

The Church of the Servant King

Thursday Night Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Thurs_Matthew11)

A brief overview of Jesus' travels recorded by Matthew will be helpful at this point to properly set the stage for Chapter 11. The following bullet points provide a good summary:

- Jesus emerges from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan (Matt 3).
- After His baptism, Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan (4:1-11).
- Jesus returns to Galilee, passes through Nazareth, and takes up temporary residence in Capernaum (4:12ff). During this period of time:
 - Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John.
 - Jesus was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (4:23).
 - He healed a great multitude of people (4:23-25).
 - He taught the Beatitudes (5:1-12) and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (5:13 to 7).
 - Jesus provides that region with evidence that He was Who He claimed to be by performing miracles in which:
 - A leper was cleansed (8:1-4).
 - The Centurion's servant was healed (8:5-13).
 - Peter's mother-in-law was healed (8:14-15).
 - Many demon-possessed people were exorcised and healed (8:16-17).
- He left Capernaum with His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to the eastern shore. While there, Jesus:
 - Calmed the Sea to the amazement of His disciples (8:23-27).
 - He then cast out the demons from two men that resulted in the herd of swine being destroyed (8:28-34).
- Jesus returned to Capernaum in a boat after being asked by the residents of the eastern shore to depart (8:34-9:1).
- In Capernaum, Jesus once again performs several miracles and answers several questions:
 - He forgives and heals a paralytic (9:2-8).
 - He dines with Matthew's friends – other tax collectors and "sinners" (9:9-13).
 - He is questioned about fasting (9:14-17).
 - He heals Jarius' daughter and another woman who touched the hem of His garment (9:18-26).
 - He heals two blind men (9:27-31).
 - He heals a mute, demon possessed man (9:32-34).
 - He preached the "gospel of the kingdom" in the synagogues, healed multitudes, and announces to His disciples that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.
 - He called His twelve disciples and made them apostles (10:1-4).
 - He sent His twelve apostles out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (10:5-15).
 - He taught that persecutions are going to come to those who proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in the last days of the Age of Israel (10:16-26).
 - He offers encouragement to His disciples in view of the coming persecution (10:27-31).
 - He gives more principles to His disciples regarding the challenges of serving Him in the last days (10:32-42).

In Chapter 11, Jesus finishes His instructions to His twelve disciples and He departs from Capernaum to teach in other cities in Galilee. Meanwhile, John the Baptist has been in prison and has heard all about the works that Jesus has been performing. The words “after Jesus had finished commanding His twelve disciples” marks the second of five major turning points in the book:

- 7:28 – the completion of the Sermon on the Mount and the beginning of His ministry from Capernaum;
- 11:1 – His ministry moves from its base in Capernaum to greater Galilee;
- 13:53 – Jesus is rejected in Nazareth the town of His birth;
- 19:1 – Jesus departs from Galilee to minister in greater Judea; and
- 26:1 – Jesus’ last days during Passover week.

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:2-3)

2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

John expected that Jesus as Messiah would immediately judge Israel and the nations and establish His kingdom (see Matt 3:2-12 and Isa 2). However, Jesus was healing and teaching His followers the spiritual characteristics that would be demonstrated by those who were true children of the kingdom (see the Beatitudes in Matt 5-7). This type of ministry by the Messiah was not what John had expected, so John began to question whether Jesus was in fact the promised Messiah. The “Coming One” is a title for the Messiah (Ps 118:26; Mk 11:9; Lu 13:35; 19:38; Heb 10:37).

Jesus Responds to John’s Messengers (11:4-6)

4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6 "And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

Jesus told John’s messengers to go back and report to John all the miracles that Jesus had performed. The miracles in and of themselves should have been enough to convince anyone that Jesus was the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1a). All who correctly perceived His Person and Work would be blessed.

Jesus Informs the Multitudes About John (11:7-19)

7 As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! 9 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 "This is the one about whom it is written,

'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

11 "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13 "For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 "And if you are willing to accept

it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 16 "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, 17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' 19 "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."

Jesus knew that some may have questioned John's commitment to the Messiah based upon John's questions. Therefore, Jesus made these supportive statements about John in verses 7-19.

Jesus explained that John was not a papyrus reed that could be shaken by every breeze that blew. John would not have survived in the wilderness had he been weak and vacillating in nature. He was a man of strong character and conviction who had cast aside this world and its comforts. He did not wear soft garments. He was a true prophet and more. If Israel would accept the Messiah, John would have been the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1 (see verse 10 and 14) and the forerunner of the Messiah before His establishment of the Kingdom. Because the nation eventually rejected the Messiah, Elijah's coming is still future (Acts 3:21 cf. Mal 4:5-6).

1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:1)

5 "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. 6 "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." (Mal 4:5-6)

Elijah and Moses appeared in person with Jesus at the Transfiguration – an event which offered the disciples a glimpse of the Kingdom (Matt 16:28 – 17:8). An Elijah-like person will also appear with a Moses-like person during the Tribulation (actually the first half of the Tribulation) and call fire down from heaven just as Elijah did (1 Ki 18:36-40 cf. Rev 11:1-6). Note: These two unnamed prophets in Revelation frequently have been identified as the resuscitated Moses and Elijah for two primary reasons: 1) they appeared with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration; and 2) the miracles that are attributed to them in Revelation 11:6 most resembles the miracles performed by these two prophets in Israel's history.

In verse 11, the phrase "least in the kingdom" refers to those who will be living in the coming kingdom. Even though John was a significant and great man, he would be insignificant in comparison to even the least in the Kingdom to be established. The reason – by the time of the Kingdom's eventual establishment, even the least in the Kingdom would have seen and understood the finished work of Christ on the Cross and witnessed His resurrection in contrast to John. John would not witness these events. This is why Jesus had been so adamant in His exhortations in 10:32-42 to not miss out on the opportunity to participate in the Kingdom because of unbelief.

In 11:12, Jesus is indicating that the violent (religious leaders hostile to the gospel of the kingdom) desire to establish the Kingdom through force. They took John the Baptist by force and eventually the King Himself would be taken by force. They wanted a kingdom, but they did not want it to be established in the manner that Jesus promoted. Because the nation rejected the Messiah, Elijah's coming is still future (Mal 4:6 cf. Acts 3:21).

In verse 14, Jesus notes that if Israel had been willing to receive the King and the kingdom, then John the Baptist would have served the role of the prophesied Elijah who would be one of the two prophets to precede the establishment of the Kingdom on earth by the Messiah.

In verse 15, Jesus makes the offer universal to everyone who has ears to hear. The offer is not just restricted to those who would believe. It is to everyone.

In verses 16-19, Jesus indicates that because of their hardness of heart, Israel failed to accept either the ministry of John the Baptist or Jesus Himself. Jesus likens Israel to a group of little children sitting in the marketplaces who could not be pleased by anything. They were not satisfied with John the Baptist because he did not eat or drink and they were dissatisfied with Jesus because He did. In the end, the wisdom of the message of both John and Jesus would be proven.

Jesus Pronounces “Woe” to the Unbelieving Cities (11:20-24)

20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 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. 22 "Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. 23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 "Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

Chorazin was a village about two and a half miles north of Capernaum and Bethsaida was about three miles east. Both of these towns were in Galilee and both had seen Jesus' ministry firsthand. They both rejected Him and had not repented in regard to their attitude toward Him as the Messiah. Tyre and Sidon were large Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean about 35 and 60 miles, respectively from the Sea of Galilee. These two cities were often the subject of warnings from the prophets because of their worship of Baal (Isa 23; Ezek 26-28; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9-10; Zech 9:2-4).

We draw an important principle from these verses. Punishment on the Day of Judgment takes into account opportunity (see 12:41; 23:13 cf. Lu 12:47-48).

Jesus describes Capernaum as being brought down to Hades. This is a clear allusion to Isaiah 14:15 and the description of the fall of Satan. Hades is the Greek word for hell and has two compartments: torments (the abode of the unbelieving until the GWTJ) and paradise or Abraham's bosom (the abode of believers of the Old Testament until paradise was transferred to heaven with Christ – Lu 16:19-31; 23:43; Ac 2:27, 31; 2 Cor 12:1-4; Eph 4:8-10). Obviously, Jesus is referring to torments here.

Jesus Pronounces the True Rest that He Provides (11:25-30)

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 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 anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Here Jesus contrasts the weight of the yoke of the Law and the legalism imposed by the religious leaders of Israel with the weight of His yoke of discipleship. Under the yoke of the religious leaders, no one would ever find rest and relief. However, Jesus provided deliverance from the condemnation of sin. He also was a humane tutor (note the phrase “learn from Me” and “My yoke is easy and My burden is light”) in contrast to the self-centered and approval seeking religious leaders of the day.