

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 13: Jesus and John; Come to Me -- Matthew 11:1-30

John the Baptist sits in a prison cell. This is the man who once stood waist-deep in the Jordan, the wild prophet in camel's hair who pointed at Jesus and cried, "Behold, the Lamb of God." He was the voice crying in the wilderness, the forerunner, the man Jesus would call the greatest born of women. And now he is in the dark, in chains, waiting on the whim of a corrupt king, and a terrible question begins to form in his mind. From that cell he sends word to Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (11:3).

It is one of the most honest moments in the Gospels. Even John, the bold prophet, wrestles with doubt when life does not go as he expected. He had announced a Messiah who would bring an axe to the root and fire to the chaff. Instead he sits forgotten in a dungeon while that Messiah heals lepers and eats with sinners. Where is the judgment? Where is the rescue? If you have ever loved Jesus and still found yourself in the dark, asking whether you had it all wrong, then John is your brother, and the way Jesus answers him is for you.

Jesus does not rebuke John's doubt. He sends back evidence: "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). These are the very things Isaiah said the Messiah would do. Then He adds a tender beatitude: "blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (11:6). And turning to the crowd, He pours out the highest praise on the very man who was doubting Him. Jesus is gentle with honest strugglers.

But the chapter does not end in the dark. It rises to one of the most beautiful invitations Jesus ever spoke. To the worn out, the burdened, the ones crushed under religion and life alike, He opens His arms: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (11:28). After warning hard, unrepentant cities, after thanking the Father for revealing truth to little children, He turns and speaks the words that have drawn weary souls to Him for two thousand years. This is the heart of Jesus on display: a King who calls, and a Savior who gives rest.

Group Discussion: John the Baptist, of all people, sent word from prison asking whether Jesus was really the one. Why do you think Jesus responded to such honest doubt with evidence and even praise rather than rebuke, and what does that tell us about how He treats us when we struggle to believe?

Personal Reflection: Jesus invites the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him and find rest. What burden are you currently carrying that you have never actually brought to Jesus, and what keeps you from laying it down at His feet?

Read Matthew 11:1-30

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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.
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 35:5–6, the prophecy of the blind seeing and the lame leaping that Jesus points John to; Isaiah 61:1, good news preached to the poor by the Anointed One; Jeremiah 6:16, the ancient call to find rest for your souls in the good way; Hebrews 4:9–11, the rest that remains for the people of God; Acts 2:37–38, the weary turning to Christ in repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins.