

Matthew Chapter 11

Verses 1-7: (Verses 2-19 parallel Luke 7:18-35). This imprisonment has already been mentioned (in Matthew 4:12), but the circumstances leading up to it are not described in detail until (14:3-12), where the manner of John's death is also recounted.

“The works of Christ refers to His miracles. “he that should come” refers to the predicted Messiah of Old Testament prophecy whose coming had already been proclaimed by John. “The blind receive their sight” is an allusion to Isaiah 35:5 where it is stated that this will be one of the works performed by the Messiah. “The poor have the gospel preached to them” is another allusion to (Isaiah 61:1). Hence, Jesus was clearly vindicating His messiahship to John, who may have begun to question why Jesus had left him in prison.

Matthew 11:1 "And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities."

“In their cities”: i.e. In Galilee. Meanwhile, the disciples were also ministering in the Jewish towns in and around Galilee (10:5-6).

Jesus had sent His disciples out in the field so that they too, could get people saved, healed, and delivered; He went to another area to minister without the 12.

Matthew 11:2-3 "Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples," "And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” John the Baptist had introduced Christ as One who would bring a fierce judgment and “burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (3:12).

He was understandably confused by the turn of events. He was imprisoned, and Christ was carrying on a ministry of healing, not judgment in Galilee, far from Jerusalem, the city of the king. And not finding a completely warm reception there (8:34), John wondered if he had misunderstood Jesus' agenda. It would be wrong to interpret this as a wavering of his faith (verse 7).

These disciples that John the Baptist sent were John's followers. John was imprisoned at this time. John proclaimed the coming of Christ and actually baptized Jesus. Now, he seemed to be going through a trial himself. Like the disciples, John probably expected Jesus to take physical rule of Israel then, so he questioned, are you the promised one?

Even the "voice crying in the wilderness" was discouraged and doubting there in prison. This is so difficult to believe after he had heard the voice from heaven, when he baptized Jesus.

Matthew 11:4 "Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:"

“Go and shew John”: He sent John’s disciples back as eyewitnesses of many miracles. Evidently He performed these miracles in their presence just so that they could report back to John that they had personally seen proof that He was indeed the Messiah (Isa. 29:18-19 35:5-10).

Note however, that he offered no further explanation to John, knowing exactly how strong John’s faith was (1 Cor. 10:13).

Matthew 11:5 "The blind receive their 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."

The Scripture that comes into my mind when I read this is in:

John 14:11 "Believe me that I [am] in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake."

No one but the Spirit of God can perform these kind of miracles in their own name. Jesus was healing, delivering, and rising from the dead in His own name. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can do these miracles today; the only difference is that we do them in His name (the names of the Lord Jesus Christ).

This same 14th chapter tells about this very thing.

John 14:12-14 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do [it]."

You see, just the miracles that Jesus did was proof of who he was (God manifest in the flesh). In (Matthew 11:4), the one word that really stands out to me is "again". John undoubtedly had seen Jesus do these miracles before, but because John was suffering in jail he needed reassurance.

Matthew 11:6 "And blessed is [he], whosoever shall not be offended in me."

This just means you are blessed, if you are not embarrassed by the miracles Jesus did.

Verses 8-11: “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? ... more,” much more (Greek perissoteron): The quotation in verse 10 is from (Malachi 3:1). John was recognized as the foreordained forerunner of the Savior and, technically, the last of the Old Testament prophets. Thus, he belonged to the Old Testament dispensation. This certainly emphasizes a clear distinction from the Old Testament era and the New Testament.

The weakest believer who has the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of the risen Christ, is therefore in a more privileged position than the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. "Them that are born of women", means of the life to come.

Matthew 11:7-10 "And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft [clothing] are in kings' houses." "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." "For this is [he], of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."

When John's disciples left, Jesus started telling the people who John the Baptist really was. The people expected Jesus to take up His reign then, and they expected the one who would herald His coming to be dressed in finery. Prophets were usually dressed in skins, not fancy clothes.

Even today, the true messengers of God are not high and mighty by the world's standards. They just have a message to bring, and usually, they stay in the back ground. The message is what stands out. I truly believe that even now, we must prepare the way for the return of Christ.

Matthew 11:11 "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."

"Is greater than he": John was greater than the Old Testament prophets because he actually saw with his eyes and personally participated in the fulfillment of what they only prophesied (verses 10, 13; 1 Peter 1:10-11). But all believers after the cross are greater still, because they participate in the full understanding and experience of something John merely foresaw in shadowy form, the actual atoning work of Christ.

John was flesh and blood like you and me. Even though there was a great call on his life, he still had human frailties. He was a voice warning people of Jesus' arrival. He was not Jesus; he was just proclaiming His coming.

No human should think too highly of himself. God the Father, God the Word, and God the Holy Spirit are the ones to be worshipped. No one else should be worshipped; no matter how close to God they seem to be.

Verses 12-15: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" (Greek *biazomai*): The meaning of this saying, and the connection of (verses 12-14), with preceding and following contexts, indicates that John opened the kingdom of heaven to sinners and thus became the culminating point of Old Testament witness. Jesus' statement the "this is Elijah" indicates the ministry predicted by Malachi 4:5-6).

Matthew 11:12 "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

“The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence”: From the time he began his preaching ministry, John the Baptist evoked a strong reaction. Having been imprisoned already, John ultimately fell victim to Herod’s savagery. But the kingdom can never be subdued or opposed by human violence.

Notice that where Matthew says, “the violent take it by force,” Luke has, “everyone forcing his way into it” (Luke 16:16). So, the sense of this verse may be rendered this way: “The kingdom presses ahead relentlessly and only the relentless press their way into it.” Thus again Christ is magnifying the difficulty of entering the kingdom.

Matthew 11:13-14 "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." "And if ye will receive [it], this is Elijah, which was for to come."

In the 4th chapter of Malachi the 5th verse, we read the promise of Elijah.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:"

“John himself is Elijah. I.e. he is the fulfillment of (Mal. 4:5-6; see 17:12-13). The Jews were aware that Elijah had not died (2 Kings 2:11). This does not suggest that John was Elijah returned. In fact, John himself denied that he was Elijah (John 1:21), yet he came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). If they had believed, John would have been the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecies. (Rev. 11:5-6).

One translation says, one like unto Elijah.

Matthew 11:15 "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

You see people, who look at the Bible from the physical and not the spiritual standpoint, cannot accept this. Those who are seeing with the heart can.

Verses 16-19: “This generation” refused to exercise its capacity to hear, but made excuses for rejecting both John and Jesus. Some have likened the illustration of Christ to that of children playing a game of “weddings” and then a game of “funerals.” The idea is that the children cannot decide which game to play, so they decide to play nothing at all.

The reference to the rejection of John’s ascetic ministry brought the charge that he was demon possessed. However, Jesus’ open contact with sinners brought the equally untrue claim that He was “gluttonous, and a winebibber.”

Matthew 11:16-17 "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows," "And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented."

Christ reflects on the scribes and Pharisees, who had a proud conceit of themselves. He likens their behavior to children's play, who being out of temper without reason, quarrel with all the attempts of their fellows to please them, or to get them to join in the plays for which they used to assemble. He was just saying that, whether it was a joyful message, or a sad message, people were not listening.

The Rev. Donald Fraser gives the picture simply and vividly: "He pictured a group of little children playing at make-believe marriages and funerals. First they acted a marriage procession; some of them piping as on instruments of music, while the rest were expected to leap and dance.

In a perverse mood however, these last did not respond, but stood still and looked discontented. So the little pipers changed their game and proposed a funeral. They began to imitate the loud wailing of eastern mourners. But again, they were thwarted, for their companions refused to chime in with the mournful cry and to beat their breasts.

So the disappointed children complained: 'We piped unto you and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn. Nothing pleases you. If you don't want to dance, why don't you mourn?'

Matthew 11:18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil."

"For John came neither eating nor drinking" This and the following verse are an explanation of the foregoing "parable"; and this shows, that John and his disciples are the persons that mourned, of which his austere life was a proof: for when he "came", being sent of God, and appeared as a public preacher, he was "neither eating nor drinking".

Not that he did not eat or drink at all, otherwise he could not have lived, and discharged his office: but he ate sparingly, very little; and what he did eat and drink, was not the common food and drink of men; he neither ate bread nor drank wine, but lived upon locusts and wild honey; he excused all invitations to people's houses, and shunned all feasts and entertainments.

So they say he hath a devil; is a demoniac, a madman, one that is unsociable and melancholy; under a delusion of Satan, and influenced by him to abstain from proper food and company of men, under a pretense of religion.

Matthew 11:19 "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."

Jesus was saying John the Baptist came denying himself everything, and you said he had a devil. Jesus told them He was the opposite of John, and they still criticized. The Scripture indicated the reason they did not understand all of this was because of the scales over their eyes.

The only kind of wisdom that we can understand is the wisdom that Christ gives us. If you eat, it must be unto the Lord. If you fast, it must be unto the Lord.

Verses 20-24: The denunciation of Galilean cities that follows is recorded also by Luke, but in a different context (see Luke 10:13-16). "Chorazin" was about an hour's journey on foot north of "Capernaum. "Bethsaida" was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, about three miles southeast of Chorazin.

"Tyre" and "Sidon" are both on the Mediterranean coast beyond the northern boundary of Palestine. "Shalt be brought down to hell:" The statement here is an allusion to (Isaiah 14:13-15), where it is spoken of the king of Babylon and probably refers to Satan himself.

Matthew 11:20 "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:"

Sometimes, people are so grounded and rooted in their sins that there is no possible way to get them to repent. If Jesus couldn't do it, what makes us think that we can? Even with all the miracles He did, they did not repent of their sins and get saved.

Matthew 11:21 "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

"Woe unto you, Chorazin ... Bethsaida": Both were cities very close to Capernaum, near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

"Tyre ... Sidon": Phoenician cities on the shore of the Mediterranean. The prophecy about the destruction of Tyre and Sidon in (Ezek. 26-28), was fulfilled in precise detail.

Verses 22-24: "More tolerable": This indicates that there will be degrees of punishment in hell for the ungodly (Mark 6:11; Luke 12:47-48; Heb. 10:29).

Matthew 11:22 "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you."

Both Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities. Though evil abounded in this area, and they had been punished, still the miracles had not been prevalent there. The sad thing was when the miracles "were" done, the people quickly forgot what God has done for them.

That is even so in our churches today. God does one miracle right after the other, and if it didn't happen in the last five minutes, we tend to forget. If we have come face to face with the opportunity to repent and be saved, and we reject it, we are without excuse before God.

Matthew 11:23 "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."

“Capernaum ... exalted ... brought down”: Capernaum, chosen by Jesus to be His headquarters, faced an even greater condemnation. Curiously, there is no record that the people of that city ever mocked or ridiculed Jesus, ran Him out of town, or threatened His life. Yet the sin of that city, indifference to Christ, was worse than Sodom’s gross wickedness (10:15).

Matthew 11:24 "But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

This was just another reprimand of a city that did not listen.

Matthew 11:25 "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

“Wise and prudent ... babes”: There is sarcasm in these words as the Jewish leaders are ironically identified as wise and intelligent and the followers of Christ as the infants (18:3, 10), yet God has revealed to those followers the truth of the Messiah and His gospel (13:10-17).

I really believe this Scripture was saying that too much education by the world can get you to the point that God cannot reveal things to you, because you feel that you already know all that there is to know about the Bible. Some of the greatest Bible interpreters of all had no formal education. They were taught by the Holy Spirit of God.

I am convinced that because the Bible is just one of many books studied, that a person gets confused which is the authority. If we could just learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to teach us, as Jesus did the early disciples, we would be just fine.

Matthew 11:26 "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

“It seemed good in thy sight”: Luke 10:21-22. This is a powerful affirmation of the sovereignty of God over all the affairs of men and in the verse that follows. Christ claimed that the task of executing the divine will had been committed to Him, a claim that would be utterly blasphemous if Jesus were anything less than sovereign God Himself.

Matthew 11:27 "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and [he] to whomsoever the Son will reveal [him]."

So you can easily see that only Jesus, His Father, and the Holy Ghost can really reveal anything to us. Head knowledge will never do. It has to be in our hearts and be a part of us for us to understand, and only God can give us that.

Verses 28-30: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden": There is an echo of the first beatitude (5:3), in this passage. Note that this is an open invitation to all who hear, but phrased in such a way that the only ones who will respond to the invitation are those who are burdened by their own spiritual bankruptcy and the weight of trying to save themselves by keeping the law.

The stubbornness of humanity's sinful rebellion is such that without a sovereignly-bestowed spiritual awakening, all sinners refuse to acknowledge the depth of their spiritual poverty. That is why, as Jesus said in verse 27, our salvation is the sovereign work of God. But the truth of divine election in verse 27 is not incompatible with the free offer to all in verses 28-30).

Matthew 11:28-29 "Come unto me, all [ye] that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"Ye shall find rest": I.e., from the endless, fruitless effort to save oneself by the works of the law (Heb. 4:1-3, 6, 9-11). This speaks of a permanent respite in the grace of God which is apart from works (verse 30).

Matthew 11:30 "For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus' call has always been to those in need. The sooner we learn to lay our cares on Jesus, the better off we are. He can take care of all our problems, if we just depend totally upon Him.

Matthew Chapter 11 Questions

1. After Jesus dispatched the disciples, what did He do?
2. Where was John when he heard?
3. What was happening to John?
4. What did Jesus tell John's disciples?
5. Who did Jesus preach to?
6. What does the Scripture say in John 14:11?
7. What is the difference in the ways Jesus healed and what we do today?
8. What is the criteria required for us to heal?
9. In John 14:13, who is glorified?

10. What was proof of who Jesus was?
11. Why did John need reassurance?
12. What did the people think about John's clothing?
13. What did prophets usually wear?
14. If these people of God are not the high and mighty, why does God send them?
15. Jesus said John was great on earth, but what about heaven?
16. Who was John?
17. What is Matthew 11:12 saying?
18. Who did Jesus say John was?
19. What causes a person to read a Scripture and not understand?
20. What 2 things did John come not doing?
21. What did the people call Jesus?
22. If you eat or fast, it must be unto whom?
23. Why was Jesus upbraiding the cities?
24. What would have happened in Tyre and Sidon, if the mighty miracles had been done there?
25. When do we become without excuse before God?
26. Jesus said the secrets of God are hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to whom?
27. These Bible scholars, who had no formal education, were taught of whom?
28. Who is the only one who understands the Son?
29. What kind of knowledge is important?
30. Where can we find rest for our souls?