

## Matthew: 11:11–19

### From Catena Aurea:

11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

CHRYSOSTOM. Having first delivered the Prophet's testimony in praise of John, He rested not there, but added His own decision respecting him, saying, Among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.

JEROME. He is then set before all those that are born in wedlock, and not before Him who was born of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit; yet these words, there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist, do not imply that John is to be set above the Prophets and Patriarchs and all others, but only makes him equal to the rest; for it does not follow that because others are not greater than him, that therefore he is greater than others.

CHRYSOSTOM. That the abundance of this praise might not beget a wrong inclination in the Jews to set John above Christ, he corrects this, saying, He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

AUGUSTINE. (Cont. Adv. Leg. et Proph. ii. 5.) The heretic<sup>1</sup> argues from this verse to prove, that since John did not belong to the kingdom of heaven, therefore much less did the other Prophets of that people, than whom John is greater. But these words of the Lord may be understood in two ways. Either the kingdom of heaven is something which we have not yet received, that, namely, of, which He speaks, Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom, (Mat. 25:34) because they in it are Angels, therefore the least among them is greater than a righteous man who has a corruptible body. Or if we must understand the kingdom of heaven of the Church, whose children are all the righteous men from the beginning of the world until now, then the Lord speaks this of Himself, who was after John in the time of His birth, but greater in respect of His divine nature and supreme power. According then to the first interpretation it will be pointed, He who is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he; according to the second, He who is less than he, is in the kingdom of heaven greater than he.

CHRYSOSTOM. The kingdom of heaven, that is, in the spiritual world, and all relating thereto. But some say that Christ spoke this of the Apostles.

JEROME. We understand it simply, that every saint who is already with the Lord is greater than he who yet stands in the battle; for it is one thing to have gained the crown of victory, another to be yet fighting in the field.

12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15. He that hath ears to ear, let him hear.

GLOSS. (non occ.) That what He had last said should not lead any to suppose that John was an alien from the kingdom of heaven, He corrects this by adding, From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

JEROME. Because John the Baptist was the first who preached repentance to the people, saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand: rightly therefore from that day forth it may be said, that the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For great indeed is the violence, when we who are born of earth, seek an abode in heaven, and obtain by excellence what we have not by nature.

HILARY. Otherwise; The Lord bade His Apostles go to the lost sheep of Israel, but all their preaching conveyed profit to the publicans and sinners. Therefore the kingdom suffers violence, and the violent take it by force, for the glory of Israel, due to the Fathers, foretold by the Prophets, offered by Christ, is entered and held by force by the might of the Gentiles.

CHRYSOSTOM. Or; All who come thereto with haste take by force the kingdom of God through the faith of Christ; whence He says, from, the days of John until now, and thus He brings them in haste to His faith, and at the same time adds support to those things which had been spoken by John. For if all things were fulfilled until John, then is Jesus He that should come; wherefore He adds, All the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

JEROME. Not that He cuts off all Prophets after John; for we read in the Acts of the Apostles that Agabus prophesied, and also four virgins daughters of Philip; but He means that the Law and the Prophets whom we have written, whatever they have prophesied, they have prophesied of the Lord. That He says,

Prophesied until John, shews that this was now the time of Christ's coming; and that whom they had foretold should come, Him John shewed to be already come.

CHRYSOSTOM. Then He adds another token of him, saying, And if ye will receive it, this is Elias who was to come. (Mal. 4:5) The Lord speaks in Malachias, I will send you Elias the Tishbite; and of the same again, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face.

JEROME. John then is said to be Elias, not according to the foolish philosophers, and certain heretics who bring forward their metempsychosis, or passing of the soul from one body to another; but because (as it is in another passage of the Gospel) he came in the spirit and power of Elias, and had the same grace and measure of the Holy Spirit. But in austerity of life, and fortitude of spirit, Elias and John were alike; they both dwelt in the desert, both were girded with a girdle of skins; because he reproved Ahab and Jezebel for their wickedness, Elias was compelled to fly; because he condemned the unlawful union of Herod and Herodias, John is beheaded.

CHRYSOSTOM. If ye will receive it, shewing their freedom, and requiring of them a willing mind. John the Baptist is Elias, and Elias is John, because both were forerunners of Christ.

JEROME. That He says, This is Elias, is figurative, and needs to be explained, as what follows, shews; He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

11:16–19

16. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17. And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

18. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of Publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

HILARY. The whole of this speech is a reproach of unbelief, and arises out of the foregoing complaint; that the stiff-necked people had not learned by two different modes of teaching.

CHRYSOSTOM. Whence He puts this question, shewing that nothing had been omitted that ought to be done for their salvation, saying, To whom shall I liken this generation?

HILARY. By the children are meant the Prophets, who preached as children in singleness of meaning, and in the midst of the synagogue, that is in the market-place, reprove them, that when they played to those to whom they had devoted the service of their body, they had not obeyed their words, as the movement of the dancers are regulated by the measures of the music. For the Prophets invited them to make confession by song to God, as it is contained in the song of Moses, of Isaiah, or of David.

JEROME. They say therefore, We have flayed music to you, and ye have not danced; i. e. We have called on you to work good works to our songs, and ye would not. We have lamented and called you to repentance, and this ye would not, rejecting both preaching, as well of exhortation to virtue, as of repentance for sin.

JEROME. The children are they of whom Isaiah speaks, Behold I, and the children whom the Lord has given me. (Is. 8:18) These children then sit in the market-place, where are many things for sale, and say,

CHRYSOSTOM. We have played music to you, and ye have not danced; that is, I have shewed you an unrestricted life, and ye are not convinced; We have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented; that is, John lived a hard life, and ye heeded him not. Yet does not he speak one thing, and I another, but both speak the same thing, because both have one and the same object. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a dæmon. The Son of man came &c.

AUGUSTINE. (Cont. Faust. xvi. 31.) I would that the Manichæans would tell me what Christ ate and drank, who here speaks of Himself as eating and drinking in comparison of John, who did neither. Not indeed that John drank nothing at all, but that he drank neither wine nor strong drink—but water only. Not that he dispensed altogether with food, but that he ate only locusts and wild honey. Whence then is it said of him that he came neither eating nor drinking, except that he used not that food which the Jews used? Unless therefore the Lord had used this food, He would not have been said to have been, in comparison of John, eating and drinking. It would be strange that he who ate locusts and honey, should be said to come neither eating nor drinking, and that he who ate only bread and herbs, should be said to come eating and drinking.

CHRYSOSTOM. He says therefore, Jesus came, as much as to say, I and John came opposite ways, to do the same thing; as two hunters chasing the same animal from opposite sides, so that it might fall into the

hands of one of them. But all mankind admire fasting and severity of life; and for this reason it was ordained from his infancy that John should be so brought up, that the things that he should say should receive credit. The Lord also walked in this way when He fasted forty days; but He had other means of teaching men to have confidence in Him; for it was a much greater thing that John who had walked in this way should bear witness to Him, than that He Himself should walk in that way. Again, John had nothing to shew besides his life, and his righteousness; whereas Christ had also the witness of His miracles. Leaving therefore to John the representation of fasting, He Himself walked in a contrary way, entering to the table of the publicans, and eating and drinking with them.

JEROME. If fasting then pleases you, why were you not satisfied with John? If fulness, why not with the Son of man? Yet one of these ye said had a dæmon, the other ye called a gluttonous man, and drunkard.

CHRYSOSTOM. What excuse then shall be given for them? Therefore He adds, And wisdom is justified of her children; that is, though ye were not convinced, yet have ye nothing whereof to accuse me, as also of the Father the Prophet speaks, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings. (Ps. 51:4.) For though nought be effected in you by that goodness which is extended to you, yet He fulfils all His part that you may not have the shadow of excuse for your ungrateful doubt.

JEROME. Wisdom is justified of her children, i. e. The dispensation or doctrine of God, or Christ Himself who is the power and wisdom of God, is proved by the Apostles, who are His children, to have done righteously.

HILARY. He is wisdom itself not by His acts, but by His nature. Many indeed evade that saying of the Apostle's, Christ is the wisdom and power of God, (1 Cor. 1:24) by saying, that truly in creating Him of a Virgin the Wisdom and Power of God were shewn mightily. (e.g. Paul of Samosata, &c.) Therefore that this might not be so explained, He calls Himself the Wisdom of God, shewing that it was verily He, and not the deeds relating to Him, of whom this was meant. For the power itself, and the effect of that power, are not the same thing; the efficient is known from the act.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. ii. 11.) Or, Wisdom is justified of her children, because the holy Apostles understood that the kingdom of God was not in meat and drink, but in patient enduring; such persons neither does abundance lift up, nor want cast down, but as Paul spoke, I know how to abound, and to suffer want. (Phil. 4:12)

JEROME. Some copies read, Wisdom is justified of her works, for wisdom does not seek the witness of words, but of works.

CHRYSOSTOM. You should not be surprised at His using trite instances, such as that respecting the children; for He spoke to the weakness of His hearers; as Ezekiel spoke many things adapted to the Jews, but unworthy of the greatness of God.

HILARY. Mystically; Neither did the preaching of John bend the Jews, to whom the law seemed burdensome in prescribing meats and drinks, difficult and grievous, having in it sin which He calls having a dæmon—for from the difficulty of keeping it they must sin under the Law. Nor again did the preaching of the Gospel with freedom of life in Christ please them—by which the hardships and burdens of the Law were remitted, and publicans and sinners only believed in it. Thus, then, so many and so great warnings of all kinds having been offered them in vain, they are neither justified by the Law, and they are cast off from grace; Wisdom, therefore, is justified of her children, by those, that is, who seize the kingdom of heaven by the justification of faith, confessing the work of wisdom to be just, that it has transferred its gift from the rebellious to the faithful.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures:**

#### **11:11 The Least in the Kingdom Greater Than John**

##### **Already Serving God in Heaven.**

Jerome: “Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Now, many would like to interpret this with reference to the Savior, as meaning that the one lesser in age is the greater in worth.

However, let us interpret it simply to mean that every saint who is already with God is greater than anyone who remains expectant, as yet in the battle. For it is one thing to possess the crown of victory, another to be still fighting in the ranks. Some conclude that the very newest angel who serves God in heaven is greater than any one, even the best, who dwells on the earth still in expectation. Commentary on Matthew 2.11.11.

### **Jesus Is the Kingdom.**

Origen: The kingdom of heaven is Jesus the Christ himself, who exhorts all people to repentance and draws them to himself by love. Fragment 226.

### **11:12 The Kingdom Suffers Violence**

#### **The Kingdom of Heaven.**

Hilary: What violence? People did not believe in John the Baptist. The works of Christ were held to be of no importance. His torment on the cross was a stumbling block. "Until now" prophecy has been dormant. But now the law is fulfilled. Every prediction is finished. The spirit of Elijah is sent in advance through John's words. Christ is proclaimed to some and acknowledged by others. He is born for some and loved by others. The violent irony is that his own people rejected him, while strangers accepted him. His own people speak ill of him, while his enemies embrace him. The act of adoption offers an inheritance, while the family rejects it. Sons refuse to accept their father's last will, while the slaves of the household receive it. This is what is meant by the phrase "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence." Earlier expectations are being torn apart. The glory that was pledged to Israel by the patriarchs, which was announced by the prophets and which was offered by Christ, is now being seized and carried off by the Gentiles, through their faith. On Matthew 11.7.

### **11:13 All the Law and the Prophets**

#### **From the Days of John Until Now.**

Origen: "The days of John" and of Jesus are understood not in reference to time but in reference to the state of the soul of the hearer of the divine Scripture. And the word now marks out clearly the days of Jesus, which the psalm points to in this way: "In his days righteousness shall arise, and there will be an

abundance of peace till the time when he is taken away.” One who has been previously taught comes to the beginning of Jesus’ discourses and still makes progress in introductory things by way of that road that appears to be rugged and steep. One thereby “takes by force” the kingdom of heaven, which “suffers violence.” The expression “suffers violence” is not to be taken in an active sense but a passive, as if to say “it has been taken.” But if the perfect Word, when he receives someone who was awaiting freedom under the law and prophetic schoolmasters and housekeepers, bestows on such a one his father’s inheritance freely, then fittingly it is said that “all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” Fragment 227.

All the Prophets and the Law. Jerome: This should not exclude the prophets who came after John the Baptist, for we read in the Acts of the Apostles that Agabus and Philip’s four young unmarried daughters uttered prophecies. But insofar as the law and prophets of the Scriptures looked toward the future, they prophesied about our Lord. So when it is written, “All the prophets and the law up to the time of John have prophesied,” the time of Christ is made known as those previous voices had said it would come. Then John showed he had come. Commentary on Matthew 2.11.13.

### **11:14 Elijah Who Is to Come**

#### **He Came in the Spirit of Elijah.**

Jerome: So John the Baptist is called Elijah, not in accordance with foolish philosophers and certain heretics who introduce the topic of metempsychosis (transmigration of souls) but because, according to other evidence of the gospel, he came in the spirit and goodness of Elijah and had either the same grace or power of the Holy Spirit. The austerity of their life and firm resolve were equally strong in Elijah and in John. Both lived in the desert. The former girded himself with a belt of skins, and the latter had a similar belt. The former was forced to flee because he accused Ahab and Jezebel of the sin of impiety in their lives. John was beheaded because he accused Herod and Herodias of unlawful marriage. There are those who think therefore that John is called Elijah because, just as Elijah would lead the way in the second coming of our Savior (according to Malachi) and would announce that the Judge was coming, so John acted at the first coming and because each was a messenger either of the first or second coming of our Lord. Commentary on Matthew 2.11.15.

## **11:15 Ears to Hear**

### **Let People Hear.**

Chrysostom: Jesus did not stop even at this praise of John but said, "He is Elijah who is to come." Then he added, to underscore the need for deeper understanding, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus said this to stir them up to inquire further. By this they were awakened so that everything might be plain and clear. Thus no one could claim that Jesus was unapproachable or that they did not dare ask him questions. For they were asking all sorts of questions and testing him in many small matters. Even when their mouths were stopped a thousand times, they did not turn away from him. For if they did not hesitate to inquire of him about these common things, they surely would be inquiring about indispensable things in whatever way they wanted to learn. In this way he himself was encouraging them and drawing them on to ask such questions. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 37.3.

## **11:16 Like Children in the Marketplace**

### **A Metaphor of the Generation.**

Jerome: The comparison of children sitting in the marketplace, shouting and saying to their peers, "We sang for you and you did not dance, we lamented and you did not mourn" is made with that generation of Jews in mind. Recall the Scripture that says, "To what will I compare this generation? It is like the children sitting in the marketplace," and the rest. We are not offered a complete understanding or a shared interpretation of allegory. But whatever we say about children should be related to their comparison with "this generation." Those children who are sitting in the marketplace are the ones of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks: "Behold, I and my children, whom God has given me." And also the psalm: "The testimony of God is faithful, giving wisdom to children." And elsewhere: "Out of the mouth of babies and sucklings you have achieved glory." So those children sat in the marketplace or in the agora, which is described in Greek more plainly as where there are many items for sale. Because the Jews did not want to listen, the children not only spoke but shouted to them, at the top of their voices: "We sang to you, and you did not dance." We challenged you to do good deeds at the sound of our song and to dance to our flute, just as David danced before the ark of the Lord, and you did not want to. "We lamented" and we challenged you to seek repentance, and you did not want to do even this, rejecting both proclamations, which were an exhortation as much to goodness as to repentance after committing

a sin. It is no wonder you have despised the dual path to salvation since you scorned poverty and wealth alike. If you are pleased with poverty, why did John displease you? If wealth pleases you, why did the Son of Man displease you? You called one of these a man with a demon, the other a glutton and a drunkard. Therefore, because you did not want to accept either teaching, “wisdom has been vindicated by her children,” that is, the direction and teaching of God. I, who am the glory of God and the wisdom of God, have been acknowledged to have acted justly by my sons, the apostles, to whom my Father unveiled what he had hidden from wise, experienced people. Commentary on Matthew 2.11.16.

### **11:17 Piping but No Dancing**

#### **The Dissonance of Dancing and Lamenting.**

Cyril of Alexandria: When some children are dancing and others are singing a dirge, their purpose does not agree. Both sides find fault with their friends for not being in harmony with them. So the Jews underwent such an experience when they accepted neither the gloominess of John the Baptist nor the freedom of Christ. They did not receive help one way or another. It was fitting for John as a lowly servant to deaden the passions of the body through very hardy training, and for Christ by the power of his Godhead freely to mortify the sensations of the body and the innate practice of the flesh, and to do so without reliance on strenuous ascetic labors. Nevertheless John, “while he was preaching the baptism of repentance,” offered himself as a model for those who were obliged to lament, whereas the Lord “who was preaching the kingdom of heaven” similarly displayed radiant freedom in himself. In this way Jesus outlined for the faithful indescribable joy and an untroubled life. The sweetness of the kingdom of heaven is like a flute. The pain of Gehenna is like a dirge. Fragments 142–43.

### **11:18–19 Wisdom Known by Its Deeds**

#### **Cause Distinguished from Effect.**

Hilary: “Wisdom has been vindicated by her children.” Those who resist the kingdom of heaven tear apart heaven itself in attempting to justify themselves. The action of Wisdom is just, because she has transferred her gift from the obstinate and faithless to the faithful and obedient covenant people. However, it is useful in this place to consider carefully the virtue of the remark “Wisdom has been proved right by her actions,” which Jesus certainly said about himself. For Jesus is Wisdom itself not because of his acts of power but by his very nature. Everything has capability, but capability is demonstrated in actions. Thus an act of

goodness is not the same as goodness itself, just as an effect is distinguishable from its cause. On Matthew 9.9.

### **The Living Wisdom.**

Theodore of Heraclea: Christ himself was judged by those who believed in him to be the living, foundational wisdom, who managed everything justly. Although he was treated spitefully by the unbelieving Jews, he did not stop speaking kindly to the Jews and calling them to be his children. Fragment 77.