

## The Gospel According to Saint Matthew

### Session 12 Notes

In Chapter 11 we have begun to encounter a rejection of Jesus' mission to Galilee. Even John the Baptist, in prison, begins to question whether he correctly identified Jesus as the One who would baptise with the Holy Spirit. Jesus assures John that although he himself has not experienced all of the works associated with the Messiah, in particular, the release of the captives, yet Jesus is working the works Isaiah identifies. These works are directly connected with Jesus' healings in the previous chapters.

We hear also Jesus beginning to be critical of the communities who reject Him, and in that rejection, reject the Father. In verses 16-19 Jesus describes the present generation as being like petulant children, who will not participate in any activity offered. They will not be joyful and join in the dance, nor will they participate in anything more serious. Similarly, the Pharisees would not respond to John's call for repentance and stringent righteous action as the narrow way leading to the kingdom of heaven; nor will they respond to Jesus' open hospitality and banqueting as a sign of the heavenly banquet unfolding. *Wisdom is justified by her deeds*, suggests that both activities are wise and righteous when undertaken at the proper time.

Vv 20-24

These verses are similar in content and style to 10:15, when Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach, teach, and heal with His authority. Previously Capernaum had been exalted as Jesus' adoptive home, but here it is condemned for having rejected Him. As Jesus' ministry unfolds and expands, along with that of His disciples, we are finding that it is not only the Pharisees who reject Jesus, but others as well.

In Chapter 10 Matthew drew a direct connection between Jesus' mission, and that of the disciples, sent out with Jesus' own *authority*. Consequently, we anticipate a rejection of the disciples' mission also, which is ultimately a rejection of Jesus. Along with telling the disciples, (not only the Twelve, but the disciples in every generation), to expect this rejection, Jesus tells them also not to be anxious, repeating phrases that bring to mind the Sermon on the Mount.

10:34

When speaking of family divisions, Matthew is quoting the prophet Micah. It's a bit surprising that Matthew doesn't identify it as another *fulfilment prophecy*.

*The son treats the Father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.* Micah 7:6-8

As we have seen frequently, Matthew quotes a verse from the Old Testament, in order to bring a larger passage to mind. The focus on this larger passage is not family divisions. Rather, it associates Jesus' disciples with the prophets of old; we are to be modern-day prophets. The prophets proclaim God's loving Word, and they are persecuted by those who ultimately reject God's love.

*The members of the house* may be a reference to a prophet's / disciple's family. But at the beginning of this section Jesus told the disciples to go to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. So, enemies within one's own house, may be a

reference to any Jew, Pharisee or others, who are not responsive to the preaching of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven in Christ.

*When I fall, I shall rise*, is heard as a reference to the Resurrection; both Jesus' Resurrection, and those who belong to Him.

*When I sit in darkness...* Jesus began His ministry quoting Isaiah, identifying His primary mission to be to bring *light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death*, a reference which includes the Gentiles.

The Lord *will be a light to me*. Jesus teaches the disciples *You are the light of the world*. So our mission is never to cause offense, but through wisdom to bring God's light to all who *sit in darkness*. Nonetheless, we are to know there will be those who take offense.

The reference to *taking up your cross and following Jesus*, is surprising because there has not yet been a reference to the Cross or Crucifixion. The first explicit reference to Christ's Passion is still six chapters away, and the first explicit reference to the Cross is another ten chapters away.

When Matthew refers to the Passion for the first time, in 16:21, he repeats again Jesus' teaching here, in v30, about losing and finding life.

*Life = soul, meaningful existence, fulfilment, purpose, identity.*

If self-actualization is your goal, then you will lose your life, in all of these senses. If you find yourself in Christ, then you gain life, in all these senses. That life is gained regardless of what happens to the body. *So do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul*, as Jesus says in v28.

Verses 40 and 41 are, structurally, something we find frequently in Matthew. The two sentences mirror each other; both verses have double clauses, where the second clause mirrors the first. All four clauses begin with *the one who receives...*

It is a style that we find mainly in the Psalms, where the second half of the verse repeats the first half, but usually with a twist. That *twist* can either broaden the meaning of the first verse, or it can spiritualise something that we hear in concrete terms – *enemy*, for example. Is our enemy a person or group of people making our lives difficult, or it is spiritual enemy within us that is complicating our life? And sometimes, in the psalms, we find the second half of the verse contradicting the first half, so that we have the psalmist saying: this is true, but that is true also.

Matthew uses the same technique as the Psalmist. Here Matthew is aligning in a poetic way those who *receive the messengers, Jesus, the Father, a prophet and a righteous person*. He also asserts that there will be a *reward* for hospitality given to the disciples. The implication is that receiving the disciples is receiving God; a point that will be expanded toward the end of the gospel at 25:35, where giving a drink *to one of the least of these...* is to give a drink to Jesus Himself.

We last encountered discussion of *reward* in the Sermon on Mount in relation to the right way of practicing prayer, fasting, almsgiving. Are these done ostentatiously to receive the glory and praise from others, as the hypocrites do, or are they undertaken in secret to deepen our connection with our Father in heaven? Jesus is telling us that simple acts of charity, undertaken righteously, receive the same reward as spiritual disciplines, and lead to a deepening of our relationship with our Father in heaven.

This section ends with verse 1 of Chapter 11. After teaching the disciples what they are to do as He sends them out with His own authority, Matthew tells us that Jesus undertakes the very same work. *When Jesus completed instructing His twelve disciples, He went from there in order to teach and preach in their cities*. Matthew is assuring his own community of disciples that Jesus is with them in their ministries.

This verse is what Matthew uses at the end of each of the five teaching blocks. We last encountered it at the end of the Sermon on the Mount 7:28, *And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at His teaching, for he taught them as one who has authority, and not as their scribes.*

That means that 11:2 is launching a new section, which extends to 12:50, and involves three negative responses to Jesus' mission.

The first section, 11:2-24, has to do with questions arising from John the Baptist. We last heard of John in 4:12. As Matthew was careful to align Jesus' ministry with John's, so too, Matthew is careful to align the disciples' ministry with John's.

John is in prison, so he sends some of his disciples to Jesus to ask whether He is indeed the One for whom they had been waiting, as John had proclaimed.

There are two problems for John: First, although Jesus has done some mighty works, yet John has not himself experienced the *liberty for the captives*, which is part of the Messiah's mission Isaiah 42:7; 61:1. John can't separate his own experience from his understanding of what the Messiah is to do. Second, John expects the Messiah to usher in the kingdom of heaven, fully and immediately.

The word *Messiah / Christ* has not been used since the Magi asked *where the Christ was to be born* 2:4.

Jesus responds to John's disciples by quoting various passages from Isaiah identifying the works of the Messiah, and each answer is directly connected with Jesus' healings recorded in chapters 8 & 9.

In verses 7-15 we hear Jesus' assessment of John the Baptist. Having been reminded of the Magi in Herod's court, and knowing John to be imprisoned

by Herod, we find Jesus using two references to Herod. The second is the more obvious to us: *those who wear soft robes are in king's houses*. The first is less obviously a reference to Herod: *A reed shaken by the wind*, illustrates someone who vacillates according to the spirit of the age, or popular opinion. These two images used by Jesus make sense when we recognize that Herod minted a new coin at this time: On one side was Herod's visage, and on the reverse was the image of reeds that grew along the Jordan's banks.

V10 After identifying John the Baptist as being *more than a prophet*, Jesus quotes a passage of Scripture: *Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you*.

This may be one of two references. Most commonly it is thought to be another quotation from the prophet Micah, and which continues: *the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts Malachi 3:1*. This passage anticipates conflict in the next section surrounding Jesus' references to the Temple.

There is another intriguing reference Jesus may be making when identifying John the Baptist as *my messenger...* The quotation is a more exact translation of Exodus 23:20, than the more free quotation from Malachi. It is a reference to God sending an angel before the Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. The Exodus, and return from Exile, have been large themes in Matthew's presentation of Jesus' mission to lead God's people to the Sabbath Rest in the kingdom of heaven, the restored Eden.

Further, when we looked at the passage from Genesis, we noted that after God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He placed an angel to guard the entrance in order to prevent humanity from reaching out and grabbing the fruit of the Tree of Life. This was in order to prevent

humanity from living forever in a state of separation from God. By identifying John the Baptist with the angelic minister leading God's people into the Promised Land, the role of the angel now is to open up the Garden once again, so that people can reach out to Christ, the Tree of Life, and live forever in a restored relationship with God.

V11f In the statements about relative greatness, Jesus is not making reference to persons so much as he is about different eras. John Baptist is the climax of the old order, which gives way to something infinitely greater in the kingdom of heaven, which is not only in heaven, but is becoming realized now in Christ.