



A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families: For the week of December 17, 2017

Note to Discussion Leaders: Have members read the Bible passage in the group meeting. This is a “worship discussion” guide, and our reflections and applications are grounded in Scripture. Read through this guide before meeting with the group. You do not need to work through the whole guide. Decide which points would be most helpful for the time of meeting together, and use them as a starting point for your time together.

Matthew 11:2-11 “Jesus, Our Scandal”

What really offends you? Why? In what way is this offense the responsibility of the offender? In what way is it on you?

Read Matthew 11:2-3

- This account begins with John the Baptist in prison. Why was he in prison?
- What news reaches him?
- What question arises for him, and what does John do to answer it?

Read Matthew 11:4-6

- In His message, Jesus identifies five signs. What are they, and what would they signify to John?
- What does Jesus mean when He says, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me”? How might Jesus offend?

Read Matthew 11:7-11

- Jesus turns His attention to the crowds to explain John’s ministry. He asks three rhetorical questions. What are they? What is the point of each question?

Jesus quotes the prophet Malachi to shed light on the ministry of John the Baptist. Malachi was the final Old Testament prophet, and God’s people have been enduring 400 years of silence waiting for his prophecy to be fulfilled! Read Malachi 3:1-2.

- What was John’s ministry?
- What would follow John’s ministry?
- Why is that scandalous?
- Jesus adds one final twist to His scandalous message in v.11—what is His point?

Take time to pray together.

- Ask our Heavenly Father that West End Presbyterian Church would be utterly amazed at the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Pray that many might see that God came for them for the first time this Christmas season.

WEPC is taking a break from *Numbers* for the season of Advent, but *Worship Study Guides* will continue to be published each Sunday:

- Dec 24: Jesus, Our Sacrifice (John 1:19-29)
- Dec 31: Jesus, Faithful Son (Luke 2:41-52)
- Jan 7: Resume the Book of Numbers

Questions about this week’s study guide? Contact Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org
To hear sermons and access past study guides visit www.wepc.org/archivedsermons

Sermon Notes

This week, Steve Shelby preached on [Matthew 11:2-11](#).

- In the old Latin Church calendar, this Sunday in Advent is called *Gaudete* which is a call to Rejoice. The text for this Sunday is the one we have read today.
- We know how this story ends.
- Things are falling apart for John's group of disciples and so he does what any good pastor would do: he sends them to Jesus.
- Look at what Jesus tells them:
- The blind receive their sight; The lame walk; Lepers are cleansed; The deaf hear; The dead are raised up; The poor have good news preached to them.
- One of these is not like the others
- And that is one of many of the "offenses" of what Jesus comes to do and to say:
- At the dedication of Jesus in the Temple, Simeon said He would be the cause of the rising and falling of many in Israel.
- Scandal tends to make us reject the one who scandalizes us.
- If Jesus only did the "real world" things we expect a messiah to do, there would be no scandal.
- However John is still in prison.
- Our expectations are unmet .
- "Jesus continues to not meet our expectations. Why does violence remain in the world? Why do the corrupt maintain power, while the weak are abused? Why does sickness infect our bodies, sorrow infect our hearts, brokenness infect our families? Jesus is called Savior, but He doesn't seem to do a very good job of it." (*Christopher Esget*)
- A second offense lies in this preaching of Good News to the poor.
- "Who are the poor? What is this poverty? Not merely lack of money, but the lack of help and comfort. When you lose all hope in institutions and people, when you realize that there is no help to be found in your efforts or ethics, that no doctor or therapist can fix your deepest problems – into this impoverishment steps Jesus, who gives you the greatest good news: 'In Me you have a gracious and merciful God; I am making all things new; by My cross you will have healing'." (*Christopher Esget*)
- What is the nature of this good news? The example of Larry King.
- First, is Jesus the only way to God? This was Larry's way of seeing if the Christian representative would insist on the uniqueness of Jesus no matter how offensive that claim might come across in a pluralistic world. You mean good people from other religions might be condemned?
- The second question came from a different angle. Could a serial killer, or someone like Hitler, or a rapist, or a pedophile receive forgiveness and wind up in heaven? This was Larry's way of seeing if the Christian representative would insist on the offer of grace, no matter how offensive that pronouncement might come across in a world that demands justice. You mean abhorrently wicked people might repent and be saved?
- Larry King is not a Christian. But he knows where the scandalous power of Christianity is found. It's in the narrowness of insisting on universal, eternal condemnation for all sinners who fall short of God's glory, and in the broadness of calling everyone to repent of their sins, trust in Christ and be saved.
- The Gospel here scandalizes the world and the religious. There is a whole book of the Bible about this. It is the book of Jonah.
- The church must be unflinching in its naming of sin. And yet the church must also not shrink back from the call to repentance. Repentance is the hope-filled call of the gospel: anyone can repent and be restored. Yes, anyone can turn from sin and find forgiveness.
- Herein lies the scandal of the gospel. Christians name evil for what it is. Yet we also believe that evil desires and deeds can be confessed and overcome, that sin can be forgiven, and that people can be redeemed. The church is the peculiar society that insists that certain acts the world finds praiseworthy are sinful, while certain sins the world finds unforgivable can be wiped away.
- So, the offense of the Christian gospel is twofold. We will seem narrow and strict when we insist on calling out sins. And yet, we will seem too generous when we insist that anyone no matter their past can repent and be restored. Our stark vision of sin is grace to the victim; our call to repentance is grace to the offender