

# A Saviour Who Demands a Response

Matthew 11:2-15

12 February 2017 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

**Big Question:** Who is the Messiah that we must respond to?

**Big Idea:** Jesus is the Saviour that everyone must respond to.

## Introduction

On Tuesday, 8 November 2016, the people of the United States of America went to the polls to elect a new president.

Some were looking for a leader who would let “love trump hate” by “fighting for us”.

Others wanted someone in the White House who would “make America great again.”

Either way, it seemed that pretty much everyone was looking for their next president to be a saviour and a lot of people seemed convinced that the wrong choice would spell certain disaster.

Did you notice that when the winner was announced, just about everyone had a response?

Even in Australia, most people couldn't help but have an opinion about the result.

You might be one of the people who thinks “Who cares?”

If you that's you, you seem to be in the minority because the decisions made by the “leader of the free world” affect us all.

When it was announced that Donald Trump would be the next president, people were divided, deeply divided.

Some people responded with not-so-quiet satisfaction.

Others responded by marching, picketing and rioting.

Most people seem to either love him or loathe him – with very few people sitting on the fence in the middle.

But the way that the last election polarised the US ain't nothin' compared to the way that Jesus polarised people in his day.

The President of the US might affect us a little, but the king of the world affects us profoundly.

And not just in Jesus' day.

Even today, people continue to be polarised in their response to Jesus.

In lots of ways, we're making a fresh start this morning.

We've moved to a new location – a building that we can call home and use throughout the week.

We've changed our name from Cornerstone Bible Church to Grace Bible Church Corinda.

But it's not a completely fresh start.

The core of what we're on about – sharing the good news of God's grace towards sinners by faithfully teaching the scriptures in season and out of season – hasn't changed at all.

We're still people who want to live the gospel in the power of the Spirit and share that good news with others.

Something else that isn't new is that we're returning to the gospel of Matthew.

Our church has a long history with this book.

It's quite a long book (with more chapters than either Luke or John) and we began teaching through it in the lead up to Christmas 2013.

So, you could say that we're chipping away at it slowly.

We'll keep coming back to it each year and do a little bit more until we're done – I reckon probably sometime in 2020!

If you've read through Matthew before – either chapter by chapter in a Bible reading program or perhaps in one sitting – chances are that it seemed like a whole heap of stories that've just been cobbled together.

Matthew's account seems to meander this way and that through the events of his life.

However, Matthew's gospel has been very carefully structured.

A lot of thought went into it. You might even call it a piece of literary art.

What do I mean?

Well, Matthew can be represented like this:

Beginning: Matthew 1-4

Sermon: Matthew 5-7  
“When Jesus had finished saying these things” (7:28)

Story: Matthew 8-9

Sermon: Matthew 10  
“After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples” (11:1)

Story: Matthew 11-12

Sermon: Matthew 13  
“When Jesus had finished these parables” (13:53)

Story: Matthew 14-17

Sermon: Matthew 18  
“When Jesus had finished saying these things” (19:1)

Story: Matthew 19-22

Sermon: Matthew 23-25  
“When Jesus had finished saying all these things” (26:1)

Ending: Matthew 24-28

It doesn't really matter if you can't see all the details on the screen – just look at the pretty colours.

**{DP}** The book has a beginning and an end.

In between, it breaks up very neatly into two types of writing.

**{DP}** There are 'sermons'

The first section of sermon is the famous 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew 5-7) which took us about 6 months to get through.

**{DP}** Each of the sermons ends with some variation of the phrase “When Jesus had finished speaking.”

**{DP}** In between, there are sections of 'story'.

Together, they make a sermon-story sandwich... which, by the way, isn't as good as a club sandwich, but it's the same idea.

Now, I'm not showing you this to show how smart I am that I could read books fancy books and tell you other people's ideas.

I want you to see that this book wasn't just slapped together and that each section has a point.

**{DP}** Last time we were in Matthew, we covered the first section of story and the first speech – chapters 8-10.

They were all about Jesus' authority.

In chapters 8 & 9, we saw Jesus' authority to act like God.

Then in chapter 10, Matthew records how Jesus used his authority to send out his disciples on a mission, warning them that they'd be persecuted.

**{DP}** This term, we're going to be working through the next section of story and sermon which covers chapters 11, 12 and 13.

Matthew doesn't tell us exactly how things went for the disciples on that first time they were sent out.

However, in this next section we do see how people respond to Jesus.

People's responses to were completely polarised – even more polarised than with Trump.

Because with Jesus there truly is no in-between.

You're either for him or you're against him.

The verse that really summarises this section is 12:30:

*Matthew 12:30 (NIV)<sup>30</sup> "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."*

**{DP}** If Jesus was on Facie, would you hit 'like' or would you be wishing that they had an 'unlike' option to respond to his posts?

In the coming weeks, we're going to keep coming back to the question, "How will you respond to Jesus?"

## Outline

Today we're beginning with verses 2-15.

Most sermons and commentaries say that this part is all about John the Baptist, so they helpfully call it something like 'John the Baptist'.

That's true, but even more importantly it's about Jesus.

This section sets us up for the coming weeks as it shows us who Jesus is that people are responding to.

**{DP}** Jesus is the Saviour that everyone must respond to.

We'll see that:

1. Jesus' ministry shows that Jesus is the Messiah
2. John's ministry shows that Jesus is the Messiah.

## 1. Jesus' ministry (11:2-6)

Matthew recounts how John the Baptist responded to the ministry of Jesus.

Although Jesus doesn't ever really come out and call himself the Messiah, this incident shows that Jesus really was God's King, the saviour, the Christ.

John the Baptist sends his disciples to come and see Jesus.

John couldn't come himself because he was a little tied up.

Since chapter 4, we've known that King Herod had the Baptist in gaol.<sup>1</sup>

This isn't the first time that John's disciples have come to ask Jesus a question.

In 9:14, they were questioning Jesus about fasting.

They've got another tricky question, this time from John about who Jesus is, verse 3:

*Matthew 11:3b (NIV) "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"*

John wants to know whether Jesus really is the Messiah.

Are you really the one we've been waiting for?

Or should we expect someone else?

At first, John seems like the last person who would question who Jesus is.

After all, he's the one who at first didn't want to baptise Jesus in chapter 3 saying,

*Matthew 3:14b (NIV) "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

It was John who saw heaven open and the Holy Spirit descend like a dove.

It was John who heard the voice from heaven declaring Jesus to be God's son.

Even though he's been in gaol, John's obviously been tracking the progress of Jesus' ministry.

He's been getting reports about the things the Messiah's been doing – the teaching and the miracles.

And that's exactly why he's puzzled.

John was expecting someone more, well, Messiah-ish.

Remember that John the Baptist's own ministry was to prepare the way for the Kingdom of heaven.

You might like to flip back to chapter 3 with me and have a look at verse 2:

*Matthew 3:2 (NIV) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

John's own message (which was really God's message) was fairly heavy, pretty confrontational.

If you have a look down at verse 7, you'll see that it was real fire & brimstone kind of stuff.

*Matthew 3:7–12 (NIV) <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

John wasn't a particularly diplomatic kind of guy.

He didn't pull any punches, which's why he was in gaol in the first place.

Herod Antipas left his own wife and then seduced his sister-in-law into leaving his brother and marrying him.

John had the hutzpah to tell him that wasn't on and so he wound up in the slammer.

Criticising the king mightn't sound very smart – and it isn't – but that's what it means to call people to repent, showing them that they're sinners and calling them to turn back to God.

Not only was John's ministry built on calling people to repent, John also personally wanted to see some judgement.

That might sound weird to us. Don't we find judgement hard, difficult and uncomfortable?

That's because most of us live fairly comfortable lives in a reasonably just society.

But those who constantly face injustice desperately want to see fairness restored.

Judgement is a good thing to the person who's confined to a wheelchair for the rest of their life because of the negligence of a drunk driver who serves 6 months home detention before being set free to go on with their life.

The little girl whose parents force her into prostitution craves the day when justice will be served on her wicked parents.

Or even just the person who's constantly mocked and ridiculed at school or work desperately hopes for fairness.

Locked up in gaol for doing the right thing, John wanted to see some justice to be metred out.

He was looking for a Messiah of fire.

And yet Jesus – the one who's meant to be Messiah – is going around being compassionate to people!

Rather than condemning the tax collectors and sinners, he's eating with them.

To John, that just didn't seem to cut the mustard.

Where's the judgment? Where's the call to repentance?

Jesus answers in what seems like an obscure way in verses 4 & 5.

He gives John's disciples what basically amounts to an accurate summary of Jesus' ministry in chapters 8 & 9 of Matthew's gospel.

*The blind receive sight* – that's 9:27-31.

*The lame walk* – that's 9:2-8.

*Those who have leprosy are cleansed* – that’s 8:1-4.

*The deaf hear* – that’s 9:32-33.

*The dead are raised* – that’s 9:18-19.

*and the good news is proclaimed to the poor* – that’s 9:35-36.

But how’s that an answer to John’s concerns?

Well, Jesus is doing more than just summarising his ministry.

He’s wording it in a very particular way that would’ve sounded very familiar to John.

If you knew Isaiah’s prophecies – like John certainly did – then it all makes perfect sense.

Isaiah 35 prophesies concerning the expected Messiah.

Messiah is the way that God will come and right the wrongs:

*Isaiah 35:3–4 (NIV)<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;<sup>4</sup> say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”*

But in the very next verses, Isaiah also describes Messiah in a very different, but familiar way:

*Isaiah 35:5–6 (NIV)<sup>5</sup> Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped.<sup>6</sup> Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.*

Jesus is saying, “John, there’s more to Messiah than just judgement.

“Yes, I am Messiah. I’m the one that was expected. There isn’t anyone else.

“Messiah will bring judgment and compassion.

“I’ve come to usher in the Messianic age.

“Through my ministry, I’m giving you a taste of what life in my kingdom will one day be like.”

John understood that Jesus was the Messiah, but he didn’t really understand what Messiah was like.

For the moment though, I want you to notice the way that Jesus responded to John.

He didn’t condemn John for having doubts.

John's doubts were real From time-to-time, we all do.

And that's okay.

But just like John, our doubts need to be investigated.

Jesus invited John to examine the Scriptures and to examine the evidence to see if he really was the Messiah.

If Jesus is real, if the Bible is true, then the Bible will give you the answers you're looking for.

In my experience, more often than not, people's faith is crushed not because they investigate their doubts, but because they don't.

It's not wise to just live with your doubts and leave them unresolved.

That's actually foolishness. It's lazy and arrogant.

Uninvestigated doubt is the kind of doubt of someone who probably isn't saved.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what people say about Jesus.

It doesn't matter how badly his representatives do of representing him.

Popularity is a very poor measure of truth.

Jesus is proven right by his deeds.

Examine the evidence. Check out Jesus' claims.

This's important, because according to verse 6, what you do with Jesus matters.

Be like the man in Mark 9:24 who said, "I believe; help my unbelief".

That's the prayer of the believer.

Blessing comes with sticking with him and having the humility to listen to God's answers even if they don't quite fit your expectations.

Many of you will know about Chappo – John Chapman – an Australian evangelist who had a very faithful and fruitful ministry.

He was a very realistic bloke.

One of his most famous sayings about being a follower of Jesus is that "the first 50 years are the hardest."

I was recently reading a tribute to him from someone who knew Chappo well.

Apparently, whenever Chappo had doubts, he'd ask himself, "Has something changed? Is there new evidence that Jesus didn't rise from the dead?"

"No? Then press on!"

Is there anything new that overturns the central truth of Christianity that Jesus rose from the grave?

If not, then trust that he did.

John found that Jesus has the authority of God to act like God and his words are powerful like God's.

And we know that his doubts were satisfied because he didn't recant.

He didn't change his mind and get out of gaol.

Instead, he was beheaded for what he believed.

As John investigated Jesus' ministry in light of the Scriptures, he found that Jesus was the Messiah.

So, investigate his ministry and see for yourself.

## 2. John's ministry (11:7-15)

Having seen how Jesus' ministry shows that he's the Messiah, in verses 7 through to 15 we see how John's ministry also shows us that Jesus is the Messiah who needs to be responded to.

As John's disciples toddle off to go back and recount what Jesus has said, Jesus starts talking to the crowd about John the Baptist.

John's ministry was a sensation.

In chapter 3, we read that people came from everywhere in Israel to see him.<sup>2</sup>

Why? Well, it wasn't the location.

John's ministry was done out in the wilderness, in the desert.

People didn't flock to him to see the picturesque scenery of the reeds growing along the banks of the river Jordan.

Nor was it because John was impressive to look at.

There was no way that he'd make it onto any ancient cat-walk with his scruffy clothes made from coarse camel hair and a leather belt.

And his breath smelled of locusts mixed with the sweet aroma of honey.

He was nothing like the kind of majestically dressed religious gurus who you'll usually find in a king's palace.

Yet people were attracted to John.

They were attracted by his convicting message.

He wasn't some namby-pamby orator there to tickle people's ears.

He wasn't a reed swaying in the winds of the latest religious fads.

Nup. He was a powerful figure with an important message.

John was a prophet. They came to see a prophet.

That's significant because in those days, prophets weren't a dime a dozen.

Actually, for 400 years God had been silent. He hadn't sent any prophets.

And then there was John.

He was the one whose ministry was to prepare the way for God's Messiah.

In verse 10, Jesus identifies John by quoting from Malachi chapter 3:1:

*Malachi 3:1 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.*

Far from being a nobody, John the Baptist was a somebody.

He was God's messenger, sent to prepare the way for Messiah.

That's why Jesus says that there had never been anyone greater in all history up until that point, as we see in verse 11:

*Matthew 11:11a (NIV)<sup>11</sup> Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist;*

John wasn't just a prophet, he was the greatest amongst all the prophets – greater than Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel.

And not just the prophets, but of all people.

There wasn't a prophet, priest or king greater than him – not Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David or Solomon.

Like all prophets, John's job was to point forward to Jesus.

In fact, all of the Old Testament points towards Jesus – even the Law prophesied concerning Jesus, verse 13:

*Matthew 11:13 (NIV)<sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.*

The Bible is one big story about how a holy God would enable sinful people to be restored and live with him forever.

Right from the time that Adam and Eve sinned, God promised that one of Eve's kids would crush sin forever.

We're going to be spending term 2 seeing this as we trace the grand story of the Bible from the beginning to the end.

John looked forward eagerly to Jesus, but there was also something different about John.

He stood on the cusp between the Old Covenant and the New.

Like Simeon in Luke 2, he didn't just point people to Messiah, he actually got to see him.

Unlike the other prophets of old, he could literally point to Jesus and say, "There's the Messiah."

That's what made him the greatest prophet of all time.

That doesn't mean that John understood everything about Messiah though.

We've already seen that he was questioning whether Jesus really was the Messiah.

Matthew tells us:

*Matthew 11:11b (NIV) yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

The weakest brother or sister in the kingdom, the one who scrapes in by the skin of their teeth is greater than John.

This isn't a comment on John's salvation.

This doesn't mean that we won't see John in heaven.

In fact, I'm fairly sure that he trusted in Messiah.

It's a comment about his place in history.

This side of the cross, we've seen what John only looked forward to.

We've seen how the Messiah can be the one who shows mercy and the just judge.

We've seen that it's at the cross where God's love and his justice meet.

Jesus stepped in – in love – to take on himself the just penalty for our sin, if we put our trust in him.

And not only that, we know that death couldn't hold him.

He rose from the dead and sits victoriously in heaven, waiting to return in judgement.

We're greater in the kingdom, not because we're better but because we've personally experienced what God has done.

Even still, Jesus warns that as his kingdom grows, there will still opposition, verse 12.

Not everyone will be happy about the kingdom.

Nothing's changed, they should expect the persecution of chapter 10 as violent people attack the kingdom and try to plunder it.

Eventually, those same violent people would even send Jesus to the cross and through their violence bring redemption to the world.

Finally, Jesus tells the crowd that John and his ministry shows that Jesus is the Messiah because John is the Elijah that was promised.

Verse 14:

*Matthew 11:14 (NIV)<sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.*

If you flick back half a dozen pages in your Bible, you'll find the end of the Old Testament.

The closing words of the Old Testament are Malachi 4:5-6:

*Malachi 4:5–6 (NIV)<sup>5</sup> "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."*

God told his people to expect Elijah.

Because when Elijah comes back, then the Lord will come.

And then there was 400 years of silence.

Even today, Jews leave a vacant seat at the Passover Seder, waiting for Elijah to come back.

But Jesus says that he's already come!

John the Baptist isn't Elijah reincarnated. John isn't Elijah who's come back to earth.

But he's still like Elijah – he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, as Luke tells us in Luke 1:17.

John had the same message as Elijah – turn back to God in repentance.

John's ministry was to prepare the way for the Messiah – Jesus the Christ – to come.

The crowd had a choice.

Would they accept John for who he was?

More importantly, how will they respond to Jesus, the Messiah that John pointed to?

*Matthew 11:15 (NIV)<sup>15</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

You need to respond to Jesus as the Messiah.

I need to respond to Jesus as the Messiah.

We need to respond to Jesus as the Messiah.

This good news is offensive to the status quo. It upsets the apple cart.

The fact that Jesus is Lord means that I need to accept that I need forgiveness.

If the world received a saviour, that means that I need to acknowledge my brokenness.

I can't earn a ticket into heaven.

I can only trust in Jesus the Messiah who suffered.

How will you respond to the Messiah that this message clearly talks about?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:12

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 3:5

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**Big Question:** Who is the Messiah that we must respond to?

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### Discussion Questions

1. How does understanding the structure help us understand Matthew's gospel?
2. How do verses 2-15 set up what follows in chapters 11-13?
3. Why do you think John wanted a different kind of Messiah? Was he wrong to have that desire?
4. How would you encourage someone who has doubts about their Christian faith?
5. What was John's special, prophetic role?
6. Why was John the Baptist greater than all those before him, but not as great as the least in the kingdom?
7. Why does it matter that John the Baptist is the Elijah that Malachi was referring to? In what ways is that truth relevant, even today?