

MATTHEW

11:1-30

Matthew 11:1-30

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 16th February 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Introduction

As you know, we are studying our way through the book of Matthew — one of the four gospel accounts that we have in the Bible, that record Jesus birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and more — and this morning we're in chapter 11 (so we're now well-more-than-a third of the way through it's 28 chapters).

And having recorded Jesus birth and the Magi's worship of Him, then Jesus' baptism, His testing in the wilderness, the calling of His first disciples, and the performing of His first miracles, we then *read* Jesus first recorded sermon; the *Sermon on The Mount* as it is known.

Then we *read* much application of what Jesus taught, as he performed many miracles, teaching His disciples not to fear (as He calmed the storm), not to look down on the outcasts of society (as He healed them), and showing kindness and compassion to many.

Then last week, as we reached chapter 10, we saw Jesus choose 12 of His disciples as apostles, sending them out in His power, for His purpose, to do His will — with much instruction and warning that He gave them regarding all that they would face. And as we start this chapter, we'll see that it continues the narrative from right after Jesus finished instructing them.

Overview of chapter eleven

Overview of chapter eleven

- **v1-6** — John the Baptist sends messengers to Jesus
- **v7-19** — Jesus speaks regarding John the Baptist
- **v20-24** — Jesus rebukes the cities where He had ministered
- **v25-30** — Jesus praises the Father, and invites the burdened to come to Him

In the opening 6 verses, we'll first see that John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus with questions, to make sure he had correctly understood who Jesus was. Then, following their departure, Jesus then spoke about John the Baptist, and the kingdom of heaven, before — in verses 20 to 24 — Jesus rebuked the cities where He had taught and performed many miracles. Then in the final 6 verses, we will read how Jesus praised the Father for those He had revealed the truth to, and called all those who are burdened into the rest that only He can give.

Chapter eleven

So let's pick up our Bible's and study this passage together, starting in verse 1 of chapter 11:

Matthew 11:1

Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

And so, having instructed these twelve men to go to the cities throughout Israel, Jesus Himself now goes and preaches in *their* cities. And there is example in that, for He was not unwilling to do anything He asked of His apostles. Likewise, there is nothing the Lord will ever ask you to do that exceeds that which He has already done for you! God will be no man's debtor.

But also, it's interesting that *Jesus* goes to their hometowns, for perhaps these men would have faced a tough time among those who knew them best, saying such things as "who do you think you are, calling yourself an apostle?!" or "I knew what he was like when he was growing up!". Of course, Jesus Himself would later say "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house." — and we should watch out that we don't dismiss the work of God in the lives of those we know well, or have known for a long time. For God saves people. God changes people. And God uses people — sometimes the ones we don't expect, too! Saul the Pharisee is one such example!

We read next:

Matthew 11:2-3

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

That is, speaking of the Coming One, he was pointing back to what was written of the Messiah in the Old Testament, such as in Genesis 3:15 where there is the first glimpse at a Saviour, where God said:

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Or in Genesis 49:10 where we read:

Genesis 49:10

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

Or Isaiah 7:14 which says:

Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Which we know means *God with us*. And he was referencing other passages too, such as Isaiah 11:1

Isaiah 11:1

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

And he was asking Jesus if He was this man, or if he should keep looking for another. And that seems like a fair question, right? He wanted to be sure. But consider what else we know of John the Baptist, for he had known Jesus from his earliest days — indeed, it was him that leapt for joy in his mother's womb as she heard the news that Jesus would be born.

When the Pharisees asked him *"Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"*, John responded, saying *"It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."*

Then later, we read, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'*

And we go on to read in the *apostle* John's gospel account:

John 1:32-36

And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

And of course, we saw how (as recorded in Matthew chapter 3) John had baptised Jesus, following which a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." — a voice that not only Jesus, but John heard too. It seems clear to me that at *that* stage there was no doubt in his mind as to who this man was. That Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, the One who had come to save the world, indeed the One who had been promised. Yet here he is now asking if Jesus was the coming One, or if he should look for another. Why?

Well, back in chapter 4 we *read* that "...when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee" — and while we don't know the exact timescale, much had happened since, for following that Jesus called His earliest disciples to Him, healed multitudes, taught the Sermon on the mount, continued to preach, teach, and heal around this area of Israel, instructed and sent out His apostles, and then went into their cities to teach and preach.

But all this time, John was in prison. And it seems that doubt had crept in. He doubted that he'd properly understood who Jesus was. Perhaps he wondered why Jesus wasn't overthrowing the Romans, and establishing an earthly kingdom. Or perhaps he wondered why Jesus hadn't freed him from prison. Perhaps he was thinking "Jesus, if you're the Messiah, why aren't you doing *this...?*". And isn't that like the doubt that can creep into our lives, when we lose sight of who Jesus is?

Given that, we really need to take note of what Jesus says in response. We read:

Matthew 11:4-6

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see 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. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

So the short answer to John's question as to whether Jesus was the Messiah, was yes — He was!

But note *how* Jesus confirmed that, for He pointed John to Scripture, to the Bible, saying these things that you hear and see, are what the Old Testament prophets said the Messiah would be like — so you can have confidence in who I am, because of what God's Word says about Me. No doubt referring to passages such as...

- Isaiah 11:2 that says "*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*"...
- And Isaiah 29:18 that says "*In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.*"
- And Isaiah 35:5-6 that says "*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.*"
- And furthermore, Isaiah 61:1 which says "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,...*"

The lesson for us in this, is that any time we doubt who God is, or what He is doing, we should turn to the Bible as well, reading of His nature, His character, His love for us. And reading of how He has rescued from lion's dens, preserved through fiery furnaces, opened prison doors, saved against impossible odds, brought down walls, parted the sea, calmed the storm, and importantly, how He has won the victory over death.

Now, Jesus gave this answer to reassure John that he hadn't misunderstood who He was. But, as John was in prison, he had sent two of his disciples to ask on his *behalf*, and so they now return to him. We read:

Matthew 11:7-10

As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.'

So, Jesus speaks to the crowd about John, and uses a Hebrew idiom of a reed shaken by the wind — which one day would blow one way, and another blow the other way. And He asks rhetorically if that was the kind of man John was, faltering between two opinions. Or whether he was a pampered individual, a yes man. Of course he was neither, and Jesus makes clear that John himself was actually prophesied of in Malachi chapter 3 verse 1, which says:

Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

John was *this* messenger. And Jesus continued speaking about him, saying:

Matthew 11:11

"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

And note, Jesus specifically said *of women* — the distinction being found of Himself in Matthew 1:20 where we read; that which was conceived in Mary was *of the Holy Spirit*. So, Jesus says of those born of *women*, there was none greater.

But why? For there certainly were some amazing men and women throughout the Old Testament — consider Moses who led Israel out of Egypt, or Joshua who led them into the promised land. Or Rahab, who in faith protected the spies sent into Jericho. Or David, and his victories in battle, or Solomon and his wisdom, or Gideon and his trust in God, or Esther and her courage that saved her people. Of course the list goes on with Daniel, Elijah, Elisha and more. There's some serious contenders we might think — and in fact their courage, and the miracles that God worked through them might make us think they were even greater.

So why did Jesus put John the Baptist at the top of this list? Well, it wasn't because of who he was, but the *message* that he brought. For it was *John* that had the privilege of being the one that declared the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Not coming, not far off, but here, right now. For he announced the Messiah. He was the one who said "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

And that's surely why Jesus then said "*he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" — because we are *beneficiaries* of His mercy and grace, we are clothed in His righteousness, we are filled with His Holy Spirit, and it is to us that the gospel has been entrusted. We have even greater news to share!

Matthew 11:12

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

That is, there are many who are animated against the truth, that are staunchly opposed to the kingdom of heaven, for they hate the thought of their sin being exposed — such as king Herod who had imprisoned John because he called him out for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. But also, those that seek the kingdom of heaven, are not those who are apathetic about it; that like the idea of it, but are not interested beyond that — no, those that will be part of the kingdom will be those who *energetically lay hold of it*. That's the literal meaning of those words *violent* and *force*.

We would do well to remember that we won't find people in heaven because they liked the idea of church, or thought well of Christianity. Those that will be in heaven are those who have chosen to repent of their sin, and put their faith in Christ, resting on what He has done.

And Jesus continues here:

Matthew 11:13-14

For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.

That is, John was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and all that preceded him *also* spoke to these things — and indeed, the spirit of Elijah will not only be seen in John, but Elijah himself (who we'll see again in the great tribulation) will likewise speak the same. Therefore, this unchanging need to turn to God requires us to take note — we read:

Matthew 11:15

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

So then, He was saying; *the law and prophets spoke to these things, but are you listening?* Not merely with your ears, but with your heart? Are you really taking on board what is being said? For there are many that are just not interested, such as we read in verses 16-19:

Matthew 11:16-19

"But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

So, Jesus uses the examples of how children would gather to play games, pretending to act out weddings, or funeral ceremonies — yet there were some kids that would neither join in with this rejoicing, or mourning. That is, nothing would make them happy. And He says, likewise, this is what this generation was like — that nothing made *them* happy — for John had lived in isolation in the wilderness eating locusts and honey, and they hated him. And now Jesus came, willing to spend time with the outcasts of society, and they hated Him too (just as we saw in Matthew 9).

Their problem was not their ears, but their hard hearts that didn't want to listen to the truth. And so, continuing this, Matthew next records:

Matthew 11:20

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:

Essentially, they had no excuse. And Jesus said:

Matthew 11:21-22

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, 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. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

And so Jesus names these two cities, Chorazin and Bethsaida, which were in the north of the Galilee area, near Capernaum where Jesus had based Himself. And despite having seen so *many* miracles performed, the people rejected Jesus. And so He rejected them. And oh what a terribly sad thing when anyone does that. To have Jesus before you, and walk away from Him. That's what happens when hearts are hard, and ears don't want to hear.

That's why we must try and reach people as much as we can before their hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, as the children of Israel became in the wilderness. That's why our Livewires and Youth Club groups are so important. It's why we those leaders have such an important job to do — not merely to entertain or provide a safe space for kids (as good as that is), but to reach them with the gospel.

It's why each one of us should be praying for those ministries, and for the salvation of these young people. So please, please come along to our church prayer meetings. I'm not expecting you to be at every one — but to *never* be at one, is lacking. We *need* to pray for open doors here, for this world is volatile and it's trying to suck young people into sin like never before.

Oh, how I long for a day where we may even be able to support a full time youth worker in this church, that could go into the schools in this town, from assemblies to RE or RS lessons, to Christian Unions to afterschool clubs. We each need to be faithful in our giving in that way too if that is ever going to happen.

But whatever the method, we need to reach young people before their hearts are hardened, ever remembering what we read in Acts 17:

Acts 17:30-31

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Oh, that there would be softened hearts in our town. We need to pray for that.

Jesus continues in verse 23:

Matthew 11:23-24

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

The phrase *exalted to heaven* was a Hebrew idiom that meant this city had great prosperity, yet Capernaum, along with Chorazin and Bethsaida, were completely destroyed by the Romans not that long after this, and they were never rebuilt. But far more significant than the material fate that awaited them, was the day of judgement that awaits us *all*, including them. Again, Jesus was underlining the point here that they were without excuse. And neither are you. Are you saved? Are you? I hope so. I dearly hope so.

My fear, as I've said before, is that — just as here where there were people who had seen Jesus' miracles, His character, and had heard His teaching, yet *rejected* Him — so too will there be people who come through the doors of *this* church, even on a weekly basis, and see the great things God does among us, who hear of God's character, who hear the Bible taught week in and week out, yet ultimately reject Him, being nothing more than a church goer, to whom Jesus will one day declare "*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*"

Don't let that be you! Don't let that be you!! Jesus is calling you to repent and put your faith in Him, because one day He is going to judge this world in righteousness, and if He is not your Saviour, you will have to face Him as your judge, and you will be guilty as charged, and worthy of His punishment.

Now, having rejected those who rejected Him, we read next:

Matthew 11:25-26

At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.

And so Jesus — moving from those who rejected Him, to those who accepted Him — praised God the Father, for not making the gospel an academic achievement, but a simple matter of child-like faith. In fact, those who try and engineer their salvation, who seek to please God through their works, will not enter heaven. As we *read* from 1 Corinthians earlier, God has put to shame the wisdom of this world, that the glory might rightly go to Him, for our salvation is in faith alone, in Christ alone. He has done all that was needed for us — what grace!

Matthew 11:27

All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

So then, the only way to the Father is through Jesus, the Son. And it is He that *calls* whom He *chooses*, that He might get the glory. But, He *commands* all men everywhere to repent, as we've already *read* this morning, and — as Peter writes in his second letter — God is *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*.

We conclude, therefore, that the only way is open to all. And those whom He knows will respond, He calls. That we might *respond* in faith, trusting in what He has *already* done. And since our *salvation* is secure in His completed work, and not in our ongoing works, He next said:

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

And so, Jesus uses the example of a yoke; such as would be put on an ox or other animal, in order that they might drag around farm equipment, bearing the full weight and strain of it. So what weight is it that we've been saddled with? Well two things:

First, is the weight of our sin. And oh what a horrendous weight that is, as the effect of our sin riddles us with worry, with stress, with drama, with many needless burdens as our love of money, sex, power, possessions and more weighs us down, ensnaring us — as the book of Hebrews describes it — giving a picture of an animal caught in a trap, and unable to escape. And oh, how many restless souls there are in our world today that are trapped in sin and struggles, never finding peace, never having the steadfast hope that is in Christ.

But second, is the weight of the law, that — given how horrendously we have sinned against God — encircles us like a collection of cannons all aimed right at us, ready to carry out the punishment we deserve. With no way of escaping through our own efforts.

However with Christ as our Saviour, we are not only free from sin — in that we are no longer slaves to it (that we don't *have* to sin) — but we are also free from the consequence of sin, with the demands of the law on us satisfied in Jesus' death on the cross in our place.

As such, there is a wonderful lightness that is in Christ — a freedom, a power to overcome additions, and any sin that would drag us down. And a freedom that not only have we been spared from eternal punishment, but we are now joint heirs with Him!

And now, as Christians, there is this yoke that is easy that Christ offers us — and that is letting Him lead us where He wills. For the leading of our Saviour, Who is perfectly trustworthy, is the most wonderful leading we can experience. Indeed, doing what we were created to do is much easier than doing something that we were not. But what we need to do, is yield to Him. For we cannot both lead. We cannot put Christ in charge of our lives, then try to run them ourselves. For we'll only find fresh struggles in doing that.

There's a story that I've heard before, I know some of you have too, of a battleship cruising the Atlantic, off the northern coast of Maine, in the United States.

One stormy evening, the commander was notified, "Sir, there's a light ahead. Oncoming vessel."

He replied, "Signal the oncoming vessel: change your courses ten degrees to the west." And the message was sent.

But a light flashed back, "Change your course ten degrees to the east."

"Signal again," barked the commander. "Change your course ten degrees to the west. I am an admiral!"

The light flashed back, "Change your course ten degrees to the east. I am a Seaman Third Class."

By this time, the admiral was incensed as he thundered, "Signal again: Change your course ten degrees to the west. I am a battleship."

And the message came back, "Change your course ten degrees to the east. I am a lighthouse."

Oh, how foolish it is when we try and tell God how our lives should go, rather than let Him lead. For He knows the end from the beginning. He knows more than we ever will. So let us trust Him, let us take on His yoke, letting Him lead us, and guide us in all things. In our friendships, our relationships, our marriages, our parenting, our learning, our working, our retiring. And in our use of time, our use of money, our use of the gifts that He has given us. Let us let Him lead us in our serving of Him. For without Him we can do nothing.

As we read in Hebrews, let us look unto Him:

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Application questions

So then, what should we ask ourselves in light of this chapter that we've studied this morning? I suggest the following:

- When you have doubts, do you turn to God's Word?
- What can you do to pray more for our Livewires and Youth Club groups?
- Are you trying to do things your own way, or are you letting God lead you?

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



Deal Christian Fellowship

Simply teaching the Bible, simply

 <https://dcf.church>