

## Encouragement for Those Who Have Been Battered Matthew 11:16-24

We live in world full of contradictions. For example:

- Medications that are advertised to make us better cause side effects that are as bad as or worse than the ailment they treat.
- Slim Fast does not cause you to really "slim fast" on its own. It is only a supplement to diet and exercise.
- Wal-Mart advertises "Low prices, always," but how many times have you found a better deal somewhere else on the same item.
- People tell us that drugs and alcohol help us relieve our stress, but we find our stress right there where we left it the night before.
- Many religions, self-help books, and motivational speakers seek to help us find true happiness and contentment within ourselves, but we still feel empty.

In the world we live in, contradictions abound and truth, well, it's hard to find total truth. Can you remember the last time you found "total truth"? The sort of truth with no agendas, no loopholes, no missing facts, no personal desires at play, just pure truth. Take a second to think about that. Time! It was hard wasn't it? Chances are, you couldn't think of anything. Maybe you thought about one thing, but probably not more than two things. Now, you may have thought about families and relationships as truth, but sadly, even those are often subjective. When preparing this sermon, I thought about the same thing and I could really only think of one true truth: God is truth.

In the eyes of God, if something is in this world and of man, truth is subjective, at times a contradiction. On the flip side, in the eyes of the world, God's truth seems to be false, a contradiction. There are many people in Scripture who can testify to this fact, but perhaps none better than John the Baptist. Listen to John's testimony found in John 1:6-8, 14-17. John was being persecuted because he was looking to the truth in a world that had a disillusion of what truth really is. From God's word, the only place and source we can find absolute truth, John found his voice. This is what he spoke about, but those around him were not open to it, they were not ready for it. That is why Jesus talked of the people in his day saying they were like the song the children sang, "We played the flute and you did not dance, we sang a dirge and you did not mourn." The people John and Jesus both ministered to had a dose of religion, but they did not have faith in the truth of God. Not only did we see the people's rejection of John in this passage, but also that of Jesus in verses 20 thru 24. The people ask for signs, God gives them, and they act like they're blind. They don't even see the truth right in front of their eyes.

Let's take a look at John's testimony in depth for a minute. In John chapter one, it said that God sent John as a witness to the world to testify

to the "light." Do you know what light does? It illuminates! Light inspires a dismal situation. You have heard it said, you may have said, "I have seen the light!" Following that statement is a point of enlightenment that someone has reached and generally an explanation of how they arrived there. You could say that when we see the light we have found... "the truth." This is what we find contained within the glory of God, that a God so great would come down to earth to show us the truth. It's the truth that sin hurts, but grace heals. John cried out that people accept this light, this enlightenment, in their lives... for their lives.

Today, John's call continues to ring out, that grace is already available and all we have to do is accept the truth:

- That we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
- Yet, while in our sinfulness, Jesus died for us, even when we did not know his name (Romans 5:8).
- And to all who accept Jesus as the way to God the Father, the truth of his life, death, and resurrection, they will have eternal life (John 14:6).

That's the truth we can count on day after day that sin hurts, but the grace of God revealed, to us in the glory of God through Jesus, can change our lives forever. Despite that truth, however, many people are still so caught up in religion that they lack faith to believe in the truth of God. Let me explain. You see, this was a part of the problem in John's day. He proclaimed true faith in Christ, but religion stood in the way. John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (NIV). In the days of the Old Testament, God used the Law as a tool to direct people to him. The Law was about what man could do to further reveal the heart of God. Religion is, "what I can do" to find God, but faith on the other hand is belief in "what God has done" to bring us to him. Religion is about doing and saying the right things, but faith is about trusting and believing in the right one.

### Religion says:

"I can be saved if..."

"I can be happy if..."

"I can have joy in my heart if..."

"If I pray..."

### Faith says:

"I am saved through Jesus."

"I am happy in Jesus."

"I have joy in my heart through the fullness of the Holy Spirit."

"I have prayed because God already knows my need."

Religion says, "It can be possible if..." But faith says, "It's already mine!" That's a truth you can take to the bank. There is no contradiction in that. Let us choose to claim the truths of what God has already promised us and not be just stuck in what could be. Let me give encouragement to those who have been battered: If you come to Jesus, you can claim victory over whatever, because the battle is won! And that's the truth!