

The Gospel of Matthew
Lesson 7
Matthew 11:2 – Matthew 12:21

Question from John the Baptist

Matthew 11:² 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?" 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."

According to the record of Josephus, John the Baptist is in prison in Machaerus on the east side of the Dead Sea.⁵⁷ He is there because he has ridiculed and chastised Herod who married his brother's wife. It seems that John's disciples had access to him in prison because he is able to send this communication to Jesus.⁵⁸ John has been in prison long enough to become discouraged because Jesus has done nothing to help him with his release.

John's disciples are to report to John the things that they have heard and seen in Jesus' ministry. They have been in the presence of Jesus long enough to be able to report their eyewitness accounts of His ministry. In speaking to the disciples, Jesus uses phrases from Isaiah to bolster the prophetic nature of His work.⁵⁹ Matthew 11:5 is the most appealing part to the poor because it presents the gospel to them in living detail.

"Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me," is His rebuke to John for doubting the Lord. In some way, John the Baptist has lost the surety of his purpose and the purpose of the Lord; jail can do that to a person. In the dungeon of life, imprisonment and living under the control of others are always the worst times to make life-changing decisions.

Jesus Questions the Crowd

Matthew 11:⁷ 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.'⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ ¹⁵ "He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

⁵⁷ Josephus, Ant. XVIII. V.2

⁵⁸ Luke 7:19 Josephus, Ant. XVIII. V.2

⁵⁹ Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5; 61:1

⁶⁰ Malachi 3:1

⁶¹ Malachi 4:5

The disciples of John do not hear the praise given to the prophet by the Lord because they have already left. In many ways, the Lord is presenting John's eulogy. It will not be long before Herod beheads him.

All the Jews with Jesus are clearly aware of the Lord's comparison of John to the reeds. The bank of the Jordan River is covered with reeds which bend in the winds. John is not like the reeds of the river bank; he will not bend to the demands of the Jews. John lives like a prophet, dresses like a prophet and looks like a prophet. He exhibits all the qualities of the prophet with his zeal for the truth, his strength of will along with his moral conviction, righteousness and integrity; therefore, John is the greatest of men. Here is another paradox in the Lord's words. Jesus surely means that John is the greatest of all men in character here on earth, yet the least of all the believers in Jesus will surpass John in privileges in heaven. John represents the last prophet in the Mosaic Age and yet he is the forerunner of the new Age of Grace. Everyone who comes after John must build on what he has begun. However, the preaching of John has resulted in a surge of violence around him and his disciples and Jesus.

As a result of John's position as the last of the prophets on the Mosaic Age, he fulfills the prophecy of Malachi as the forerunner of Christ.⁶² From that passage, Jesus identifies John as the fulfillment of the return of "Elijah."

Compare This Generation

Matthew 11:¹⁶ "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."

Luke also mentions this parable about the children playing in the market place.⁶³ The Lord has a keen interest in the children as they play in the streets where the markets are set up. There, one child will call out to another to engage in playful events such as dancing and singing, often complaining because the other children do not play along in the same way. So it is with the ministries of John and Jesus; they are purposefully different. The generation who swoons around John is childish, not childlike. It wants the whimsical excitement stirred by John in the ministry of Jesus and because it is not there, it finds fault. John has no demon within him; he has been filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. Neither is Jesus a drunken glutton. To make matters worse, Jesus is known to be the friend of the worst sinners in the world and He is therefore guilty by association of the same sins. Another paradox for the Jewish reader is drawn; the worst of the sinners have the opportunity to become the greatest saints. Those with true wisdom will understand the wonder of this paradox.

The Cities Do Not Repent

Matthew 11:²⁰ 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.

⁶² Malachi 3:1

⁶³ Luke 7:31-32

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.⁶⁴ 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, Bethsaida and Capernaum have had more than their share of the Lord's ministry. In each of these cities Jesus has performed enough miracles that everyone should have believed in Him as the Messiah, but they did not. None of these people repented; none of them changed their conduct and business. Jesus says that the sinful people of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would have changed and believed had they had the same chance.

Jesus Speaking to the Father

Matthew 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*.⁶⁵

We do not know where Jesus is when He speaks these words, but obviously, for Matthew to have heard them and recorded them, the twelve must have rejoined Jesus and begun to report the results of their mission trip. The three cities that Jesus mentions in the previous passage were most likely hometowns of the apostles, where Jesus has just ministered. Condemning those cities, Jesus speaks to the Father in this wonderful petition of praise, communion and prayer.

When Jesus says that all things have been handed over to Him, He is directly stating that He is the Messiah and Lord of everything. He is clearly the Christ who is in full fellowship with the Father. In this passage we see that Jesus is endowed with the power and purpose to show the Father to all mankind.

Jesus Saying Come to Me

Matthew 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.⁶⁶ ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

When Jesus finishes speaking to the Father, He turns to the people around Him and makes them a wonderful offer. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Although most of this passage is also in the Luke account, Luke does not include the words "Come to me." Jesus offers Himself as the place where all toils and burdens can be lifted; He will bear the weight and struggle of the world for them. Take off the yoke of the world and take on the Lord because His restrictions and regiments lead to an easier life. He will make all our burdens light and He is the one who will teach us how to live. He will refresh the willing soul who puts his trust in the Him. But it is far more than rest; it is rejuvenation.

⁶⁴ Isaiah 14:13-15

⁶⁵ Luke 10:22

⁶⁶ Jeremiah 6:16

Eating the Grain – The Sabbath

Matthew 12:¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of *grain* and eat.⁶⁷ ² But when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."⁶⁸ ³ But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, ⁴ how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?⁶⁹ ⁵ "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?⁷⁰ ⁶ "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent.⁷¹ ⁸ "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

This event actually occurs before the Sermon on the Mount. Once again they had caught Jesus breaking the Judaic law by picking the grain to eat on the Sabbath day. The Old Testament does not consider this act as breaking the Mosaic Law. The rabbis had determined that plucking the grain could be considered the work of preparing a meal on the Sabbath. The Lord's response most likely infuriates the Pharisees because He associates His need to eat with King David's eating of the consecrated bread of the tabernacle. Each week the priest prepared twelve round flat loaves of bread to be placed on the sacred table in the tabernacle. The loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel and their allegiance to the Lord. After seven days, the priest prepared twelve new loaves for the table and the old bread could be consumed by the priest as he performed his priestly duties. One day when David and his men needed food, they asked the priest if they could eat the old consecrated bread of the tabernacle. The priest determined that David's men were holy and could eat the bread even though the Sanhedrin had previously determined that it could be eaten only by the priest. David and his men had not broken the law of God, but they had broken the law of the religious leaders. With that as the background, Jesus makes a most astonishing and profound statement which flies in the face of the Pharisees' belief, that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Relegating the Sabbath to the welfare of mankind rather than as a holy day for God stands in direct contradiction to the centuries old teaching of the rabbis. The law would not allow a person to eat an egg laid by a chicken on the Sabbath because it involved work; how much more offensive could it be for a person to personally harvest the grain and eat, let alone eat an egg when the chicken had done all the work. The rabbis had it all wrong according to Jesus; God had given the Sabbath to man for man's welfare. Jesus would not be a slave of the Sabbath; He created and owned the Sabbath. For Jesus to call Himself the Son of Man means that He is the representative of man to God, as the Messiah and Lord. As Lord of the Sabbath, He and his faithful followers are holy and can rightfully eat of the grain of the field because it does not break His law. Jesus has not come to do away with the Sabbath; He has come to correct the interpretation and teaching about the Sabbath. On the next Sabbath He will take the opportunity to prove His point again to the Pharisees by healing a man's withered hand.

⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 23:25

⁶⁸ Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14

⁶⁹ 1 Samuel 21:1-7; Leviticus 24:7-9

⁷⁰ Numbers 28:9-10

⁷¹ Hosea 6:6

The Withered Hand

Matthew 12:⁹ Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. ¹⁰ And a man was *there* whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. ¹¹ And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." ¹³ Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.

In chronological sequence, Jesus' healing of the withered hand occurs before the Sermon on the Mount. The Pharisees' strict obedience to the Jewish laws and traditions has set them at odds with the Lord's ministry, specifically His healings on the Sabbath. They cannot get past their ingrained rules to see the wonder and glory of the Lord's work. The Lord has already defused the influence of the Pharisees among the people and they have discerned that they will need the help of a Roman political group to bring an end to this opposition to their way of life and worship. They counsel the Herodians and enlist their help to destroy the Lord. Who were the Herodians? Mark Antony made Herod the tetrarch of Judea in BC 40. Soon afterwards the Roman senate made him king of Judea, or as the Bible says, the king of the Jews. Like every political leader today, Herod had a group of people, the Herodians, who followed and supported his ideas and leadership style. The report of the Pharisees troubles this political party and they join the campaign to destroy Jesus. They see Jesus as a threat to the future of their political party, especially since for years they have been engaged in a legal courtship with Rome to regain some of their lost political power in the region. From this point on, the religious powerhouse of the Sanhedrin will be joined by the political powerhouse of the government to entrap the Lord and put Him to death. In the midst of such opposition, the Lord carefully designs His ministry to minister to the people, to continue to enrage His opponents, and to fulfill His work on earth.

Matthew 12:¹⁵ But Jesus, aware of *this*, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, ¹⁶ and warned them not to tell who He was. ¹⁷ *This* was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁸ "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. ¹⁹ "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. ²⁰ "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. ²¹ "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

According to Mark, Jesus goes down to the Sea of Galilee and the crowd follows Him. The crowd has come from 60 miles north to 170 miles south of the Sea of Galilee, and the impact of the Lord's ministry compels the people to face all the trials and tribulations of traveling in that day just to be near Him. Our generation has never experienced the hope that they felt in those days; if they can just to be near Him, they know they can be healed. For centuries, explorers and scientists have sought the fountain of youth and the miracle working potions that will give immortality on earth, but they all have failed. When these people go to see Jesus to be healed of their earthly ailments, they are healed. But Jesus does more than heal them; He speaks to them about the eternal will of God. This passage comes directly from Isaiah 42:1-4 and is a fulfillment of that prophecy. This event also occurs before the Sermon on the Mount.