

Matthew 11:16-19

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-11/matthew-1116-19/>

Jesus demonstrates how Judea has rejected John as Elijah and Himself as the Messiah with a short parable about children playing different kinds of music for others who refuse to accept it.

The parallel gospel account of this teaching is found in Luke 7:31-35.

Jesus knew that the people did not have ears to hear His offer and accept the kingdom of heaven at that time. He knew that they would reject Him as the Messiah as they were in the process of rejecting John as Elijah. And He illustrated their failure to understand in a series of dramatic remarks.

But to what shall I compare this generation? The term, *this generation* refers to the particular generation of Jews living during Christ's and John's ministries.

Jesus then made two comparisons.

It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

The *market places* are a public venue. They are social arenas of transactions where goods and ideas are exchanged, and people mingle with one another. Because they were high traffic areas, musicians would play their songs as people went about their business. In Jesus's illustration *children* are these musicians. And *they played* the bright and cheerful notes of *the flute* and they *sang* the sad notes of *a dirge*. But in neither song did their fellow children respond properly. The others *did not dance for the flute*. And they *did not mourn during the dirge*. They were unmoved in both instances, and the players point out the inappropriate non-response to those they played for.

Jesus then interpreted this unflattering mini-parable. *For like a dirge, John came* living in the wilderness in rough clothing and a strange diet *neither eating nor drinking, and they* dismiss him and his message saying, *'He has a demon!'* Instead of repenting, they rejected John's message. And on the other hand, when Jesus *came eating and drinking* with hated *tax collectors* and other *sinners* who associated with Gentiles, they rejected Him because of these perceived social vices. The people reject *John* because he was too eccentric and odd. And they rejected *the Son of Man* (a Jewish term for the Messiah that Christ frequently used for Himself) because He was too much of a partier. They accused Jesus of being *a gluttonous man and a drunkard*. The lifestyle, appearance, and ultimately the teachings and the persons of *John*, the forerunner and Jesus, the Messiah were rejected by the Jews because they did not meet their expectations. In the end they rejected God and the kingdom they claimed to seek, because He did not fit in their theological boxes.

Jesus ends His lamentation about Judah's rejection of *the Son of Man* and *John* with this parable about wisdom's *vindication*. It serves as a prophetic warning to take listen, consider, and act upon what He says.

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. A more literal translation of Jesus's proverb is *wisdom is vindicated by her* "children" or "offspring." Its meaning is that good consequences result from wise choices and perspectives. When we have *wisdom* (the proper perspective and make choices based on that perspective) good things tend to follow, thus the perspective that led to those good outcomes *is vindicated* as being wise. On the other hand, if bad results follow, it shows a lack of *wisdom*.

In the end, Israel will not be *vindicated* for rejecting John's message of repentance or Jesus as their Messiah. It will be seen as unwise to reject the King, His messenger because it will result in missing His kingdom.

Biblical Text

11:16-19 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."