following God's Will (vv. 1-27)

II. The Promise of Peace in Finishing God's Will (vv. 28-30)

I. The Possibility of Pain in Following God's Will (vv. 1-27)

John the Baptist is the one who announced the coming of Messiah (3:11-12). He even sent his own disciples after Jesus to follow him (John 1:35-37). Matthew now returns to tell us about John, who has been seized and thrown into prison. It seems such a sad ending to a courageous, fiery and faithful man of God. In fact, John later left prison in two pieces. Herod had him beheaded.

As the story unfolds before us, keep in mind that John was just obeying God. This begs the question: *Is this what awaits those who seek God's will?* Let's examine this section together.

First of all, note John's *consternation as he considers his circumstances* (vv. 2-6). While sitting in the dark humid pit, John sent two of his disciples to question Jesus. He had gotten partial reports that did not harmonize well with his understanding of who the Messiah was and what the Messiah would do.

Pause for a moment and consider how many times you have questioned whether God loved you or was listening to the prayers that you so often lifted up to Him? Too often, unfortunately, the average Christian questions whether God is God because He has allowed a certain tragedy to take place. For John, Jesus was just not living up to the expectations he had for Him. *Could it not be one of our greatest problems today that God does not fit our definition of Whom or what He is supposed to be?*

It must have provoked John's mind while in prison. Was he mistaken to have sent two of his own disciples to follow Jesus? (John 1:35; cp. Psalms 40:7, 118:26). John was only thinking reasonably: "If Jesus Is the Messiah and I am His forerunner, why am I in prison?" John courageously asked only what we feel many times over, but rather than express our disappointments, we hide them instead.



Reflection Connection

Take a moment to reflect on Jim's situation recorded in the introduction. Allow the class to openly participate.

Also, it must be remembered that John did the right thing even during his doubtful moments—he took the question to the One who could give the correct answer. He took his questions to Jesus.

Our problem, unlike John, is that when we have moments when consternation seems to control our lives, the last place we go is to the One who has the answer. We frequently go to the counselor or lose ourselves in shopping sprees, over-medicate on anti-depressants and the like or indulge in a number of other escapes we've found to help us "cope" with our doubt. *John goes to Jesus. That should be the very first step of every Christian.*

Jesus did not leave John's question unanswered: "Go and tell John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, 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" (vv. 4-5). The message to John's two disciples was clear. Jesus was doing the very signs foretold by the prophets that John so well knew (Isaiah 35:5-6).

One disadvantage John had was the era in which he lived. That is, John lived in the days of partial fulfillment and did not have the advantage of complete revelation. There were two lines of prophecies about the Messiah. One line spoke of the Messiah's *glory*. John easily saw this, as did so many others of Jesus' day. There was a second line of prophecies, however, that remained veiled to the masses. That line was Messiah's *suffering*. John saw Messiah's *glory* but did not see Messiah's *suffering*.

Jesus adds a personal word of encouragement to John in verse six: "*and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*" In short, Jesus was saying to John: "Don't doubt Me; even if you don't understand Me fully, trust Me fully".

John didn't have all the answers. In fact, John died not having all the answers. But John's lesson is ours: *When we cannot see clearly, trust God completely.*

Second, observe *John's exaltation as we consider his experience* (vv. 7-15). John's life had been one of humility toward Jesus and honor of Jesus. Note that Jesus did not hesitate to honor John (cp. 1 Peter 5:6).

Jesus first honors John as a *person* (vv. 7-8). The first mistake many people make is to judge a person by a moment and not their entire lifetime. There exists in every person's life things they wished could just disappear. The fact is we all fail somewhere along the line. A person should be judged by their entire life.

Jesus spoke of a "reed shaken" (v. 7). Reeds line the Jordan River and bow to the earth as the wind blows against them. Though some reeds grow as tall as 12 feet, nevertheless, at every passing breeze, they bend over because they are weak.

John was no weak vacillating man. Instead he was more of a sturdy oak. That's precisely why he was in prison. Strong Christians inevitably face suffering times. When those times come, we must stand strong.

John did the right thing even during his doubtful moments.

Reflection Connection

How do you suppose John felt when all the people began to follow Jesus instead of him? Why do we feel like a failure when "numbers" begin to fall?



Reflection Connection

Do we allow pain to take place in our children's lives in order for a greater good to be accomplished? Why or why not? Name an incident when this took place in your own life and share it with the class (e.g., Parents take their children to the dentist knowing they will experience pain; yet, they do it anyway).

Next, Jesus honored John as a *prophet* (vv. 9-15). Prophets were God's spiritual champions and the most powerful spokesmen God has ever had. John was not only a prophet but was a prophecy himself (cp. Malachi 3:1).

As such, Jesus said "*Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist*" (v. 11). What a commendation! The world has lots of standards by which it judges a person. The three big ones are beauty, brilliance and bucks. However, God looks at *character, conviction and conduct*.

Third, let's notice *John's generation* (vv. 16-19). Jesus asked a question of the generation which rejected Him: "*But whereunto shall I liken this generation?*" (v. 16). This phrase was like chapel bells ringing at a funeral for those who said "NO" to Christ.

The Lord first offered the image of children at play who remained dissatisfied with every game (vv. 16-17). Jesus also mentions the generation's rejection of both John and Him. John was an ascetic who shunned the crowds and preferred the wilderness. He was rejected as one who was possessed by demons because he chose the wilderness where demons were known to dwell (4:1).

On the other hand, Jesus was far different from John. He mixed with the people, feasted with them at weddings and associated with them as sinners. The religious leaders slandered Him, calling him a glutton and drunkard. A generation bent on rejecting Jesus will find dissatisfaction no matter what.

After speaking of the generation's general rejection of Him, Jesus offered more specific examples (vv. 20-24) and thanked the Father that there were some who, like John, always honored Him (vv. 25-27).

II. The Promise of Peace in finishing God's Will (vv. 28-30)

These verses include one of the greatest promises in the Bible to people loaded down with the difficulties of life. Here Jesus invites any and all who pursue the will of God to trust in His promise of peace.

Jesus began with a beautiful Bible word: "*Come*" (v. 28). When Jesus said "*Come*," He was issuing a personal invitation (cp. 4:19, 22:4). And, in coming to Jesus, one is trusting Him and committing oneself to Him. What is the promise He offers? Rest! That's the need of every person. The notable literary author Henry Thoreau once wrote, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation"!

There is an inner restlessness that plagues the heart of every unsaved human being. St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

What is often missed is, Jesus promised here two kinds of rest, a double rest if you will. One was a *gift* costing a person nothing. The other type of rest *costs* quite a bit. Let's examine the two types of rest.

When Jesus said "Come," He was issuing a personal invitation.

Reflection Connection

Is it easier to trust God during bad times or good times? Explain.



Reflection Connection

Did John's doubts about Jesus raise in Jesus doubts about John?

Reflection Connection

Does our "resting in Jesus" mean we are to just "let go and let God"? How passive should we be when bad things happen to us?

First of all, *Jesus promises a salvation type of rest* (v. 28). He invites persons to "come...and I will give you rest." Rest from what one might rightly ask?

First, Jesus spoke of a rest from *work*. He spoke concerning "all ye that labor." The word is strong and carries with it the idea of working to the point of exhaustion, laboring until one loses all evidence of strength.

Little doubt exists that Jesus was picturing those who try to earn salvation by their own effort. Religion in Jesus' day had become a wearisome affair, the Pharisees had moved into the Jewish faith and taken over. People were expected to work hard in order for God to accept them. This curse of religion has not ceased to rule to this very day, people still attempt to earn God's ear by seeking salvation through their own goodness.

Jesus' cure was to simply invite the exhausted labor force who attempted to put in enough hours to please God to "Come unto Me." What a statement Jesus was making. Stop working, because none of your laborious hours mean anything—"Come unto Me."

In addition, Jesus made no distinctions about who could come. All *could* come if only they *would* come. Matthew writes: "all ye that labor." Our Lord, in one stroke, made coming to Him an invitation to the whole planet. Salvation is coming to Jesus, so quit trying to come and start trusting in Him right now!

Jesus made no distinctions about who could come.

Second, it is a *rest from weight*. Note again our Lord's words: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." (v. 28). The term translated "heavy laden" alludes to one that carries a weight so heavy that they're stooped over, slumping under the massive cargo they bear. Here Jesus was referring to the yoke of Pharisaic legalism (cp. Matthew 23:4, Acts 15:10). Their religion was built on rules and regulations instead of the Word of God.

Sin in itself is considered a weight no person can carry (Psalm 38:4). Many people who think they are living a loose, care-free life are really living in bondage. And, there is only one place to unload this weight of sin (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus is the One who bears the sin of the entire world (John 1:129). By bearing our sin, He offers us rest: "I will give you rest." (v. 28). There is rest in Jesus, for He promises us peace and delivers it. Money cannot buy it and goodness cannot deserve it. The salvation rest is offered freely to those who will receive.

The second type of rest is satisfaction (vv. 29-30). *If Jesus has given me rest by saving me, why am I so restless?* So many do not understand that while all who are saved get the first type of rest as a gift, costing a person nothing, the second type of rest comes with an incredible price tag attached!

The first price tag is a *decision* a person must make. Jesus said "take my yoke upon you." A yoke was laid on the back of an Ox with straps attached in order to guide the animal. Yoke was also used of a Rabbi who guided would-be disciples. Jesus



Reflection Connection

Ponder the difference, if any, between being “meek” and being “weak.”

was saying to submit to Him as Lord, and enroll in His school of discipleship. The only way to effectively serve Jesus is to be under His yoke.

Someone might immediately protest “How is being under the yoke of Jesus different from being under the yoke of the Pharisees? A yoke is a yoke is a yoke, isn’t it? Not really. Note carefully the yoke of Jesus is “easy” (v.30). This term was used by tailors of fine clothing. It meant “well-fitted.” The yoke that Jesus offers is not one made of wood, for a disciple is not an animal. Neither is it the yoke of legalism, for Jesus’ disciples are directed by Spirit not law. Jesus’ yoke is custom tailored for the perfect fit. Whatever God wants you to do for Him will bring joy and fulfillment in life.

The first rest—that is, the salvation rest—was given when we put our faith in Christ. The second rest is one we find as we continue living for Him.

This brings up the second price tag: *development*. Jesus says “learn of me” (v. 29). What does it mean to learn of Jesus? The only self-portrait Jesus ever gave is here in these words: “I am meek and lowly in heart.” “Meek” is a word which means one seeks only to do good to others. It is a complete self-denial, seeking no honor, no satisfaction for one’s self. “Lowly” is similar and can best be seen in Jesus’ words to the Father when facing the horrible cross: “Not my will but thine be done” (26:42).

Finally, there is the price tag of *discovery*—“ye shall find rest” (v. 29). When one decides for Jesus and starts serving Him, a beautiful discovery takes place: peace is found and rest is secured. The discovery is, in the Apostle Paul’s words, “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4.7).

Golden Greek Nugget

In v. 23, Jesus used a word translated as “hell.” There are three words in the Greek New Testament translated in the English Bible as “hell”: Gehenna, hades, and tartaroo, the last of which is used a single time in the Bible (2 Peter 2:4). All three indicate afterlife and are associated with punishment. Hades is the term Jesus uses in our text. He compared the rejection of His miracles by his own country with the horrors of hell itself.

Wrap Up

Whenever we step out in faith, following Jesus as a disciple, the possibility of pain remains a reality. No one is exempt. John the Baptist whom Jesus honored above all men, suffered specifically because he obeyed God. But while we’re not promised a path without pain in following Jesus, we are promised peace in finishing God’s will.

We get a major dose of peace upon becoming a disciple of Jesus through faith. That peace comes as a free gift. Furthermore, we also discover peace along the way as we continue following Him in faith.

