

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Jesus and John; Come to Me

Matthew 11:1-30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 11 carries serious doctrinal weight beneath its tender surface. At stake first is the identity of Jesus. He answers John's doubt by pointing to His works as the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic prophecies, and He climaxes the chapter with a staggering claim of deity and unique authority: all things have been handed to Him by the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals Him (11:27). Here is the exclusive mediatorship of Christ, the only one who makes the Father known. The chapter also teaches the privilege and accountability of living within the kingdom, the danger of hardened unbelief in the face of clear evidence, and the earnestness with which the kingdom must be received. Help your students see Jesus clearly: the prophesied Messiah, the divine Son, the one mediator between God and men.

But Matthew 11 is also one of the most pastorally rich chapters in the Gospel, and it aims straight at the heart. Jesus is gentle with a doubting John, tender toward little children, and breathtakingly inviting toward the weary. The chapter forms disciples who learn that honest doubt is met with patience, that pride blocks the kingdom while childlike humility receives it, and that the deepest rest a soul can know is found not in escaping our burdens but in coming to a gentle and lowly Savior and taking His yoke. This is the heartbeat of the whole lesson.

So teach for both. Send your students home with a firmer grip on who Jesus is, the divine Son who alone reveals the Father and alone gives rest. And send them home softened and drawn, with the invitation of verse 28 ringing in their ears, ready to bring their real burdens to the One who is gentle and lowly in heart.

Question 1

Student Question:

From prison, John asks, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" and Jesus answers by pointing to His works fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies (11:3-5). What does Jesus' response teach us about the evidence for who He is, and why does He point to Scripture being fulfilled rather than simply asserting His identity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by setting the scene with compassion. John is in Herod's prison (4:12; 14:3-4), and from that cell he sends disciples with an aching question: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (11:3). This is the forerunner himself, the man who baptized Jesus and

saw the Spirit descend, now wrestling with whether he had been right all along. Doubt does not visit only the weak.

Notice how Jesus answers. He does not simply say, “Yes, trust me.” He points to His works: “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (11:5). Each phrase echoes Isaiah (Isaiah 35:5–6; 61:1). Jesus is saying, in effect, look at what is happening, and look at what the prophets foretold, and see that they match. The evidence is the fulfillment of Scripture before John’s eyes.

Draw out why this matters. Jesus consistently roots His identity not in bare assertion but in the convergence of His works with the written word of God. Faith in Christ is not a leap into the dark; it rests on real evidence: prophecy fulfilled, works no mere man could do, the testimony of God’s own word. This is the same kind of evidence the apostles will later preach, and it is preserved for us in the Scriptures.

Then highlight the tender beatitude that follows: “blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (11:6). Jesus knows His ministry was not the fire-and-axe campaign John had announced, and that this could trip people up. He blesses those who, even when Jesus does not act as they expected, refuse to take offense and keep trusting. That blessing is offered to your students too.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ identity confirmed by the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 35:5–6; 61:1)
- Faith grounded in evidence: the works of Christ and the testimony of Scripture (John 5:36–39)
- Jesus’ gentleness toward honest doubt rather than rebuke
- The blessing on those who keep trusting Christ even when He defies their expectations (11:6)
- Scripture as the abiding witness to who Jesus is, given to us today

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that Jesus answers doubt with evidence from His works and Scripture?
- How does it comfort you that even John the Baptist wrestled with doubt?
- Where do you need to refuse to take offense and keep trusting Christ even when He defies your expectations?

Question 2

Student Question:

John was a giant of faith, yet he wrestled with doubt when his circumstances did not match his expectations. When have your own expectations of how God should act collided with reality, and how did that affect your faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses John's struggle into the student's own life. John had preached a Messiah who would clear the threshing floor with fire and lay the axe to the root (3:10–12). What he got, from a prison cell, was a Messiah who healed the sick and welcomed sinners while the wicked Herod still sat on his throne. The gap between expectation and reality is exactly where John's doubt was born.

Help students recognize the same pattern in themselves. Much of our disappointment with God is really a collision between what we assumed He would do and what He actually did. We expected the prayer answered, the illness healed, the marriage saved, the door opened, and instead came silence, or loss, or a closed door. Like John, we begin to wonder whether we misread everything.

Lead them to handle these expectations honestly rather than burying them. John did the right thing: he took his question straight to Jesus. He did not abandon his faith in the dark; he brought his doubt into the light and let Jesus answer. That is a model worth naming for your class. Doubt taken to Jesus is far healthier than doubt nursed in silence.

Move toward trust without pretending. The aim is not to manufacture certainty but to anchor faith in who Jesus has shown Himself to be, even when His ways confound us. Often our expectations were too small or too earthly, and God was doing something better and deeper than we could see. Encourage students to keep bringing their honest questions to a Savior who does not flinch at them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between our expectations and God's ways as a common source of doubt (Isaiah 55:8–9)
- Bringing honest doubt to Christ rather than nursing it in silence
- Faith anchored in Christ's revealed character rather than in our preferred outcomes
- God's purposes often larger and deeper than what we expected

Discussion Prompts

- When have your expectations of God collided hardest with reality?
- What helps you bring your doubts to Jesus instead of hiding them?
- Looking back, where did God do something better than what you had expected of Him?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus says John is the greatest born of women, yet “the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (11:11). What does this teach about the privilege of those who live on this side of the cross and the resurrection, within the kingdom Christ established?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus pours out astonishing praise on John: “among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist” (11:11). John is the climax of all the prophets, the long-awaited forerunner (11:10, 14). And then Jesus adds a line that should make us sit up: “yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Clarify what this does and does not mean. Jesus is not demeaning John’s character or faithfulness. He is describing a difference of privilege and position. John stood at the threshold of the kingdom, pointing forward; he died before the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost. The humblest believer who lives within the kingdom Christ established enjoys blessings John only glimpsed from outside.

Spell out those privileges so students feel their weight. We live on this side of the cross, with sins forgiven through the blood of Christ. We have the indwelling presence of God, the completed Scriptures, the fellowship of the church, the Lord’s Supper, the full revelation of the gospel. The kingdom John announced from a distance, we live inside. To be “least in the kingdom” is to possess what the greatest prophet of the old era longed to see.

Turn this toward gratitude and responsibility. Many believers take their privileges for granted, treating the gospel as old news. This verse should reawaken wonder: the things prophets and kings desired to see, we hold daily (compare 13:16–17). And privilege carries responsibility, which is exactly where the next question will go.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- John as the greatest of the prophets and the forerunner of Christ (11:9–11)
- The superior privilege of those who live within the kingdom Christ established
- The kingdom inaugurated in Christ, with blessings the old era only anticipated (Matthew 13:16–17)
- Gratitude for the full revelation of the gospel and the blessings of the church

Discussion Prompts

- What blessings do you enjoy as a Christian that John the Baptist never experienced?
- How can you recover a sense of wonder at privileges you may take for granted?
- How should living within the kingdom shape the way you treat the gospel?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus warns Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon, and even Sodom, than for them (11:20–24). Why does greater exposure to the truth bring greater accountability, and how should that sober you about the spiritual privileges you enjoy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus pronounces woes on the cities where most of His mighty works were done: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (11:20–24). His verdict is sobering: pagan Tyre and Sidon, even Sodom, would have repented had they seen what these cities saw, and so it will be “more bearable” for them in the day of judgment. The cities of privilege face the heavier reckoning.

Draw out the principle clearly: greater exposure to truth brings greater accountability. These towns had the Son of God walking their streets, healing their sick, teaching in their synagogues, and yet they did not repent. Their problem was not lack of evidence but hardness of heart in the face of overwhelming evidence. To whom much is given, much will be required (Luke 12:48).

Apply this honestly to your class, which is a room full of the highly privileged. Your students have Bibles in their hands, sermons every week, a lifetime of teaching, the gospel at their fingertips. They have seen and heard more of Christ than Chorazin ever did. That is a glorious gift, but it raises the stakes. Familiarity with the truth can quietly harden into indifference toward it.

Let this sober without crushing. The point is not to terrify but to awaken. Privilege is not meant to make us complacent but responsive. Ask students where they have grown numb to truths they know well, and call them to let knowledge lead to repentance and obedience rather than to a comfortable, unmoved hearing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Greater exposure to truth bringing greater accountability before God (Luke 12:47–48)
- Unrepentance in the face of clear evidence as the root sin of the privileged cities
- The danger of familiarity with the gospel hardening into indifference
- Knowledge of the truth meant to lead to repentance and obedience (James 1:22)

Discussion Prompts

- Which spiritual privileges have you begun to take for granted?
- Where have you grown numb to truths you know well?
- How can knowledge of the gospel move you toward repentance rather than mere familiarity?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus says, “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (11:12). What is Jesus teaching here about the kingdom and the wholehearted earnestness with which people must respond to it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the more puzzling verses in Matthew: “from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (11:12). Teachers and translations have understood it in two main ways, and it is worth presenting both with care.

One reading sees the kingdom as under attack: from John’s imprisonment onward, the kingdom and its messengers face violent opposition from hostile people, Herod being the first example. The other reading, which fits the call of the chapter well, sees the verse describing the forceful earnestness with which people press into the kingdom: since John began preaching, crowds have been pushing in, laying hold of the kingdom with wholehearted determination, as if storming a gate.

Whichever emphasis you take, the point for the disciple is the same: the kingdom is not received by the casual or the half-hearted. It calls for earnest, wholehearted, even strenuous response. Jesus elsewhere speaks of striving to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24) and of the kingdom worth selling everything to obtain (13:44–46). Entering the kingdom is not a gentle drift; it is a determined coming.

Bring this home gently but firmly. We live in a culture of low-commitment, keep-your-options-open religion. Jesus calls for something far more serious: a decisive, all-in pursuit of His kingdom. Ask students whether they are pressing into the kingdom with the earnestness it deserves, or merely sampling it from a comfortable distance. Hold this together with the rest of the chapter: the same kingdom we must seek with all our heart is entered by coming to a Savior who is gentle and lowly. Earnestness and rest are not enemies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom received only by earnest, wholehearted response, not casual interest (Luke 13:24)
- The reality of opposition that the kingdom and its messengers face
- The supreme worth of the kingdom, worth pursuing with everything (Matthew 13:44–46)
- Earnest pursuit of the kingdom held together with rest in a gentle Savior

Discussion Prompts

- Are you pressing into the kingdom with whole-hearted earnestness, or sampling it from a distance?
- What would a more decisive, all-in pursuit of Christ look like in your life?
- How can earnest seeking and resting in a gentle Savior belong together?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus thanks the Father for hiding these things “from the wise and understanding” and revealing them “to little children” (11:25). Where might your own pride, cleverness, or self-sufficiency be keeping you from receiving the kingdom with the humble trust of a child?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus prays aloud, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children” (11:25). This is not God being arbitrary; it is God resisting the proud and giving grace to the humble (James 4:6). The truths of the kingdom are received not by intellectual brilliance but by childlike trust.

Explain what kind of wisdom Jesus warns against. It is not learning itself, but the self-sufficient cleverness that thinks it has no need to be taught, that approaches God as a critic rather than a child. The cities that rejected Him were not lacking in evidence; they were too proud, too sure of themselves, to bow. Meanwhile ordinary, humble people received the kingdom with open hands.

Now turn the searchlight on the student. Pride is subtle. It can hide in our competence, our theology, our experience, our sense that we already know all this. Ask where each person’s self-sufficiency might be keeping them from the simple, trusting posture of a child before God. The most dangerous barrier to the kingdom is often not ignorance but the conviction that we have nothing left to learn.

Point toward the remedy: childlike humility. A child does not earn a gift; a child simply receives it, trusts, depends, asks. That is exactly the posture in which the kingdom is given. Encourage students to come to God not as experts to be impressed but as children glad to be taught and held.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God revealing the kingdom to the humble and hiding it from the proud (James 4:6; 1 Corinthians 1:26–29)
- Childlike humility and trust as the posture in which the kingdom is received (Matthew 18:3)
- Self-sufficiency and pride as barriers to receiving truth
- The Father’s sovereign good pleasure in revealing Christ to the lowly

Discussion Prompts

- Where might your own competence or knowledge be feeding a subtle pride before God?
- What does it look like to come to God with the trust of a child rather than the posture of an expert?

- What is one area where you sense God still has something to teach you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus declares, “all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27). What does this claim reveal about the deity of Jesus and His unique role as the one who makes the Father known?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Jesus makes one of the most exalted claims in the Gospels: “all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27). Slow down and let the weight of this land. This is the language of deity and of unique, exclusive authority.

Unpack the claim in parts. First, “all things have been handed over to me by my Father.” Jesus possesses universal authority granted by the Father, the same authority He will declare after the resurrection (28:18). Second, the mutual, exhaustive knowledge between the Father and the Son: no one fully knows the Son but the Father, and no one fully knows the Father but the Son. Only one who shares the divine nature could speak this way. This is no mere prophet.

Then highlight the exclusivity that follows: the Father is known only through the Son, and through those to whom the Son reveals Him. Jesus is the one and only doorway to the knowledge of God. As He will later say, “no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), and there is “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). All our knowledge of God runs through Jesus.

Hold deity and invitation together, because they sit side by side in the text. The same Jesus who claims to know the Father exhaustively immediately says, “Come to me” (11:28). His towering authority is not cold; it is the very thing that makes His invitation trustworthy. Lead your class to marvel that the divine Son who alone reveals the Father turns and opens His arms to the weary. The highest one stoops the lowest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deity of Christ implied in His exhaustive, mutual knowledge with the Father (John 10:30; 11:27)
- All authority handed to the Son by the Father (Matthew 28:18)
- Jesus as the exclusive revealer of the Father and the one mediator (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5)
- Knowledge of God available only through Christ
- Christ's towering authority making His tender invitation utterly trustworthy

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean for your faith that no one knows the Father except through the Son?
- How does Jesus' claim to share the Father's knowledge confirm His deity?
- How does His supreme authority make His invitation to come to Him more, not less, inviting?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus offers His invitation specifically to those who "labor and are heavy laden" (11:28). Be honest about what is wearing you down right now, and what it would mean to actually bring that weariness to Jesus rather than just enduring it alone.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the great invitation and makes it intensely personal. Jesus addresses His call to a specific crowd: "all who labor and are heavy laden" (11:28). Notice who He is looking for. Not the rested and the strong, but the worn out, the burdened, the ones bent under a weight they can no longer carry. If that is you, He is talking to you.

Help students name the weight honestly. The burdens are many: the crushing load of religious performance and trying to earn God's favor; the weight of guilt and regret; the exhaustion of anxiety, grief, broken relationships, financial strain, caregiving, or simply the relentless grind of life. Jesus does not ask us to clean up before we come; He invites us as we are, heavy-laden.

Confront the tendency to carry burdens alone. Many believers, oddly, never actually bring their weariness to Jesus. They pray about everything except the thing that is really crushing them. They white-knuckle through, assuming they should be able to handle it, or fearing Jesus is too busy or too holy to be bothered with their ordinary exhaustion. The invitation exposes that lie.

Move toward action. Ask each person to name, at least in their own heart, the one burden they have been carrying without ever truly laying it before Christ. Then ask what it would look like this week to actually bring it to Him in prayer, to confess it, to ask for help, to stop pretending they are fine. The first step toward rest is simply coming.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's invitation directed specifically to the weary and burdened (11:28)
- Coming to Jesus as we are, not after we have cleaned ourselves up
- Casting our cares on God who cares for us (1 Peter 5:7)
- The danger of carrying burdens alone instead of bringing them to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- What burden have you been carrying that you have never truly brought to Jesus?
- What keeps you from laying it down at His feet?
- What would it look like, this week, to actually bring that weariness to Him?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus says, "Come to me, all 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" (11:28-29). What is the rest Jesus promises, how can taking up a yoke possibly bring rest, and how does a person actually come to Christ to receive it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal and pastoral high point of the chapter, so give it the fullest treatment.

"Come to me, all 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" (11:28-30). Read it slowly aloud and let it breathe.

Define the rest Jesus promises. It is not mere physical rest or escape from all responsibility. It is "rest for your souls," a deep, settled peace with God and within ourselves. It is the end of striving to earn what cannot be earned, the laying down of guilt at the cross, the security of belonging to a Savior who will never cast us out. It is the rest the Old Testament longed for and that remains for the people of God in Christ (Jeremiah 6:16; Hebrews 4:9-11).

Address the paradox honestly: how can taking up a yoke bring rest? A yoke is a working harness; it speaks of submission and labor. The answer is that we are already yoked, to sin, to anxiety, to the impossible burden of self-salvation, to harsh taskmasters that never satisfy. Jesus does not offer a life with no yoke; He offers an exchange. Trade the crushing yoke you are under for His, which is "easy" and "light," because He is gentle and lowly, and because He pulls alongside us. Submission to a gentle Master is not bondage; it is freedom.

Now make clear how a person actually comes to Christ to receive this rest, for the invitation is not a vague feeling but a real response to the gospel. We come to Jesus as we hear the good news and believe He is the Christ, the Son of God. We come by repenting of our sins, turning from the old taskmasters. We come by confessing Him as Lord and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27). Coming to Christ is taking His yoke: bowing to Him as Lord and then learning from Him in a life of glad obedience. This is no contradiction of grace; it is how grace is received by a trusting, obedient heart.

Close on the gentleness of the Savior. The reason His yoke is light is the kind of Master He is: "gentle and lowly in heart." This is the only place in the Gospels where Jesus directly describes His own heart, and what He chooses to reveal is tenderness. Lead your class to come to Him not

in fear but in trust, laying down their burdens, taking up His yoke, and finding, at last, rest for their souls.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The rest Christ gives as deep peace with God, not mere relief from labor (Hebrews 4:9–11)
- The exchange of yokes: trading the crushing burden of self-salvation and sin for Christ's easy yoke
- Coming to Christ as the gospel response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Acts 2:37–38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27)
- Taking Christ's yoke as bowing to Him as Lord and learning from Him in obedience
- The gentleness and lowliness of Christ's own heart as the ground of our trust (11:29)
- Rest received by grace through an obedient, trusting faith, not earned by works

Discussion Prompts

- What does “rest for your souls” mean to you, and where do you most long for it?
- What yoke are you currently under that Jesus is offering to exchange for His?
- How does the New Testament describe the way a person actually comes to Christ to receive this rest?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole chapter, from John's doubt to the great invitation. Name one specific way Jesus, the gentle and lowly King who calls the weary, is inviting you to come to Him and find rest this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole chapter and press it toward the heart. Matthew 11 has shown us a Jesus who is gentle with doubters, who fulfills prophecy, who alone reveals the Father, who warns the hardened, who welcomes the childlike, and who calls the weary to rest. The danger now is that students close their Bibles still carrying the very burdens Jesus just offered to take.

Press for the specific. A vague resolve to “trust Jesus more” fades fast. A concrete answer sounds like: “I will finally bring my anxiety about my child to Jesus instead of carrying it alone,” or “I will stop trying to earn God's approval and rest in His grace,” or “I will come to Christ in baptism and take His yoke,” or “I will set aside my pride and let God teach me in an area I thought I had mastered.”

Let the question land personally. Consider a moment of silence for students to write one sentence before sharing. The goal is for each person to leave having actually accepted, in some specific way, the invitation of verse 28, rather than merely admiring it.

Close in worship and rest. Remind your class that the One who calls them is gentle and lowly in heart, the divine Son who stooped to invite the weary. Their response is not a heavier burden but an exchange that brings rest. Lead them to come to Him, lay it down, and breathe.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of doctrine and the heart's rest in Christ
- Specific, concrete response to Christ's invitation as the fruit of encountering Him
- Coming to Jesus as a present, active response rather than an admired idea
- The lifelong walk of learning from the gentle and lowly Savior

Discussion Prompts

- What is the one truth from Matthew 11 that God most wants to work into your heart?
- What specific step will you take this week to come to Jesus and find rest?
- How can this class pray for you as you bring your burden to Him?