

MATTHEW

Chapter 11

Jesus and John the Baptist

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” 4 And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 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. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet ? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one 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 has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear. 16 “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 17 “‘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, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

11:1 While the 12 apostles were carrying out their first mission, Jesus continued his ministry in Galilee. (CSB)

After Jesus finished giving mission instructions to His disciples (ch 10), He resumed His travels in the cities and villages of Galilee (9:35). (TLSB)

11:2 *John heard in prison* – In prison, John heard about Jesus’ activities, and he was somewhat puzzled and confused. (PBC)

John the Baptist had been imprisoned by King Herod, Antipas about a year earlier. (TLSB)

sent his disciples – John wanted to verify the reports he had heard about Jesus. (TLSB)

11:3 *the one who is to come* – The Messiah. (CSB)

John the Baptist had used images of judgment to describe the ministry of the One who was coming (3:10–12). Jesus seemed not to be living up to John’s expectations of the Coming One, a title for the Messiah. (TLSB)

John was troubled and unsure at this point. John was aware of the mighty works of mercy that Jesus was performing, but where were his acts of judgment? Even before he baptized Jesus, John described Jesus' work in terms of an ax at the root of trees about to be cut down and as wielding a winnowing fork to separate the chaff from the wheat and to burn the chaff in unquenchable fire (see 3:19,12). But those acts of judgment had not taken place. And John, the special forerunner of the Messiah, was sitting in Herod's prison. John was a courageous man of God, but he had his human weaknesses. The prophet Elijah, to whom the Scriptures compare John, had his weak moments too. At one time he was convinced that his faithful ministry had been a failure, and he wanted to die. Do you suppose that there has ever been a man of God who has never had his doubts about himself and about at least some of the Lord's promises? Would that not be expecting the impossible of anyone with sinful nature. (PBC)

Was the Baptist really asking his question for his own sake or merely for the sake of his disciples? This question has occupied interpreters over the centuries, and it is not unimportant. Indeed, it is related to the main point of the unit, and the issue deserves an answer in itself. The central thrust of this passage, however, emerges from the Lord's reply to John and his claim that in his ministry of wonders and preaching good news, the promised renewal of all things is taking place. Yet there is a strange twist to Jesus' answer. Even though the prophecies are coming true, Jesus' ministry will have a paradoxical character that can cause one to stumble and fall away without the proper eyes to see and ears to hear. (CC p. 555)

“Are you the Coming One, or shall we expect another? Did the Baptist ask this question for his own sake or merely to assist his disciples in their understanding and faith? With the apparent exception of Tertullian, the church fathers and early commentators held that the Baptist could not possibly have entertained doubts about the identity of Jesus. Yet in terms of grammar, near context, and even the wider sweep of Scripture's story, there is no compelling reason to reject the obvious senses of the text. Grammatically, it is John who is the subject of the verb “he said” in this verse. Further Jesus replies, “Go and announce to John....” (v-4). Finally, the closing beatitude is singular and in the first place refers to John himself. Grammatically, John has asked a question, and Jesus has answered him. (CC p.555-556)

In terms of the near context, the obvious must not be overlooked: John heard the deeds of Christ while he was in prison. John had announced that Jesus was the eschatological Judge, far mightier than John himself and on the verge of wielding the winnowing fork of separation (3:11-12). But now John is in prison. (CC p. 556)

“Where was the thunder of judgment? Where was the rebuke of the wicked? Why this use of power over demons but not over evil men? Why did Jesus consort with them in their feasting? Why did he allow the prophet's righteous wrath against sin to rot in Herod's jail without a word of protest?” Could this possibly be the Messiah? Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. (CC p. 556)

Jesus' teaching about the Baptist's significance in the following periscope (11:7-15) will afford more opportunity to develop this theme, but let it be said here that this does not look like the reign of God! We should not even necessarily think in terms of John's concern for his own personal welfare. John is the fiery prophet of the Lord, and he knows it. Just as he was taken aback, however, when the Lord came to receive his baptism (3:13-15), so is he here, as the judgment tarries and the forces of evil men are still so strong. John has heard of the works of the Christ, Jesus' authoritative preaching and his deeds of gracious authority. What John has heard, however does not match the end-time message he himself has preached not what he himself is experiencing. (CC p. 556)

In terms of Scripture's wider context, there are any number of parallels to John's journey from faith to doubt and back to faith again. The disappointment and frustration of Moses (Ex. 5:22-23), Elijah (1 Kings 18-19), Jeremiah (Jer. 20:1-18), and others give ample support for the view that John sends his disciples to Jesus with a question that is truly his own. We need not conclude that John has lost all faith, and we can surely believe that his faith is strengthened by the answer that Jesus sends back to him. The question, nevertheless, is John's own, and it is real. (CC p. 556)

look for another – *erchomenos* – The coming one. That is an appropriate phrase for Advent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

To say, then, that John had his doubts about Jesus as the Messiah is not to judge him as having rejected Jesus. Doubts may threaten faith, but they do not automatically rule it out or destroy it. Is significant to note what John did about his doubts. He took them to Jesus! When doubts of any kind assail our Christian faith, we too need to go to Jesus for reassurance. When we consider everything He endured for our sakes, everything He did to demonstrate His divine powers – His voluntary death and His victorious resurrection on the third day – we are reassured that we can rely on all His promises and trust Him to take us safely to Himself in heaven in His own good time. (PBC)

11:4-6 Jesus' answer in 11:4-6 exhibits a twofold character. On the one hand, his words offer the strongest "yes!" to the first part of the Baptist's question. The deeds that Jesus has been performing are the long-expected signs of renewal and restoration in Israel. God is at work, establishing the new age of salvation! Physical infirmity signifies that the creation is a fallen and broken place because of man's sin. OT prophecy, especially in Isaiah, promises that God would come to restore and to heal. Good news is being preached to the poor, as promised in Is. 61:1. The OT promises are being fulfilled in Jesus. The age of salvation is here; He is the One who was to come. (CC pp. 556-557)

On the other hand, Jesus' words invite John to accept in faith the strangest of all paradoxes in the history of the world. (CC p. 557)

John the Baptist was the first person who had to learn this paradox, and since John, paradox of existence in an era of fulfillment that is nevertheless short of the consummation has had to be learned by the apostles, by the members of Matthew's church and by each Christian of every generation." Hagner, Matthew 1:302 (CC p. 557)

The reign of God has broken into history in the person of Jesus, and he is the Coming One. But the power of evil men remains strong, and Christ will not overthrow that evil – yet. Jesus has come to save his people from their sins (1:21), yet he teaches his followers to expect opposition and hatred (10:24-39). God has come to rule and restore through this Jesus, and through him alone. But only God can reveal to people the knowledge of Jesus' identity, and many will be caused to fall into unbelief because of Jesus and his hidden ways of revealing God's reign. (CC p. 557)

11:4 *go tell John what you hear and see.* Isaiah 42:3 "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice"

11:5 *the good news is preached to them* – Jesus pointed to His mighty works of healing (chs 8–9) and His proclamation of the Good News to the poor as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s messianic prophecies (cf Is 26:19; 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; 61:1–2). These words and deeds verified that He was the promised Christ. (TLSB)

They were also the very works that Isaiah the prophet had foretold of the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:5,6). The same prophet (61:1) had promised that the poor in spirit would be evangelized. Jesus had opened His most famous sermon by declaring, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). (PBC)

11:6 *Blessed* – Jesus’ beatitude (cf. 5:3-12) promised spiritual tranquility to John and anyone else who was not repelled by Him. (TLSB)

who is not fall offended by me – To the Baptist and to all hearers since Jesus uttered these words, his final saying reaches out, inviting to faith and discipleship: “Blessed is the one who is not caused to stumble because of me!” (the literal Greek order of 11:6). One can easily imagine that John, in prison and poor in spirit, heard the Lord’s message as truly good news filled with salvation and hope. Believers today, who struggle in the paradox of salvation already won and salvation not yet fully experienced, can hear Jesus’ invitation and, not stumbling over Him, rejoice in God’s gracious and hidden reign in the Savior. (CC p. 557)

St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “The Lord intimated He was about to die, and by such a death as might be to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (SLSB, p. 174). (TLSB)

To not be captured in a trap. A stumbling block. To the religious leaders of that day, Jesus was the stone over which they tripped. – Jesus described the poor in spirit when He said, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” John the Baptist in prison may have been in danger of falling away. Jesus reminded him of the blessings in store for anyone who would remain faithful unto death – the crown of everlasting life! With that goal before him, John would be able to persevere. (PBC)

11:7-15 God, the Father of the Lord Jesus, is a “historical” God. What I mean by this is that God has always engaged His creation by coming down into it with deeds – deeds of judgment and/or salvation. Jesus teaches that in the ministry of John the Baptist, God was doing a new thing; a new time has dawned in the world. Unless Jesus’ hearers would understand and recognize the significance of John, they would not be able to know what God the King was now doing, and most stunningly, how the creation’s King had condescended to rule among Israel in Jesus. (CC p. 563))

The structure of Jesus’ teaching in 11:7-15 can be laid out as follows. Three rhetorical questions (11:7-9) invite Jesus’ hearers to consider what they had gone out to see when so many of them had responded to John’s ministry. Jesus then provides the correct understanding of John and 11:10 is the heart of the teaching: John is the one prophesied in Mal. 3:1! (CC p. 563)

11:7-9 Jesus’ teaching begins to engage the crowds who have been following him by setting before them a thrice-repeated questions: “What did you go out into the desert to see?” The Messiah offers three possible answers, none of which is satisfactory. (CC p. 564)

Jesus had established who He was. He now asks the same rhetorical question three times to explain John’s mission. Each moves closer to the purpose described in Mal 3:1 (cf Mt 11:10). (TLSB)

11:7 concerning John – Before John’s disciples were out of earshot, Jesus addressed the assembled crowd with word that would also reassure those disciple. He reminded the people of John’s ministry and how they had responded to it. Usually prophets would have to go where the people were if the were to get a hearing. In John’s case, the people flocked out to him, even though he was out in the wilderness along the Jordan River. If he had been an unstable character, like the reeds along the riverbank that would sway back and forth in every breeze, not many would have bothered to go and hear him. (PBC)

a reed shaken by the wind – That is, fickle, accommodating, or weak in his ministry? No, John stood strong against all winds: he was willing to proclaim God’s words against the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 3:7-10) and even risk the anger of Herod Antipas because of his preaching and was imprisoned as a result (4:12; 14:3)! (CC p. 564)

11:8 man dressed in soft clothes –The second hypothetical answer Christ supplies is likely intended as sarcasm or irony. Was John a man dressed in the soft clothing of a wealthy person? No, such people live in the houses of kings, while John is languishing in a king’s prison. In a way, yes. Even to acknowledge John as Yahweh’s prophet, however, is to come short of grasping the significance of John, his ministry, and the times that have come upon Israel and the world. For John is someone even greater than a prophet. (CC p. 564)

John’s ascetic garb of camel’s hair and leather belt were hardly the silk garments of noble courtiers. (TLSB)

11:9 more than a prophet – John surpassed all other prophets because he was God’s chosen messenger, specifically identified as such in the OT, to prepare the way for the Messiah (v 10). He played a unique role in God’s plan of salvation. (TLSB)

He was a prophet who had himself been prophesied about by Isaiah and Malachi. He was the prophet who bridged the gap between the OT and the NT. Unlike all the OT prophets, who could speak only of a Messiah who would appear sometime in the distant future, John had prepared the way for the Savior (PBC).

11:10 before your face...prepare your way – Both John and Jesus have proclaimed, “The reign of heaven stands near!” (3:2; 4:17). John is more than a prophet; he himself was the subject of end-time prophesy. Therefore his ministry signifies that the decisive moment in the history of salvation – indeed, in the history of the world – has begun. (CC pp. 565-566)

11:11 truly I say to you – To underscore and teach further, Jesus adds His “amen” (aman) statement: “truly I say to you.” Here Jesus emphasizes that John has brought the time of prophecy to an end; the Baptizer has, so to speak, one foot in the old era even as it concludes. From the point of view of God’s people who still lived by the promises in the old covenant, John the Baptist is the greatest man ever born of a woman. (CC p. 566))

who is the least – But the new deed of salvation, not that God has begun to reign in Jesus, is so wondrous that even the least person who by faith now comes under that reign of blessing can be regarded as greater than John! (CC p. 566)

Jesus here affirms that those who believe in him receive the blessings of the reign of heaven already now during their earthly lives; he is not only speaking about the blessedness of believers in the future life to come (contra Yamasaki, *John the Baptist*,

113-114). The whole punch of 11:11 depends on the change in salvation history that has happened with the pivotal figure of John the Baptist. The “least in the reign of heaven” refers to any disciple of Jesus. It does not refer to Jesus himself (*Homilies on Matthew*, 37:3 [NPNF 10:244-245]). (CC p. 566)

Even the newest, most timid believing disciple is greater than John – not because of anything in himself, but because the forgiveness and power and new life of the reign of God have come to and encompassed him. (CC p. 566)

greater than he. John belonged to the age of the old covenant, which was preparatory to Christ. The least NT saint has a higher privilege in Christ as a part of his bride (the church, Eph 5:25–27, 32) than John the Baptist, who was only a friend of the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). Another view, however, stresses the expression “he who is least,” holding that the key to its meaning is found in 18:4—“whoever humbles himself like this child.” Such a person, though “least,” is regarded by God as even greater than John the Baptist. (CSB)

11:12 *but* – (only found in Greek original) – As Jesus’ teaching about the Baptist continues in 11:12, the flexible little word *de*’ actually indicates a dramatic contrast with the prior verse. If 11:11 places John with one foot in the time of prophesy as yet unfulfilled, Jesus now in 11:12 locates the other foot of John in the era of end-time fulfillment when God’s reign is active on the earth. How shocking it must have been, then for Jesus to say what he now pronounces about God’s ruling deeds. In some incomprehensible fashion, God’s eschatological reign can be resisted; in truth evil men can make God’s deeds to be of no effect, at least in some sense. (CC pp. 566-567)

kingdom of heaven has suffered violence – John experienced violence; Jesus and His disciples expected violent opposition as they carried out their mission (ch 10). (TLNB)

To be sure, God’s ultimate purposes in Jesus will prevail. But Jesus now reveals that in him, God is reigning in a hidden, lowly, resistible fashion. John, the forerunner of the reign and of him in whom God is reigning, is the prime example. Herod Antipas, that violent man, has arrested John, and soon John will be executed. As the unfolding narrative of Matthew’s Gospel now will begin to emphasize, Jesus himself will increasingly meet with opposition and unbelief, calling forth his condemnation of the places to which he has gone but where no repentance and faith in him have resulted from his gracious ministry (11:16-24). Soon Matthew will narrate that the Pharisees who opposed Jesus in Galilee have determined to destroy him (12:14). And on one obvious level, the desires of Israel’s religious leaders to eliminate Jesus will come to fruition, in league with the power of Rome. Jesus will die the shameful death of crucifixion. (CC p. 567)

violent take it by force – They enter the kingdom and become Christ’s disciples. To do this takes spiritual courage, vigor, power and determination because of ever-present persecution. (CSB)

Jesus went on to point out the great significance of John’s ministry for the kingdom of God. Beginning with the powerful preaching of John, God’s kingdom was moving relentlessly onward. As they heard John and Jesus calling them to repentance, many common people, publicans, sinner, harlots, and others were brought to repentance and were storming into the kingdom. Martin Luther observed, “Men whose consciences have been aroused, when they hear the gospel, press upon it, so that they cannot be stopped.” Nor could Satan and all his evil henchmen prevent Jesus from gaining the victory over them, a victory accomplished by his sacrificial death

and demonstrated by his glorious resurrection. Finally, when Jesus comes again, every knee will be compelled to bow before Him, go the glory of God the Father. (PBC)

11:13 *for* – (gar) John is no mere prophetic messenger. He is the one who fulfills Mal. 3:1! Moreover, the times in which John (and Jesus) are ministering are no ordinary times; they are the days in which the time of OT prophecy has come to an end, as Jesus now explains (gar) in 11:13-14. John stands astride the ages, in a sense. The OT’s prophetic voice rang out until the arrival of John and Jesus. Now the new times of fulfillment have begun, and God’s royal rule is being established in Israel and in the world. Jesus’ proclamation of good news to the poor and miracles of creation-restoration mean that God is reigning in a new way. Most importantly, Jesus himself is “God is with us” (1:23), the end-time Anointed Deliverer and Savior. (CC pp. 567-568)

OT era, with its writings that foretold the coming of both John and Jesus, had come to an end. (TLSB)

11:14 *he is Elijah* – He was not the OT prophet Elijah raised from the dead; he was the second Elijah. He was like Elijah in forcefulness and courage. Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord had promised, “I will send you the prophet Elijah” (Malachi 4:5), and the Lord’s angel had told the priest Zechariah that his son John the Baptist, would “go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17). Now, Jesus says, these prophecies have been fulfilled. John is this second Elijah. (PBC)

Malachi had predicted that a prophet like Elijah would come “before the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Mal 4:5). John the Baptist was that prophet. (TLSB)

11:15 *has ears let him hear* – This warns that anyone who has ears to hear this message had better pay attention to it. The Savior to whom John pointed is the only Savior sinners will ever have. (PBC)

He says this because in His wisdom, God has come to reign in a way that will not look right to normal human perception. Is there power in the reign of God in Jesus? Yes – but it is power for those in need who repent and believe, and not power to overthrow violent men. (CC p. 568)

Outwardly hearing what Jesus said about himself and John was not sufficient. Real hearing called for faith, something that Jesus’ contemporaries lacked (vv. 15-24). (TLSB)

11:16 *this generation* – This generation of those who are rejecting John and Jesus, then, is like children who want others to match their expectations. They deem John’s ministry too harsh; many in this generation, particularly among the religious leaders, refuse John’s call to mourn in repentance. On the other hand, in their view the new wineskins of Jesus’ ministry are too “liberal” and unabashedly celebratory – and welcome all the wrong kinds of people! (CC)

Jesus was often critical of the people of His day (12:38, 41–42, 45; 16:4; 17:17). Like children who did not want to play either happy or sad games, people were dissatisfied with both John and Jesus. (TLSB)

11:17 His own people would not listen. Cf Lk 11:32. (TLSB)

played the flute – As at a wedding. (CSB)

sang a dirge – As at a funeral. The latter symbolized the ministry of John, the former that of Jesus. The Jews were like children who refused to respond on either occasion. (CSB)

11:19 *wisdom is justified by her deed* – Apparently means that God (wisdom) had sent both John and Jesus in specific roles, and that this would be vindicated by the miraculous works of Jesus (see v. 20). (CSB)

What a person does demonstrates wisdom. Because of what Jesus did (v 2), one was justified in believing that He was the Messiah. (TLSB)

Jesus' words are ironic, even sarcastic. The figure of divine Wisdom was well-known and well-developed in the OT, as early as Job and prominently in the books of Solomon and the Wisdom psalms (1: 19:8-15; 34; 37; 49; 73; 111; 119; 127; 128;133; 139). In some OT passages Wisdom was personified as "Lady Wisdom," but in others, Wisdom was Someone even greater, a personal hypostasis of God. In light of the NT's authoritative interpretation of the OT, we can identify this Wisdom as the second person of the Trinity, the preexistent Son, who was the agent of creation and became incarnate in Jesus Christ. (CC)

The question before Jesus' generation is this: Through the ministry of John and of Jesus of Nazareth, has divine Wisdom come down to earth to work among humanity? According to many in "this generation," in no way would Wisdom be guilty of doing and saying the things that John and Jesus are doing. To reject John and Jesus is to reject God's own Wisdom. (CC)

11:1–19 People commonly experience disappointment because of false or unfulfilled expectations. We hope God will act in a certain way, but He does not. We then wonder why. To guard against false expectations, focus on Jesus and on what He has said and done. He is the fulfillment of all our hopes. "All the promises of God find their Yes in Him" (2Co 1:20). • Lord Jesus, when I struggle with doubts and unfulfilled hopes, remind me of Your words and works that assure me of Your saving love. Amen. (TLSB)

Woe on Unrepentant Cities

²⁰ **Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.** ²¹ **“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.** ²² **But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.** ²³ **And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.** ²⁴ **But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”**

11:20 *denounce the cities.* Both John and Jesus exhorted their hearers to repent (3:2; 4:17). Jesus expressed indignation against the cities; though crowds flocked to hear Him, they remained unmoved by His proclamation. These cities refused to respond positively to Jesus' messianic presence and message. (TLSB)

because they did not repent – Though Matthew's Gospel has not fully narrated all the events in Jesus' Galilean ministry, summary statements such as 4:23; 9:35 and 11:2 make it clear that He has traveled widely in His ministry of forgiving Word and restoring power. In this verse, however, Matthew's hearers first learn that there has been widespread indifference to Jesus'

miracles and teaching. The repentance and faith that Christ desires from the twons in Galilee have not happened. (CC)

11:21 Korazin. Mentioned in the Bible only twice (here and in Lk 10:13), it was near the Sea of Galilee, probably about two miles north of Capernaum. (CSB)

Bethsaida. On the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. Philip the tetrarch rebuilt Bethsaida and named it “Julias,” after Julia, daughter of Caesar Augustus. (CSB)

Tyre and Sidon. Cities on the Phoenician coast north of Palestine. (CSB)

Twin cities. Was assigned to Asher but never conquered (Ju 1:31; 10:12; 18:7, 28). Sidon’s religion corrupted Israel (1 Kg 11:5). Was the native city of Jezebel (1 Kg 16:31). It was denounced by the prophets (Jer 27:3; Jl 3:4-6). (Concordia Bible Dictionary)

11:22 *be more bearable* – In these towns He has performed miracles of power that were intended to lead the people to repentance and faith in Himself, the end-time Savior of Israel and fulfiller of God’s promises. With savage hyperbole, Jesus declares that Israel’s pagan enemies of old, Tyre and Sidon, will fare better on the Judgment Day than these Israelite towns will. (CC)

These words do not mean that those cities that were enemies of Israel and her God will escape judgment. Instead, all unbelievers will be condemned on the Last Day, and the severity of the judgment will correspond to the heinousness of the sins committed by each unbeliever. Carson, Matthew, 273, maintains that Jesus’ words here indicate “degrees of torment in hell (12:41; 23:13; cf Luke 12:47-48). Neither Mt 12:41 nor 23:13 supports Carson’s point, but Luke 12:47-48 does. (CC)

11:23 Capernaum. (Jesus’ headquarters on the north shore of Galilee, whose inhabitants had many opportunities to see and hear Jesus. Therefore the condemnation for their rejection was the greater.) (CSB)

exalted ... brought down. Capernaum’s inhabitants may have felt a sense of pride because Jesus had adopted it as His hometown. But their failure to heed His message would plunge them into the depths of Hades, a term that here designates hell. (TLSB)

In response Jesus denounces the pride of those who have rejected His ministry in terms that could readily have evoked Isaiah’s taunt against the king of Babylon, who was cast down to Sheol for his arrogance in thinking he could ascend to heaven and reign like God. (CC)

See Is. 14:3-23. This attempt at self-deification and subsequent removal from heaven could be compared to that of Satan (Lk 10:18; Rev 12:9; 20:2) and his temptation for Adam and Eve to become “lie God” (Gen 3:5; his words of temptation in Gen 3:1-5 are addressed to both Adam and Eve, since the Hebrew forms translated as “you” and “yours” are plural. (CC)

Sodom. One of the cities destroyed by sulfur and fire (Gn 19:24); proverbial for wickedness. (TLSB)

Even Sodom, legendary for its evil ways and its destruction by God, would surely still be standing if Jesus had performed His miracles there! In language almost too shocking to imagine, Jesus promises a harsher judgment for Capernaum than for Sodom. (CC)

For the infamy of Sodom, see the OT and NT verses cited in the commentary on 10:15. As affirmed in the commentary there, the most heinous sin of Sodom was homosexuality, which is condemned as an abomination that excludes a person from the reign of God. See, for example, Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:8-10; Rev 22:15. (CC)

These words addressed to “this generation” of Jesus’ contemporaries, and in response to this generation’s failure to repent during the days of Jesus’ Galilean ministry. On the other hand, there is also a ready application to all the generations that will continue until the Judgment Day breaks upon this fallen, sinful world. Our human nature, corrupted by original sin inherited from Adam, does not want to repent, and we sinners do not naturally want the joy and celebration of grace. We would rather rejoice on some other terms than the ones that Christ offers to us. The Baptizer would encounter many members of the “brood of vipers” also in our day; all of us, by nature, belong to that progeny. The Son of God would find many today who refuse to accept His terms: unconditional grace that strips us of all of our claims and lays us out naked and rejoicing in being needy receivers – purely and simply and only. Without the aid of the Spirit’s work, that kind of gracious gift is the one we would naturally spurn. (CC)

If, then, we find ourselves regularly acknowledging our sin, living lives of repentance, and rejoicing in the gracious celebration of the Messiah’s love and forgiveness – to God be the glory. These are the only gifts offered by God who comes in Jesus to save His people from their sins, granting them the sure promise of bodily resurrection to everlasting bliss in the new creation. Those who spurn the divine gifts now will face divine wrath on the Day of Judgment and everlasting torment thereafter. (CC)

11:20–24 Jesus is deeply grieved that some who have had the greatest opportunity to hear the Gospel stubbornly refuse to repent and believe. His warning to the Galilean cities is one for us to take to heart as well. Many of us have been blessed to drink often of the water of life. We must respond eagerly and sincerely. Day by day, Jesus patiently invites us to repent of our sins and hear His word of forgiveness. • Turn my heart daily, O Holy Spirit, to confess my sins and receive the full and free forgiveness earned by Jesus. Amen. (TLSB)

Rest for the Weary

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

11:25 *at this time* – Jesus is speaking words of severe judgment on three cities mentioned in verses 21 and 23. They had refused to repent and to believe in Jesus.

At that time (*kairōi*) Jesus declares that these things (*tauta*) have been concealed from the understanding and wise (*sophōn*) and revealed to infants (*nēpiois*). “That time” is immediately after decrying the pride and haughtiness of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, cities of Galilee that thought they should be exalted simply because the miracle worker was from their region. How timely! And what more of an emphasis on grace alone could one ask for? God has revealed Christ’s mercy and power, hidden behind his humble guise (cf. 11:2–5), not to the proud or the

wise elite but to the very smallest, most helpless infant. We need not be wise to be loved. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

hidden these things from the wise and learned – Jesus is not saying educated people will be lost and the uneducated will be saved. He is simply speaking about those who wise in their own eyes and reject the invitation of the Gospel.

The wise and learned both in the days of Jesus’ ministry and in every era since, are those who will not repent. (CC)

Jesus thanked His Father for revealing the truth of the Gospel to little children rather than having the knowledge of salvation depend on human wisdom. Jesus referred to His followers as the “little ones” (10:42) and pointed to a child as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:1-4). Those considered wise by earthly standards regard the word of the cross as folly (cf. Is. 29:14). St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Those who are led by this Spirit, they are sons, and cannot be kept from their Father’s council” (SLSB, p. 150). (TLSB)

little children – The defining characteristic of the “infants” in this text should be read directly of its opposite, namely, the “wise and understanding.” Jesus is not here commending those who have responded in faith to His ministry for some positive quality in themselves. Instead, He is saying that the divine revelation comes to those who (are led by the Spirit to recognize that they) are ignorant, impotent, and incapable of saving themselves, just as a helpless infant relies completely on his parents for food, warmth, safety, and life itself. (CC)

11:26 *yes* – Literally, “Yes, Father, for this was good before you.” The ESV takes some liberties with this particular verse for no discernible reason. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

your gracious will – Jesus is by no means rejoicing in the fact that some will be lost. He is rejoicing in the fact that as God was well-pleased with his Son, this good pleasure is mine and for all people, without distinction.

God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud (James 4:6. Cf. Luke 1:52. (TLSB)

11:27 *no one knows the Father except the Son* – The majesty of the divine nature is communicated to the human nature” (CT I). (TLSB)

We come to faith, not because of the strength of our own will, but because the Son chooses (*boulētai*) to reveal (*apokalypsai*) the Father to us. Why, then, should we expect that the continuance of the Christian life should depend our own the strength of our own will? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

At this point in the history of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Father alone knows who the Son is, but the Father is already revealing that His way of salvation is through the Son, and through the Son only. (CC)

11:28 *labor and are heavy laden* – This means the anxiety and terrors of sin and death. We tire ourselves out trying to save ourselves by our own doing.

Come to me all who are weary (*kopiōntes*) and laden (*pephortismenoi*), and I will give you rest (*anapausō*). No real surprises in the Greek here, but such a compelling verse for those who live in

a fast-paced culture where we often work without rest. So often we work hard and live fast because we're never quite sure we're measuring up. How many of our people, then, need to hear the reassurance that Christ has come not to add to our burdens, but to carry them in our place? He does the measuring up for us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

The burdens mentioned include the subtle (and perhaps not so subtle) burdens experienced in Judaism at that time with its unbalanced emphasis upon the necessity of obedience to all the commands of the Torah – both the written Torah and the expanding corpus of Jewish traditions that comprise the so-called oral Torah. (CC)

The people were burdened by the “yoke of the law” of which the rabbis spoke. They could not meet its demands with its many regulations and restrictions. Jesus invites everyone struggling with sin and the burden of the Law to come to him for rest and refreshment. He was keeping the Law in their stead and would bear their sins in his own body on the tree of the cross.

Those who acknowledge their sinfulness and realize that it is a burden too heavy for them to bear, that this load will drag them down to hell if they must bear it by themselves – they are ones to whom Jesus promises rest. It is his gift.

Will give you rest - The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding and guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). “Here there are two parts. The ‘labor’ and the burden signify the contrition, anxiety, and terrors of sin and death. To ‘come to’ Christ is to believe that sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. When we believe, our hearts are brought to life by the Holy Spirit through Christ’s Word. Here, therefore, are these two chief parts: contrition and faith” (Ap. XIIA 44-45). (TLSB)

11:29 take my yoke – A yoke was a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two animals. Jewish rabbis spoke of the “yoke of the Law” as glorious obedience to God, which freed one from obligations to the world and gave rest. (Cf. Eccl 24:33; 51:26). Jesus described this yoke as heavy (Mt. 23:4) and offered His alternative, to be yoked with Him to the Gospel. One yoked to Jesus will find rest. Luther: “The yoke that Christ lays upon us is sweet, and His burden is light. When sin has been forgiven and the conscience has been liberated from the burden and the sting of sin, then a Christian can bear everything easily. Because everything within is sweet and pleasant, he willingly does and suffers everything” (AE 26:133). (TLSB)

The yoke here has recently been interpreted as implying a rabbinical yoke or set of teachings, but there appears to be little historically to substantiate that interpretation. The meaning of the passage is unchanged, however. It is well worth noting in any case that a yoke often hitched two animals together. Christ invites us to be hitched to him! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Jesus does not promise us immunity from family, social, academic, economic and political problems. He does not promise us a Utopia. He does promise rest for the soul, freedom from the guilt and power of sin, freedom from the threat of death, freedom from the power of the devil. His yoke of discipleship is easy to wear and his burden of service to others is light.

The yoke Jesus asks us to take upon ourselves might be defined as the whole Christian life and hope. Once we have assumed that yoke, God’s commandments are no longer a heavy burden that weighs us down and destroys us. Instead, they are expressions of God’s will in which we delight, for we look for ways to express our thanks to God for the blessings of his grace.

Will find rest – It is not easy to be a consistent believer in Christ Jesus, finding one’s rest only in that Gospel because the people of the world are constantly accusing Christians of stressing the wrong thing.

How comforting these words are to us! Weighed down by unrealistic expectations, heavy responsibilities, and nagging guilt of sins committed and imagined, we cannot bear life’s demands. Admitting our false sense of wisdom and our failure to shoulder our own burdens, we hear the voice of the Savior.

11:30 *my yoke is easy* – Jesus is not saying that life is easy, but afflictions, the cross and suffering simple drive Christian closer to Jesus.

Jesus has carried all our sins and sorrows to the cross. His presence and forgiveness lightens every load. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Testimonies of the Truth console me, which wonderfully raise up those whom they make humble, instruct while they humiliate. Thus this same Hand that casts me down raises me up again and makes me sing with joy...This marvel the word of God, living and efficacious, produces” (SLSB, p. 62). (TLSB)

Christ calls his followers to a life of service in the Kingdom, but, unlike the rule of the Pharisees, this yoke is good/easy (*chrēstos*) and my burden (*phortion*) is light (*elaphron*). How different is this from attempts to justify ourselves? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Crosses we are called upon to bear on account of our loyalty to our Savior are faith-strengthening experiences, for they help us to understand what Christ endured for us, and we have our Lord’s promise that he will give us the strength to endure them and that he will make them channels for all kinds of blessings. The more faithfully we follow Christ, the easier his yoke and the lighter his burden becomes.

We take his yoke upon us joyfully, seeking ways to serve him in home, neighborhood, church, and vocation. We receive his rest that refreshes us for daily service and await the rest which belongs to the people of God.

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Ephesians 2:10 is doable because it follows Ephesians 2:8-9.

Ephesians 2:8-9, “⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.”

11:25–30 The thing hidden from the wise and understanding is God’s gracious plan of salvation, the message that both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed. Jesus’ contemporaries by and large rejected Him, preferring to live under the heavy yoke of the Law as the way to salvation. Jesus invites us to receive the yoke of the Gospel, which guarantees true rest. • Dearest Jesus, I praise You that when I am yoked to You, no burden is too heavy. Amen. (TLSB)