

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 5B – Matthew 11-12: The Rejection of Jesus and the Slander of the Spirit

Greetings, everyone. This is David Turner again. This is Lecture 5B, Matthew 11 and 12, Jesus Rejected and the Spirit Slandered.

We've bitten off quite a big hunk for this one lecture here in Matthew 11 and 12, and I hope that we'll be able to chew it appropriately. I'm going to let you read the first section of the material analysis of Matthew 11:1 to 12:50 on page 25 of the supplemental materials. Look at that for yourself.

And we will begin with the John the Baptist question in Matthew 11:1 through 6. It's interesting that Matthew 11:1 mentions only that Jesus had instructed the disciples by setting out on his own ministry. Matthew does not mention either that Jesus sent the disciples or that they later returned to follow Jesus, although they are with him again in 12:1 and following. Evidently, Matthew does not narrate the mission of the disciples or of their return to Jesus because his literary purpose is centered on Jesus and the teaching of Jesus for the disciples and the church, which is built on the disciples.

John's question in 11:2 and 3 is essentially about what kind of Messiah Jesus is. It focuses on Jesus' works, which Matthew has highlighted since 4:23. Matthew has shown that the response to those works has been mixed with popular acclaim 4:25, 7:28, 8:1, and 18:9, 8, and 33.

Popular acclaim balanced with increasing opposition from the Jewish leaders, 5:20, 7:29, 9:3, 11, and 34. So John's question as to whether Jesus is the coming Messiah is crucial for the reader of Matthew. Although John's doubts are often downplayed, they should be given full force.

Although John had ample reason to believe in Jesus 3:13 through 17, his imprisonment for 12 and the seeming delay in the coming of the kingdom would inevitably take a toll on his confidence. Jesus' answer to John serves to refocus him on the fulfillment of Old Testament promises of salvation, not on promises of judgment. Not only John, but all those who focus on the messianic works of Jesus will be blessed because they will not lose faith.

11:6. John's doubts and the way Jesus deals with them are exemplary for all of Jesus' disciples. Davies and Allison point out in their commentary that Matthew 11:1 through 6 interprets all of Matthew 4 through 10. Jesus is indeed the coming one whom John announced.

Jesus' words and works bring the saving rule of God to bear on human sin and suffering, fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah. But if even one as great as John could doubt this, what of Jesus' other followers, both ancient and modern? They, too, must focus on Jesus' messianic words and works, for the opposition will only get worse as Matthew's narrative unfolds. If the followers of Jesus focus on the delay in God's judgment of sin, doubts will arise.

But their focus must be on the presence of salvation, not the absence of judgment. Compare Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:8 and 9 and in verse 15. Now we move on to the section Matthew 11, verses 7 through 19, where Jesus speaks of the greatness of John the Baptist.

Despite John's doubts in 11 to 6, he should not be viewed as a weak, vacillating person. Obviously, to the contrary, no greater human being ever lived, and there could be no prophet greater than the one spoken of in Malachi 3:1, who would prepare the way for the Messiah. John also lived at a great time, at the crucial juncture of the end of the prophetic era.

But he was martyred just before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated the new covenant. Compare 26:28. John's ministry heralded the forceful advance of the kingdom, but he became a victim of the violent people who were attacking it.

His role was like that of Elijah. Compare 11:11 through 15. Neither John nor Jesus, whose lifestyles were quite opposite, were acceptable to their evil contemporaries, 11:16 through 19.

Hagner puts it this way. John is too holy. Jesus is not holy enough.

But ultimately, Jesus, perhaps personified as wisdom, will be vindicated by his deeds, 11:19. Matthew 11:7 to 19, sets the scene for the blatant slander raised against Jesus in Matthew chapter 12. Well, enough for the analysis of 11:7 through 19.

What about the theological issue here of John and Elijah? Jesus' solemn words that anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand underline the importance of grasping his identification of John the Baptist with Elijah in 11:14, and 15. These words have been the occasion of a great deal of discussion. A first reading of Malachi 4 verses 5 and 6 seems to indicate that a future return of Elijah the prophet to the earth to herald the day of the Lord will occur.

The Malachi 4:5 and 6 was taken at face value may be seen from John 1:21 and Matthew 16:14, 17:10, 27:47, 49. Jesus himself seems to affirm a future role for

Elijah in Matthew 17:11. And some believe that Matthew, excuse me, that Malachi 4:5 and 6 will yet be literally fulfilled.

But in what sense, if John is said to be Elijah? In other passages, John, on the one hand, denied he was Elijah, John 1:21, but on the other hand, he is said to minister in Elijah's spirit and power, Luke 1:17, which may remind the reader of the manner in which Elisha succeeded Elijah in Second Kings 2:9 through 15. John was not Elijah reborn, but he fulfilled a role similar to that of Elijah. Sadly, his contemporaries were, for the most part, not willing to accept this.

11:14, compare 21:32. Whether there is yet to be a literal return of Elijah to fulfill Malachi 4, verses 5 and 6 must be left as an open question, and now we must hasten on to John 11, verses 20 to 24 and make a few comments about the solemn woes Jesus pronounces on the cities which had received his ministry. Or I should say, had not received his ministry.

The reproaches of 11:20 to 24 are the most severe words of Jesus to this point in Matthew, but they will be worsened in chapter 23, verse 13 and following. If there are any questions on the part of the reader as to how Jesus' ministry was being received, they're put to rest here. Although Matthew has stressed how the multitudes followed Jesus due to his healing miracles, here he shows that the majority of these crowds did not grasp the point of the miracles, that is, Jesus' authority on earth to forgive sins, 9:6. Many had personally experienced the blessings of the miracles, and evidently many more had observed the miracles taking place.

But sadly, relatively few had grasped the significance of the miracles as authenticating the kingdom message of repentance. Sort of like the situation in the Gospel of John, chapter 6, verses 14 and 15, and compare 6:26 and 27. The eschatological blessings of the kingdom were enthusiastically received, but the ethical imperative of repentance was rejected.

Jesus' woes against Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum assume an important principle of divine judgment, the principle of proportional accountability, which results in degrees of reward and punishment. Compare Luke 27, excuse me, Luke 12, verses 47 and 48. Tyre and Sidon, along with Sodom, were wicked cities which had rejected God's revelation.

But the revelation they had received was not nearly so clear or sustained as the revelation of Jesus to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum, Jesus' adopted hometown, Matthew 4:13 and 9:1. Thus, the judgment of Tyre, Sidon, and even Sodom would be more tolerable than that of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. These three cities also serve as a warning to all those today whose familiarity with Christianity seems to have bred contempt. Being born into a Christian family, being a

member of a church where the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, or even being a citizen of a country where Christianity is prominent are choice blessings from God, but none of them is a substitute for personal repentance.

It's one thing to know about the gospel due to one's environment. It's another thing entirely to personally acknowledge one's own need of the gospel. Judas Iscariot is another sad testimony to the fact that those who are nearest to the means of grace are sometimes the farthest from its end.

Bruner's commentary makes some pointed, though totally appropriate, remarks about how this passage ought to impact those of us who have become nonchalant about the blessings and warnings of the gospel. Now we move on to the last words in chapter 11:11, 25 to 30, words which are very familiar to us, I'm sure, already. In this passage, Jesus responds in two ways to growing opposition.

First, he finds comfort and strength in the sovereignty of God as Father in 11:25 to 27. Second, he continues to invite people to follow him in 11:25 to 30. It's striking that both of these responses follow the announcement of doom upon the towns that rejected Jesus' kingdom message.

We can find no better response to opposition than that of Jesus. When people reject the gospel of Christ, we can only rest in God's sovereignty and continue to offer God's grace. People come to faith in Christ for two reasons.

Ultimately, because of God's purpose and election, and immediately because they've heard the gospel. We can continue today to rest in the sovereignty of God and the sufficiency of the gospel to bring people to faith. With the end of Matthew 11, we've come to the end of the first three sets of two passages on unbelief, 11:2 to 19, and 11:20 to 24, followed by a passage on belief, 11:25 to 30.

Opposition to the Messiah and his messengers has been increasingly alluded to as Matthew's story continues. Just think back through it, and you'll remember lots of passages where opposition has been increasingly mentioned. But as Matthew 11 unfolds, the situation is unmistakably grim.

The Messiah's forerunner is in prison, and even he is beginning to have doubts about Jesus' ministry, Matthew 11:1 to 3. Jesus points to unmistakable signs of the kingdom's presence in words, word, and work, 11:4 to 6, and extols John's unsurpassed greatness. However, the kingdom is being violently attacked by people who arrogantly and obstinately refuse its authority, 11:12, 16 through 24. Nevertheless, the Father has been revealed by the Son to certain childlike people whose weariness has compelled them to find the rest which Jesus offers in kingdom discipleship, 11:25 to 30.

Those who are wise in their own eyes increasingly reject this humbling message as Matthew's narrative unfolds. The second and third sets of unbelief and belief passages are going to make it clear that this division is a very strong one. Now as to the theology implied in 11:25 to 30, the unique relationship of the Father and the Son and the redemption of God's people was described with unparalleled clarity here in 11:25 to 27.

Matthew has prepared the reader for this quintessential statement by means of previous declarations about the Son. Emmanuel, the Son miraculously born to Mary, signifies the unique saving presence of God with His people, Matthew 1:23. Matthew's narrative of Jesus' baptism mentions the pleasure the Father takes in the Son in the words echoing Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 3:17.

Satan is unable to shake the Son from his resolve not to test the Father in Matthew 4:1 through 11. Jesus does miracles to show that the Father has given to the Son of Man authority to forgive sins on earth in 9:6. In times of persecution, disciples must confess the Son if they wish the Son to confess them to the Father, 10:32 and 33. Further comments on the grandeur of the Son will occur, culminating in the Great Commission being predicated on the Son's unique authority in 28:18 to 20.

But one would be hard-pressed to speak of the Son in terms more exalted than those used here in 11:27, which bluntly yet elegantly say that saving knowledge of God the Father comes only through the electing revelation of Jesus, the exclusive mediator of salvation. The reader of Matthew 11: 25 to 30 may be surprised that the way in which the sovereignty of God in 11:25 is joined to the appeal for human decision in 11:28 to 30. The history of the Church has often witnessed polarization on these two areas of its doctrine, with some emphasizing the sovereignty of God and others human responsibility.

But since biblical texts often speak of these matters side by side, it seems foolish to try to separate them. It's only due to the sovereign grace of God that sinners repent and believe in Jesus, and that sovereign grace operates only through the message of the Gospel of Jesus. The Church must rest in the sovereignty of God if it's to gain the strength for its labor of inviting people all over the world to believe in Jesus.

It's also important to note how Jesus speaks of discipleship here. The mention of a yoke is in keeping with Jewish metaphors of discipleship, but in what sense was Jesus' yoke easy in his burden light? It is true because Jesus did not endorse the oral traditions of the Pharisees, which threatened to obscure the weightier matters of the law, 15:3, following, and 23:16-24. Jesus' yoke, however, should not be viewed as less rigorous than that of the Pharisees, since he stated that the righteousness he required surpassed their righteousness in 5:20. Jesus' discipleship yoke is light compared to that of the Pharisees, but it is still a yoke. Jesus is the sole revealer of the Father, and he, not the Pharisees, is the definitive teacher of the Torah in 5:17-

48. He is gentle and humble, while they are proud and ostentatious, 6:1-18, 23:1-12. Their traditions obscure and even transgress the obligations demanded by the Torah, 15:3 and 6. But Jesus gets to the heart of the Torah by stressing its weightier matters.

Paradoxically, his focus on weightier matters lends itself to a lighter yoke. Compare 1 John 5:3. Now we move into chapter 12, verses 1-8, and the controversy about the Sabbath. This passage describes the controversy which occurs when the Pharisees object to Jesus' disciples innocently picking and eating grain as they walk through a field in 12:1-2. Notice chapter 12.7, as well as the background in the book of Deuteronomy 23:25. Jesus' response to this objection refers to King David, the temple, and the Sabbath, with the upshot that he is greater than each of them.

The argument from David's activities in 12:3 and 4 would be problematic enough for the Pharisees, but the clear affirmations that Jesus is greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath would be viewed by them as outrageous, even blasphemous. Another key to Jesus' differences with the Pharisees is their contrasting ways of interpreting the Old Testament. The Pharisees begin with the institution of the Sabbath and view it as all-important.

It overrides the humanitarian concerns behind the legislation of Deuteronomy 23:25, which permits the picking and eating of grain as one walks through a field. Jesus, on the other hand, begins with God's concern for His people, which overrides the institution of the Sabbath on certain occasions. The Sabbath was made to benefit people, not people to benefit the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus provides the ultimate authoritative interpretation of its role in the life of God's people. Jesus has provided His disciples rest, an easy yoke and a light burden. His approach to the Sabbath is a clear example of how His promise is fulfilled.

Now, in 12:9-14, we want to briefly discuss another controversy, this time about a synagogue healing on the Sabbath. This passage reinforces the basic impasse between Jesus and the Pharisees, which is evident in 12:1-8. They are at loggerheads over the relationship of Sabbath law to deeds of compassion. The Pharisees evidently interpret the Sabbath law strictly and make no exceptions for instances of compassion like those involved in Jesus' healings.

But Jesus points out an inconsistency in the Pharisees' approach. They have no problem with a sheep being rescued from a cistern on the Sabbath, yet they condemn Him for healing a person, who is much more valuable to God than a sheep. Theoretically, they might have responded to Jesus that the healing of the man's hand was not a matter of life or death.

And it could have waited until the next day. But Matthew's narrative ends with this rejoinder of Jesus. Evidently, Jesus believed that the written Torah was not violated by this healing.

The legal dispute is one thing, but it leads the Pharisees to take steps to end the dispute by eliminating Jesus. At first glance, this seems to be a rather draconian solution to a religious dispute. Perhaps the Pharisees were simply planning to enforce Exodus 31:14, but baser motives were probably at work.

Evidently, Jesus is perceived as a threat to the status quo, so jealousy could also be involved, since an increase in Jesus' popularity and influence would inevitably mean a decrease in that of the Pharisees. Now we move on to Matthew 12, verses 15 through 21. Matthew 11 and 12 comprise a block of narrative material in stressing the increasing opposition to Jesus in the kingdom.

The threefold structure of Matthew in this narrative block has been discussed previously. This structure involves three sets of passages, each containing two passages stressing unbelief, followed by a passage stressing belief. This is on your outline on page 25.

With Matthew 12:21, we have come to the end of the second of these three sets, with 12:1-8 and 9:14 stressing unbelief and 12:15-21 stressing belief. The citation of Isaiah 42:1-4 and Matthew 12:15 and following serves three purposes. It explains why Jesus withdrew from conflict with the Pharisees and why he urged the people whom he had healed not to reveal who he was.

As the Lord's spirit-enabled servant, Jesus' ministry would not be characterized by conflict and by loud words spoken to incite the masses. Instead, he would prove to be a gentle and merciful person in his ministry to the weak. Compare Matthew 5:5-7 and 11:29.

Second, Isaiah 42:1 and 42:4 indicate that the servant would have a ministry to the Gentiles. Although Jesus is increasingly rejected by many of the sons of the kingdom, compare 8:12, Matthew has gradually been making it clear that certain Gentiles are receptive to the kingdom. Notice many passages where this has been hinted in the narrative.

And that the followers of Jesus must widen their horizons for a worldwide ministry to all the nations. Compare 22:9, 24:14, 25:32 and 28:18-20. Third, Isaiah 42:1 stresses that the servant's ministry will be spirit-empowered.

This lays the background for Jesus' response to the slander that his powers of exorcism were demonic. Thus, the Pharisees' charge in 12:24 is found to be anti-scriptural and amounts to an unforgivable slander of the spirit of God. 12:31 and 32.

It's paradoxical that the power of Jesus in the kingdom is found in service born out of humility and compassion. Compare 11:29. The Messiah uses his power not to gain control over people but to serve them.

Jesus does not attempt to extend the kingdom by selfish quarrels involving inflammatory rhetoric. His ministry will eventually bring justice to victory. 12:20.

But even John the Baptist had doubts about the way in which this was being accomplished. Certainly, Christians today have a great deal to learn from their Lord on this matter. Their course of life is likewise to be that of sacrificial service.

Compare 16:21-25 and 20:25-28. And now we go on ahead to one of the more difficult passages in Matthew, the so-called passage on the unpardonable sin, which we have described here as Jesus and the prince of the demons in 12:22-37. By way of exposition, the Pharisaic opposition to Jesus comes to a head in this section.

The healing of a blind, mute, demon-possessed man results in antithetical responses. The crowd, on the one hand, wonders whether Jesus is the Messiah. The Pharisees, on the other hand, perhaps in response to both the miracle and the crowd's openness to Jesus, slander Jesus and, more importantly, the Spirit with the charge of collaborating with the prince of demons.

12:22-24. Jesus' response comprises the rest of the passage, 12:25-37. In it he argues convincingly against the Pharisees' view of his ministry and affirms that his ministry must be understood as nothing less than the arrival of the kingdom by the power of God's Spirit, 12:25-28.

Then he likens the advance of the kingdom into Satan's domain to the binding of a strong man and the looting of his household, and he warns his followers that neutrality is impossible when it comes to the work of the kingdom, 12:29-30. The Pharisees' slander amounts to an unforgivable sin and an unforgivable blasphemy not merely of Jesus but of the Spirit of God who empowers Jesus, 12:31-32. Further, their slanderous words betray their evil hearts and portend their eschatological doom, just as worthless fruit proves that a tree is ruthless, 12:33-37.

Now, the comings of Jesus and the binding of Satan. Most expositors acknowledge that Matthew 12:28 and 29 teach the presence of God's kingdom and that his saving power began to encroach upon the domain of Satan during the life and ministry of Jesus. Generally, this encroachment or binding is linked in some way to the description of the binding of Satan in the abyss in Revelation 20:1-10.

Theologians who hold to amillennialism generally argue that Satan has been bound by the first coming of Christ so that he can no longer deceive the nations, compared

to Revelation 20, verse 3. Those who hold to premillennialism, especially dispensational premillennialism, take an opposite view, stressing that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is a yet future event which will happen only at the second coming of Christ to the earth. It appears that one must find some truth in both of these views. Dispensationalists must make room for the decisive defeat of Satan at Jesus' first coming and amillennialists must not underestimate the extent to which Satan's limited power can still injure the Church.

Satan's power has been effectively shattered by Christ's first coming, yet he remains a powerful enemy who must be resisted by all the means of grace, compare Ephesians 6:11 and following, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5, verses 8 and 9. Only in the future will Satan be totally incapacitated, and that evidently in two stages, Revelation 20, verses 1-10. Believers can rejoice that the power of the Gospel of Jesus already overcomes the enemy, John 12:31, 16:11, Acts 26:18, and other passages such as Colossians 1:13. And they can rejoice that God will eventually fully destroy Satan's evil works so that in the new earth only righteousness can dwell, Revelation 21 and 22. Now, the matter of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, the unpardonable sin.

The solemn words of 12:31 and 32 ought to be taken to heart by all readers of Matthew, but the question remains as to the precise nature of the unpardonable sin. Well-meaning but overzealous preachers have at times utilized this verse to threaten their listeners that to disbelieve the Gospel message is to commit the unpardonable sin. In ministry, you may have encountered such individuals who are under the impression that there is no hope for them because they've supposedly sinned away their day of grace.

Theologians tend to interpret the unpardonable sin as the generic sin of unbelief, linking this Matthean passage to other texts such as John 3:18, John 16:9, and 1 John 5:16. But as serious as general disbelief in Jesus is, those who take this passage as a reference to it are probably mistaken. The specific situation in Matthew 12 involves the spirit-empowered miracles of Jesus, which ought to have been viewed as evidence for his messianic status, 12:23, and his authority to forgive sins on the earth, 9:6. Far from simply disbelieving this, the Pharisees slander the ministry of the Spirit with the Messiah by accusing Jesus of collaborating with the very forces his kingdom ministry is overpowering, according to 12:29. Therefore, it would be wise for expositors to exercise caution in the broad application of this text to unbelief in general. To be sure, ultimate unbelief in Jesus is unforgivable, but the point of this text is to underline not only unbelief in the face of clear evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, but also the slanderous perversion of messianic evidence into demonic evidence.

Today, people are accountable to believe the Gospel when they hear it, to be sure, but this hardly warrants the notion that those who do not immediately accept Jesus have entered an unalterable state of unforgivable doom. Sadly, the Pharisees

respond to these scorching words of Jesus by asking him for a sign that will authenticate his words. This is ironic, since their slanderous response to his previous miraculous sign is what's led to these words.

They were not in need of good evidence, but of good hearts. What would be the use of further miracles? Now, the sign of Jonah in Matthew 12, verses 38-45. Matthew 12, verses 38-45, contains two parts, both of which stress the gravity of the unbelief of Jesus' contemporaries.

The first part contrasts the Pharisees' unbelief with notable and surprising cases of belief in the Old Testament, 12:38-42. The second part betrays this unbelief parabolically, 12:43-45, evidently to point out that Israel would be worse off after not believing in Jesus than it was before he came. It seems to be a cryptic warning against superficial repentance and a veiled prophecy of the eschatological doom of Jesus' contemporaries.

Compare Luke 11:24-26. This passage underlines the evils of hardened unbelief, as do few others. After the Pharisees had seen Jesus do many miracles, instead of believing, they outrageously attributed those miracles to Satan.

When they were shown the untenability of that position, they responded not with belief, but with an evidently insincere request for another miracle. Their unbelief in the face of overwhelming evidence is contrasted with the belief of the Ninevites and the Queen of the South in the face of relatively little evidence. Thus, they provide a grim illustration of what Jesus spoke about in 11:25, that God had hidden the message of the kingdom from those who were wise and clever in their own estimation and had revealed it to those who were childlike.

No amount of further signs would avail for such people, not even the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The parable of 12:43-45 is enigmatic. The mere absence of evil spirits does not accomplish redemption.

The house had been cleaned, but a good tenant had not yet taken up residence. Perhaps this refers to the response of Jesus' contemporaries to John's and his own ministry. Some repented, but many did not, with the result that there was no genuine national repentance and there were bleak prospects for the future.

Finally, we need to make a few comments on 12, 46-50 about the true family of Jesus. Matthew 11 and 12 comprise a block of narrative material stressing the increasing opposition to Jesus and the kingdom. This threefold structure of this narrative block has been discussed previously in the commentary on Matthew 11:1-6 and on page 24, 25 of these notes.

The structure involves three sets of passages, each containing two passages on unbelief and a passage stressing belief. In Matthew 12:50, we've come to the end of the second of these three sets with 12, 32-37 and 12:38-45 stressing unbelief and 12, 46-50 stressing belief. At this point in 13:1, Matthew introduces Jesus' third discourse which flows into the next narrative block after the characteristic transition in 13:53.

In 12:46-50, the mood turns from unbelief to belief, from a negative to a positive perspective. Jesus' own family becomes a warning against superficial discipleship. Elsewhere, Jesus affirms the family, so the point here is not disrespect for them but allegiance to those whose lives are ordered by the values of the kingdom.

Davies and Allison put it well when they say these words do not dissolve family bonds but they relativize them. Jesus' disciples may have to leave their families behind, 19:29. They may even have to face betrayal by members of their families, 10:21, 35-37.

Christians today must follow Jesus' example in the area of family loyalties, 23:8. It's not at all unusual for Christians to treat their brothers and sisters in Christ in a harsh manner inconsistent with kingdom values and the relationship in the family of God. There's great need for renewed appreciation of the truth portrayed in Matthew 12:46-50.

Finally, a summary of Matthew 11 and 12 moving into chapter 13. In Matthew 11 and 12, Matthew has gradually made his readers aware of the rising opposition and rejection that Jesus has been experiencing. He previously alluded briefly to the issue, which erupts into unforgivable blasphemy in this chapter.

But chapter 12 amounts to a total rift between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Overall, the chapter makes it clear that Jesus' approach to the Old Testament is totally at variance with that of the Pharisees. They plan to murder the one who is greater than David, the temple, the Sabbath, Jonah, and Solomon.

As the opposition by the evil and adulterous generation escalates, Jesus begins to speak more in parables by which he communicates with his disciples as he obscures the truth from his enemies, who...