

07/09/2023 Matthew 11:16-30 "Come to Me Little Children and I will Give You Rest."

Background

For a couple of weeks, I have shared **discipleship**. The disciple is a **follower of Jesus**, being transformed by learning, growing, and joining in the Lord's mission. And they are disciple-making disciples. And we saw Jesus send out the twelve disciples in Matthew 10 for two weeks.

As we move into chapter 11, v1 tells us that the Lord continues to teach and preach in the villages of Galilee. Then, the story begins with the appearance of John the Baptist. He had doubts and sent his disciples to Jesus, questioning, *"Are You the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"* (v3)

Q. Why did he ask that? He had been imprisoned in Herod's dungeon for several months because of his brave and righteous deeds - pointing out King Herod's wicked and immoral behavior, stealing his brother's wife.

John was the forerunner of Jesus, who came to "proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isa 61:1). Nevertheless, the Messiah seemed to care nothing about him. He was confused about the Lord's inaction. And the people have largely ignored or forgotten John's ministry and negatively judged it. The same thing occurred to the Messiah; he prepared the way.

He needed to know for sure if Jesus was the real Messiah. It is the same for us. Who Jesus really is is more important than the circumstances of our lives.

So, Jesus testified about Himself (v2-6), saying, "God blesses those who do not fall away because of Me." (v6) And John the Baptist (v7-15), "of all who ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist" (v11), "he is Elijah who was to come." (v14). However, many people still do not know much about John and the Lord to whom he testified, and they reacted incorrectly.

With that background, we see three parts in today's text: 1) The people's negative Response to the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus with a parable. (v16-19) 2) It's actual cases from three actual cities in Galilee (v20-24), and 3) Then, the Lord's fantastic invitation to them. (v25-30)

1. The people's negative Response to Jesus and John the Baptist. (v16-19)

Now, let's see from v16 that Jesus explains the people's response to John and His ministry in parables. ¹⁶ **"To what can I compare this generation?"**

The Lord describes what the people of this generation are like, who rejected John and Himself.

They are like children sitting in the marketplaces, - a central area of cities and towns where people went to do business and socialize, also the best place for children to play, who **and calling out to others**:

¹⁷ **"We played the pipe (wedding songs) for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, (funeral song) and you did not mourn."**

They played with each other doing mainly two games, "wedding" and "funeral," which were the two main social events in people's lives.

The children didn't have computer games, cartoons, iPhones, sports activities, social media, etc. So, mimicking adults was the best play activity. [My story](#)) I did that, too, when I was little. I remember a little girl in the neighborhood telling me she was the bride and I was the groom. I wasn't very interested and reluctant, but I accepted the role. So, she would serve us food, and we would eat it together.

They expected everyone to dance when the imaginary flute was played and to mourn when they played the imaginary funeral song.

There were always holdouts (peevish, irritable) who refused to accompany the rest of the children, nothing the other children did satisfy them. Jesus portrayed His unbelieving contemporaries as spoiled children and how they responded to John the Baptist and Himself.

1) John the Baptist.

He says John the Baptist first, whose message and way of life were in the funeral mode.

¹⁸ **For John came neither eating nor drinking**, which are basic human needs and pleasures of life.

Well, John, dressed in camel's hair, living in the desert, fasted often, but he ate locusts and wild honey. (very healthy food). **and they say, 'He has a demon.'**

The people of that generation complained about John, who, rather than dance, lived an ascetic life and criticized the luxurious life of a kingdom. In addition, his message continually emphasized repentance and judgment severely and harshly for corresponding good works. They thought John was crazy because a demon possessed him.

They tolerated him for a short while, but they were pushed to either accept and follow him or reject and rebuke him as he demanded, not to be neutral uncommitted bystanders.

Many people came to be baptized by John. Still, we can imagine that many people reacted negatively to John then, especially the religious leaders, and the political establishment did not treat him favorably.

2) Jesus Himself

Then, how about Jesus? ¹⁹ **The Son of Man came eating and drinking, ...**

Just as John lived in the funeral mode, Jesus lived in the wedding mode in their eyes.

Well, when the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus, "Why don't Your disciples fast like we do and the Pharisees do?" He told them, "Do wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Of course not." (Matt 9:14,15). We also know that His first miracle was to change water into wine at a wedding in Cana.

and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

It was true that Jesus was a friend of "sinners," eating with them, which meant having fellowship. Still, they exaggerated His normal activities identifying Him with the outcasts' sin and wickedness.

Like children stubbornly complaining to others, they critique John for his austerity and conscience-indicting call to repentance. Then, they turn around and complain that Jesus' style is too celebratory and welcoming of unseemly, under-serving companions.

William Barclay says about this, "*The plain fact is their saying of John the Baptist and Jesus is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening,*" rather than finding out whether it is true or not.

This generation's response to Jesus

Many people evaluate Jesus through the lens of their own desires and beliefs. They demand from Jesus what they want, and when they don't get it, they turn away, so they fail to respond to the Messiah appropriately. However, responding to Jesus and following Him is not about aligning Jesus with my own hopes.

We need to examine whether what I am asking of the Lord is what He wants us to hear and give. There have been many false prophets throughout history: whose message was peace in the face of God's impending judgment, victory in the face of defeat in war, and telling people whatever their itching ears want to hear (2 Tim 4:3) rather than what God wanted them to hear.

Q. Why are there many of them? Because many people follow their own desires and look for those kinds of messages!

The Lord says, **But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.** (by its results) Jesus is described as the Wisdom of God in the OT (Prov 8:23,24) and the NT. (1Co 1:24). And His actions as Wisdom confirm Him as Israel's Messiah.

2. The Response of three evil cities (v20-24).

Now, we see the fate of those who didn't respond to the Wisdom right, three actual cities in Galilee.

²⁰ **Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of His miracles had been performed,**

Jesus did many miracles in Galilee cities. We see the list in v5 "The blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor," including—the story of feeding five thousand.

The purpose of the miracles was to let them know Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, and so believe in Him and repent, that is, to turn to God. The same message of John and Jesus is "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come!" (Matt 3:2).

However, **because they did not repent.** The Lord emphasizes that though He had worked the hardest in Galilee, the cities were unrepentant and unresponsive.

He explicitly mentions the three cities. ²¹**"Woe to you, doom to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens?**

The Bible doesn't tell us much about Chorazin, but the other two are familiar places. A fishing village Bethsaida is the hometown of Philip, Andrew, and Peter. Capernaum, a beautiful, prosperous fishing and trade city, was Galilee's capital and the headquarters of the Lord's Galilee ministry. Peter's house was there, and it was called "Jesus' own town." (Matt 9:1)

These are called "Triangle of the Gospel" because Jesus focused on His ministry for nearly two years among three years of His public ministry.

The Lord warns Chorazin and Bethsaida together. **For 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.**

Tyre and Sidon, - the nation of that wicked queen of North Israel, Baal worshiper Jezebel, who nearly turned all of Israel into a nation of Baal, even mentioned in the book of Revelation to be destroyed-, characterized pagan, Gentile corruption, and worthlessness, noted for their immorality and godlessness. So, many prophets prophesized their doom.

Yet, the Lord says, "They would have been on their knees in a minute if they had seen half of the powerful miracles Chorazin and Bethsaida have seen." (MSG). The Lord says, at Judgment Day, Tyre and Sidon will be better off than Chorazin and Bethsaida.

What about Capernaum? Jesus says, "Will you be lifted to the heavens?" **No, you will go down to Hades.** which means judgment and hell. **For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.**

Sodom is a synonym for moral depravity. If you ask the Jews at that time where the most evil city in the world was, it's Sodom, where God judged those who did the most evil things. It has the infamous

distinction of lending its name (in sodomy) to the most extreme forms of homosexuality and sexual bestiality.

Jesus says, its people would have repented their sins, turned to God, and been spared destruction. He says even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than Capernaum. The sin of Capernaum, which had the privilege of meeting the Messiah and witnessing His ministry, was greater than the sin of Sodom.

Q. Why was Jesus so harsh to those cities? Is it because they are morally and socially evil people? No. As far as is known, most of the people of Capernaum were upright, law-abiding, and decent. Did they hate Jesus and persecute Him? No. It's the opposite! They liked Jesus; they were enthusiastic about Him, wanted Him, and even tried to force Him to be their King! They never persecuted, mocked, ridiculed Jesus, ran Him out of town, or threatened His life. Few of them even criticized Him.

They probably thought they were receiving Jesus! Why not? He is a famous miracle worker, healing diseases and feeding thousands. So, then, why was Jesus so harsh to them? We have two hints in the text.

First, they are unrepentant people. That means most Galileans did not respond to Christ at all as Christ intended them to do. They might've understood what Jesus preached and taught but never reflected the truth into their inner selves and souls. However, they had no desire to be His disciples as they wrestled with what He was really saying and how it should affect their entire beings and daily lives.

Second, "Will you be lifted, exalted to the heavens?" They were the ones who elevated themselves above the Lord. Not Jesus the Lord, but they were the ones who decided how to set their relationship with Jesus, meaning that what they want and require of Jesus is more important than what Jesus wants to give and requires them to be.

A question to consider is this, "*Are you a fan or a follower of Jesus?*" Although they had enough evidence, information, and the direct teaching of Jesus, they didn't accept Him as His way of calling or believe in His proclaiming Himself. They were not violent or immoral and may be fans of the Lord. Still, they have an attitude of spiritual ignorance and indifference, not believing or treating Him the way Jesus wants them to.

3. The Response of the disciples (little ones) (v25-30).

Although the Lord had to warn them severely, He abruptly broke into a prayer of praise because He could remember those who called "little children." He prays openly so that others will

listen to them because it will be His great invitation: "Come to Me and I will give you Rest" to anybody who responds to Him right.

1) Who God is, how He relates to Jesus, what pleases Him

²⁵ **At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,**

The Lord makes them known who God is and how He relates to Him before He invites them. Jesus calls God "Abba" (αββα), the Aramaic word for father, "daddy" in English. Jews would never call God Father because it was blasphemy. But the Lord, calling God "Abba," shows us His intimate and unique relationship with His Father. Yet, He calls Abba "Lord of heaven and earth," saying God is the Creator of the universe, almighty God.

And the reason He praises God is, saying, **because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned,** God's plan of salvation, hidden in heaven, especially the knowledge of the Son of God, is concealed from those who think themselves wise and clever, who think they can save themselves by their human wisdom, resources, and achievement, who rely on themselves, represented by the Pharisees.

They are like some Pharisees who asked Jesus, "Are you saying we're blind?" To whom, Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty, but you remain guilty because you claim you can see." (John 9:40,41). These people do not know what they don't know and see.

They are not only nonbelievers of Jesus: These are those who do not understand God's revelation, intentions, plans, and heart about Jesus as fully recorded in the Bible and who understand and relate to the Lord with fragmented and insufficient knowledge that they have heard and read here and there and on their own understanding and judgment. The Lord says these are the very people God hides His truth.

But God **and revealed them** Christ and His teachings **to little children**, simply babies. These are childlike, regardless of their age or experience of knowledge: those who have a pure heart for God, total dependence, humility, and a desire for the divine milk. In Matthew, the true disciples are called little children.

²⁶ **Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.** It is the Father's pleasure that the Lord's disciples, little children, have come to realize Him, His ministry, and God through Him.

So, we saw who God is, how He relates to Jesus, and what pleases Him.

2) Who Jesus is, God Revealer

Since Jesus Christ is at the heart of the truth that God reveals to them, He tells them who He is and how He relates to His Father.

²⁷ **"All things have been committed to me by my Father.** Jesus received all authority that belonged to God from His Father.

Q. What authority? As Jesus said in Matthew 28: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me," the authority sovereignly controls everything on earth and in heaven, visible and invisible, as Creator and Sustainer: Authority over our life, death, family, time, history, nature, illnesses and diseases, and demons: Authority to forgive sins and give eternal life.

The Lord not only received the Father's power, but He dwells in a unique and special relationship with the Father.

No one (truly) knows the Son except the Father the way the Father does, and no one knows the Father except the Son the way the Son does. The word "knows" in Greek "*epiginosko*" means knowing exactly, knowing through personal and direct relationships, and experiential knowing.

So, in His intimate and unique Father-Son relationship operation, little children can know the Father because they are **and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.**

Only the disciples of Jesus have come to know the heavenly Father through the Son's revelation of the Father; as John says, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known" (John 1:18). Only through Jesus will we truly "know" "*epiginosko*" God! Jesus defines eternal life as "that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

3) The invitation of Jesus

Now, by openly telling who God is, the Lord of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ, who received all authority, and their intimate and unique relationships, Jesus the Lord calls people, including those He warned.

²⁸ **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**

The Lord calls people to Himself. This is a call to personal and intimate relationship with Him.

Q. Who are they? They are all who are weary (tired) which refers to a state of exhaustion: physically, mentally, and spiritually drained.

That is a human life condition given since Adam's sin, which resulted in God saying, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil, you will eat food from it all the days of your life." (Gen 3:17). Not only do humans have to work hard to maintain their lives, but also to keep healthy, raise children, grow gardens, and maintain relationships with people, in which almost every activity, even for our religious life.

The burdened, in the context, are those who have despaired of achieving God's standard of righteousness through their own efforts. Jesus told the Pharisees, "They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden." (Matt 23:4).

They are also problems we passively and unintentionally face in various life situations in a sinful, evil, unjust, and unreasonable world. All humans are in this category. Isn't it? Although people always try to figure out that weariness and burden, the thirst and hunger for God of real by pursuing any desires, entertainment, satisfaction, enjoyment, approval of people, accomplishment, or collections, in reality, all these things make us realize more that we are still in our spiritual weariness and emptiness and burden.

Obviously, the state of "weary and burdened" comes from the absence of personal, intimate, and experiential KNOWING God and the Son.

To them, the Lord promises "I will give you rest," which is more of our heart and soul than physical rest; as Jesus says in v29, "You will find rest for your souls," **"a real rest, true satisfaction of your souls and life."**

Q. Then, how can we get that rest? The Lord says two conditions.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, ... and you will find rest for your souls.

A yoke is a device placed around working animals' necks that helps carry a load or obey their master's commands. It is also used as a burden to put a yoke on a pair of animals. So the first condition for rest is "To take the Lord's yoke."

The other condition is this: "Learn from Me." The Greek word "learn" ("*manthano*") is closely related to "disciple" ("*mathetes*"), reinforcing the truth that Christ's disciples are His submissive learners.

The MSG translation makes much sense of it: "Take My yoke upon you" as "Walk with Me and work with Me." "Learn from Me" as "Watch how I do it." I liked it so much, and still!

The Lord says **³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**

The way to follow Jesus is not to remove our yoke but to take the Lord's yoke and walk with Him. The word "Easy" (*chréastos*) is used more as "good," "useful," "well-fitted," etc. In other words, it refers to a very appropriate and useful state for carrying a load of which the yoke reflects the Lord's consideration.

Q. Wait a minute. Is Jesus' yoke easy and His burden really light? Does He not commands, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:20)? Also,

following Jesus does not guarantee an easier life.

Nevertheless, it is possible. Why? How? The Lord says **for I am gentle and humble in heart**, What if the one who has all the power, who walks with you and works with you in all things, is tyrannical, coercive, takes advantage of the weak, bullies you, is indifferent, is cold? Wouldn't that be terrifying to even imagine?

Not for Jesus our Lord! Because His heart, the center and source of inner life, thoughts, and will, as well as feelings, wishes, and aspirations, is gentle, kind, and humble. He is God, but "but didn't think so much of Himself... but made Himself nothing, became human" (Phil 2:5). Why? To understand us, sinners, all our weariness and burdens, weaknesses and inadequacies.

Because He cares for us, and "He is not unable to empathize with our weaknesses, who has been tempted in every way, just as we are." (Heb 4:15). And while we were yet sinners, He gave His life for us.

Therefore, taking the Lord's yoke upon us, walking and working with Him, and learning from Him by watching how He does all things, which means to be His disciples, is a path on which we will find rest for our souls. The rest that the Lord gives is not rest without work but the satisfaction and peace that comes from realizing and living with Him, and in the eschatological sense, rest in the eternal Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

Today, we have looked at people's responses to the Lord's ministry. Many have seen and experienced the Lord doing wonderful things only God can do and have heard blessed truths hidden in heaven. But many of them, in their own judgment and knowledge, in the relationship with the Lord they had set up for themselves, not the Lord, let down the possibility of the blessed and wonderful life the Lord truly wanted to give.

On the other hand, the little children, the disciples of Jesus, received them all with a pure heart, humility, and faith, as much as the Lord made Himself open and known and became those who "knew" God. God is so pleased with them.

Q. Are you wise and learned before the Lord or like little children? No matter how you have lived your life so far, the Lord still invites you to come to Him, to take His yoke upon you, and to learn from Him. As the Lord has authority over all things, His yoke covers everything we go through in life, big and small. When we walk and work with Him, He provides an easy, good, and light yoke by showing and teaching us how He works in all things in our life.

The images of me taking the Lord's yoke upon me and walking and working with Him, watching

how He is doing in all things, and just following along have given me great relief and freedom in everything I go through in my ministry and daily life. Because, like all of you, I experience weariness and burden in my day-to-day work and life. Because I sometimes don't know what to do or how to do it.

I always had the idea in the back of my mind that the ministry is always challenging, and I have to endure it, but this word of the Lord has given me new hope that "*as long as I take His yoke and go with Him, the ministry doesn't have to be so hard,*" and last week, I could live a better life than the week before.

The Class Meeting) I want and have to recommend you to join the Class Meeting. There we get to share, see, and learn about God at work in each other's lives as we honestly share how we've experienced the Lord in our walk and work with Him and the areas He's working on in us.

I am probably the biggest beneficiary of the Class Meeting. I've found myself thinking about, relying on, and walking with the Lord more often. We need each other, and by walking with the Lord together, we are being built up to be better disciples of the Lord. So, I ask you prayerfully consider it, and I hope to see you on Thursday at 7 pm.

Now, I'm going to close this time. Q. What wearinesses and burdens are you struggling with and trying to carry alone? The Lord calls you, "Come, little children, be My disciples." So, why don't you come to the Lord who gives true rest to your souls and lives and take up the easy, good, and light yoke that He offers so that your life may be a walk with Him?