

WHERE UNTO SHALL I LIKEN THIS GENERATION MATTHEW 11:16-17

Text: Matthew 11:16-17

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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.

Series Introduction:

As we begin this series of messages entitled “The Question of Christ,” we must remember that the Lord doesn’t ask questions for an answer, but to bring those being questioned to a place of awareness, for He knows all things.

Over the next weeks we will consider the questions our Savior ask, and may the Lord make us aware of the things that the Lord wishes to reveal in asking these questions.

(Read Text)

Introduction:

Have ever wondered to which generation you belong, I've found some data that may help you. Those born between 1901 and 1924 are a part of what is commonly called "the Builders" generation. Also known as "the Greatest Generation", these folks won the World Wars, and largely built the America that their children and grandchildren have enjoyed.

If you were born between 1925 and 1942, you are a part of what is known as "the Silent Generation." You inherited the work ethic of your parents, and used it to quietly and resiliently survive the great depression.

Those of you born sometime between 1943 and 1960 are a part of one of the largest generations ever. You are what is known as a "Baby Boomer." The majority of Boomers were protesting in the sixties, marrying in the seventies, and building businesses in the eighties.

Their children, born between 1961 and 1981, are a part of "Generation X". This is my generation. Most of us can't remember a time without television, and we can't function without a cell phone.

While sociologist and historians divide us up into categories and divisions, in many ways, we are all a part of one generation. We live in a common time, and

we share a common society. We are all a part of the present generation.

In our text the Lord offered an evaluation of the generation in which He lived. He used an analogy to sum up their overall attitude and life.

His evaluation was not exactly a positive one. He compared His generation to a group of children playing games in a marketplace.

While Jesus was speaking specifically to the Jewish people that surrounded Him some 2,000 years ago, as we study His assessment of them, there are some truths that definitely apply to our generation.

Note again the question the Lord asks:

Matthew 11:16

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

Note three truths that the Lord pointed out and see how they apply to us as well.

1. IT IS A SILLY GENERATION

Jesus says that the generation in which he lived could be compared to, "...children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows" or friends.

The people were acting immature and childish.

There was silliness about the way in which these people lived. By examining the Lord's words, we find some clues as to why the Lord compared them to children. Notice first of all, they were silly:

A. Because of Their Apathy

The Lord Jesus said that the people were like children, "sitting in the markets..." Notice they are sitting in the market.

Important business is being transacted in the market. Money is changing hands, livelihoods are being made, and the business of life is taking place all around. Yet, the Lord describes his generation as being like children, completely oblivious to the importance of the things going on around them.

As we look at our present world, important events are taking place all around us. The "signs of the times" are literally plastered on the front pages of newspapers.

The leading stories on the nightly news often sound like a contemporary report of Bible prophecies.

All the while, many in our generation are blissfully unaware of the critical nature of the day in which we live. We are in our own little world, unconscious of the real world rapidly moving around us.

It reminds of a famous photograph that was taken while John Kennedy was president. In the picture, the president is on the phone in the oval office, conducting the business of the president, and all the while, John Jr. is under the desk, playing with a toy.

John Jr. was not only oblivious to the importance of what was going on around him, he really didn't care. His childishness made him apathetic to the historic events unfolding around him.

The Lord compared His generation to "little children", and that is not only because of their apathy, but notice further that it is also:

B Because of Their Activity

Look again at the picture Christ paints in our text. He compares his generation to little children, sitting in the market. Look at verse 17:

Matthew 11:17

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

These children are playing games. The phrase “we have piped,” refers to the music played at a wedding. They were playing wedding. When they say, “...we have mourned...,” they are pretending to be at a funeral.

Literally, Christ compared his generation to a group of kids playing games of make-believe and pretending. Their lives were nothing more than silly, childish games.

Today we live in a day and among a generation that is addicted to amusement.

Illustration:

According to *Entertainment Weekly*, in 2004, Americans spent over 33 billion dollars on movies, either at the rental store, or the theater. According to the A.C. Neilson Co. the average American will spend an estimated four hours a day watching television.

We often talk about how busy we are, when in reality, most of our time outside of work is spent trying to amuse ourselves with activities that in the scope of eternity mean nothing. They are, as in Christ’s analogy, childish, silly games!

There is nothing wrong with amusement, and enjoying certain activities. Yet, when our whole lives consist of nothing but one mindless amusement after another, we then become like silly children.

2. IT IS A SELFISH GENERATION

Look again at the words of the children in verse 17:

Matthew 11:17

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

Imagine them, with the arms crossed, bottom lips sticking out, upset that they did not get their way. Like petty children, they selfishly expected the world to revolve around them.

This image of a selfish generation is a hard one to swallow, but it is unfortunately an accurate one. The selfishness of the people Christ described is seen in a couple of ways. Notice first of all that:

A. They Were Demanding

The children in the story call out to their cohorts, “Didn’t you hear me playing the music? You are supposed to dance when I play the music?” “Didn’t you hear me say that we were going to play funeral? Get over here and weep like you mean it!”

Do you sense the demanding, bossy tone in the words of these children? They act as if others owe it to them to do whatever they want them to do.

Do you recognize this attitude of entitlement? We have a segment of people among us today who truly believe that everybody owes them something. Their parents owe them money and possessions. The government owes them a college education. The world owes them a high-paying job.

This sense of entitlement and demanding attitude are symptoms of the disease of selfishness. Many believe and adopt the Burger King slogan, "Have it your way."

This attitude has crept into the church, where people honestly believe that the church is supposed to meet all their needs, and not the other way around. When the music, or the preaching, or the ministries don't meet our needs, we go somewhere else, where we can be catered to, petted, and served.

Note what the Lord said:

Matthew 20:28

²⁸ Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Their selfishness is not only seen in the fact that they were demanding, but it is also seen in the fact that:

B. They Were Delicate

Again, when you imagine these children, scolding their friends for not playing with them, you can almost hear and see in your mind the pouting, whiny attitude of these childish characters.

Their feelings are hurt because their friends didn't do what they wanted. Their childish sensitivities are evident, and you can almost hear them say, "I'm mad! They won't play with me!"

Unfortunately, we live in a culture today that is thin-skinned. We are overly sensitive, and when someone says or does something that we don't like, we are apt to pout and whine like the children in this story.

The Lord Jesus warned His disciples about persecution. He then told them in Matthew 5:12, that when they were persecuted, they should, "Rejoice."

Matthew 5:12

¹² Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Being overly sensitive is a sure sign of selfishness. Those who don't think too highly of themselves are less likely to get hurt when others slight them.

There is one more truth we draw from this picture the Lord painted of His generation. Notice not only that *it is a silly generation*, and *it is a selfish generation*, but notice also further that:

3. IT IS A STUBBORN GENERATION

When you read this little analogy that Christ used, it is important to remember that there are two groups of children mentioned in this story.

You have the group that is piping and mourning, and then you have the group that is ignoring them, and refusing to play along.

This silent group, that refused to join in the games, represents the stubbornness and hardness of the culture in which Christ ministered.

Notice a couple of things we draw from this stubborn group. This group represents those who are:

A. Ignoring the Wonder of the Gospel

Matthew 11:17

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

In other words, we played a happy song, and you refused to celebrate with us.

The message of the gospel is the good news. It tells the wonderful story of how God's love intervened for sinful man in the glorious person of Jesus Christ.

It tells men that their sins can be forgiven, their lives can be transformed, and their future can be certain. It is a wonderful message.

Yet, there are those, like the stubborn kids in the story, who are unmoved by the good news of the gospel.

They fold their arms, and sit unimpressed with the wonderful offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. The joyful melody of redemption does not excite them.

There are many in our generation that is largely unimpressed with the joyous, wonderful claims of the gospel.

Notice not only that these children were stubborn in ignoring the wonder of the gospel, but notice also that their stubbornness is seen in the fact that they were also:

B. Ignoring the Warnings of the Gospel

Matthew 11:17

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

They offered to play not only a happy game, but a somber and sad one as well. The results were the same. The other group of children did not want to play along.

The good news of the gospel is always accompanied with the bad news of judgment. The good news is that you can be delivered. The bad news is that the wrath of God is going to fall upon those who disobey the gospel.

In our culture, when a preacher proclaims the wrath and judgment of God, for the most part people are either offended by it, or they simply ignore it.

The gospel largely falls on deaf ears. The generation in which we live, much like that of Christ's day, is stubborn regarding the gospel.

Neither the hope of the salvation or the threat of damnation seems to move them. Like children with their fingers in their ears, they refuse to hear the Word of the Lord.

The storm of judgment is coming, but many are indifferent to the warnings. The Lord described a stubborn, hardened generation.

The stubbornness of those around Him is not unique to His day. There is still a hardness and coldness in our generation.

Close:

It is hard to look at this analogy given by the Lord and not see some resemblance to our day and our generation.

The question is: what are we to do? We know that there is a silliness, selfishness, and stubbornness that has pervaded our culture, but how are we to combat it?

The answer is to live differently ourselves! We cannot change everyone's behavior, but we can change our own!

We can cut much of the silly, frivolous activity out of our lives, and give that time to serving the Lord instead. We can quit living in a selfish bubble, and can instead give our lives in service to others.

Finally, we can quit treating the glorious message of the gospel as if it is a dusty, old, worn out tale! We can listen and respond to the Word of God today, instead of stubbornly refusing to answer His call!

The generation evaluation that Christ gave in our text is not a kind one. Yet, we must hear it and respond if we are ever to change what are generation is.