

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

sin. He not only purified the conscience but also provided the Gospel whereby the whole man can be transformed into a strong, stable character. What is most remarkable is that Jesus held all sinners responsible for the mess into which they get themselves (Cf. Jn. 5:14; Mt. 12:45), especially drunkards (Lk. 21:34; Ro. 13:13; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). Accordingly, if people were merely sick due to some physical weakness related to causes not dependent upon their choice, then, presumably, Jesus could not justly hold them responsible for the bad results of their actions. So, the fact that He judges men responsible for their drunkenness, lays the charge for failure, not merely upon constitutional weaknesses, but upon the quality of the heart of the individual. Rather than become a scientist or a doctor to heal all mankind by giving out useful remedies or advice on physical health, He dealt with man's fundamental problem: his relation with God and man. If THIS problem be not solved, physical or mental healing if only to live a few more years in constant danger of being corrupted again, solves nothing.

### HOW DID JESUS ESCAPE BECOMING AN ALCOHOLIC?

As completely out of place as this query may seem, yet to answer it may lead us to grasp something of the answer to our other question, "Should Jesus' disciple drink wine?" How is it possible to harmonize the potentially catastrophic danger that alcohol represents both to the individual and to society, with Jesus' practice of taking wine? The secret lies in being guided by all the moral directives that prompted Jesus. By taking His view of the world, by having a conscience molded by the will of God and by showing the same forthright obedience to the Father as did He, by knowing no other dependence than upon the daily provision of the Father, one will be pleased to learn that he is not troubled by those diseases that excess and indulgence bring in their wake.

#### Section 25

### JESUS CONDEMNS UNBELIEVING CITIES AND INVITES "BABES" TO COME TO HIM

## I. HEARTBROKEN CONDEMNATION

20. Then began he to unbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.
21. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
22. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.
23. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down into Hades; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day.
24. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

## II. HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY

25. At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes:
26. yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.
27. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him*.

## II. HEARTFELT COMPASSION

28. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.
30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did God "reveal things" to babes and "hide" them from the wise? If God hides truth from anybody, is that not partiality? Prove your answer.
- b. How is Jesus' yoke easy?

- c. What kind of labor and burdens do you think Jesus was promising to relieve?
- d. Why and how will it be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom than for Capernaum?
- e. What do you think Jesus expected of the people in Capernaum to do, that they did not do, which, in turn, moved Him to upbraid them for not repenting?
- f. What is repentance?
- g. Have you ever wished that you could have been personally present with Jesus during His ministry in those happy, golden days in Capernaum along the shores of blue Galilee? What grand illusions does this particular section shatter, bringing such dreaming back to reality and prepares us for eternity and judgment?
- h. Do you think that this section teaches us to believe that there will be degrees of punishment for the wicked? On what basis do you answer as you do? If you say yes, then does that not picture God as showing favoritism in judgment, using one standard for Tyre and Sidon and Sodom while requiring another of the privileged cities of Galilee? If you say no, then how do you interpret the words "more tolerable"?
- i. Should we revise our theology and our hymns that teach us, "Jesus never fails". It appears that Jesus has clearly failed to win these famous Galilean cities for God's Kingdom, even though most of His time and work had been spent within their precincts. How do you explain this failure?
- j. Is Jesus meaning to say that not a single soul in these three cities had repented? Give proof for the answer you give.
- k. In what way can a city or a people be "exalted to heaven"? In what way can they be "brought down to Hades"? Where is "Hades"?
- l. Jesus thanks God for hiding important truth from the "wise and understanding". It would seem to some that this is putting a premium on ignorance and degrading the advancement in knowledge and culture. This is a long-held charge laid against Christianity. How would you interpret these words of Jesus in such a way as would show that, in reality, Jesus actually holds no brief for ignorance and unwillingness to seek truth?
- m. Even though a man may be very well-developed intellectually, when he views God's way of saving the world as nonsense, what then should we say about him and his wisdom? Should we reject all the truth that he knows, even though he rejects the gospel we

know? Is he a fool for rejecting the gospel? If so, how far has he lost the key to truth, i.e. can he continue learning truth about nature? Will he be hampered in learning the fundamental truth about himself and human nature? How far will he err or fail to grasp the fundamental truths of psychology or sociology?

- n. Do you think that Jesus accepts the possibility that the people He describes as "wise and understanding" really are wise and understanding? What makes you say that?
- o. What is there so praiseworthy about people whom Jesus describes as "babes"?
- p. Should we get excited or be upset by the attacks upon Christianity launched by the intelligentsia of our day? If so, in what way? If not, why not?
- q. What fundamental attitude is Jesus requiring before participation in His Kingdom is even possible?
- r. Why should Jesus be thankful to God that some folks are actually unable to see the truth ("I thank you that you have hidden these things from the wise.")? How can any sane person be thankful for this?
- s. If Jesus be *only a mere man*, what must we conclude about the grandiloquent claims He is making for Himself in this section? If Jesus be God come in the flesh, what must we do about the claims He makes upon us in this section?
- t. After reading the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' other sermons on the high cost of discipleship (for example, Luke 14:26-33), can we still take Him seriously, when He claims that His yoke is the easy one, HIS burden the light one? If so, how?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus began then to censure those cities where He had done most of His miracles, simply because they remained apathetic and unrepentant. "How sorry I am for you, Chorazin! You too are to be pitied, Bethsaida! For if the wicked cities, Tyre and Sidon, had seen the miracles performed to demonstrate God's authority that you have seen, their people would have turned to God long ago, wearing the sackcloth of shame and with ashes on their head to show their humility. But let me tell you that it is going to go easier on judgment day for those wicked cities than for you!

"And you, Capernaum, do you suppose that I will exalt you to a position of imminence, power and importance, simply because I have preached in your midst? No! As a city you shall die! Had the

miracles taken place in the vilest city you can think of—even Sodom, that I have performed in your streets, yes, even Sodom would still be standing today! But I can assure you that it will go much easier for the whole land of Sodom than for you!”

At that time Jesus prayed, “Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who suppose themselves to be learned and wise, and for showing it to humble, teachable people. Yes, Father, I thank you that you were pleased to do it that way.

“My Father has turned everything over to me. No one really knows me, except the Father, and no one really knows God but me! And I am willing to reveal God to anyone I want to. So, come to me, all you who are worn-out and loaded down with impossible burdens. I will give you real rest. Here: wear my yoke: let me teach you. You will find me gentle with you and genuinely humble. You will actually find the soul refreshment you are seeking. Last but not best, in the final analysis, you will find that, of all the yokes you will ever know, my yoke is the easy one; my burden is really the light one.”

## SUMMARY

Jesus denounced those privileged cities where He had spent the major part of His earthly ministry, because they remained undecided and unwilling to turn to God after all His efforts and evidences given to convince them. Wicked cities with less opportunity will not be so severely condemned as those reasonably good cities that had refused to take a positive stand for Jesus. Then, in rapid-fire order, Jesus expresses the rigorous judgment of the Judge Himself, His exultation over the Father’s choice of method. Next He makes the highest possible claim to the knowledge of God by excluding all others. Upon the basis of this claim, He makes the deepest, most sympathetic invitation to the whole human race, while asserting the most incredible humility. He concludes by making the astounding claim that, after all, His way is best.

## NOTES

11:20 **Then began he.** Luke (10:13-16) records this same denunciation pronounced upon the three Galilean cities, however with several noteworthy differences, in connection with the mission of the Seventy. Because of this fact, the chronological unity of Matthew’s

chapter has been doubted. That is, is this condemnation of these cities situated in its proper chronological place? While it is true that Matthew often links together in the same chapter harmoniously organized material from different situations, weaving them into one closely-woven whole, the following suggestions tend to argue that in this case he did not do so:

1. Matthew's version of the denunciation is given in some loose connection with Jesus' Galilean ministry, while Luke makes it clear that the Mission of the Seventy, and the instructions given in connection with it, were given after Jesus had definitely left Galilee for Jerusalem. (Cf. Lk. 9:51, 52; 10:1 "after this")
2. In the commission of the Seventy, the significant omission of the injunction not to enter either Gentile or Samaritan territory (cf. Mt. 10:5, 6) may point to the evangelization of an area containing mixed populations, such as Perea with its Decapolis, without excluding Judea. If this is, in fact, the case, then a different audience for Jesus' remarks, especially this denunciation in Lk. 10:13-15, would naturally permit Jesus to repeat what He had said earlier (Mt. 11:20-24)
3. The fact that Jesus' actual commission of the Seventy includes Luke 10:16, shows that Luke intended to include the denunciation as an integral part of that commission. This is all the more significant in light of the fact that Lk. 10:16 was also said to the Twelve before their mission in Galilee (Mt. 10:40), a fact that tends to confirm the conclusion that Matthew and Luke record similar words spoken on two separate occasions.
4. That they are similar, but not identical expressions, will be seen from the following arrangements:

Matthew:

- a. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- b. Capernaum and Sodom; facts and fate compared.

Luke:

- a. Sodom and any city rejecting the Apostles; fate not connected in any way with Capernaum.
- b. Chorazin and Bethsaida; Tyre and Sidon; facts and fate compared.
- c. Capernaum's fate, not compared with that of Sodom.

Therefore, this condemnation of the unrepentant cities is in its chronological places both here in the Sermon of Matthew 11 as well as in the commission of the Seventy in Luke 10. In that place it is in order for two important reasons:

1. Since His great Galilean ministry would already have been concluded, His words become a warning to any other cities in the virgin territory to which He would send the Seventy, that to reject Jesus or any of His messengers is to invite the same dreadful judgment pending for the Galilean cities that had remained impenitent.
2. Precisely because Jesus would not be permitted the leisure to develop the same friendly rapport with other cities in Palestine, as He had with Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, the people of other cities might be tempted to feel themselves particularly neglected and, hence, at a great disadvantage because they would not be able to witness so many miracles at first hand. So, by uttering, both in Galilee and elsewhere, this fiery judgment upon those privileged towns, Jesus serves notice both to the privileged and underprivileged cities alike that no amount of first-hand acquaintance with Him can take the place of genuine repentance! The miracles, and the proof of them, are important, but not at the expense of the real point of Christ's mission: God was in Christ endeavoring to bring men to their knees in surrender of their lives.

But even having said that this condemnation was uttered in Galilee within earshot of some of the inhabitants of the very cities in question, does not also argue that this chapter is one continuous sermon, since **then began he** may be taken, not as a note of time ("the very next thing Jesus said was . . ."), but could well be Matthew's means of transition from one subject to another. ("Then another thing Jesus said in this same general connection was . . .")

## I. INVINCIBLE UNBELIEF (11:20-24)

### A. IMPENITANCE = UNBELIEF (11:20)

**Then began he to upbraid** (*oneidizein*, "to reproach justifiably," Arndt-Gingrich, 573). **Upbraid** means to rebuke, censure, blame; to charge, accuse or reprove reproachfully. But why would the usually quiet, gentle Jesus be so disturbed? We must feel the ironic contrast in Matthew's introduction: God's part in seeking to save these cities had been **mighty works** done by Jesus. Men's reaction: **they repented not!** Whose conscience would not be

deeply indignant at this obstinate refusal of divine mercy! In Jonah's ministry to Ninevah, the warning of imminent total disaster and the terrifying judgment of God was sufficient to bring vicious pagans like those Assyrians to tremble on their knees before God. By contrast, even the "riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience," by which Jesus' message of mercy and ministry of generous helpfulness were intended to encourage men to change their lives, could not move God's own people! Jesus scolds them, because He knows that a refusal to repent constitutes defiance of the living God! (Cf. Ro. 2:3-6) They were so very unforgivable, for they rejected evidence that would have persuaded some of the wickedest cities in the world! Whereas this same gentle Jesus had spoken many precious promises and would yet offer many yearning invitations to these people, they must now hear the other side of the question: the fiery condemnation and the fearful warnings. They must face what Lenski calls "the mighty and terrible Jesus."

Surprisingly, as Jesus sounds these awesome warnings, we realize that we are standing in the presence of the very Messiah that John the Baptist had been seeking! This entire section (11:20-30) is Jesus' own claim to be the Judge Himself who would one day take up the winnowing shovel to separate the wheat from the chaff. The day would come when He would actually sieze the ax to cut down fruitless trees. And the first among the worthless to go down would be these very cities who had had the finest opportunities to know the truth of God and live by it! In this one stroke, Jesus justifies the OT predictions of the Messiah's justice, clarifies what John longed to see Jesus undertake now and gives us all fair warning, by asserting that He would bring this all to pass. But by His great invitation, He teaches us that the day of mercy and of God's long-suffering is still in effect.

**Cities wherein most of his mighty works were done.**

A phrase like this proves to us once more how very little we know of all that Jesus did. (Cf. Jn. 21:25) Even after a close examination of the recorded incidents in that tri-city area, we must admit that great selectivity has been exercised in eliminating all but the few stories we do have. And though the Evangelists' impression is that these narratives are representative of the rest, yet our knowledge of the samples does not permit us to presume we know all there is to know even about the earthly ministry of our Lord.

**Most of his mighty works** (*hai pleístai dunámeis autoú*). Though *pleístos* is superlative in form, yet in *koiné* Greek, as in



modern popular English, the superlative is used with a much more relative sense than the form suggests. It is used for emotional emphasis (relative use) where we would translate it "very," or "many." (See Robertson-Davis, *Short Grammar*, 206; Arndt-Gingrich, 696; Dana-Mantey, 121) To get a quantitatively precise picture of the miracles wrought there and, at the same time, be faithful to *koiné* usage, we should translate it "many of His works." The word "most" however, carries its proper emotional impact and, simultaneously, vouches for the authenticity of Matthew's work. If he were inventing his story and altering to avoid possible mistakes, he would be unlikely to admit that most of the great miracles of his Messiah resulted in the failure to win those who witnessed them. Yet, if he did consciously say that the major part of Jesus' miracles produced no more than this, then we may rest assured that he is not counterfeiting, and his story true. We must search elsewhere for the explanation behind this admission (that Jesus' works failed to secure repentance in significant cases).

Jesus' ministry there was two-pronged, consisting of action and preaching. (Cf. Ac. 1:1: His "doing" came before his "teaching.") Jesus first established His right to say what He came to reveal, then He preached it.

1. Incidents in the tri-city area:

- a. Jesus moved there with His family and disciples. (Jn. 2:12)
- b. At Cana in the first year of His ministry, He healed the nobleman's son who was dying at Capernaum. (Jn. 4:46-54)
- c. Miraculous catch of fish, called four fishermen, healed many (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5).
- d. In Capernaum the man with the unclean demon liberated on the sabbath in the synagogue (Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- e. Peter's mother-in-law healed that afternoon (Mt. 8; Mk. 1; Lk. 4).
- f. That evening, whole city gathered at door for healing.
- g. Paralytic borne by four men was cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 4).
- h. Centurion's servant healed (Mt. 8; Lk. 7).
- i. Stilling the tempest, with other little boats from cities also present on the lake with Jesus (Mt. 8; Mk. 4:36; Lk. 8).
- j. Jairus' daughter raised from dead (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8).

k. Woman with hemorrhage cured (Mt. 9; Mk. 5; Lk. 8). But mere mighty works alone cannot produce faith, if they are divorced from what the miracle Worker says of Himself. Jesus' miracles could be verified by these very townspeople, but they failed to see that these signs pointed to Jesus' identity. These **mighty works** were in themselves a word from God, saying, "This is my Son: listen to Him!"

2. Some of Jesus' greatest messages were delivered in this area:
  - a. Perhaps the Sermon on the Mount was preached close enough to these cities that at least some of the inhabitants could have heard it.
  - b. The Sermon on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:59).
  - c. Probably also the Message on Human Traditions (Mt. 15; Mk. 7).
  - d. The Sermon on True Greatness, Stumbling-blocks, Mis-treatment and Forgiveness (Mt. 18).

What is the connection between Jesus' miracles and the result He anticipated, i.e. the repentance of these Galileans? His miracles served to lead men to change their lives, by demonstrating Jesus' right to demand that they repent. Since His miracles were evidence of the nearness of the Kingdom of God (Mt. 11:28), the paradox was true: though the Kingdom of God had come nigh to them, yet they remained far from the Kingdom! (Cf. Lk. 10:9-12 with Mk. 12:34) Their continued impenitence, even in the presence of the best evidence of a divine break-through into human history, is the best answer for those who would insist upon the supreme necessity of miraculous manifestations today for convincing the impenitent skeptics. We must not depend upon **mighty works** to convince and convert men today, if the Gospel attested by Christ's own miracles was rejected by men of the same mentality in His day. To paraphrase Abraham's response to the tormented rich man: "No, if they hear not Christ and the Apostles, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead or work other marvelous miracles."

**They repented not** is a tragic epitaph! What could have been the motives that induced these privileged Galileans to justify their failure to repent? Some of the fatal assumptions may have been:

1. "Proximity to the Lord is as acceptable as faith." Physical nearness to Him did not guarantee their repentance nor strengthen their faith. The more distant ministry of John the Baptist had stirred multitudes throughout the nation, but not even Jesus' ministry right in their midst had been able to bring these cities to their knees. In fact, the sheer common-

ness of their fellowship with Him may have dulled their sensitivity to His message and to His mission on their behalf. It is foolish to think that faith would necessarily have been excited in us, or would be stronger than it is, had we been immediate neighbors of the Master and thus witnesses of His life and work. (Analogous cases: Jn. 11:47; 12:37) Here is the moral exception to the proverb: "Seeing is believing." This area had seen many wonders but did not believe the moral significance of them sufficiently to submit to the message based on them.

2. "Morality may be substituted for repentance." The relative morality of these cities seems to have been higher than that of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. They may have even been priding themselves on their relative respectability. Perhaps they even sneered at Jesus' demands that they bow with other common sinners, that they too be born again, repent deeply and sincerely seek the redemption and leadership He offered. They were generally good people; they at least did not try to stone or crucify Jesus. In fact, one could say that they accepted Jesus up to a point. But, for Jesus, that "certain point" cannot exist: He wants all or nothing. He teaches that the greatest sin man can commit is to refuse to believe in Him. And, as far as the so-called "good morality" is concerned, it is not really good after all. A person or a city that retains itself for itself and does not give itself to the Lord, is really wicked! They were too confident that they already pursued the proper course, with God. Their "good conscience" was their most blinding fault. Jesus was not trying to make people more or less good; He was endeavoring to lead them to trust Him to make them perfect! We too may shudder at the sins of others and at the punishment they have incurred, and yet be far more guilty ourselves of crime against God. We may not be violent, sensual people, ready to ridicule or oppose the work of Christ. And yet our own self-righteousness and complacency will cause us to be indifferent to Him, dulling the influence of His ministry, letting Him produce no change in us. Though externally our lives may be more eminently respectable than those whose conduct is openly disreputable, we may be ungodly in a far more deadly way.
3. "Education in godliness, or information, is as good as faith." These cities had enjoyed the distinct opportunity to be edu-

cated directly at the feet of the Master Himself, whom to know was to know the very mind of God! But the mere fact that they had heard many messages and were informed on the nature of God's plans did not release these Galileans from the necessity of trusting Jesus! For, according to the measure of light against which they sinned, so will their judgment be! They enjoyed the utmost opportunity. Now they must face the utmost in responsibility. They forgot the responsibilities of privilege.

4. They may even have supposed that sympathy with the Master's work were equal to repentance. Surely had they lacked some faith in His miraculous power or had they begrudged Him some understanding of His intentions, He would "have done no mighty works there." (Cf. Mt. 13:58; Mk. 5:6) But mere sympathy with His general program to the extent of rejoicing in the evidences of the blossoming of righteousness, or to the extent of agreeing that Jesus was on the right track in bringing God close to men, without submitting to the spiritual demands of His message, is to remain uncommitted, and, in Jesus' sight, ultimately against God. (Cf. 12:30) The sympathy that men show for Jesus' work and their agreement that His Gospel is the best view of life may help us to open their hearts to submit to His rule, but sympathy is not repentance.
5. "Failure to repent is as good as repentance." Christ was relegated to the realm of indifferent. They did not care enough about Him to react. Theirs was the sin of inaction. Many a man's defense before God is no more than this: "But I did not do anything!" But this may be his condemnation, for Jesus had outlined a plan of action. He blamed these favored cities **because they repented not.**

One cannot help wondering whether Jesus' piercing description of that last great Day were not most directly true of these cities: "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart for me, all you workers of iniquity!'" (Lk. 13:26, 27)

**Because they repented not.** To bring these cities to repentance was the Lord's grand desire and the practical goal of His labor. Even though He had lavished blessings upon them and caused much rejoicing, His toil appeared comparatively wasted, because He

could be satisfied with nothing short of repentance. He did not aim to leave His audiences merely richer, only better educated, perhaps more adequately adjusted socially, materially more comfortable. We must notice how little emphasis Jesus put upon the externals of religion. Even though great multitudes from these cities followed Him, they did not surrender their will to that of God. What great emphasis we tend to put on church buildings, budgets, numbers in attendance at worship, in short, mere trappings of religion, even though the people themselves, who are brought into contact with "our religion," do not feel the heavy burden of their responsibility for what they have had the opportunity to know of God! They must never be the same after hearing the voice of God speaking through Jesus! Do men actually hear this voice in our gospel proclamation? So, in our work for Him, we too must not rest content with results that did not please the Lord when He worked at the same task.

Implicit in His reproaches is the rigorous judgment pronounced by the Judge Himself:

1. By implication He claims to know the past more perfectly than any, by declaring what men of ancient cities WOULD HAVE DONE with better opportunities. Only omniscience could guarantee accuracy at this point.
2. By implication He claims to know with unshakeable certainty the outcome of the yet future judgment, an issue which only God could know.

And because these presuppositions are merely implied, not asserted or defended (as He does, in fact, do elsewhere, Jn. 5:22, 27; cf. Ac. 10:42; 17:31), the positive boldness with which Jesus speaks is the more awesome.

#### B. OPPORTUNITY = RESPONSIBILITY (11:21-24)

11:21 **Woe unto thee** (*ouai soi*) is an interjection denoting pain or displeasure (Arpdt-Gingrich, 595), but in what sense does Jesus mean it here?

1. An as expression of grief, as if the Master is pained to reveal the fate of so many friends? This makes excellent sense here, because of Jesus' sorrowing sympathy for these who stumble on in their wilful blindness with no real conception of their impending doom. This idea is perfectly in harmony with the known character of our Lord, who is merciful even to the hardest sinners whose wilful unbelief demands additional signs when so many had already been given. (Cf. 12:38-42) **Woe** may be so interpreted. (Cf. Mt. 24:19; 26:24; Rev.

8:13; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19) Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 13) is certainly in order to notice:

This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched (nor) of one who is blazingly angry because . . . insulted, (nor) a passion of hatred at men. It is the accent of sorrow, . . . of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and who saw it completely disregarded. (He is) watching a tragedy being played out and . . . is powerless to stop men rushing on to ruin.

2. In condemning judgment? Jesus hates sin, He cannot but expose it, even if it means scorching rebuke aimed at friends among whom He was a well-known and appreciated companion, for they had proudly refused God's grace. This suggestion is probably the right one, since, contextually, Jesus is clearly pronouncing the destiny of those who continued to reject His representation of God's mercy.

**Chorazin** is an otherwise unknown city probably located about two miles to the north of Capernaum, now utterly desolate, its very existence being yet attested by extensive ruins. (*ISBE*, 614a)

**Bethsaida.** Two cities bore this name and were both situated at the north end of the Sea of Galilee on opposite sides of the mouth of the Jordan River. A critical study of the following texts reveals them to be "Bethsaida in Galilee" (Jn. 12:21; Mk. 6:45; Jn. 6:17; near Capernaum) and "Bethsaida Julias" (Lk. 9:10; cf. Jn. 6:1 "on the other side of the Sea of Galilee" from Capernaum; Mk. 8:22, a blind man was healed there on "the other side," Mk. 8:13, after the discussion at Dalmanutha Magadan on the west bank, Mt. 15:39b; Mk. 8:10b) That two similarly-named cities, located so close together, should not be thought strange, since "Bethsaida," etymologically, may mean nothing more than "house of fishing" (*ISBE*, 451b), hence refer to the water-front fishing villages so-called from the occupation of their inhabitants.

**The mighty works done in you.** Although we have no record of miracles worked in Chorazin and Bethsaida (however, see notes on 8:14), yet in every part of the Gospel narratives are found evident summaries of much vaster extent of Jesus' labors. (Cf. Mt. 9:35; 4:23-25; Jn. 20:35; 21-25) Nevertheless, due to the proximity of these towns to Capernaum, the scene of much of Jesus' activity, as well as the headquarters of His Galilean campaigns, the many

miracles done in the city limits of Capernaum would have had repercussions in those other two adjoining communities located but a short walk away. On the other hand, if the "great day of miracles" (Mt. 8:14-17; Mk. 1:21-34; Lk. 4:31b-41) ended at Bethsaida in Galilee, rather than in Capernaum, then we have an excellent sample of **the mighty works done in Bethsaida**, since Peter and Andrew, at whose home that day was concluded, were originally from there and perhaps still lived there. (Jn. 1:44)

If . . . (they) had been done in Tyre and Sidon means that no such ministry of any of God's prophets had actually been carried out in those cities. While it is true that God's men had thundered against Tyre and Sidon time and again (cf. Isa. 23; Jer. 25:22; Ezek. 26:1—28:26; Amos 1:9, 10; Zech. 9:2-4), yet apparently God sent no prophet to bear the warnings of their destined judgment. The case of Nineveh and Jonah seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. The above-mentioned prophecies were delivered, then, for "local consumption" among the Jews themselves, as God gave them evidence of His planning. By declaring His counsel prior to its execution, He provided written proof that He is the Lord of history and ruled nations. Nevertheless, it was not His purpose to do **mighty works** in those pagan cities. To the Jews, then, the mention of these two Phoenician cities called up the image of typical pagan cities, ignorant of God's revelations and, as a consequence, morally degraded. Tyre and Sidon were geographically close enough to Palestine for their notorious wickedness to be generally proverbial among the Jews.

Foster (SLC-1957, 49) submits the interesting suggestion that Jesus may not have been looking at the ancient pagan cities in their own historical context, but rather was alluding to the modern cities of His day. However, if the Lord intended a parallel between Tyre and Sidon on the one hand with Sodom (11:23) on the other, in approximately the same sense in which He mentioned Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin together, then it becomes evident that He had only the ancient cities in mind, since Sodom had never been rebuilt and was no longer existing in the time of Christ.

**They would have repented long ago.** This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, notwithstanding the possibility that anyone could have levelled this objection to Jesus' affirmation. His assertion remains above challenge, if we admit the identity of the One who asserts it. Only God's omniscience could comprehend in its scope all possible actions, as well as what people actually do. The Master does not

hesitate to reveal what the wicked ancients **would have** done, and, by so doing, reveals His own identity even further. This impression is made the more evident by the solemn introduction prefixed to His pronouncement: **But I say unto you.** This is the authoritative voice which will pronounce the sentence **on the day of judgment.** These words encourage the vilest sinner to believe that, if these cities might have escaped their horrible fate by thorough-going repentance, there is hope for him too if he but repent.

**Repented** in what sense?

1. Does Jesus mean that full conversion to God that was expected of the chosen people? That would depend upon the precise nature and requirements of the message those pagan cities would have received. If that preaching were equal to the message supported by **the mighty works done in** Bethsaida, Chorazin and Capernaum, then the Master means nothing short of full transformation.
2. If, however, He meant a message geared to the actual degree of maturity (or lack of it) at which those ancients lived, then He probably refers to that leaving off of their more heinous sins for which they had grown notorious. In this case God would not have destroyed them, even as He tolerated the continued existence of other relatively ungodly cities, until the times were right to provide them more complete revelations. (Cf. Ac. 17:30) It may be safe to decide this, since, in light of Jesus' principle, responsibility is equal to one's opportunity. For if these cities had no special revelation on the basis of which they could be deeply transformed, as had the Jews, then it could not be expected of them that they produce that of which they were psychologically incapable. (Cf. Ro. 10:14)

**Sackcloth and ashes.** The wearing of a rough, prickly hair-shirt next to the skin and the covering of one's head with annoying ashes (or also sitting in them) was the ancient way of expressing extreme sorrow and genuine repentance. (Cf. Isa. 58:5; Dan. 9:3; Jonah 3:5-10; Esther 4:3; Rev. 11:3) This bodily discomfort harmonizes well with the contrite attitude of one's spirit. Because it was obvious to all, it became a public recognition of one's contrition.

11:22 **More tolerable in the day of judgment than for you,** does not mean that these ancient, corrupt cities will get off scot-free at the judgment, in the sense that they would not be punished, or that they would be assured a place in God's paradise. The rule



still stands: responsibility equals opportunity. (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; Jn. 15:22-24; 9:40, 41; Ro. 2:12-16; 3:23-25) So there is no favoritism with God here, as if the corrupt Gentile cities might be thought to be judged by one standard and the Jews by another. The one standard for all is that of opportunity to know the truth and act upon it. So a man is responsible not merely for what he actually knows, but for what it was possible for him to know, but he chose not to recognize. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-28) One of the most excruciating parts of Hell is the burning within the conscience which screams to the suffered how much opportunity he had to receive God's loving grace. (Cf. Lk. 16:25) As a consequence, Jesus is not teaching that all the unsaved will suffer punishment of the same severity, since the gravity of guiltiness will vary with the opportunity.

Who would have supposed that judgment would reveal such a reversal of popular standards and upset estimates so commonly held? The jarring surprise caused by Jesus' declaration could not have been greater! One would have thought that of all people, surely those good Galilean neighbors of the Lord would be first in the Kingdom. What a lesson: the relative degree of a sinner's guilt may not come to the fore here on earth, and should never be used as a standard for measuring the guilt of others. Only the judgment of God will reveal the depth of one's guilt, since only then will the facts be bared that show how much opportunity one had to know and do God's will.

This is a judgment upon an attitude toward Jesus' message, but not absolutely irrevocable in the case of individuals, since some of these very townsmen could yet be won. This solemn declaration, then, is a fearful warning of a fate too dreadful to be conceived, deliberately worded to shake the complacent back to a sense of reality, calling them to repent before the hour of opportunity had elapsed.

**11:23 And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven?** Is this a question or an affirmation?

1. Affirmation (KJV: "Thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven . . .") Capernaum would naturally feel honored as a city whose face would soar to the gates of heaven itself, inasmuch as she could consider God's Son her most illustrious citizen. But taken in juxtaposition with the following phrase, this affirmation becomes ironic, since her temporal fame is not matched by eternal glory.
2. Question (ASV, RSV). This suggests that Jesus was verbalizing Capernaum's self-estimate: "You did not suppose that my mere presence among you would guarantee your eternal

fame and glory, did you? Wait till you hear your sentence read!"

The problem lies in the reading of the manuscripts, since *E, G, phi* and other Greek MSS as well as *f* and *q* among the Latin, the Siniatic and Peshitta Syriac have "And you, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven," where *K, M,* and other Greek MSS and *b* Latin have a similar variant: "And you, Capernaum, the one which has been exalted unto heaven." But contrary to these two variant readings, *Aleph, B, D, W, Theta, C,* many Latin MSS, the Vulgate; the Curetonian Syriac, the Sahidic, Bohairic and many other ancient translations have: "And you, Capernaum, you will not be exalted to heaven, will you?" (*mé béōs ouranoū bypsōthēsē;*). Since in the best judgment of the editors of the critical text, the latter reading has the best MSS support, this is a question expecting a negative answer.

**Thou shalt go down into Hades.** **Hades** most often refers to the unseen world of the dead, the tomb. Moreover it can also connote the fate of those dead whose punishment is sure, having been so destined by their passage beyond the realm of further opportunity to change. (Cf. Lk. 16:23) For this reason **Hades** may sometimes be used as a synonym for Hell. Which is it here, merely the obscurity of the grave and the oblivion in the dust of the centuries, or a fiery threat of eternal punishment?

1. The grave, historical oblivion.

*ISBE*, 1315b: "As in the OT Sheol is a figure for the greatest depths known (Dt. 32:22; Isa. 7:11; 57:9; Job 11:8; 26:6), this seems to be a figure for the extreme of humiliation to which that city was to be reduced in the course of history. It is true that ver. 24, with its mention of the day of judgment, might seem to favor an eschatological reference to the ultimate doom of the unbelieving inhabitants, but the usual restriction of Hades to the punishment of the intermediate state . . . is against this."

In this connection note also Isa. 14:13-15; Ezek. 26:20. So, without denying the threatened punishment of any who rejects Jesus, it may be possible to interpret figuratively **heaven** and **hades** in this verse, since in Jesus' mind they represent proper antitheses. Thus, in the same way that the

exaltation of Capernaum's citizens probably did not mean that they would all go to live in heaven, so their humiliation in hades need refer to no more than the material ruin of the city. Capernaum would lose her glory and privileges, falling to a level as far below other cities as she had been honored above them. The Jewish wars with Rome so thoroughly destroyed the city, that one might almost believe that those who overthrew it were bent on proving Jesus right.

2. Hell. Foster (*SLC-1957*, 50) argues that

The reference as to what will happen to Sodom in the day of judgment makes it plain that Jesus was not threatening Capernaum with a mere return of its fine buildings to rubble and its people to the grave. As a matter of fact, this was the fate of these cities within the scope of about a generation, but the warning of Jesus carried a more solemn import.

What would be the point in saying that unrepentant men shall be brought down to the grave? Where else would dying men go? The fate of these cities is determined by no other factor in this context than the obdurate indifference to repentance and faith. Temporal oblivion is too good for anyone who turns thumbs down on God's Son!

**Go down into Hades.** Though there is reasonably good manuscript evidence for the reading: "You shall be brought down to Hades" (*katābībāsthēsē*), a reading which suggests the active punitive justice of God, the reading chosen for the text is well supported. It raises the instructive problem in what sense unrepentant cities **go down into Hades**. God's judgment is often passive in its function. When men would have expected Him to rain fire from heaven upon the wicked, thus giving a world-shaking indication of His justice, sometimes He gives no sign at all, almost as if He were happily unconcerned. Why is He silent? Since He did not destroy Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida for their refusal to repent, as He did in the case of the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, how could He be just? Often He simply withdraws His blessing after men prove themselves disinclined to appreciate them, thus leaving them to fend for themselves. When He thus abandons men to the logical consequences of their own choices, He is actually delivering them up to their own damnation. (Cf. Ro. 1:18-32, esp. 24, 26, 28) Further, it may well be that in the very hour, in which God's patient silence is interpreted by rebels as a motive for relaxing in their false security, God is

mixing for them a cup of wrath. Either way, the apparent silence of the Judge is fully as ominous as if He had taken immediate action. Men must not confuse God's long-suffering for weakness or forgetfulness.

To what city does Jesus compare His adopted hometown? **Sodom**, with the opportunities offered Capernaum, **would have remained until this day**. Out of this affirmation arise four truths:

1. A reminder of the appalling end of those wicked cities of the Plain. (Cf. Gen. 19:24ff.; Mt. 10:15; Lk. 10:12; 17:29) The historical ruin of these metropoli naturally lent itself to their proverbial use as symbols of divine punishment. (Cf. Isa. 1:9; Ro. 9:29; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 7; Rev. 11:8)
2. A solemn affirmation of the dreadful doom awaiting the Sodomites at Judgment. If they thought their earthly punishment had been terrible, they miscalculated God! This future justice is not, as some suppose, because the Sodomites rejected the angels sent to them, for God did not send them to save Sodom, but to retrieve Lot and his house. Sodom had already been condemned for sinning against the knowledge of God and righteousness it possessed.
3. A divine announcement that with the same challenge to know the truth given to Capernaum, Sodom would have repented and so never would have been cremated alive. This is no hypothesis contrary to fact, given the divine superhuman knowledge of the One who declares it. He who read the hearts of the Sodomites, now reads the consciences of these Galileans.
4. An encouraging hope: if Sodom would have been spared, despite the heinousness of her sin, **there remains a chance** for the vilest sinner who accepts the very Gospel that would have saved Sodom!

**11:24 It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.** (See on 10:15) This proposition contains several other presuppositions that deserve consideration:

1. Though Sodom had been extinct for almost two millenia before His coming, Jesus points out yet another day on which Sodom must stand with Capernaum to give account before God.

2. Death itself is not, therefore, all the punishment an individual can expect for his sins. After death there is also a judgment.
3. Though cremated alive for their sins, the Sodomites await yet future judgment. This means that punitive judgment on earth for one's sin is not the final satisfaction of absolute justice. That kind of summary vengeance may only mean that God speeded up the time left until death, immediately thereby eliminating the opportunities to continue sinning with apparent impunity.
4. Though horribly punished with death on earth, the Sodomites were not thereby annihilated. They are yet alive somewhere facing the final vindication of God's righteousness and their final sentence.

The fearful instruction of this section (11:20-24) is that while men still breathe, they are the absolute masters of the citadel of their hearts—their emotions, their intellect, their conscience and their will. God Himself in Jesus Christ chose to leave men absolutely free to throw open the gates of the fortress and surrender, or resist divine mercy clear to the bitter end. This means, of course, that in the present, Jesus is willing to let each unbeliever's private kingdom remain invincible. This also means that in the light of time, Jesus appears to be beaten, since He refuses to force man's surrender. But the Master knows that the few pages, necessary to tell anyone's entire life story, do not include the final denouement, for every man, rebel or friend, will one day bow the knee to Jesus and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Phil. 2:9-11) Then it will be decided who was really invincible. Jesus can wait.

## II. UNCONQUERABLE SUBMISSION (11:25-30)

### A. JOYOUS THANKSGIVING (11:25, 26)

A superficial reading of the previous section, as suggested above, might tempt us to shake our heads in discouragement, since even the Son of God is apparently failing even to hold His own with the most favorable opportunities among the best contacts as He ministers among His own people. And if He fail there. . . ? But the Master is anything but beaten. Matthew leads us to a closer examination of what he himself learned to appreciate, i.e. how the Christ reacted to frustrating heart-crushing disappointments. Instead of flailing out or becoming bitter or accusing others of blundering and failure to evangelize properly, Jesus turns to God. The paradox is especially true of the Son of God: though invincibility and submission usually

mutually contradict each other, in Jesus they are nicely matched. He absolutely refuses to permit anything to hinder Him (here is His unconquerable spirit), turning Him aside from His responsibility to do exactly what His Father sent Him to do even if that means personal disappointments to Him (here is His real meekness and submission). Jesus knows that the secret of ultimate invincibility lies in submission—immediate, unhesitating, willing and continuous submission to the Father's desires. Would that we could learn that self-rule and invincibility are the real opposites!

11:25 **At that season** (*en ekeinō tō kairō*) is a most remarkable wording if Matthew is adhering to a strict chronological presentation in this chapter, for *kairos* ("season") often refers to a longer period of time than just a moment on the day when this discourse would have been presented. Further, Luke (10:21), in an almost exact parallel passage has "in that same hour" (*in autē tē hōrā*), as it were, to express the precise moment when Jesus prayed the very prayer here reported by Matthew in a loose general connection. Matthew knows how to be precise when the occasion calls for precision. (Mt. 8:13; 10:19; 18:1; 26:55) And He can speak loosely as necessary. (Mt. 12:1; 14:1; 11:25?) Perhaps the publican-Apostle has taken Jesus' prayer and observations from the Mission of the Seventy, which he does not intend to include, and uses it here because of its suitability to close this section in which he has illustrated the varying effects of the Lord's ministry upon those who came into contact with it.

**Jesus answered and said, To whom or what is He making "answer"?**

1. Is He responding to His own reflections upon the ignorance, unbelief and rejection found in the most favored cities. Only if these two parts of this section (i.e. 11:20-24 and 11:25-30) are chronologically connected.
2. Or is His answer a grateful response to the deep confidence in Him manifested by many humble disciples who were willing to come to Him, confessing, "Lord, you know everything I need to know. Teach me"? In this case, chronological connection is not so important, since the Lord is viewed as responding to a general situation. Matthew, then, sees the Lord as expressing His own answer to the climate of unbelief all around Him, contrasted with some evidences of simple trust.
3. Or, is it merely an introductory formula "common in Hebrew

narrative as an enlarged equivalent for 'said'?" (Plummer, *Matthew*, 165; cf. 17:4; 28:5; Deut. 21:7; Job 3:2; Isa. 21:9 in ASV)

**I thank thee** (*exomologōmai soi*). Since the verb *exomologōmai* means primarily "to confess, admit; acknowledge" and, the connotative meaning, "to praise" (See Arndt-Gingrich, 276), one might wonder why many English translations have it: "I thank thee." But when it is remembered that, by nature, our thanks is an acknowledgement of some favor or kindness received, a confession of our gratitude, this connection becomes more natural. Further, *exomologōmai* in the LXX period had already begun to include the more general sense of *praise*. (Compare the following especially in the LXX; Gen. 29:35; 2 Sam 22:50; 1 Chron. 29:13; Psa. 86:12 [85:12 LXX]; 118:28 [117:28 LXX]; 18:49 [17:50 LXX]; 35:18 [34:18 LXX]; Sirach 51:1) In all of these passages the idea of giving thanks is easily substituted with the idea of praise and vice versa. Vine (*EDNTW*, IV, 122) has it "I make thankful confession" or "I make acknowledgement with praise." In our dealings with God, the dual force of this word (*exomologōmai*) is most appropriate, since the nature of His gifts and loving care is such that we feel that we may *confess* our dependence upon him, *praise* Him for His graciousness and *thank* Him for His gifts almost all in one breath! It should not be surprising that pious Greek-speaking Hebrews should have found the one word that beautifully expresses all these ideas!

In addition, if Jesus feels the exuberant joy here, that is described by Luke, then it is more than psychologically credible that all these ideas be united in His mind. He is in high spirits, rejoicing as completely as if a great victory had just been won, even though He is realistically and frankly facing failure. The Lord has failed to win over those cities wherein most of His labor had been expended, and yet He gives thanks? Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 91ff.) senses this:

Jesus is frankly facing relative failure in His preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven to the people. Not that we are to suppose He was surprised, and in that sense, disappointed. The actual fact and experience of failure is, however, upon Him; and there is no prescience or preparation that can take away the grief and sting of failure to do the good to people to which one had devoted all his energy . . . Yet few would have agreed with Him that He was failing—probably not one would have agreed. He had never been more popular

... multitudes seek Him out on every opportunity, . . . They are ready to risk all and follow Him in revolt against all authority, religious and political . . .

Therein appears His superior insight. Here was for Him the mark of His failure. The people were missing the point of His appeal. They wanted a bread king. They wanted His miracle personality to perform in miracles of provision and protection, deliverance and defense while, unchanged in heart and life, they would enjoy a physical, a material Messianic reign. How it all wrung His soul and drove Him to prayer. He was calling them to repentance, they wished to follow Him to power. He wanted to get God into them, they wanted to get Him and God into their service. His soul is wrung in deep anguish, because of their deep need of repentance and their persistent unrepentance. He has tried so hard, so faithfully, unselfishly, so perfectly tried to give them God, and they have not seen it.

And yet, Jesus refuses to be downed by the failure implicit in His judgment of those cities. Instead He has a high heart and nothing but words of praise for God! What an exquisite expression of the very meekness He will shortly claim! This is no mere acquiescence: "I accept your wisdom, since I have no other alternative." There is no sorrowful, but dutiful, submission that whines, "I conform, because I feel that I should." Rather there is joy and satisfaction with God's plans: "I thank you—I praise you!" The depth of His meekness becomes evident when we examine who it is that stands here rejoicing despite the heartaches in being so limited: the only One who truly knows God and is perfectly understood by God, the One to whom the Father entrusted everything! (Mt. 11:27) Despite these divine prerogatives that might have seemed to guarantee Him the right to expect better treatment and greater success, He accepts being limited this way as part of His mission and the most excellent course.

The things which cause the Lord Jesus to rejoice and give thanks, should give us reason to reflect upon what pleases us. His strange thanksgiving challenges us to inquire into our easy satisfaction with those irrelevant, superficial symbols of success: our great crowds, our spacious cathedrals, our tight schedules, many programs and multitudes of meetings. What does He have to be so triumphantly glad about?

1. God is His Father and universal Sovereign. No matter what issues the intermediate conflicts may have, the ultimate victory



is safely in His hand. There is an unquestionable stabilizing effect in knowing that **the Lord of heaven and earth** is also our **Father**. Temporary setbacks, however heartbreaking they be, cannot upset the confidence that is founded on the invincible God! (Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4; Psa. 112:7)

2. Jesus can be grateful that elementary justice is already being done, since the intellectual aristocracy, so proud of its superiority, would for that very reason, be hindered from knowing the eternal truths, whereas the intellectually humble believers would actually recognize the divine wisdom.
3. Jesus can rejoice in the width of the abyss that separates the supreme majesty of God from the vaunted "greatness" of earth's "wise and understanding," who dare pit their limited understanding and unlimited pride against His wisdom and revelations. This contrast merely proves that God's efforts to save man do not rest in any way upon human intellect. Rather, intellectual talents, instead of being necessary, often get in the way. Jesus can praise God for working out a means of salvation that leaves God completely autonomous and that demands that man surrender his pride in order to understand.
4. He praises God that He, to whom all heaven and earth owe submission, mercifully stoops to bless the nobodies, the rankest beginner, the babes! For whom does Jesus give thanks? Often we are tempted to thank God for the rich, the powerful, the learned, the "beautiful people in our congregations, who are capable of giving an air of success and prosperity to our efforts, whereas He is grateful for those in whom FAITH dwells. He praises God for the marvellous vitality of those humble followers who are willing to brave the world's scorn in order to do things God's way.

Paradoxically, Jesus' cause for gratitude is the very limitation which had produced His greatest disappointment. God's plan for saving the teachable was working, even though this means the loss of those who were, by their own choice, unteachable.

**Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding and didst reveal them unto babes. These things** involves all that Jesus had been trying to reach. This, in effect is the Gospel whereby men can be saved by trusting God, rather than by accumulating their own merits or depending upon the (presumed) merits of others. While its fundamental concepts are relatively

simple and within the grasp of all, this message is not designed to appeal only to the ignorant, but rather to the humble. (cf. 1 Co. 2:6-16)

Who are **the wise and understanding**? They are the aristocratic intellectuals, as well as the common man on the street, who believe they know too much to permit themselves to be duped into committing their lives into the hands of an itinerate, unauthorized rabbi like Jesus of Nazareth. (Study Jn. 7:48, 49; 9:40) The scribes and Pharisees, whose entire life was dedicated to the proposition that the law of Moses and the traditions of the fathers, taken together, constituted the consummate wisdom of the ages, were not open to any new truth that did not sanction and revere the old as they understood it. And, because they refused to humble themselves before the truth preached by the Nazarene, they became the worst of idolaters, satisfying themselves with the half-god of their own imagination: the sum total of their theological deductions and speculations. (Compare the pagan's decline: Ro. 1:21, 22, 25, 28, 32)

This, of course, involves a preconditioning of pride and arrogance in order to be able to shut one's eyes to evidence. It also forces **the wise and understanding** to create another view of the universe that explains away the force of the facts and proof that contradict their pet theories and traditions. (Study 12:22-24; 9:32-34) But, in so doing, they move away from reality (as represented by Jesus), thus creating for themselves a world of unreality in which they choose to live. But to set one's mind against truth—whether physical, cosmic or ethical truth—causes a fearful hardening of the heart which blinds to those realities the individual who does it. It causes Him to manipulate the truth to suit himself. He will even rearrange God, His Word and His universe in his mind, molding them according to the dictates of the system he is substituting for God's. So many care not at all for truth: they neither long for it nor care about falsity (unless falsity brings them some immediate discomfort!) They are controlled principally by desires. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:3, 10-19; 3:3; Jas. 1:6-8, 13-15; 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:2, 3) They live by wishful thinking in this denial of unwelcome reality presented by the Lord. Despite the temporary and apparent relief from responsibility to recognize and live with reality; the tendency to ignore a reality hardens one to it. Airport noise, glue factories, alarm clocks, etc., are no longer noticed, if ignored long enough. There are none so blind as those who will not see, true enough, but it produces even deeper darkness to say "We see," while remaining indifferent or openly hostile to

God's truth revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. (Cf. Jn. 9:39-41; 2 Co. 3:12—4:6)

It is also quite natural for **the wise and understanding** to band together. Because they like to think this way, they encourage others to join them in an elite club of the worldly wise. Those who are reluctant to relax their grip on reality (i.e. the world as God reveals it through Jesus) are cajoled, embarrassed, black-mailed and otherwise threatened. (Cf. Jn. 9:22-34; 7:45-52; 12:9-11) The result is but a conspiracy against God and His people. (Cf. Jn. 16:1-4; Ac. 4:23-31, etc.) Substitute theories are popularized and termed "scientific explanations". Even though contrary evidence is presented, it is scorned, suppressed, and its apologists persecuted, harassed, demoted or simply ignored.

Further, **the wise and understanding** naively believe their lives to be very much under control. Paradoxically, a man will not stop sinning until he admits that he cannot stop. This is why **the wise and understanding** will remain what they are until they are willing to admit that they have been ignorant, deceived and conceited, until they confess that their human wisdom was leading them even further from God's truth, until they see that man is not the center of the universe nor the measure of all things. So it is that, when a man admits that he cannot stop trusting his own understanding and comes to Jesus, saying, "Lord teach me," only then does he really find the power to depend upon the Lord's wisdom.

**Thou . . . didst reveal them unto babes.** Who are the **babes**? They are not merely those unlearned, common men who made up the large percentage of Jesus' disciples (cf. Ac. 4:13; Jn. 7:45-49), but those who are willing to consider themselves as such. (Mt. 18:3, 4; Lk. 18:17) **Babes** are those who are intelligent enough—not to be so presumingly certain of their own conclusions, who are honest enough to admit the fine possibility that they do not know everything, even about the most common matters, whose general attitude is one of openness and willingness to learn. **Babes** are those who can learn from any and every one regardless of their own personal educational achievement, but who are critical enough themselves to be able to distinguish truth from error, good from bad advice, the precious from the worthless. **Babes** are those who are willing to judge the case on the weight of the evidence, rather than distort the evidence to suit their own preconceptions. **Babes** can see that, as sinners, their lives are unmanageable, out of control, that they have made a mess of them. In short, they are men who can

say with clear minds, but in deep revulsion of themselves, "I am a sinner—I have sinned." **Babes** are men whose minds are not so thoroughly jammed with false notions that have to be unlearned before divine truth can enter. The Lord can do a great deal with man whose thinking is relatively unencumbered with the educated non-sense expounded by the arrogant pseudo-intellectuals. But since most of us are troubled with the incompleteness and relative accuracy of much of our best information, Jesus is not so much concerned with the amount of true knowledge we have, but He is very much concerned with our attitude toward the truth that we think we possess.

How is it that God hides truth from **the wise and understanding**? Can He be just if He does this? How can He be justified in condemning those who do not see the truth which might have saved them? There are two sides to the answer:

1. Suppose we never arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question. It may well be difficult, by pondering and logic, to fathom how God is said to hide the truth from some men. We may never find out just how God could harden Pharaoh's heart (cf. Ex. 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:20; Ro. 9:14-18) or open Lydia's (Ac. 16:14). But even if so, until we do understand, we find ourselves before an excellent case of the necessity to trust God where our limited understanding fails to comprehend all parts of His plans or falls short of grasping the wisdom behind His choices. Were we to go no further, we could still answer the above questions by saying, "In terms of human understanding of justice, it may not seem right that God should hide the truth from some men and reveal it to others, but because I have learned to trust God on the basis of the evidence Jesus gives, I will also trust Him to be just and know what He is doing in this matter too."
2. But is the problem clearly stated? In the same way that particular predestination wrongly states its case elsewhere, so also here. Jesus is not referring to particular individuals who merely happen to be **wise and understanding**, but to classes of conceited people who, because of their vaunted culture and enlightenment, reject God's revelation. Any individual who overestimates the importance of his learning and experience and counts himself to be erudite and worldly wise in the sense rejected by Jesus, and puts himself into this class, will find himself strangely blinded and quite unable

to see any lasting significance in God's message. So, it is not true that God hides His life-giving truth from certain unfortunate individuals, thus predestining them to eternal damnation, while, at the same time, revealing His wisdom to other individuals, so saving them. Were "particular election" true, this entire passage could have no sense, since Jesus is lamenting the fate of people who could have chosen to repent. But if they could not have changed their personal, eternal destiny by repentance, according to the theory, God's Son had been wasting His efforts on them without knowing it!

Or, on the other hand, to state the problem differently, so as to get closer to its solution, has God set in motion certain natural, psychological laws, programmed into the human mind, whereby His truth can be assessed by EVERY mind? If all human brains operate in more or less the same way, then, seeing or failing to see God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ is not a question of the superior performance or functioning of the receiving equipment (the human intellect), nor the range of the transmitter (God), but of the willingness of the receiver's operator to turn on and tune his set. If all the radios operate more or less the same way and are so constructed as to pick up the frequency on which God is transmitting is it God's fault if some men turn Him off by dialing another frequency? The responsibility lies, then, with the hand that changes the dial.

But if this be the case, then how is it true that "**Thou didst hide these things?**" That is, if man himself hides the truth from his own eyes, how can it be said that God did this? As suggested above, because God created the human mind with its particular characteristics, He is responsible for knowing its limitations. Further it was He that chose to reveal truth that can only be received by humble, honest minds. He resolved that the Word of life shall not be broadcast so as to be intercepted on the channels of human wisdom, prudence or understanding. In a word, by limiting His broadcasting to this one frequency, God **hid these things from the wise and understanding**, because they are far too sure that all significant truth must come through human thought and discovery. Men were convinced that divine wisdom had to be announced by philosophers, sage rabbis, priests or kings, but when God sent a simple Galilean carpenter, this they could not accept. So, Jesus is discussing the inclination (or disinclination) to open one's mind to accept revelation, not the strength of that mind or one's intellectual gifts.

How does God reveal truth to babes? The word reveal is

the key to the fundamental difference between **the wise** and **the babes**: what are men willing to have told to them that they do not already think they know? If men believe they already know all there is to know that is significant, then revelation to them is impossible. However, God has chosen revelation as His means of communication, and by so doing, has quite literally hidden His truth from all those who choose not to be told anything they do not already know and approve. (See on 11:14; 13:10-17) At the same time, His truth gets through to all the rest. The express purpose of the Gospel is to dethrone self and enthrone God in men's hearts. Had the Father made the Kingdom of God the prize for human scholarship, then its message would have been grasped only by the few great intellectuals, but in this case it would have become the object of human achievement and the stimulus to pride and self-sufficiency. Such an approach would have defeated the purpose the Gospel was intended to accomplish. But by addressing His message to all who are humble, the Lord brings it within reach of everyone who is willing to descend from his throne and exalt God to His rightful place. Luke 10:23, 24 indicates how distance in time from Jesus of Nazareth kept some men from seeing God's truth perfectly revealed, a limitation of which they were not responsible, but by which they were nonetheless hindered. But the blessing pronounced upon the disciples was occasioned, not by the accident of birth that chanced to drop them into the same time schedule on earth with Jesus, but because they permitted themselves actually to perceive in Jesus what the self-praising religious analysts were unable to fathom, because these latter were unwilling to acknowledge it. Mt. 13:16, 17 clarifies this concept: "Blessed are your eyes BECAUSE THEY SEE . . ." For example, God revealed Jesus' true identity and mission to Peter, while this same vital information remained unpalatable and, consequently, unappreciated and unknown to the Jewish hierarchy! (Cf. Mt. 16:17; 1 Co. 2:8.) But the same evidence God gave Peter was also at the disposal of the scholars. The difference in the evaluations lay in the evaluators.

Christianity is for the weak. The problem is that men dislike the awful tension of being weak in a world that demands that they be strong. As a result, they are greatly tempted to prove themselves strong—to themselves and others—by illegitimate means that equivocate their dependence upon God or anyone else. Least of all does anyone wish to admit his own intellectual inferiority and dependence. But in the presence of the Almighty, one can hardly confess anything else

but weakness, inferiority and dependence. It is a shame that so many miss the point of this sort of confession, when they suppose that to admit this means to deny some part of their essential humanity. But belief does not require intellectual dishonesty or mediocrity to have validity, just intellectual humility. Christ can make weak men strong, if they but confess their need of Him and seek His power. (Cf. Jer. 1:6, 7; 2 Co. 11:30; 12:9, 10) Irreligious people who seem so strong are often people who have not been tested, are yet young enough, rich enough to maintain a substantial level of autonomy. But just let some of these factors fall below subsistence levels and put them through some real crises that try men's souls and then judge their strength. Unbelief is no evidence of a person's intellectual superiority or of some inadequacy in the evidence upon which faith could be founded. Unbelief may only be proof of the unbeliever's prejudiced standpoint, his own limited grasp of the available information and his unbounded self-esteem. Jesus does not condemn intellectual excellence any more than He condemns the mere possession of wealth. But He does point out the danger inherent in both: idolatry. He who bows before a mental concept of his own devising is no less an idolator than the man who kneels at Mammon's altar.

The Apostle Paul could measure the exact distance between **the wise and understanding** and **the babes**, between the effects of a false education and viewpoint, and the knowledge of Christ, because he had personally covered that distance in his own spiritual pilgrimage. When he announced his estimate of the Jewish tradition at its highest, most scholarly level, he describes it as "rubbish" (Phil. 3:8), not because Hebrew culture was deliberately false or calculatingly wicked but because of its false view of reality in rejecting God's Messiah. The scholars of Jesus' day could give a number of apparently valid reasons for rejecting the "untenable claims of that Nazarene," reasons that would have been perfectly consistent within the framework of the accepted system of thought. But once reality broke through this system that was permeating Paul's mind, when he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus highway, he was shocked with the realization that his perfectly consistent system was based upon a false premise that ignored true reality (as opposed to the imagined reality in the Jewish system that invented a Messiahship for God to respect.) Saul of Tarsus bowed before the evidence, while many of his brilliant contemporaries did not.

Jesus could see the future judgment with unerring eye and rejoiced because the very laws, which were set in motion to save the

saveable, were functioning perfectly. People were actually coming into God's Kingdom in God's way! The proud, the unrepentant, those who deemed themselves **wise and understanding**, the self-satisfied, those who sat on both the throne and cathedra of their own lives, those, in short, who refused God's rule and wisdom, were damning themselves. The Kingdom of God was right on course! (Study notes on Mt. 3:2, 15; 4:17) Those whom God wanted to be saved—the little people who had so little other chance for greatness or godliness in this life, but who wanted to do things God's way—these were really grasping the fundamental truth of God's message. The publicans, the harlots, the demon-possessed, the simple, common people of the land, because of their open-hearted response to Jesus, stood out in bold contrast with the Pharisees and others who made laws for God to keep! Nevertheless, Jesus puts no premium upon either ignorance or stupidity as qualifications for recognizing His divine wisdom. Intellect, per se, is no disqualification, nor are all simple people qualified. Intellectual power or its opposite are simply immaterial, for Jesus is describing the MORAL qualifications of the individual who would be examining His revelations. A man does not have to be either an intellectual or a simpleton to be able to trust Jesus, just humble, whatever his intellectual gifts or deficiencies.

God in his wisdom chose not to save the comparatively righteous or to damn the relatively wicked. He elected to remove the old man completely, since, when judged by absolute perfection, he can only be condemned, because he does not measure up. Therefore, it is only when we stop justifying ourselves and judging ourselves somehow to be worthy, when we stop living by our self-rule and stop walking by sight, when we begin life under Jesus' direction, that we can see what God is trying to tell us about life and truth. The trouble with **the wise and understanding** is that they think they have sufficient understanding, that they are already righteous in any way that is really important, that they have enough. (Cf. Rev. 3:17; 1 Co. 4:8) They want to preserve something "worthy" in themselves and not surrender to death, letting the whole life be sacrificed. The news that God has already condemned ALL men is totally unacceptable to them. After all, they argue, we're no great sinners! But the greatest of all sins is to be conscious of none. The very next scene which chronologically takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, so well illustrates this problem. (Study Lk. 7:36-50) Look at that woman standing at Jesus' feet, without any pretenses or demands, weeping in appreciation of her Lord and fully knowing that



Jesus knows all about her. She is not trying to save face: she would save her soul! Then, by contrast, study the Pharisee who feels no sin. How little he understood, how little he loved, how little he repented, how little he was forgiven! The **babe** is one who is willing to come out in public, even in the house of hypocrites, and admit his sin, wanting to do anything for Jesus,—even wash feet while listening to the sarcastic remarks of others. Such are willing, as was the Prodigal Son, even to face one's own self-righteous older brother.

**Wise and understanding . . . babes.** Even though the Master uses these categories to describe widely contrasting attitudes people have toward truth, it does not follow that any individual who finds himself in one or the other class will always remain there. The very work of the Gospel proclamation involves dealing with those prejudices held by any who feel that their own wisdom, their own reasons, are sufficient to reject Jesus. And if such people hear the Gospel presented often enough and persuasively enough, they may be induced to admit the folly of their wisdom and turn themselves over to Jesus after all. Further, a person who was once open to the tender appeals of the Lord may someday awaken to the realization that the Lord no longer really dominates his life and this former **babe** has then become **wise and understanding** in his own eyes, so much so that even Jesus Himself can no longer make Himself understood to this man. This former **babe**, now well-versed in Christianity, has made himself insensitive to the call of God, despite his constant familiarity with it. The Apostles were constantly doing battle with their own understanding of Jesus and His program. (Cf. Lk. 9:45; 18:34; Gal. 2:11ff.) One's own self-satisfaction ("I know enough, I am good enough, I am doing enough"), is just as blinding to spiritual light today as religious pride in Jesus' day. This is why we must consent to die to self and live only for Him. To become and remain what Jesus means when He speaks of **babes**, we must be willing to say, "The self that I thought so righteous, justly deserved death. I accept the sentence of death and die to my rationalizations, self-defence and self-rule. I now submit my understanding to the test of the truth that Jesus guarantees, always remembering that I may well have an imperfect grasp even of His truth." This is why Christ's servant must constantly ask himself whether he is eager to learn new truth that he did not already know, whether he really be prompt to obey and sensitive to Jesus' desires.

God has always been using **babes**, the few, the foolish, the weak, to confound the strength, numbers and wisdom of the self-

confident. (Cf. Is. 29:14; 1 Co. 1:19, 26ff.; 2:6ff.; 3:18-21; Psa. 8:3 and notes on Mt. 21:16) The Lord had chosen these unknown, trusting men to pit them against all the wisdom, wealth and power of the foremost leaders in Israel, and ultimately, in the world. Jesus may have been rejoicing to see that the establishment of the Kingdom on earth was first to be done by poor, weak instruments (as the powerful of earth would judge them), for He could see that even this tactic would be a strong argument in its favor, for men would be drawn to admit that the greatness of the power operative in such a movement must be God's! (2 Co. 1:9; 4:7; 12:9, 10) But never let that calumny stand that would scorn them as "unlearned, common men" (Ac. 4:13)! Though they had studied in no recognized school of the day, they sat under the unique instruction of the only Rabbi accredited by the Father.

What effect would this prayer have had upon the disciples who heard it? Would they have immediately grasped the great issues that are involved here? Perhaps the Lord said more than Matthew's summary includes, in which case they might have sensed more readily the Master's meaning. That He should give praise and thanks to God for such relatively insignificant men as these, must have touched them deeply.

Bruce (*Training*, 102, 103) takes another point of departure. Instead of looking at the theological objections levelled at Jesus by the hierarchy, he examines the objections they may have had to His methods and procedure. Consider also his application:

The reference in the thanksgiving prayer of Jesus to the 'wise and prudent' suggests the thought that these evangelistic efforts were regarded with disfavour by the refined, fastidious classes of Jewish religious society. This is in itself probable. There are always men in the church, intelligent, wise and even good, to whom popular religious movements are distasteful. The noise, the excitement, the extravagances, the delusions, the misdirection of zeal, the rudeness of the agents, the instability of the converts—all these things offend them. . . .

None of the 'wise and prudent' knew half so well as Jesus what evil would be mixed with the good in the work of the kingdom. But He was not so easily offended as they. The Friend of sinners was ever like Himself. He sympathized with the multitude, and could not, like the Pharisees, contentedly resign them to a permanent condition of ignorance and depravity. He rejoiced greatly over even one lost sheep

restored; and He was, one might say overjoyed, when not one, but a whole flock, even *began* to return to the fold. . . . His love was strong and where strong love is, even wisdom and refinement will not be fastidious.

. . . Another class of Christians, quite distinct from the wise and prudent, in whose eyes such evangelistic labours as these of the twelve stand in no need of vindication. Their tendency, on the contrary, is to regard such labours as the whole work of the kingdom. Revival of religion among the neglected masses is for them the sum of all good-doing. Of the more still, less observable work of instruction going on in the church they take no account. Where there is no obvious excitement, the church in their view is dead, and her ministry inefficient. Such need to be reminded that there were *two* religious movements going on in the days of the Lord Jesus. One consisted in rousing the masses out of the stupor of indifference, the other consisted in the careful, exact training of men already in earnest, in the principles, and truths of the divine kingdom. Of the one movement the disciples, i.e. both the twelve and the seventy, were the agents; of the other movement they were the subjects. And the latter movement, though less noticeable, and much more limited in extent, was by far more important than the former; for it was destined to bring forth fruit that should remain—to tell not merely on the present time, but on the whole history of the world.

If Bruce's observations seem to miss the main point Jesus is making, let it be remembered that we have yet a great deal to learn from the Lord, especially about methods; and it is often at this point that we need to acknowledge our ignorance and, as babes, learn from Him.

**11:26 Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight.** This subordinate clause depends upon 11:25 for its principle verb (*exomologotimai*, "I praise and thank thee") and provides us Jesus' second expression of thanks or praise for the Father. Whereas before He praised Him for His absolute sovereignty, here the Son's emphasis is upon God's good pleasure, His *eudokia*. (Cf. uses of *eudokia* in Lk. 2:14; Phil. 1:15; 2:13; 2 Th. 1:11; Eph. 1:5, 9 unites these two concepts of the absolute sovereignty of His will and the emotional impact of God's pleasure. See also Lk. 12:32; 1 Co. 1:21; Col. 1:19)

Barnes' personal expression of confidence in the wisdom of God is worthy of repetition here. (*Matthew-Mark*, 123)

(The proud and haughty scribes and Pharisees) rejected his gospel, but it was the pleasure of God to reveal it to obscure and more humble men. The reason given, the only satisfactory reason, is, that it so seemed good in the sight of God. In this the Savior acquiesced . . . and in the dealings of God it is fit that all should acquiesce. *Such is the will of God* is often the only explanation which can be offered in regard to the various events which happen to us on earth . . . (it) is the only account which can be given of the reason of the dispensations of his grace. Our understanding is often confounded. We are unsuccessful in all our efforts at explanation. Our philosophy fails, and all that we can say is, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good to thee." And this is enough. That GOD does a thing, is, after all, the best reason which we can have that it is right. It is a security that nothing wrong is done; and though now mysterious, yet light will hereafter shine upon it like the light of noonday. I have more certainty that a thing is right if I can say that I know such is the will of God, than I could have by depending on my own reason.

One of the clearest lessons of this text is that Jesus does not expect to save the whole world. It tears at His great heart, but He will not relent. Even though He yearns to rescue everyone, yet He is willing to say even here, "Not my will, but yours, be done." He is grateful that this psychological law, which permitted God's truth to be concealed even while it was being revealed, was God's idea, God's will. (Study 1 Co. 1:30; 2 Co. 4:4)

#### B. MAJESTIC SELF-REVELATION (11:27)

How can Jesus be so sure that this psychological law, which automatically excludes the proud Pharisee while at the same time opens God's truth to the humble disciple, is in perfect agreement with the eternal counsel of God? This critical question receives its resounding answer in the magnificent claim now expressed.

11:27 **All things have been delivered unto me of my Father.** What were **all things** that were delegated to the Son? Plummer (*Luke*, 283) is right to notice that "it is arbitrary to confine the *panta* (i.e. **all things**) to the *potestas revelandi*" (i.e. right to reveal. See also the expository sermon "Rest in a Restless World" which follows.)

1. All authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18; Heb. 2:8, 9; Dan. 7:14; 1 Co. 15:24-28; Jn. 3:27-36).
2. Power on earth to forgive sins (Lk. 5:24).
3. Right to be Lord of the living and the dead (Ro. 15:8, 9).
4. Inheritance of all things (Heb. 1:2; 2:10; 1 Co. 8:6).
5. All glory and honor, a position superior to angels (Heb. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11).
6. The responsibility to suffer for all (Heb. 2:8, 9).
7. The headship over the Church (Eph. 2:22).
8. The authority to judge all men (Jn. 5:22).

There could be many more. Nevertheless, the most important prerogative claimed by Jesus in this context is primarily the unique knowledge of God. Such a claim is common in John's Gospel (cf. 3:35; 6:46; 7:29; 10:14, 15; 13:3; 17:2, 25), but so utterly unique in so outspoken a form in the Synoptic Gospels (although there are numerous allusions and a few widely-scattered but clear declarations like this one), that this claim has been rejected by some as a genuine utterance of the Lord. However, no critical evidence in the manuscripts can be presented to undermine its authenticity as part of Matthew's Gospel. It can only be discredited in circles where prejudice makes its truth unwelcome. It is interesting to notice that this kind of claim has never been popular in intellectual circles because, if Jesus is right, such a statement declares false or, at best, totally inadequate men's best efforts to arrive at absolutes and truth without going by way of Jesus. And **the wise and understanding** just do not like to be told that they are wrong. Some of the best brains of Jesus' day used this kind of utterance against Him to crucify Him. It is Jesus' highest claim to exclusive knowledge of God. We must feel this exclusiveness: it puts us on the outside. **My Father** speaks of a relationship shared by no other. (Cf. Jn. 5:17, 18) **The Son** refers to One who is unique among all other sons of God.

Is Jesus speaking here of a past fact (**have been delivered**) or by anticipation? That is, did He at that moment actually possess all that He claims? Yes, because He sees the Father's sending Him to earth and committing all these tremendous responsibilities to Him as one act. All the pain and glory that is involved in being the Son of God was part of His commission.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 454), citing Luther, points out the perfect balance in Jesus' deity and perfect humanity:

By this he indicates that he is true man, who has received them from the Father. For neither would God deliver all things to one who was only man, nor would one who was only God received them from another. For neither is it possible for one who is only man to be over all things, nor for one who is only God to be beneath God. Thus in this one person true God and true man are joined together.

Luther argues his case well but we must also weigh Jesus' next statement into our conclusions.

**No man knoweth the Son.** This very assertion gives us reason to re-study and re-examine all that we thought we ever knew about Him. As we struggle to understand Jesus' divine and human nature, and as we try to comprehend His earthly ministry and interpret His message, we must hold lightly our own interpretations, lest they become more decisive in our deliberations, than the very Word of Christ itself. Though He came to earth with the specific intention to reveal God, and though He let Himself be seen, heard and studied, there was always that other side of Jesus, His infinite deity that staggers men's minds and keeps Him just beyond their complete grasp of His nature. Note how unobtrusively Matthew admits to being one of those very few Galileans who did not presume to know all there was to know about the Master. He simply quotes Jesus' words without qualification or personal reservation. He might have said, as do modern critics in their estimates of the historical Jesus, "His affirmation, that no one really understood Him, may have been true when He said it, but we have Him figured out now!" The favored cities of Galilee too thought they knew Jesus, but their conceit prohibited them from recognizing anything more in Him than just another Nazarene carpenter, or perhaps as another Galilean rabbi whose opinions were to be added to the ever-growing body of scribal traditions. But lest we hide our own limited knowledge behind repeated criticisms of the unbelieving Jews, let us ask ourselves whether, with our greatly increased opportunities to know the completed revelation as presented and explained by the Apostles in the NT, we have done any better. Do we know the Son, His attitudes, His methods, what He was trying to get us to understand about God, the world, sin, life and eternity?

**Neither doth any know the Father save the Son.** Feel the stupendous impact of this bold declaration made by a young Hebrew who stands before the entire world and cries, "If you would really know the heart, mind, nature and will of God, look at me!

Come to ME, learn from ME. I am the only Person who really knows God! All who came before me are liars, thieves and robbers." (Cf. Jn. 14:9; 1:18; 10:1; 1 Jn. 5:20) The grand significance of this statement is that there is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We must believe that Jesus is the exclusive authority and our only necessity, for, if He is right, there can be no other way back to God than through Him. (Jn. 14:6) People demand free-thought, because they do not want Jesus' authority over their lives. But if they would see God, they must honor the Son by submitting themselves totally to His authority! (Jn. 5:23, 24) And Christians cannot rule their lives and still call themselves His disciples, for Jesus recognizes no peer nor rival. But His authority or right to rule is implicit in His knowledge and revelation of the Father. This claim must have been positively scandalous to Jesus' Hebrew audience, for He is claiming a knowledge of God that no prophet, seer or sage either before or after Him, could pretend.

**And he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.**

Jesus' own thanksgiving (11:25, 26) certifies that His own will is in perfect agreement with the Father's good will, hence those to whom Jesus **wills to reveal** these mighty truths are the **babes** of 11:25. There is here no arbitrary selection of certain persons to whom this knowledge is granted. Rather, Jesus graciously invites all men, trying to lead them to lay aside their prejudices. His grace is sincerely offered to every man, but He has chosen that only those who are humble shall receive it. His will remains a closed book to condemn those who can, but will not, study it, because their lives are occupied with *other things, their minds* already jammed with human wisdom. **The Son willeth** (*boûletai*). There is a choice that has been made. Jesus decided not to give the same intimate revelation to those who prove themselves definitely wicked, as He would to those who submit to Him as trusting disciples. So this declaration is all of a piece with the presuppositions inherent in everything Jesus has been saying throughout this entire passage. That none are to be excluded, except by the exercise of their own will, is proved by the universality of the following invitation. (See on 11:28) Yet, as Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 98) points out:

It is a thousand pities that men have paused at this point in the pouring out of His soul in anguish of longing to make men know the Father—paused to build metaphysical theories in theology while the Redeemer's heart breaks with longing for lost men who will not heed. . . . He is as far

as possible from thinking of barring any from the Father. He is setting before Himself the problem of how to get men to this knowledge that gives eternal life. It is the cry of the Savior, not the dogma of a theologian, that we hear from Him. He knows the Father, He is in a world in which He finds no man who knows Him, all men must know Him or they have missed the whole meaning of life and had better never have been born. . . . He must make them know His Father. . . . How? . . . He offers Himself as the way to the Father.

#### D. PLEADING, UNIVERSAL INVITATION (11:28-30)

How does this passage fit together with the sections preceding it? Only the fact that Jesus possesses full authority qualifies Him to issue this universal invitation. The connection is perfect, since Jesus has just described Himself as the only One qualified to reveal the Father. Now He invites all men to be His students.

To whom is this invitation addressed? **All ye that labor and are heavy laden.** Upon first reading, this attractive offer seems limited to a single, particular group: the down-trodden, oppressed masses. But reflection reveals that sooner or later every human being finds himself caught by unexpected changes in life that leave him sorrowing, burdened, anguished and frustrated. The ancient Hebrews had understood this, and they expressed themselves in what makes an excellent and striking background for Jesus' bold declaration. (See Ecclesiasticus, 40:1-9) Life itself, with its seemingly interminable and apparently inevitable cares, becomes a galling yoke to those who have no choice but to keep their noses to the grindstone. Even those who are in some measure successful become aware of the fact that they must maintain their success with an even greater expenditure of strength, even though their resources are failing.

It is worthy of note that many of our trials are of our own choosing, because they are based upon some concept of life that holds us firm in that situation. We feel bound by our principles to remain in that situation and suffer the trial. But if it is a false concept of life for which we suffer, in Jesus' discipleship it would lose its importance and power, as it would be submerged into reality as Jesus preaches it. Too often men measure life by an unreal standard and then scourge themselves mercilessly for failing to meet it. Ironically, such false standards are not the things that truly matter in the final analysis.



It is not physical work or mental activity that drains us, leaving us weak, frustrated and burdened for one day's work. We were designed to work—and work well. We function best when we are profitably and contentedly working. But here is the catch: much of our work is neither profitable nor pleasing. And even in our best work we fail to achieve all our goals. Our hopes far exceed our realization. The tedium of routine sets in to dull our interest and increase both our boredom and our fatigue. On the other hand, the goals that Jesus sets before us, and the prospects of realizing them, gives us direction, stimulation, security, and, as a consequence, real rest, even though we may have even more work to do and more responsibility as His disciples than ever before. Life takes on a new significance, even daily tasks glow with new meaning.

But in this Jewish context is Jesus talking about the aches and pains of everyday living? Yes, and more, for His emphasis is also a moral one.

1. He is talking about the moral struggle to live up to the divine standards.

a. This constant measuring oneself with God's perfection is a discouraging, heart-breaking disappointment! (Cf. Gal. 5:1; Ac. 15:10; Ro. 7:21-24) In the end, without the victory and power of Jesus, ours is a losing battle to be good enough. (See notes on 5:48 and Notes Introductory to the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, pp. 184ff., esp. 190.) This invitation, then, is Christ's answer to the dubious and the desperate who are afraid that His ideals are un-reachable. Jesus knows that, without His life in us, there is even more bondage and frustration in trying to imitate Him, than there is in any other law. This is why He invites the hopeless and the skeptics to come to Him, so He can make them over, empowering them to be all that they dream.

b. But Jesus' hearers were not merely struggling with God's requirements. They were also measuring themselves by human standards mistaken for divine law. (Cf. 23:4; Lk. 11:46) Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) describes this:

He was thinking of the drudging burden of the endless round of ceremonial exactions, petty negotiations, shallow dogmas, formal duties with which the religionists of the day loaded life down until

it seemed impossible for the ordinary man to be godly. . . .

Plummer (*Matthew*, 169) summarizes it:

The scribes could not give rest to souls which He can promise (note the emphatic *kagō*) "They bind heavy burdens (*phortia*) and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders' (23:4); but His burden (*phortion*) is light. This shows that 'heavy laden' (*pephortisménoi*) does not refer primarily to the load of sin, but to the burdens which Pharisaic interpretations of the law imposed, and which, after all, gave no relief to men's conscience; . . . The heavy load of observances which gave no relief and perhaps also to the sorrows of life, which, apart from the consolations of a true faith, are so crushing. To those worn out with restless seeking . . . to those who are weighed down with unprofitable burdens . . . (Jesus offered His invitation.)

2. But that He includes also all of the weary, burdensome toil of sin and the suffering that accompanies it, is evident from the consideration that Jesus' discipleship has a unifying power to make us at peace with ourselves. Most of us are "walking civil wars", because of our divided heart. We are determined to try to serve both God and Mammon, have our fling with the flesh and still reap a harvest of righteousness in the Spirit. But this tension can only break us, since only God's world is the true one, only His rules function and bring us true joy. The other name for that tension, wherein we try to live in God's world and yet run it by our own rules, is "sin!"

**All ye that labor and are heavy laden:** here again Jesus' shepherd heart expresses His full, deeply-felt compassion for the shepherdless, harrassed and helpless sheep. (Cf. 9:36) And when He says **all**, He means it with that same generous universality found everywhere in His teaching: "Whosoever will, may come." (Cf. Rev. 22:17; Mt. 10:32; 12:50; 16:25; 18:4; Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 6:37; 11:26) Here is your personal invitation: include yourself in this category of "**all ye that labor**". Let no one imagine that he does not come under this invitation or that God might have other plans for saving him. This is it!

**Come unto me.** The great ones of earth maintain a strict reserve of inaccessibility around them. In contrast, Jesus is not only willing to be approached by "just anybody," but even graciously invites us! Imagine a 30-year-old Jew spreading His arms to receive the entire human race, saying, "All you who have any problems, come to me and I will help you!" Said by any other person, these words either sound ludicrous or border on blasphemy. The Jews were accustomed to this invitation made by Wisdom personified in their literature. (Cf. Prov. 8—9:6; Ecclesiasticus 24:19; 51:23-27) Further they had even heard great rabbis invite students to come for instruction. But never before had they heard anyone offer himself as the *unique solution* to all the deepest problems of the human race. As in the case of Jesus' miracles, so also here with His claims, truth and justice demand that we dismiss Him as a raving maniac, crucify Him as an imposter or bow before Him as our God. **I will give you rest.** This is just like Jesus to help the struggling, the unsuccessful, the weak and unworthy. (Mt. 12:20) Yet this is distinctly God's work. (Ex. 33:14; Jer. 31:25) How ill the Nazarene conceals His identity, if He wants none to mistake Him for God come in the flesh!

**Come to me . . . I will give you rest.** The extremely personal nature of this invitation is absolutely amazing, for Jesus presents us no formal system of philosophy or theology, no writings containing abstract theories, no new legal system or package of simple answers to the world's ills. He knows that we have had enough of that already. Instead, He is offering Himself! No doctrine or philosophy could ever do for us what our intimate fellowship with Jesus can.

11:29 **Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.** The **yoke** is a symbol well-known to the Hebrews, standing for control, discipline, obligation and even bondage. (Cf. Isa. 9:4; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Kgs. 12:4; Ps. 2:3 LXX; Jer. 5:5; 27:1—28:17; Psalms of Solomon 7:9; 17:30; Ac. 15:10; Gal. 5:1; 2 Co. 6:14) We cannot help feeling the contrast in Jesus' mind between **MY yoke** and all the other burdens borne by the weary and heavy-laden. But this very contrast suggests that even Jesus' yoke is definitely a kind of control, an obligation, a discipline. If so, then He is making it crystal-clear that He is not merely our Friend and Example. He is to be our Lord and Master. Rather, our new relationship to Him requires of us that we be willing to learn truth from Him and obey His voice, in the same way that the Jews felt their obligation to the Law and

discipline of Moses. **Take my yoke upon you** means that we are to submit to Him by our own free decision and deliberate resolve. Freedom in Christ cannot mean an absence of any control whatever, for that would mean antinomian anarchy. The greatest freedom from that tyranny that would enslave and destroy self is to be found by placing self completely under the dominion of Christ.

**Learn of me**, stated in clearer modern English is simply: "Learn from me." (*μάθητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ*; cf. Col. 1:7 *ἐμάθητε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρά*) Obviously, the **rest** Jesus offers is not an eternity of boring inactivity, since He envisions a discipleship of learning and activity. The joy of comradeship with the Lord in doing God's will, in our struggle with temptations and in our efforts to bring men into the Kingdom, is the very kind of labor that leaves our spirits rested and refreshed, even though our work is never completely or perfectly done. But before we could ever hope to begin such a task we must learn from him. Those who know not this fellowship nor this hope, cannot know the psychological strength that comes from it. They can but face the unabated frustrations of the present and the dark unknowns of the future.

What must we learn from Him? Frankly, everything. We see immediately that the righteousness which accords with God's will is not a ritual consisting in certain external observances but rather a meek and lowly heart. Because He too is a human being, notwithstanding His undoubted deity, we can imitate Him. We find inspiration and motivation to attempt His challenging ideals, because He deliberately set us an example for imitation. (Phil 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2:21ff.) The **yoke** and the **burden** He gives us are His exacting requirements, but with His power working in us, the possibilities of realization are by far so much greater. This Teacher is one who was first a learner Himself. (Heb. 2:14-18; 5:7-9) He Himself has submitted to the very yoke He would have us wear. His example not only teaches us how to wear ours well, but, since we have seen the joyous result of His life, we are the more encouraged to shoulder it. (Cf. Heb. 12:3)

**Learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.** Jesus is inviting us to investigate His method, meet Him personally and enroll in His school. Tenderly He motivates us to find in Him a Teacher that is kind and patient with slow students. **I am meek and lowly in heart.** (Cf. 5:5; 21:5; Nu. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:1) Scan the ministry of Jesus and count the times He proved this proposition true. In how many ways did He do things to which no ordinary oriental monarch would have stooped? How did He act in a manner unthink-

able to the kind of typical rabbi described in Mt. 23 and Lk. 11? Something of the importance of this observation can be felt by analyzing Jesus' public reputation as the one who "welcomes sinners and eats with them"! (cf. Lk. 15,1, 2) The Lord is not merely discussing His own personal character here, but also the methods He will use with His disciples, for His methods with each one, grow out of His own nature. What a contrast He makes to those harsh teachers who only know how to demand that the pupil rise to his duty, but who do not know how to motivate the poor learner to desire above all else to learn how to do what he knows is right. Nor is the Lord satisfied to sit in the cathedra of heaven and dictate lectures on religion and ethics. He is personally concerned that the dullest students, as well as the most brilliant, achieve their own personal best.

These gentle, comforting words, so easy for us to accept now, must have been a message difficult to believe for many in Jesus' audience. John the Baptist had hoped that the Christ would have seized the reins of government, destroyed the wicked leadership that was corrupting the nation, and usher in the Kingdom of the Messiah. This was the heart-cry of every Nationalist among Jesus' hearers, it was an ambition not entirely absent from the breast of the Apostles. Instead of giving Himself out to be the mighty Messianic Warrior-King ready for violence and civil revolution, the Lord quietly but firmly insisted: **"I am meek and lowly in heart!"**

**Rest for your souls.** While the wise and godly Hebrew sought rest for his soul in the contemplation of wisdom (cf. Ecclesiasticus 6:18-31, esp. v. 28; 51:27), Jesus boldly asserts that true rest is only available to those who learn from HIM. He presumes that only His Word is the true wisdom, the only ultimate truth of real permanence. (Cf. Mt. 11:27; 7:24-27; 24:35; Jn. 14:6) "Learn from me (and) you will find rest for your souls" is no empty promise if He has the right to say this, for one will find no satisfying rest outside of the reality represented in Jesus' message. The easy way to do a difficult task is to use the proper methods and equipment. There is nothing so fatiguing, so frustrating and, ultimately, so unsatisfying as to struggle with the difficult task, using inadequate equipment. It is the Lord's plan to equip us thoroughly for every good work. (2 Ti. 3:16, 17) By doing things His way, our struggle to accomplish the very same task, no matter how difficult, becomes easy by contrast to our own inadequate methods. We notice the repose when we change over to His system, because it rests us while we work. But even this simple promise puts to the test the reality of our confidence

in Him, for we must decide whose world is real, whose instructions are the true ones. For so long as we continue to do things our way, we will continue to dash ourselves against the harsh realities that contradict our pet notions. So doing, we will never find peace and rest. This promise becomes also a test of our methods even in our service to Him, for if we do not find anything but frustration, disappointment and endless fatigue in the service of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves whether we have really learned His method, share His Spirit and, hence, know His power and victory.

To call this **rest** merely spiritual, as opposed to physical rest, is a false dichotomy, since man is all of a piece and his spirit lives in a body. Both his spirit and his physical life are involved in his *psychē*, the word here translated **soul**. Jesus is offering rest for the whole man. This comes in two stages:

1. Upon simple faith in Jesus as we come to Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (cf. 1 Co. 1:30, 31), we rest from the struggle to prove ourselves good enough to satisfy God. We rest from the harrassing guilt of our sins. Our distress and fears are mercifully eliminated as we commit ourselves to His grace. (Cf. Ro. 5:1; 8:1; 2 Ti. 1:12)
2. There is greater rest in bearing the yoke of Christ, in imitating Him and in becoming conformed to His image, for in so doing, we deny ourselves. The natural result of this is that that selfish clamor for attention and those conflicting desires that kept us constantly at war with ourselves are devaluated and gradually eliminated. Rest from self is rest from every other struggle with temptation. Why? Because we have settled our fundamental question of priorities as to which is most important: what the Father wills for us, or what we demand for self. Obedience to His will liberates us from the indecision and unrest of self-will. Submission to His yoke brings us real rest, since it is the joyous deference to a King whom we know and love as our Father. To obey rests us from the despotism of our desires, the liabilities of liberty and from the conflicts of conscience.

**11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** This is an astounding claim! Jesus is saying that, after all is examined, His way alone is best: "Compare my demands upon your life, the discipline to which I call you, and its end results, with those required by any other discipline, and other yoke, any other world-

view, and you will find that my discipline, in the long run, is the easiest and the load I place upon you the lightest." Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) understands how the painfully exacting demands of Jesus can be considered "light and easy".

He did not mean to tell us that being a disciple of His is not exacting, nor that true righteousness is an easy task. . . . (But) so soon as religion becomes really possible, it becomes in a sense easy, for when it is genuine its very essence is liberating. . . . No meaningless rules in the school of Jesus. . . . The lessons are light because they are enlightening. They put you in the way of learning deepest truths and highest realities. Pupils—real students—never object to hard lessons; they glory in them. But they want their lessons to "have some sense to them", to lead somewhere, to hold clues to life's mysteries and nature's riddles. Any lesson that does that is easy, fascinating.

**Easy yoke? Light burden?** No hard work seems joyful at the moment, but what training for greater things it produces in those who have been disciplined by it! (Heb. 12:3-11) AFTER he turned himself over to Christ, Paul had more work to do than ever before, but what a difference in the prospects of accomplishment his new attachment to Christ made! Christ's yoke is easier, His burden lighter, not in the sense of less toil or difficulty, but in the sense of what is achieved for eternity. It is only the long-range view, which takes eternity into account, that permits one to see that His way really is best, though it be temporarily punctuated with crosses. (2 Co. 4:16-18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Jn. 5:3) Jesus has never lowered the standard of righteousness to make life easier for anyone. Rather, He actually raised the standard to absolute perfection. Despite this, the burden He places on our shoulders is actually lighter than any other we might choose, because He alters us. He alters our motives for bearing the load, thus giving us power to do it! W. M. Taylor (*PHC*, XXII 289) suggests that the yoke of Christ is easy:

1. Because our conscience approves of this burden.
2. Because love lightens our work, making us less conscious of a load that would otherwise be unendurable.
3. Because Jesus' own Spirit empowers us to bear it.
4. Because the longer we submit to His discipline, the easier it becomes. What at first required a great deal of effort becomes easy and more enjoyable with time.

5. Because we are encouraged by a valid, unshaken hope which has power to keep us steady under our discipline, where otherwise we would break and fall.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what sense does Matthew mean that "most" of Jesus' miracles were done in the area of the three Galilean cities?
2. Were there absolutely no converts made in these cities? Explain.
3. Locate the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin.
4. Locate the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, describing that part of Bible history regarding those cities that has bearing on Jesus' use of them as a basis of comparison.
5. Explain the cosmology involved in the expression "exalted to heaven" and "brought down to Hades". Is Hades "down" and heaven "up"? From what standpoint? If Jesus is really God, hence knows that the earth is spherical, then how can He conscientiously use these terms that are obviously oriented to a flat-earth concept? Or, does physics have anything to do with His basic meaning?
6. Define "Hades", giving its varying shades of meaning, and tell how Jesus uses it to describe the fate of unrepentant cities. Explain how cities can go down to Hades.
7. What other passages of Scripture show in what sense the expression "wise and understanding" is to be understood?
8. What other passages of Scripture help to explain what Jesus means by the term "babes"?
9. List the declarations in this section that reveal the divine nature and authority of Jesus.
10. Explain how God hides truth and, at the same time, reveals it. Do this by drawing your illustrations from the ministry and results of Jesus.
11. What is the full content of the expression: "All things" in the larger context of "All things have been given to me by my Father"?
12. When were "all things" given to Jesus? For how long were they to be His?
13. In what sense does Jesus mean that none really know Him?
14. In what sense does only Jesus know the Father?
15. What is the connection between Jesus' grand claims that He makes for Himself and His great invitation offered to all?
16. Explain the expressions "take my yoke upon you and learn of me" and "my burden is light". What is the *yoke* and the *burden*



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in this context? To what sphere of human endeavor do they refer when used by One who presents Himself to all as Teacher?

### EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN "LOOKING FOR ANOTHER CHRIST"

*Introduction:* WHY look for another Christ? Because some are disappointed in the Christ given to us! This is not so surprising in light of the experiences of the people described in this chapter:

#### I. THE PERPLEXITY OF THE LOYAL-HEARTED (11:2-15)

A. John the Baptist: "If you are really the Messiah, how is it that the world goes on more or less as before, as if you had never come?"

1. This is the statement in other words of the problem of pain and evil: "Why does not God DO something about evil in the world, especially about the wicked themselves?"
2. It is similar to the question stabbing the conscience of our age: "If you are really the Church of the living God, if you really proclaim a Gospel of salvation and moral transformation that really works, why have you not done more to eliminate evil and initiate a practical demonstration of the rule and love of God on earth?" Our age just cannot ignore 2000 years of bad church history with its failures, corruptions and misrepresentations of Jesus.
3. As with all expressions of the problem of evil, these questions reveal an ignorance and a misapprehension of God's plans.
  - a. In the patient, merciful ministry of Jesus, God WAS doing a great deal about the injustices in the world.
  - b. Human intellect had failed to decipher the designs of God.
4. John's personal problem was the disproportional exaltation of Jesus' divine office as Judge, to the detriment of His merciful human ministry as the Son of man come to seek and save the lost.
  - a. The Law, Prophets and John had prepared Israel for the glorious coming of the King.

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- b. Jesus had come but apparently nothing was happening that would square with John's understanding of the coming Christ.
  - c. In desperation, John cries out: "Are you the coming One?"
5. But John's faith in the Lord brought him to no other source for answers to his dilemma.
- B. Jesus' answer: He appreciated the honest perplexity of His loyal prophet. He corrected His understanding and vindicated him completely. Notice the correction (11:6): "Tell John that although human intellect has failed to give him complete understanding of his problem, his intellect must submit to the wisdom of my methods and results. If his intellect judges my way not to be the best, it must see what I am accomplishing, even if it means turning his back upon his prejudices about what I should be doing. John must be content to say, 'God's methods are against my wisdom: I cannot understand why He does what He does, but I follow because HE leads me, for I have learned to trust Him.'"

## II. THE FICKLENESS OF AN UNREASONABLE AGE (11:16-19)

- A. John had come protesting against the falsely-inspired merriment of his age.
- B. Jesus had come refusing to sorrow over the things that made men of His age mourn.
- C. Reaction of people in general: "If you are really the Holy One of God, why do you fraternize so familiarly with the rest of us? You are not saintly enough!"
  - 1. One reason for this reaction was the exaggeration of Jesus' divine character at the expense of His necessary and true humanity. Men thought that the great God would never so disturb Himself, so befoul Himself as to attend the banquet of a common sinner! Here again human intellect was at fault.
  - 2. Another reason is that human emotion is falsely stimulated. Men sought the inspiration of their joys and sorrows in the wrong places.
- D. Jesus' answer: "Human emotion must seek my inspiration, must learn to dance to my music, and mourn to my lamenta-

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tion. The age must discover that the only way into the Kingdom of God is that of beginning to rejoice where hitherto there had been no joy; to mourn where hitherto there had been no mourning. . . . Men must be done with dancing to the wrong music, with mourning over unimportant things."

- E. The Lord committed to the judgment of time that age dissatisfied with wisdom contrary to its fickle tastes and capricious emotions.

### III. THE IMPENITENCE OF THE MOST FAVORED CITIES (11:20-24)

- A. Their reaction: "You cannot be taken too seriously as the voice of God. We plan to run our lives much as we have been doing it before you came along!"

1. Here is the depreciation of Jesus' divine authority and the demotion of the King to the level of any other human being.
2. Although these towns had personally witnessed Jesus' triumph over sin and its results that were causing the suffering in their midst, they did not recognize in His mastery a perpetual protest against their own sins. They remained rebels against God.
3. Here is the refusal of the will to submit to the control of God in Christ.

- B. Jesus' answer: "Your great opportunities make you so much more responsible before God for what you know, therefore your punishment for impenitence will be so much more severe! Change your mind about what I am teaching you: turn back upon your false concepts of the Kingdom of God and submit to His rule now!"

### IV. THE FOLLY OF THE WISE AND THE WISDOM OF THE BABES (11:25-30)

- A. The wise and prudent reaction: "Any fool knows that yours is no way to establish a kingdom! Your program does not rhyme with any standard rabbinical formula of how the messianic kingdom has to be."

1. This is the refusal of human intellect to bow, acknowledging its own ignorance.

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2. The net result is the reduction of Jesus to less than a human prophet, for the wise see in this Nazarene something less than a sage whose advice should at least be considered.
- B. The reason for this reaction is that God gives His greatest blessings only to the humble, but the human heart protests against the thought of starting all over again by being born again. People demand a religion that may be grasped as a prize for intellectual achievement; a religion that permits them to give full vent to their passions; a religion that grants them the dignity of their own self-will. But Christ demands that man surrender his darkened intellect, his vulgarized emotions and his prostituted will, so that he might begin again as a little child.
- C. Who is a little child?
1. He is an ignorant man asking instruction.
  2. He is an emotional person seeking proper inspiration.
  3. He is a will searching for authority.
  4. He is a weak one seeking power.
  5. He is imperfect, but looking for perfection.
  6. He trusts Jesus to lead him to find all this and more.

### V. APPLICATION: How do people of our age look for another Christ?

- A. By letting the disappointments and failures in our personal Christian life turn us aside from the Christ who actually came:
1. Do we have no assurance of forgiveness and relief from our guilt and sins?
  2. Do we fail to find the joy and brightness we expected?
  3. What kind of Christ did we expect? Does our *image* differ from the reality?
- B. By letting the general condition of the world blind us to the real Christ and His purposes.
1. Jesus came to save the world and yet the larger portion of it not only remains unsaved but is also growing larger in proportion to the total population. How can He let this go on?

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2. If you look for another Christ, what kind of Messiah could alleviate the human predicament better than Jesus is now doing?
- C. We are not actually expecting the coming of another Christ that is not to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth, but the Jesus Christ whom we know will return in another form! (See Ac. 1:11; Phil. 3:20, 21)
1. When He comes, He will only seem to be another Christ different from the humble Galilean we once knew.
    - a. He will be a Christ whom most men had never believed in.
    - b. He will be a Christ whom most never expected to see come.
    - c. But He will be the very Christ whom John the Baptist said would come in blazing glory.
  2. But He will appear in His power and majesty to bring to a glorious conclusion the mission which He undertook in shame and weakness.
    - a. He has never changed His mission: it has ever been His intention to make righteousness to triumph over sin and get God's will done.
    - b. The same Jesus who was crucified in shame, raised in glory and now reigns at the Father's right hand, is even now perfecting His mission with an eye to that day when He will come for His saints.
- D. What then is to be our reaction?
1. We must ask ourselves, "Am I willing to admit my ignorance and ask instruction; am I willing to yield my emotional nature and take only His inspiration, dancing only to His piping, and mourning only to His lamentation; am I willing to take my will and submit it wholly to His authority; am I willing to take the place of unutterable weakness and depend upon His strength? Am I willing to confess my absolute and utter imperfection and give myself to Him for perfecting of all that concerns me?"
  2. "This is the passage from proud independence to simple confession of weakness. So men enter into this Kingdom. So men find their rest. . . . Our very pre-eminent re-

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spectability prevents the definite daring necessary to get into God's Kingdom. We are prone to drift upon easy seas, to admire the visions of the beautiful land, consent to the beauties of the great ideal, and never enter in because we will not . . . consent to yield to the claim of the King. . . ."

3. "Let this be the hour when you have done with your dilettante fooling with sacred things. Let this be the night when you translate your sickly anemic imagination into grip, force, go and determination."

(The above outline and some of its points were suggested by G. C. Morgan's sermon "The Kingdom By Violence" in *26 Sermons by Dr. G. Campbell Morgan*, Vol. II, p. 229ff.)

Another outline of this chapter might be:

### "JESUS JUDGES HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND HIMSELF"

- I. John the Baptist (11:2-15): "More than a prophet!"
- II. His people in general (11:16-19): "Like children!"
- III. The most favored cities (11:20-24): "Damned!"
- IV. The simple disciples (11:25-30): "Learned!"
- V. Himself (11:20-30): "The Unique Hope of the Race!"

## EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN

### "REST IN A RESTLESS WORLD" (11:20-30)

*Introduction:* The newspapers of the world report riots that picture the great unrest of our world. In the great cities of the world every day is heard news of strikes, riots, protest movements, wars and famines. We wonder where this will all lead to or when it will end. Men's hearts faint for the fear and anxiety over the things that are coming over the world. And why should that be?

There is NO REST IN OUR RESTLESS WORLD, BECAUSE THERE IS NO CERTAINTY.

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1. One woman is uncertain, because another woman could take her husband away from her, and she is not sure that he would not like to go with the other woman!
2. The student is not sure that he can pass his exams, in order to find a small place in our society.
3. The worker can not be sure that tomorrow a machine will not take away his position and work for him.
4. The big industrialist can not be sure that he can hold his wealth.
5. The politicians can only try to establish a better government, but they can never be sure of the outcome.

In whatever other area we can discuss, there exists no rest-bringing security. We can certainly say that the one thing in our world that is certain, is our UNCERTAINTY! And our uncertainty troubles us!

But over the centuries we hear a mighty voice that says: "Come to me! I will give you rest!" In our dark world full of care and strife, difficulties and problems, anxieties and fear, these words bring us comfort, inspiration, encouragement and rest.

Let us listen to this voice from a bit closer by. What does Jesus mean to say to us?

### I JESUS CONDEMNNS THE UNBELIEVING BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT (11:20-24)

- A. Even though Jesus had fulfilled His commission in this world, yet His own people did not accept Him: they did not repent!
  1. Even though He had done His greatest miracles in their presence, miracles that established His message as God's personal revelation:
  2. Even though He had revealed God's will to them, yet they did not repent.
- B. There was no one more joyfully seen, heard and received than Jesus of Nazareth!
  1. They were all ready to make Him their King and establish a worldly messianic kingdom.
  2. They were willing to risk everything to follow Him, rising up against the Roman government, against the hypocritical religion of the Pharisees and chief priests, against all political authority.
  3. They wanted to have a King who could give them bread,

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miracles and wealth, a place among the greatest empires of the world!

4. They wanted the SECURITY, that could come through His miraculous power. They wanted His providence and protection, His conquest of all enemies and His divine defence. They wanted to have all this, while THEY REMAINED UNCHANGED IN HEART AND LIFE.

C. But Jesus sees that they have not understood Him:

1. He had called them to repentance; they wanted to make Him their servant.
2. He wanted to put God in them; they wanted Him and God in THEIR service.
3. Jesus' heart is broken over their deep need of repentance and over their unwillingness to repent.
4. Jesus has so strenuously, so faithfully, so unselfishly, so carefully tried to give them God! And they have neither seen it nor understood!

D. Is this not a picture of our world?

1. We want God on OUR conditions: all His blessings, all His goodness, but He does not dare demand our repentance nor our obedience!
2. Jesus wants to bring us to reality and truth; He wants to create God in us; He wants to put real rest and peace in our heart, but UNDER HIS CONDITIONS: "I tell you, unless you all likewise repent, you shall all likewise perish!"
3. But to whom did Jesus say that?
  - a. To people that thought that simply to be in the vicinity of Jesus was the same thing as faith and repentance.
  - b. To people who thought that common goodness was the same as deep-felt repentance:
    - (1) These were more or less better people than those of Sodom, Tyre and Sidon.
    - (2) But Jesus did not want to make people *more or less* good, but just as perfect as God Himself! (Mt. 5:48)
  - c. To people who thought that culture and enlightenment were sufficient to enjoy the better life.



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- (1) They had had the best enlightenment, because they could hear the Truth itself and revelation of God's will, preached by Jesus Himself!
  - (2) But the light against which we sin, will be the measure whereby we will be judged!
  - (3) The greatness of the quantity of information that we have received concerning God's truth, does not release us from the responsibility to repent and trust Jesus!
- d. To people who thought that to do nothing was as sufficient as repenting. Their sin was the sin of refusing to take a positive stand for Jesus Christ!
- (1) How many people today exalt Jesus as a Superman, "a Man born before His time", perhaps a great Prophet, yes, even as God's Son?
  - (2) And yet they do nothing with Him! They take no responsibility for what they know about Jesus of Nazareth!
4. So why does our world have unrest, insecurity, desperation?  
BECAUSE WE WILL NOT TRUST JESUS AND REPENT!

Let us listen further to His words:

### II JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS OWN CONDITIONS, WHEREBY WE CAN RECEIVE GOD'S TRUST AND REST. (11:25, 26)

Even though He gives us conditions that are absolutely necessary to which we must render whole-hearted and immediate obedience, yet He gives us also His own personal example how we should understand the conditions He requires. What does He do?

- A. He thanks God and rejoices with the Father over the method whereby God chose to reveal His will. This is the grateful acceptance of the will and plans of His Father.
1. Even though He could not reach the unrepentant people and cities, after thousands of attempts, yet He gives God thanks that God had used this method to reveal Himself and that it was God's idea.
  2. Even though there were a very few simple people that truly accepted Jesus, yet Jesus THANKS the Father for them.
  3. Jesus recognizes the universal Lordship of His Father. This

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too is an anchor for our souls, if we acknowledge that there is no place in this universe, no problem in our world over which our God is not fully Master and fully in charge!

4. Jesus praised and thanked God that His plan *really works* to save those people who *can be* taught.

B. But what is God's method to save the world? By revealing these eternal truths to humble seekers, to "little children."

1. Who are "the wise and understanding" of this world, from whom God has hidden His will? These are the people who are "wise" in their own eyes and proud of their own understanding.

—So far as the world could see it was Pilate who was a greater man than Peter, but Jesus could do much more with a Peter than with Pilate!

—The high priest Caiaphas went far higher in the human society than Matthew, but that publican could become an Apostle for eternity, because he could forsake everything to follow Jesus!

2. Who are the "little children", to whom God has given great revelations of His will? These are the humble people who open their lives to follow Jesus' leadership and accept His teaching.

a. The doors of God's Kingdom remain open for those who repent and become little children.

b. These are the people who admit their ignorance, confess their sins and come to Jesus for forgiveness. (I Cor. 1:18-31)

3. Yes, this is God's plan and Jesus thanks Him for it.

### III JESUS ACCEPTS THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE AND PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE ONLY POSSIBLE REVEALER OF GOD (11:27)

A. "All things have been committed to me by my Father."

1. Perhaps we are caused to think immediately of the glory and royalty of God's Son, because we know that, at the end of the world, everything will be the inheritance of Jesus.

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2. But here Jesus is not speaking about the glory and wealth that shall be His.
3. He understands very clearly that the weight of the sins of the whole world have been laid upon HIM!
  - a. There is no arrogance here, but an honest bending of the Lord Jesus Himself to take upon Himself the gigantic weight of a lost mankind upon Himself.
  - b. He had just seen people, that had had the best possible opportunity to be saved, refuse the call of God.
  - c. Perhaps He is reminded of the ancient words of Isaiah:  
"All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned every one to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."  
(53:6)  
Our own unwillingness to repent was laid upon God's Son!
  - d. Yes, "the government will be upon his shoulder", but the insignia thereof are not the colorful flags and marching eagles of a great empire, but the bleeding "stripes by which we are healed"!
4. Yes, all things have been committed to Jesus by His Father: the moral responsibility for all men *just like they are*: in their sins, their dying and in their deep need for repentance and redemption!  
This is why we are not surprised about what Jesus says next:
  - B. "No one knows the Son but the Father!"
    1. Here is a cry that comes out of the loneliness of the Lord Jesus.
      - a. There is no man on earth that realizes the greatness of the burden of the Son of God.
      - b. Jesus has not found anyone who really understands how He feels among sinners, nor shares His burden.
    2. Jesus has had thousands of followers, but very few of them continued to follow Him, even though those few themselves were deeply unaware of His mission, His purpose, and His Person. Even so late as the last week of His life, before going to the cross, Jesus had to say to them,

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"Have I been so long with you, and you do not yet know me?"

3. Jesus feels deeply His loneliness on earth: no one really knows or understands Him.
  - a. But people must understand Him in order to be saved!
  - b. But we must understand His message, in order thereby to be able to know the Father.

C. "No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

1. Jesus finds Himself in a world where no one really knows God!
  - a. This means that all the great inventors of religion are liars, if they contradict, diminish or deny the Word of Jesus!
  - b. This means that all the lesser religious lights who have led men away from God's Will are "thieves and robbers"! (Jn. 10:1)

2. This is a world, in Jesus' day and in our own as well, wherein people have lost the very key to life, because they live as if God does not exist. But Jesus knows that God is the central fact of all reality, the greatest, most important fact of all.

3. Jesus prayed: "This is eternal life, that men might know you, the only true God, AND JESUS CHRIST, whom you have sent!" (Jn. 17:3)

4. Only JESUS knew God. Here Jesus expressed the longing to make God known to men.

5. He MUST make God known, but how can He go about the task of revealing God?

D. Here is His method whereby He reveals the Father.

## IV. JESUS INVITES HUMBLE DISCIPLES TO COME TO HIM AND LEARN (11:28-30)

A. This young Jew, not more than 33 years old, invites the entire human race to come to Him to learn. He promises that every one, however great his problems might be, shall find rest for his soul! Let the stupendous nature of this invitation sink deep into your heart: feel the gigantic nature of the fraud if

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the claims implicit in this invitation are false. Feel the power of God's loving mercy, if these claims are true! Here we must decide what we think about Jesus!

B. But Jesus has to be the teacher, if we are to find rest for our souls. The only ones whom Jesus can help are the "little children". We must be willing to learn EVERYTHING from Him.

1. Jesus has already had too many theologians and professors, who molded His ideas according to their own conceptions! He wants *disciples*, or followers, who are willing to follow Him and live under His discipline. The so-called "great" preachers, professors, priests, bishops, popes, councils, theologians and universities are not what Jesus is looking for! He seeks men and women, boys and girls who are willing to enroll themselves in His school and learn under HIM.

C. Even though Jesus Himself is the Revealer of the eternal God, even though He Himself is the Creator of heaven and earth, even though He is the Judge before whom all must give account, yet He is gentle and lowly in heart.

1. He is not a teacher that His students need to be afraid of.

2. He does not boss His students around; they do not need to be afraid to expose their ignorance before Him.

3. My friend, He could become your Teacher: with Jesus you need fear no ridicule or contempt in His school.

4. If you are an eager student, you will find Jesus ready to help you, sharing with you the same spirit of joy in knowledge. He will help you at whatever level you find yourself, in order to bring you up to His level of full knowledge of the entire universe! You will find Him a wise and sympathetic Teacher, who will lead you into truth.

5. How many times has Jesus already shown Himself this kind of Teacher? How many times did the sinners and publicans come to Jesus, even though they had run away from the proud, strict Pharisees? They knew that Jesus was different, so, friend, do not put Jesus in the same class with religious leaders that you know, because He is not at all like any teacher you ever knew. He is in a class all by Himself, but you will enjoy enrolling in the class!

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6. The publicans and sinners of Jesus' day felt the attraction of His gentleness, and they knew that He could help free them from sins that they had for years taken for granted.
- D. In Jesus' school you find SECURITY and rest for your soul!
1. To the tired worker, Jesus gives genuine rest for the body, nerves and mind, because Jesus gives true rest for his SPIRIT. Such a person can now sleep, because he has a forgiven conscience.
  2. To the tired and heavy-laden worshipper, Jesus gives rest also.
    - a. Tired of religious ceremonies, duties, norms and empty forms? Then, Jesus offers you devotion to a Person.
    - b. Tired of defeats and disappointments in the struggle against sin? Then Jesus gives you the refreshment of forgiveness and power to overcome.
  3. To the tired worldly who has found everything to be futile and empty, Jesus offers His fullness, all His friendship and companionship.

INVITATION: Friend, you know your own cares, your own sins, and problems. Let Jesus take your difficulties and free you. Lay all your difficulties down at the feet of Jesus. Enroll yourself in His school; He invites you now.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

- Section 26. Jesus Faces Charges of Sabbath Breaking (12:1-14)  
Section 27. Jesus the Healing Servant of Jehovah (12:15-21)  
Section 28. Jesus Is Attacked For Casting Out Demons and Charged With League With Satan (12:22-37)  
Section 29. Jesus Gives the Sign of Jonah and Condemns His Generation (12:38-45)  
Section 30. Jesus Refuses to Permit Fleshly Ties to Bind Him (12:46-50)

## STUDY OUTLINES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
  - A. For permitting "grain threshing" on the Sabbath (12:18)

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### ANSWERS:

1. Human need rises above strict legal procedure. (12:3, 4)
2. Work in God's service is permitted on the Sabbath. (12:5, 6)
3. God's interpretation of law is much more lenient than yours (12:7)
4. I am Lord of the Sabbath. (12:8)

#### B. For healing man's withered hand in synagogue on Sabbath. (12:9-15a)

1. To refuse to do good or save life is to do harm or destroy. (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)
2. You work by helping dumb beast. Why not help man who is worth so much more to God? (12:11, 12a)
3. Doing good is legal! (12:12b)
4. Jesus established His correct conclusion by the miracle of healing the man's hand. (12:13)
5. The Pharisees immediately held counsel with the Herodians discussing how to destroy Jesus. (12:14)

### II. JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT OF JEHOVAH (12:15-21)

A. Situation: Jesus strategically withdrew from immediate hostility of the religious leaders. Common people followed Him from many areas, seeking healing. Jesus healed them, ordering strict secrecy.

#### B. Result: Fulfilment of Isaiah 42:1ff.

1. His Nature (12:18a)
2. His Authority and Task (12:18b)
3. His Method (12:19)
4. His Results (12:20)
5. His Universality (12:21)

### III. JESUS IS ATTACKED FOR CASTING OUT DEMONS AND CHARGED WITH LEAGUE WITH SATAN (12:22-37)

A. SITUATION: He healed a blind, dumb demoniac, which resulted in the crowds' asking, "Is He the Messiah?" Jealous Pharisees counterattack by asserting Jesus works by devil's power.

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### B. JESUS' BASIC REBUTTAL:

1. Satan is divided: good! (12:25, 26)
2. What about your students who exorcize demons? (12:27)
3. Reasonable alternative: God's Spirit empowers me. (12:28)
4. More evidence: in order to overpower the devil, one must be stronger than Satan! (12:29)
5. Neutrality is impossible. (12:30)

### C. JESUS EXPLAINS HIS WARNING AGAINST BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (12:31, 32; cf. Lk. 12:8-10; Mk. 3:28-30)

1. All sins will be forgivable, except that by which all knowledge of God's truth and forgiveness is received, i.e. by His Spirit.
2. Eternal damnation awaits the sinner who rejects all that is the Spirit's work among men.

### D. TALK IS NOT CHEAP (12:33-37)

1. Speech reveals one's sense of moral discernment. (12:33-35)
2. There are no words that do not count, for God holds us accountable for all. (12:36, 37)

## IV. JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH AND CONDEMNS HIS GENERATION (12:38-45)

### A. Unreasonable request for a sign of Jesus' identity and authority. (38)

### B. Jesus' logical refusal: "It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those already given!" (12:39)

### C. Jesus' merciful exception: the resurrection is His last sign. (12:40)

### D. Jesus' condemnation well-grounded. (12:41, 42)

1. Illustration: Ninevites heard only the prophet Jonah.
2. Illustration: Queen of the South heard only Solomon.
3. Implicit Conclusion: According to the light against which you have sinned will be your judgment. You have had greater opportunities to know God's will.

### E. Warning: "Your religion has made you empty, leaving you a spiritual vacuum for anything that will fill it up."

## V. JESUS REFUSES TO PERMIT FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM (12:46-50)