



THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Lesson 8 - Study Questions

Matthew 11:1-30; 12:1-32

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 11:1-19

NOTE: As today's lesson begins, Jesus sends his disciples on their missions while he goes away to teach and preach in their towns (verse 1). The next section of the gospel (sometimes referred to as "Book 3") deals with the growing opposition to Jesus among the Jewish leadership and among some of the Galileans. "The unbelief of the chosen people toward their own Messiah begins to be seen here and will last through the end of the gospel. The struggle between belief and unbelief means that miracles decrease in number, the line between disciples and enemies hardens, and the narrative section is filled with questions, dispute stories, defense, and counterattacks on the part of Jesus." *Meier*

As a reminder, the description of the structure of Matthew used by our Collegeville Commentary (p.10) divided the gospel into 6 "books" with Matthew acting as a storyteller.

1. While Jesus and the disciples are teaching and preaching, John the Baptist is in Herod's prison (verse 2). From there John sent his disciples to ask Jesus a question. After reading verses 2-5 briefly summarize the following:

What did John the Baptist want his disciples to ask Jesus?

How did Jesus respond to their inquiry?

NOTE: John knew that Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 3:13-17). He sent his disciples to Jesus so that they could shed their mistaken notions about the kind of Messiah to expect, and come to recognize Jesus. *Navarre Bible*

2. In verses 7-9 Jesus spoke to the crowd about their expectations of John the Baptist when they went out to the desert to see him. Jesus then confirms that John fulfills the prophecies of Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1. Briefly describe one of these prophecies.

3. Verses 11-15 describe why John the Baptist is the Elijah-like prophet, the promised anointed messenger of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). Jesus asks the crowd if they are willing to accept this finishing with “whoever has ears ought to hear.” What do you think Jesus is emphasizing with this last phrase?

4. Jesus proceeds with a parable in verses 16-17 comparing “this generation” to children who refuse to play with another group, no matter the game. The crowd, represented by the children in the parable, sit in judgment, rejecting John and Jesus. From the last sentence of verse 19, by what is “wisdom” (Jesus) vindicated?

NOTE: “God’s Wisdom is so powerful that it is personified in the Old Testament as “Lady Wisdom” (Prov 1–9) and again in the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24). Wisdom ranks among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isa 11:2-3). Through divine wisdom, God grants us a sharing in his very own eternal wisdom. It is as though he hands us his pair of spectacles through which to see the world. *Catholic Exchange*, “*Who is Wisdom?*”

5. CONNECTION: “Jesus is the teacher-rabbi, the wise person who masters the skill to impart counsel to those followers who are open to the difficult task of living out God’s wisdom. Biblical wisdom consists first in a choice...whether or not to follow God’s will...rather than wisdom gleaned from our own life experiences.” (*America Magazine*, “*Biblical Wisdom Is the Skill We Need Today*”) Recall a time when you have received wise advice and made your choice based on what you believed was God’s will.

Please pray and reflect on this Thomas Merton prayer.

A Prayer of Unknowing

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that, if I do this You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen. – *Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude*

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 11:20-30

6. With verse 20, Jesus begins to reproach the people of cities in which he had preached and done amazing miracles of healing. What is the reason for his reproach?

7. The towns that he mentioned in verses 20-24 are cities in Galilee (see map, page 159, in the Commentary). While not a comprehensive list of towns in which he performed miracles, Capernaum and Bethsaida were certainly among those with important miracles. Choose one of the following references and briefly describe the miracle performed.

Mark 2:1-12 (Capernaum)-

Mark 8:22-26 (Bethsaida)-

Luke 7:1-10 (Capernaum)-

NOTE: The city of Chorazin is not mentioned specifically in relation to miracles; however, it was among the cities of Galilee in which Jesus most likely walked, preached and healed. Tyre and Sidon were considered pagan/Gentile cities. Jesus warns that the cities which he decries are no better than Sodom (Genesis 19).

8. Beginning with verse 25 Jesus offers a prayer of praise, stressing the mystery of the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father, and Jesus' unique role as revealer. What are some reasons a "childlike" nature could enable us to more easily receive and embrace the Word of God?

9. In the next section entitled "The Gentle Mastery of Christ" (NABRE), Jesus invites all those who "labor and are burdened." Complete verses 29-30. (Good memory verse)

Take my yoke upon you

for I am meek and

and you will find

For my yoke is easy,

THINK: Prayerfully consider verses 28-29, and what it means to you to offer up your burdens to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

10. CONNECTION: We speak of the “peace of Christ,” which is found by those who “take up his “yoke.” “This yoke cannot be borne with arrogance, presumption, or pride, but only with meekness and humbleness of heart.” (*Pope Francis*) In what ways do you share the peace of Christ with others, and in so doing, do you ever feel that the “yoke” of living as a Christian is heavy?

Read and record Isaiah 41:10, and offer all you have, burdens as well as gifts, to the Lord.

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 12:1-14

NOTE: Following the destruction of the first temple in 587 B.C. and during the exile, the Sabbath gained importance as one way the displaced Jews maintained their identity while they lived among strangers. By Jesus’ time, keeping the Sabbath was an essential part of Jewish life...lists of rules were drawn up by rabbis. Penalties were enforced for breaking the law. As a result, a day set apart for rest in God’s image had turned into a day of obligation, stripped of its meaning and intended effect. *Cavins and Christmyer*

11. From verses 1-5 briefly describe what happened.

Jesus and the disciples were going through a field on the sabbath and

The Pharisees were upset because

Jesus reminded the Pharisees that King David and his companions also

And on the sabbath priests serving in the temple

NOTE: When Jesus says “something greater than the temple is here” he may mean:

(1) Jesus may be referring to His own divine identity and His authority that surpasses the Temple authority

(2) He may be referring to His community of disciples who will become, led by St. Peter, the foundation of the New Covenant Church

(3) He may be referring to the ministry the disciples share with Him in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom. Or his statement may be referring to all three. *Agape*

12. In verses 7-8 what is Jesus trying to convey to the Pharisees and his disciples, and to us today?

13. The second sabbath controversy begins with verse 9 as Matthew tells us, “Moving on from there, Jesus went into their synagogue” where he beheld a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees begin to question him even before he heals the man. What phrase or phrases from verse 10 suggests the developing animosity that the Pharisees held for Jesus?

14. Once again Jesus answers their question with a question: “Which one of you who has a sheep that falls into a pit on the sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable a person is than a sheep.” Then he restores the man’s hand. How did the Pharisees react? (verse 14)

15. CONNECTION: How extraordinary that among the commandments is one directing us to set aside a day to rest and worship. Keeping the sabbath, or the Lord’s Day, isn’t just a “day off.” It is a day to make special time remembering God’s gifts of his Son, the establishment of the New Covenant, and Jesus’ death and resurrection. What is one way that you can more fully fulfill this special commandment?

Read and record Hebrews 4:9-10 and today make an intentional effort to make Sunday a day of rest and to have an awareness of God’s constant presence in your life every day.

NOTE: After Jesus’ Resurrection, the Jewish (Saturday) Sabbath that was established on the last day of the first creation (Genesis 2:1-3) was replaced by the “Lord’s Day” (Sunday), the first day of the new creation in Christ Jesus (Rev 1:10). It was a day of “rest” in which Christians joined together in the celebration of the Risen Savior and in the participation of the sacred meal of the New Covenant, the Eucharist. (see also CCC 2175)

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 12:15-21

16. When Jesus realized that the Pharisees were planning his death, “he withdrew from that place.” (verse 15) Many people followed him, and he cured them all, but he warned the crowd not to make him known. Read John 7:6-8 and briefly summarize the possible reason for this.

17. In verse 18-21, Matthew cites the servant song from Isaiah 42:1-9, which begins with the words “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight...” Record the confirmation of this prophecy from:

Matthew 3:17

Matthew 17:5

18. From verses 19 and 20, what words speak to you of the peaceful way in which Jesus will accomplish the will of God?

19. Verse 21 ends with the phrase “And in his name, the Gentiles will hope.” Comment on how these words of Isaiah reflect Jesus as hope for the world.

20. CONNECTION: Today we live in a society which has been termed a “culture of violence” driven by a general lack of respect for life. Yet, when we read Matthew, we can see the light of Christ shining in the darkness. The peace of Christ rests in each of us. What can we do individually to be peacemakers and spread hope?

The Prayer of St. Francis was made into the familiar hymn, “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.” Pick a phrase or verse and let those thoughts lead you into prayer today.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 12:22-32

NOTE: In this section of Chapter 12, Jesus will tell the Pharisees “Whoever is not with me is against me.” One must either recognize that Jesus drives out demons by the Spirit of God and join with Jesus, or attribute Jesus’ powers to Satan and join with those who are against Jesus. Jesus also warns that “whoever does not gather with me scatters.” This is the image of a flock of sheep that is either gathered with a shepherd or scattered in the wilderness. Jesus’ warning is an invitation to gather with him, to come to him (11:28) and enter into the reign of God. *George Martin, “Bringing the Gospel of Matthew to Life”*

21. In verses 22-24 we read that Jesus cured a person who was blind, mute and considered a demoniac. While the people were astounded, the Pharisees used this healing to accuse Jesus of receiving power from “Beelzebub, the prince of demons.” The crowd appeared confused and unsure of Jesus’ identity. What question did they ask?

22. The Pharisees are seeking to ruin Jesus’ reputation by associating him with the power of evil. Jesus knows what they are thinking and immediately defends himself using several short parables as examples. Briefly explain one of the following defensive arguments.

A kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and no house or town divided against itself can stand.

And if Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself; how, then, will his kingdom stand?

NOTE: The “kingdom” or “house” to which Jesus referred was Israel, divided and oppressed by the religious leaders appointed to uphold God’s Word and his will and those willing to follow the Word. This same topic was later the theme of a speech by Abraham Lincoln, “A Divided House,” which became one of his most famous.

23. Jesus continues his argument in verse 27 reminding the Pharisees that they had exorcists among their ranks (“your own people,” in some places translated as “your sons”) and thus were in no position to accuse him. He continues with his examples of the clash of two kingdoms. Who or what do you think is represented by the following?

The strong man

His goods

The thief

24. Jesus warns the Pharisees of their mortal error in pitting themselves against God by opposing him. He warns them against “the unforgivable sin,” blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. (verses 31-32) Refer to the Commentary, page 72, and note what they consciously refuse to do.

25. CONNECTION: Those who witnessed or participated in Jesus’ healings would have wanted to share their good news, but the rising antagonism of the Pharisees could have been confusing and even frightening. We as Christians, knowing the truth of Christ’s death and resurrection may sometimes feel hesitant about sharing the good news among non-Christians. How comfortable are you speaking about your faith... “making him known” and on what might this depend?

Read and record 1 Peter 3:15 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

FINAL QUESTION for the WEEK

How will this lesson help you to become more confident at spreading the gospel message to others?

Read pages 65-73 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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