

Matthew

Chapter 11

By

Don Stewart

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 11

After Jesus had finished commissioning the twelve He went on His own preaching and teaching mission. John the Baptist will send messengers to Him to find out if He truly is the Messiah or whether the people should expect someone else to come later. Jesus answers John's question as well as testifies concerning John's character. The Lord then deals with opposition to His ministry and pronounces judgment upon the cities that did not repent.

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S DOUBTS ABOUT JESUS (11:1-3)

As John languishes in Herod's prison he begins to have doubts about Jesus.

Matt. 11:1 And it came about when Jesus finished commanding his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

And it came about when Jesus finished commanding his twelve disciples, In Matthew, unlike Mark (6:12-13,30) and Luke (9:6,10; cf. 10:17-20) there is no report of the fulfillment of the mission of the twelve or of their return from that mission.

He departed from there to teach and preach Matthew returns the focus to Jesus and His activities. Again the emphasis is on His teaching and preaching.

in their cities. The cities of Israel—the Jews as opposed to the Gentiles.

Matt. 11:2 Now when John heard in prison about the works of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples,

Note on a variant: Instead of *by His disciples* many manuscripts read *two of his disciples*.

Now when John heard in prison The forerunner of the Messiah has found himself in Herod's prison.

about the works of the Christ, Notice that Jesus is called here the Christ in this passage that deals with the question of John the Baptist.

he sent word by his disciples, John still has disciples after he told them to follow Jesus.

Matt. 11:3 and said to him, "Are you the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?"

and said to him, "Are you the Coming One, A title for the Messiah (cf. 3:11; Hebrews 10:37; Revelation 1:4, 8; Acts 19:4; for Old Testament background: Psalm 118:26; Daniel 7:13; 9:25-27; Malachi 3:1).

or shall we look for someone else?" Why did John ask Jesus about His Messianic identity? John the Baptist had proclaimed the imminent coming of the kingdom, and had baptized Jesus the king, the one who would fulfill that promise. Now, well into the ministry of Jesus, he has doubters question about Jesus' identity. His doubts are not unreasonable considering John preached the imminent end of the age involving

the judgment of the wicked (3:12). Yet here he was in prison, not experiencing the Messianic promise of liberty to the captives (Isaiah 61:1, see also 42:7). He had to speak to Jesus through his disciples with his question. Since Jesus had not fulfilled John's expectation of judgment on the enemies of God he wondered if he should be looking for someone else.

JESUS' REPLY TO JOHN (11:4-6)

Jesus will now send a message back to John by way of the deeds which He is performing.

Matt. 11:4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go back and report to John the things which you hear and see:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go back and report to John the things which you hear and see: Jesus will now provide the unmistakable evidence that He is the Messiah. He points to, "the things you are hearing and seeing" as Matthew has done in the gospel, to the words (chapters 5-7) and deeds (chapters 8,9) of Jesus, in that order.

Matt. 11:5 the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are being evangelized.

the blind received their sight, Almost the exact same language in Isaiah 29:18; cf 42:18; 35:5; Isaiah 35:6; See 9:27-31 for a previous example.

and the lame walk, See 9:1-8 for a previous example of Jesus healing the lame.

the lepers are cleansed Though this is not a specific Old Testament expectation it is implied in general statements Isaiah 53:4; see 8:1-4 for the healing of a leper.

and the deaf hear, See Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; cf 42:18. Matthew has already given one specific example of Jesus healing the deaf (9:32-34).

the dead are raised, Confer 9:18-26. There is similar language in Isaiah 26:19;

and the poor are being evangelized See 9:35 for Jesus evangelizing the poor. (Isaiah 61:1).

Matt. 11:6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of me.

And blessed is he who is not offended because of me. Jesus is implying that not everything will work out in accord with John's expectations. Jesus is not the kind of Messiah awaited for by John and the populace at large. This statement shows that there will be some who are offended with the nature of His Messiahship. John is meant to understand that Jesus is the promised one, but that the kingdom He is bringing is *not* one, for the present time, that will bring judgment upon the wicked (John 3:17). The personal consequences for John is that he will continue in prison and eventually die a martyr's death.

JESUS TESTIFIES TO JOHN THE BAPTIST (11:7-15)

The Lord now gives testimony to the character and ministry of John.

Matt. 11:7 While they were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John, “What did you go out to the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?”

While they were proceeding away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John, Jesus will now defend John before the people.

“What did you go out to the wilderness to look at?” He is going to ask the crowd this question three times.

A reed shaken by the wind? This suggests weakness and vacillation.

Matt. 11:8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, the ones wearing the soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

But what did you go out to see? Same question repeated.

A man dressed in soft clothing? Fine clothing contrasted to John’s ascetic attire.

Behold, the ones wearing the soft clothing are in kings’ houses. The houses of kings are not in the wilderness where they came out to see John. He could be referring to one of the many houses that Herod had.

Matt. 11:9 What did you come out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Note on a variant reading. In some the manuscripts the words *to see* and *a prophet* are transposed. Thus the translation would be either *What did you come out to see? A prophet?* or *“Why then did you go out? To see a prophet?”*

What did you come out to see? Repeated now for a third time.

A prophet? Had they come out to merely see a prophet in the wilderness?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. Luke 1:76 describes John as a prophet of the Most High. Jesus will spell out in the next verse the sense in which John was more than a prophet.

Matt. 11:10 This is the one about whom it is written, “Behold, I myself am sending my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.”

This is the one about whom it was written, His coming is a fulfillment of Scripture.

“Behold, I myself am sending my messenger before your face, This is quoting Malachi 3:1.

who will prepare your way before you.” John was sent to prepare the way of the Lord Himself.

Matt. 11:11 Truly, I say to you, “Among those born of women, there has not risen one who is greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is the least one in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Truly, I say to you, “Among those born of women, This expression refers to humanity.

there has not risen one who is greater than John the Baptist; The point made in this verse depends upon the premise that John is a transitional figure between two ages; he is the climax of the old order; a prophet like those of the past but greater. From a human point of view no one greater than John has ever been born (of course with the exception of Jesus).

yet he who is the least one in the kingdom of heaven is greater than him.” This speaks of the greatness of the kingdom. The contrast is not between individuals but between eras.

Matt. 11:12 From the days of John until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent ones are taking it by force.

From the days of John until now, This could refer to the time Matthew wrote his gospel rather than to Jesus’ time.

the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent ones are taking it by force. This statement has been interpreted in a variety of ways. The difficulty arises because of two clauses, each of which can be taken positively or negatively. As a result there are four possible ways of understanding it.

- (1) Both clauses can be understood positively “The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and forceful people are taking it” (NIV).
- (2) Both clauses can be understood negatively “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent ones are taking it by force” (KJV, RSV ASV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV).
- (3) The first clause can be understood positively and the second negatively “The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and the violent ones are plundering it.”
- (4) The first clause can be understood negatively and the second clause positively. “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence ,and forceful people are seizing it.”

The most natural way of understanding it is the reality of persecution and opposition to the kingdom of God.

The violent ones could be a reference to the zealots who were attempting to bring about a political kingdom for the Messiah instead of the type of realm which Jesus had come to bring.

Matt. 11:13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. John is the culmination of the law and the prophets.

Matt. 11:14 And if you are willing to accept it, he himself is Elijah, the one who is to come.

And if you willing to accept it, A degree of faith is required.

he himself is Elijah, the one who is to come. John functioned in the role of Elijah. Elijah himself will come before the day of judgment of God (Malachi 4:5) but this is not a time of judgment.

Matt. 11:15 He who has ears, let him hear!

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts read *to hear* after *He who has ears*.

He who has ears, let him hear! This formula, or one similar to it, is often used in contexts where difficult content is present (e.g. 13:9,43, Mark 4:9,23; Luke 8:8; 14:35; see Revelation 2:7,11,17).

John the Baptist is by definition at the turning point of the two ages. He was the last and greatest of the old prophets announcing the new kingdom and its Messiah.

THE CROWD'S REACTION TO JESUS (11:16-19)

Jesus now points out the fickleness of the multitudes.

Matt. 11:16 But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to the other children.

But to what shall I compare this generation? The phrase “this generation” often connotes unbelief (cf. 12:41,42, 45;) the disobedience and unbelief becomes explicit in 12:39; 16:4; and 17:17.

It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to the other children. Jesus compares them to children playing in the market place who call out to their friends for not joining them.

Matt. 11:17 saying, “We have played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we have sung a dirge, and you did not mourn.”

Note on a variant reading: After *sung a dirge* some manuscripts read *to you*

saying, “We have played the flute for you, This refers to playing a flute at a wedding.

and you did not dance; They refuse to respond. They refuse to respond.

we have sung a dirge, Or sing a dirge as in a funeral

and you did not mourn.” Still no response. In the same way Jesus’ contemporaries will have nothing to do with His messengers sent to them by God. Like the children, they refuse to participate in anything offered to them.

Matt. 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, They rejected John because of his extreme asceticism (3:4;9:14; cf Luke 1:15).

and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ His intensity and demeanor made him seem possessed by those who were unresponsive. The same expression “he has a demon” is used of Jesus repeatedly in John 7:20; 8:48,52; 10:20. Jesus will be accused of driving out the demons by the ruler of the demons (12:24 and Mark 3:22).

Matt. 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” And wisdom is justified from her deeds.

Note on a variant reading. Instead of *from her deeds* some manuscripts read *from her children*.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking In contrast Jesus was feasting not fasting.

and they say, “Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, This was because of His frequent attendance at banquets.

a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” He mingled with the lower class of society.

And wisdom is justified from her deeds. Unbelief is never satisfied. The deeds for which Jesus is being criticized will ultimately vindicate Him. John and Jesus, the central figures in the salvation being offered by God are rejected by the people. The mystery becomes even greater when, as the gospel proceeds, each is killed. According to the people’s standards John is too holy; Jesus is not holy enough.

JUDGMENT PRONOUNCED ON UNBELIEVING CITIES (11:20-24)

Jesus now denounces the cities which did not receive Him.

Matt. 11:20 Then he began to denounce the cities in which the most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent.

Then he began to denounce the cities in which the most of his miracles were done, With the unbelief of Israel, a turning point in the narrative has now been reached. The message of Jesus has been rejected and now He begins to pronounce judgment upon those who were privileged to see His miracles.

because they did not repent. This indicates that the message of Jesus about the kingdom was accompanied from the beginning with a call to repentance.

Matt. 11:21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! His first lament is against Chorazin, one of the cities in the vicinity of the sea of Galilee. Chorazin is only mentioned here in Matthew and the gospels provide no specific record of His activity there.

Woe to you Bethsaida! This was at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. It is the place where Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 8:22) and in Luke 9:10 as the place where Jesus spoke to them of the kingdom of God, and cured those who had need of healing. Despite the evidence given to them, these cities did not respond to Jesus, and thus were thus guilty.

For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, They are contrasted to the wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon who were judged by God. Sidon is one of the most ancient cities in the world (Genesis 10:15-19).

they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth and ashes refer to the signs of sorrow for ones' sins. God knows the future, not only what will happen, but also all the things that might possibly happen (see 1 Samuel 23 with David and the men of Keilah).

Matt. 11:22 Nevertheless, I say to you, It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.

Nevertheless, I say to you, A solemn statement.

It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. Again we have the teaching that there will be degrees of judgment depending upon the circumstances of the individual (see Luke 12:48).

Matt. 11:23 And you Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down into Hades. Because if the miracles had occurred in Sodom that occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

Note on a variant readings. Instead of *And you Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?* Some manuscripts read *And you Capernaum that are exalted to heaven* (KJV, NKJV).

Instead of *you will be brought down into Hades* some manuscripts read *you will go down to Hades*.

And you Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? Capernaum was the headquarters of Jesus' ministry (4:13; 8:5; 9:1; 17:24; cf. Mark 2:1). "Will you not be exalted to heaven" suggests Isaiah 14:13 and the fall of the king of Babylon. Behind the fall of the king of Babylon is the fall of the angel who became the Devil.

No, you will be brought down into Hades. Instead of exaltation, they will be brought down low to Hades—the unseen realm of the dead. This term is only used elsewhere in Matthew in 16:18.

Because if the miracles had occurred in Sodom that occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Sodom would have survived if they would have seen the same deeds.

Matt. 11:24 Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.

Nevertheless I say to you Another solemn statement.

that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you. Again stressing the degrees of judgment. This passage again illustrates the simple truth that the greater the

revelation, the greater the accountability. In the day of judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah (the land of Sodom included Gomorrah) will fare better than Capernaum.

This brings up the issue of God knowing the future—the things that will occur and the things that might have occurred. Scripture is clear that God not only knows everything that will happen, he also knows everything that might potentially happen to us.

JESUS: THE ONE WHO GIVES THE BELIEVERS REST (11:25-30)

The Lord thanks God the Father for revealing His will to the *humble* rather than to the arrogant.

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of the Heaven and the Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent, and you have revealed them unto children.

At that time This links the passage to the preceding lament concerning the unbelief of the people

Jesus answered and said, “I praise you, Father, The word translated “praise” is often translated in New Testament as “confess.”

Lord of the Heaven and the Earth, God’s sovereignty is in view.

because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, The proud and self sufficient ones will not have the message revealed to them.

and you have revealed them unto children. Those who come in simple humble faith will be receivers of the message.

Matt. 11:26 Yes, O Father, because it seemed well-pleasing in your sight.

Yes, O Father, because it seemed well-pleasing in your sight. God’s purpose and will. The note of predestination cannot be missed but it must be read in light of the guilt of those who refused to believe (vss. 20-24).

Matt. 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts change the word order of the phrase *neither anyone knows the Father except the Son* to *no one knows the Son except the Father*.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; Jesus has absolute authority. Handed over at some past time. This brings up the question of the eternal Sonship of Jesus. Was He always the Son, subject to the Father though equal in nature? Or did He become God the Son at His incarnation or coming to earth?

and no one knows the Son except the Father, Jesus also has a unique relationship with the Father.

nor anyone knows the Father except the Son, Jesus has a unique role between God the Father and mankind (see 1 Timothy 2:5).

and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal him This is an astonishing statement. Jesus chooses who will know the Father. All their wisdom will not help them unless the Son wishes to reveal the Father.

Matt. 11:28 Come unto me all who are laboring and burdened down, and I will give you rest.

Come unto me Previously Jesus had given an invitation to the disciples to “come after Me” (4:19) but only here in all the New Testament is the direct invitation to “come to Me.” The word translated “come” is an adverb used in animated invitations. It expresses lively interest on the part of the speaker, and invites one to come at once. “Me” is not emphatic in the sentence in Greek. Jesus instructs that He is the great teacher saying He alone has the knowledge.

all who are laboring and burdened down, He goes on further by saying “all” The ones laboring and burdened down are not yet His disciples. The Jewish teachers of that time promised rest based upon minute attention to the ceremonies of the written law and also the tradition of the elders. See Peter’s statement in Acts 15:10. See also 23:4.

and I will give you rest In Exodus 33:14 the Lord promises to give rest. Here Jesus call people to Himself to give them rest.

Matt. 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.

Take my yoke upon you, The invitation is to follow Jesus in discipleship.

and learn from me, This is His own teaching as opposed to the teaching of the Pharisees and the tradition of the elders.

because I am gentle and humble of heart; Although He speaks with authority, Jesus comes humbly as a servant (see Isaiah 42:2,3; 53:1-12).

and you will find rest for your souls. Rest refers to salvation.

Matt. 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. He takes the burden upon Himself. As later the New Testament will say, “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 11

Though John had spoken with conviction concerning the identity of Jesus, there came a time when he began to doubt the things that he had said. John sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him about His

identity. The probable reason for this doubt lay in the position where John found himself—in Herod's prison.

Add to this, Jesus was not fulfilling John's statements about the impending judgment. Instead of judgment, Jesus was speaking of God's grace and forgiveness to the people. John's understanding of the Messiah's role of judging the unbelievers was correct. However, this judgment will take place when Jesus comes the second time. Jesus dealt with John in a merciful manner. He pointed to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the miracles of healing, deliverance and restoration that would characterize the ministry of the Messiah. These pertained to His first coming.

Jesus emphasized that the ministry of the Messiah was being fulfilled. Jesus then defended John before the multitudes by pointing out that John had done his job as heralding the coming of the Messiah. John did not flatter people. He told the truth and that is why he landed in Herod's jail instead of his palace.

Therefore the people should take seriously what John had taught about repentance. They should not be like the children in the market place which could never be satisfied.

In the second section of this chapter (vs. 20-24) Jesus denounced the cities in which He had performed most of His mighty works because they did not repent. The lesson is that there will be degrees of judgment.

In contrast to the words of judgment, in the third section of this chapter (vs. 25-30) Jesus invites those who are weary to come to Him and He will give them rest.