



Session 1: Matthew 11-12

for the week of September 19th

Responding the King

So far in his gospel, Matthew has presented Jesus as the Messiah who is ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven.¹ The reign of God on earth, long promised by the prophets of old, is now being realized in the person and work of Christ Jesus. In this, Jesus is reconciling the divide between heaven and earth caused by humanity's sinful rebellion against God.

However, as we progress through Matthew's gospel, we see that Jesus is not yet ushering in the Kingdom the way that the Israelites expected. Rather than vindicating the righteousness of his people, Jesus forecasts persecution for righteousness's sake.² Rather than destroying the pagan enemies of Israel, Jesus teaches his followers to love their enemies and go the extra mile for them.³ Rather than restore the prosperity of Israel, Jesus teaches about the temporality and danger of earthly treasure and predicts the destruction of their capital city, Jerusalem.⁴

This is not to suggest that the the ministry of Jesus is contradicting or abolishing the promises of God in the Old Testament. Jesus says he comes to fulfill these promises.⁵ Indeed, though he comes first as a suffering servant rather than a conquering warrior, Jesus is the realization of the fullness of God's expectations of righteousness and promises of salvation for his people. The blessings that God intends for humanity to experience in their union with him are being realized through the sacrifice of Christ as he lays his life down to defeat a more vile enemy than any worldly empire that ever oppressed God's people, the enemy of sin and death. With this redemptive mission in mind, Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who recognize their need for mercy and embrace the mercy God offers through him, a blessing that includes a final and ultimate reconciliation of the heaven and earth divide.⁶

So, in this unexpected way, Jesus ushers in the reign of God into the lives of those who embrace him for who he is. In his teaching and actions, Jesus' humility does not fit the Jewish longings for a conqueror, and his authority threatens the hypocritical legalism of the religious leadership. Therefore, as we pick up on the story of Jesus' life and teaching in Matthew 11, we find increasing resistance from those who are skeptical and antagonistic towards him. This forces a crucial question for our own life: when we can no longer neatly fit our view of Jesus within our own presuppositions, preferences, and self-interested worldviews, how will we respond to the King?

¹ Matthew 4:17.

² Matthew 5:10-11.

³ Matthew 5:38-48.

⁴ Matthew 6:19-24; 24:15-28

⁵ Matthew 5:17.

⁶ Matthew 5:3-12.

Discussion⁷

- 1) John expected the Messiah to bring both blessing and judgment immediately. Sitting confused in prison, he wonders if Jesus really is “the one who is to come” (Matt. 11:3). Read the promises of the coming day of salvation in Isaiah 29:18–19; 35:5–6; and 61:1. What similarities do these have with Jesus’ message to John in Matthew 11:4–5? What is Jesus’ purpose in sending this message to him?
- 2) A “yoke” is a wooden frame joining two animals (usually oxen) for pulling loads. The same Greek word for “yoke” could also be used to refer to the shackles a conqueror might put on those who are conquered. With either interpretation, Jesus clearly viewed the religious legalism of his day as an oppressive burden like a yoke (see Matt. 23:4). According to Matthew 11:28–30, how does Jesus describe his character, his “yoke,” and his promise for those who come to him? What does it mean to “come” to Jesus in this context?
- 3) The Pharisees accused Jesus’ disciples of breaking the law by plucking grain on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees viewed as a form of “work” (Matt. 12:1–2). Jesus defends these actions by providing examples from the Old Testament where certain commands or principles were formally set aside in order to obey the intention of the law or a command of a higher priority. How do we see this with the examples from David (Matt. 12:3–4), the priests (Matt. 12:5), and the quotation from Hosea 6:6 (Matt. 12:7)? How is this also seen in the following story in Matthew 12:9–14?
- 4) Throughout chapter 12 of Matthew, Jesus proclaims that “something greater” has arrived (12:6, 41, 42). How is Jesus greater than David and the kings that followed him? Than the priests? Than the temple? Than the prophets?
- 5) The Pharisees suggest that Jesus’ ability to cast out demons shows that he is in league with Satan (Matt. 12:24). How does Jesus logically turn this accusation against them? What does Jesus go on to say are the real implications of his power over demons?
- 6) As Matthew’s Gospel progresses, Jesus becomes increasingly polarizing. Identify several ways we see this in Matthew 12:33–50. How does Jesus characterize the people who respond positively to him, according to Matthew 12:46–50?
- 7) How has the biblical view of Jesus, as presented in Matthew and other gospels, compared or contrasted with your own view or preconceived notions of him? How has Jesus’ life, mission, and/or teaching shaped and challenged your own worldviews? In what ways does seeing Jesus rightly bring the kind of rest Jesus describes in 11:29? In what ways does seeing Jesus rightly empower us for living in submission to God’s reign in our daily lives?

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer together, praying for each other’s needs and that the Spirit will grant us a deeper understanding of the goodness and authority of Christ and empower us for living as representative of his kingdom in this world.

⁷ Some questions adapted from *Knowing the Bible: Matthew* by Drew Hunter.