Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 73.9%

Weekly Readings will cover:
Sunday: Luke 7:18 – 23 & Matthew 11:1 – 6
Monday: Luke 7:24 – 28 & Matthew 11:7 – 11
Tuesday: Matthew 11:12 – 19 & Luke 7:29– 35
Wednesday: Matthew 11:20 - 24
Thursday: Matthew 11:25 - 30
Friday: Preparation Day
Saturday: Sabbath

Current # of email addresses in the group: 730

I hope you enjoyed getting back into the Gospel accounts and continuing in our reading program.

Sunday this week is long, it's about twice what I typically try to provide for a single day. Since I no longer send out a Friday and Sabbath reading, you could break that in half if you wish and extend the reading to an additional day. I didn't see a natural place to break this material so I kept it all together. Additionally, the material provided for Monday and Tuesday would ideally stay together as well, but I found a more natural break so that I did not provide two days in a row that were both long.

I hope the pace and level of explanation is what is desired by all of you in this group. I'm striving to find the balance between over explaining and striving to ensuring appropriate understanding. I'm not always sure that I'm finding that appropriate balance. I'm always open to your feedback on that balance.

I hope you enjoy this week's reading and that you have a wonderful Sabbath.

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:
https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:
https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH
You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:
https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 122

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 825 – SUNDAY: November 15th
Luke 7:18-23 & Matthew 11:2-6
Daily Deep Dive:
We now come to a very interesting passage that if we are not careful we can read and miss a lot of what is really going on here.

Matthew 11:2 – John the Baptizer is in prison. We covered this previous when John was thrown in prison by Herod Antipas because John had publicly condemned Herod's marriage to Herodias (his brother's wife). Jewish historian Josephus records that John was in Machaerus, a fortress east of the Dead Sea. This location was especially suited to holding a politically troublesome prisoner because it was in a remote location and had strong defenses. John had been a popular religious leader. Josephus records that Herod feared the unrest that John's imprisonment could bring. This is likely why he was held in this location.

The facts up to this point are that John had faithfully fulfilled his calling and prepared the way for the Messiah. He had faithfully and boldly preached repentance, even confronting powerful political leaders. He now sits in prison. He's likely been there for many months, perhaps over a year, depending on the chronology of the Gospel accounts. I can only imagine that his living conditions are not good. To this location, reports of the miracles Jesus is doing are coming to John through John's disciples, and he calls for and sends two of them with a question for Jesus (Luke 7:18).

Luke 7:19/Matthew 11:3 – "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Both Gospel accounts record the question the exact same way. Out of all the questions John could have asked, why is this the question? In Greek, the use of the definite article "Ho" (translated "the") makes this a reference to a particular individual.

Who was “The Coming One”? (ὁ ἐρχόμενος - ho erchomenos)
This expression draws upon several Old Testament passages that had connections with Messianic expectations. The same Greek words are found in the Septuagint of Psalm 118:26 - “Blessed is he who comes (erchomenos) in the name of the LORD!” This passage not only was closely associated with Messianic expectations, it was the exact passage that the crowds would later quote when Jesus entered Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:9).

I personally wonder if Psalm 118 was very much on John the Baptizer’s mind as he sat in prison. Let me share a bit from this chapter with you as I speculate that John may have recited this passage often to himself. Verses 1 to 4 repeat four times “His mercy *endures* forever.” The chapter will also end with that phrase as well.

This is a Psalm of one in distress, who has been persecuted and yet remains fixed on the mercy and salvation of the Lord --- as indicated in these following verses:

- Psa 118:5 I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a broad place.
- Psa 118:6 The LORD *is* on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?
- Psa 118:13 You pushed me violently, that I might fall, But the LORD helped me.
- Psa 118:14 The LORD *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.
- Psa 118:17 I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the LORD.
- Psa 118:18 The LORD has chastened me severely, But He has not given me over to death.
- Psa 118:22 The stone *which* the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

- Psa 118:25 Save now, I pray, O LORD; O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.
- Psa 118:26 Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD!

Another passage that John could have been referring to is Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts. [John clearly understood his role to prepare the way for the Lord (compare Mark 1:2-4 and John 1:23). Jesus was the One whose coming John had been announcing.]
And if this passage in Malachi was on John's mind, perhaps what isn't said is also important. The very next verse here says: "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?" (Malachi 3:2).

And perhaps this is a bit of the question John may be wresting with. Maybe he's thinking, "I did my job faithfully and now I sit in prison. Where is the judgment on the world? Where is the deliverance for your people from Rome's oppression? Where is my deliverance as I sit in prison? You're the Messiah! Right? You are …. right?"

For completeness, let's consider one more passage that reinforces this same idea. Zechariah 9:9 states "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, <u>your King is coming to you</u>; He *is* just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." This verse was fulfilled in Matthew 21:9. Zechariah chapter 9 is a chapter about the "Judgement on Israel's Enemies". Notice a couple verses near the end of this chapter (Zechariah 9:15-16) "The LORD of hosts will defend them; They shall devour and subdue with slingstones. They shall drink *and* roar as if with wine; They shall be filled *with blood* like basins, Like the corners of the altar. The LORD

their God will save them in that day, As the flock of His people. For they *shall be like* the jewels of a crown, Lifted like a banner over His land—" This is what their nation was looking for. For the Messiah to come and bring judgement and deliverance of His people.

But even more, in the immediate context of "your King is coming to you…" of verse 9. Notice the next verses (10 through 12) "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion *shall be* 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.' "As for you also, Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, You prisoners of hope. Even today I declare *That* I will restore double to you." I think from these verses, it seems fairly clear and obvious that John is likely struggling from prison with expectations of Jesus. While we know that John has already identified Jesus as the Lamb of God --- that was earlier. John sitting in prison --- and perhaps not seeing what He expected Jesus to be doing --- may be experiencing a very human moment of uncertainty, especially as he sees Jesus not yet bringing the judgement and national deliverance that John likely anticipated. This seems to be the case due to the final statement we will review today in Luke 7:23/Matthew 11:6 (which we'll come to at the end of today's reading).

In no way am I suggesting that John has or is considering abandoning his faith. The Bible shows many examples when even faithful servants of God can struggle to understand how God's actions fit within their expectations. I think this is just another of those examples --- and is a very natural and human response.

I will share, another interpretation I've read which wonders if John is asking this question due not to his uncertainty, but that of John's disciples. In other words, that John's disciples were feeling uncertain

and so John had them ask for their benefit. I feel this is less likely based on the previous scriptural context we read in the Old Testament.

Let's now discuss the answer that Jesus gives --- as it also is very interesting.
Luke 7:21-22 & Matthew 11:4-5: Luke records that before Jesus answers them, over the course of an hour --- with those disciples of John the Baptizer likely right there with Him --- He has them witness His miraculous healing of many who were ill, crippled, etc., His casting out of demons and restoring of eyesight to many blind people. It sounds like a very eventful and amazing hour of time --- one that likely left an amazing impression on John's disciples.

Jesus then specifically tells these disciples to go tell John what they have just seen and heard. What is it that they had just seen and heard?

- The blind see.
- The lame walk.
- Lepers are cleansed.
- The deaf hear.
- The dead are raised.
- The poor have the gospel preached to them.

This list is the same in both Matthew's and Luke's accounts. This list seems to be a clear reference to a number of Old Testament passages, specifically from Isaiah. Jesus pulls from a number of prophetic passages and themes to point to His identity as the One who is fulfilling what God had promised. But we will see it's also important what Jesus did NOT quote from these same chapters. Let's dive in!

Isaiah 42 is a chapter that is clearly a prophecy of God's Elect One (verse 1). And in verse 7, God says that one of the of the works of this

One would be to “open blind eyes”. This Messianic prophetic passage was likely referred to by Jesus when He said, tell John “the blind see”. Yet there is no reference to the words that immediately follow that statement in Isaiah 42:7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the prison, Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

Isaiah 35 is also a clearly a prophetic chapter. In verses 5 & 6 it says “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing.” The chapter ends with verse 10 that states “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” But again, there is no reference to this section from Jesus.

The Hebrew word translated “ransomed” is פְּדוּיֵי (peduyei), from the root פָּדָה (padah). The verb padah means to redeem, ransom, or deliver someone from a condition of bondage. The fundamental idea is one bringing someone out of another’s claim or control, sometimes through the payment of a ransom or substitute. In Deuteronomy 7:8, God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. In Deuteronomy 15:15 Israel was redeemed from the house of bondage. In Jeremiah 15:21, God promised to redeem Jeremiah from the grasp of violent men. There are other passages we could consider, but that shows some of this word’s uses. Freeing someone from prison would comfortably fit within the word’s range of meaning. The clear reference of Isaiah 35 is to a time when God would deliver His people and bring them home. However, similar to the previous prophetic passage, Jesus does not reference anything to do with the “ransomed returning with joy...”. There is no reference of any kind to prisoners going free --- and therefore no reference to John that he will get out of prison.

So far in these Isaiah passages we’ve seen the blind receiving sight, the

deaf hearing, the lame leaping. How about the "poor having the gospel preached to them"? In Isaiah 61:1 it states, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach <u>good tidings to the poor</u>;" The Septuagint translates the Hebrew for "good tidings" to the exact same Greek verb that we get the word "Gospel" (verb "to proclaim the gospel").

So here again another prophetic passage showing the work the Messiah would do. However, again no reference to the words also from Isaiah 61:1, where it states "To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;".

What about the "dead are raised". I am not aware of any prophetic Messianic passage that predicted the Messiah would raise individuals back to life. Obviously God did this through His prophets in the Old Testament --- and there are clear passages about future resurrections at the end. However, among the Dead Sea Scrolls was a scroll that is commonly called the "Messianic Apocalypse" (4Q521). It is dated to before Jesus Christ, and yet it's language is similar to Jesus' response to John's disciples. It includes "…restores sight to the blind, heals the b[ent]…heals the wounded, <u>resurrect the dead</u> and bring good news to the poor." The text describes God's coming intervention --- and uses language that is very similar. and especially the last two things mentioned are in the same sequence that is used in Matthew 11 and Luke 7. This is significant in the fact that even before Jesus' ministry there was some understanding that He would "resurrect the dead".

The only one I don't have specifically accounted for in Isaiah prophecies or even this "Messianic Apocalypse" is the cleansing of lepers. The best connection I see (and there may be others I'm unaware of) is to that of Naaman, the Syrian commander who was cleansed of leprosy by the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 5. The reason it may be worth considering is that Luke has already referenced this miracle in Luke 4:27. In Luke 4

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61, 58 and 42 in crafting how He was the living embodiment and fulfillment of these passages --- and then He sat down. However, some doubted because they knew He was the son of Joseph, and they knew His upbringing and background. In sharing that no prophet is accepted in his own country, He shared the story of the miracle of Naaman through Elisha --- and that while many in Israel also had leprosy, Elisha only healed Naaman (Luke 4:27). In this particular chapter, Jesus is showing that He too would do many miracles (and including healing many of leprosy as well. And yet many would still doubt and not have the faith to believe.

This might seem a lot of time and space in this reading program to take to go through all of this. And maybe it's more than necessary. What I hope you are left with is that Jesus sent John's disciples back with visual confirmation, and also with what others had shared about the miracles of Jesus Christ (what they saw and heard). The clear meaning was that Jesus absolutely was the Messiah, "The One to Come", and was actively doing what the Scriptures had prophesied He would do. But I also think the clear lack of reference to prisoners going free, being ransomed, or anything of that nature, was a clear answer to John that Jesus wasn't going to be freeing him out of that situation.

Luke 7:23 & Matthew 11:6 – Both accounts finish this section with the words "And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

This might at first seem like an odd way for Jesus to finish this. He's just done all of these miracles and dispatched John's disciples with the message of all the miracles He's doing. Why would Jesus be talking about people being offended in this context? This ending might actually be the most important verse of the whole passage we've covered today. It's certainly the climax that both accounts build to and leave us with. The Greek word translated offended is σκανδαλίζω (skandalizō). It carries the idea of stumbling, falling away or being

caused to stumble spiritually. The word is related to the idea of a trap or stumbling block. Jesus seems to be warning them against allowing something about Him to become an obstacle of faith. John is in prison. Maybe that's not where he thought his life would end when he had faithfully given his life to God. Maybe even after going to prison, John fully expected Jesus to get him out.
Matthew's and Luke's accounts recorded John's words that there was One coming after him (notice that connection again to "The One to Come") who would baptize with the "Holy Spirit AND with FIRE!" (see Matthew 3:11 & Luke 3:16). John might be thinking: "Where is the FIRE?" Where is the judgement?

That's an important lesson for us too. How many walked away from the faith when Jesus didn't return when they thought He would? Sometimes we might understand a promise of God, but not understand when and how God intends to fulfill it. This was not only likely a challenge here for John the Baptizer, but we clearly see that the disciples, even at the end of Jesus Christ's life and after He was resurrected, were looking for Jesus to "restore the kingdom" (Acts 1:6). Their understanding of the timing and the when and how were incomplete. These types of things can become a stumbling block for any of us if we aren't on guard.

What happens when God doesn't heal us? What happens when we have to live in chronic pain or illness? What happens when God doesn't remove some trial, or let's someone close to us die --- all while we are praying and crying out for deliverance? Is God not good then? Could we conclude, "there is no God"? I think this is the hard reality that John had to come to face. And I think it's the clear meaning of this section of scripture that we have to face as well.

Faith requires trusting God and God's promises even when their fulfillment unfolds differently than we anticipated and had hoped. We

must be careful not to allow our own expectations about how or when God should act to become obstacles to our faith. God's promises are certain, even when His timing and methods differ from what we imagined.

Day 826 – MONDAY: November 16th
Luke 7:24-28 & Matthew 11:7-11
Daily Deep Dive:
As we continue right from where we left off yesterday in Luke and Matthew, John's disciples have now departed, and Jesus begins to speak directly to the multitude that has been following him.
Alfred Edersheim commentary on this section emphasizes two observations. The first is that Jesus deliberately waiting until John's disciples had left before publicly praising John. The second observation is that since Jesus waits until John's disciples left that John himself almost certainly never heard these words of Jesus, remaining imprisoned at Machaerus until his execution. His emphasis is that Jesus was defending John's reputation before the crowd, not sending encouragement back through John's disciples.
This makes sense to me. Jesus didn't have to do it this way. He could have said all of the praise of John the Baptizer BEFORE John's disciples left IF he had wanted them to hear and report those words back to John.
It seems likely that John had to live in prison by faith until his death, not having heard those wonderfully encouraging words that Christ spoke after John's disciples had departed.
So now, with those disciples of John now departed, Jesus goes out of His way to praise John and clearly show that John has fulfilled his great purpose before God. Jesus begins by asking three rhetorical questions to this crowd. Each begins with "what did you go out to see?", followed by one of the following:

- "A reed shaken by the wind?"

- “A man clothed in soft garments?”
- “A prophet?”

Why these questions? Many traditional commentaries believe there is a metaphor here. For example, John Gill’s commentary captures a traditional teaching of this that states: “This may either refer to John's gesture in preaching, who might wave to and fro as a reed does, when shaken by the wind; and Christ's question is, did ye go out only to see and observe the preacher's gesture, to see him move his body to and fro? Was it not to hear his doctrine, and receive benefit for your souls? And did you not? Wherefore, you ought still to retain a valuable respect for him. Or this may regard their opinion of him; and the sense of the interrogation is, when you first went out to him, did you take him to be an unstable, inconstant man? Like a reed shaken with every wind! If you did, you were mistaken; he was firm and stable in his sentiments and ministry, his preaching was not yea and nay, his doctrine was all of a piece; he stood to it, that he was not the Messiah, but his forerunner; the testimony he bore was always alike, consistent with himself, and he is the same man now he ever was”. [END]

I’m not convinced that Jesus was metaphorically speaking of either of those things. I believe Jesus is reminding the people why they originally went into the wilderness. They weren’t going sightseeing to observe the reeds which were common along the Jordan River where John had been baptizing people. They didn’t go out to view some wealthy or powerful individual. They went because they recognized John as a prophet. This straight forward reading of this section makes sense grammatically, and follows the natural progression of the questions. There is nothing in the Greek grammar itself that requires the reed to symbolize an unstable person, etc.

Again, the second question regarding soft or luxurious clothing also seems straight forward (The Greek for “soft” can mean “fine” or

"delicate" as well). You go to a palace, not a wilderness, if you want to see someone dressed up in nice and precious clothing. They didn't go to the wilderness expecting to find John dressed that way. They went expecting to find a prophet --- and a prophet is what they found.

If anything, a reed "shaken by the wind" is an image of something that the world blows about but remains grounded and steadfast. But again, I don't think that was what Jesus was really saying either.

Here the clear obvious answers to His first two rhetorical answers were supposed to be "No, that's not what we went out to see".

Matthew 11:9 – In verse 9 is where Jesus clearly wants the "yes" answer --- and so He Himself says "yes" to make sure that it's clear. You went to see a prophet. But now we have an important transition point. Jesus says "And I say to you". He's now going to tell them what they "really" saw but didn't even know they went out to see. This Greek expression "And I say to you" (legō hymin) or literally "Yes, I tell you", is the usual way that Jesus speaks throughout the Gospels. He frequently does this to introduce His authoritative statement of truth, often taking their understanding further than what they originally understood (compare Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 6:29, 8:10, 11:11, and 12:6. And this authoritative truth was that John was "more than a prophet".

Matthew 11:10 – To begin to explain how John is "more than a prophet", Jesus explains that Malachi 3:1 was written about John. That John was picked out for this important role, to be an instrument in God's hand, to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. He had a very distinctive place in God's plan. It is likely that due to John's dedicated and faithful teachings, many were ready to respond and follow Jesus when He began His ministry.

Matthew 11:11 – Jesus doesn't elevate John above everyone else. He did not say "John was the greatest EVER born of women". He did say that John was right at the top, the cream of the crop --- that no one was above John. This is high praise. And yes, it's clear that Jesus is purposely wanting to praise John before the crowd due to John's faithfulness and dedication throughout life to follow God and fulfill his purpose. Jesus doesn't stop here, because He has a greater point to make. To make this point Jesus contrasts John's placement as a human amongst the greatest humans to ever exist with a comparison to the lowest within the Kingdom of God. Even the lowest in that future Kingdom will be greater than the greatest humans, even someone like John who served to pave the way for the Savior of mankind.

In context, John appears to have wondered why he was left in prison and wasn't being saved by Jesus.. John gave it all, even to death. It was all worth it. No matter how great John was as a human, and the special role he had, it pales in comparison to being in God's Kingdom as a spirit being. And Jesus wanted the crowd to understand how great John was as a person and in fulfilling his extraordinary calling. But He also wanted them to understand that they all had the potential to be even greater as a part of God's Family!

Day 827 – TUESDAY: November 17th
Matthew 11:12-19 & Luke 7:29-35
Daily Deep Dive:
Matthew 11:12 – This is one of more difficult verses in the Bible to clearly understand. The reason it's so difficult to break down is because the Greek allows for significantly different interpretations.
NET Notes does a good job explaining some of the complications: "The verb βιάζεται can be understood as either passive voice or middle voice by form. An additional problem is whether the term is to be understood in a negative sense or a positive sense. It is frequently understood here as a passive in a negative sense, "is violently treated," "is oppressed",

or “has suffered violence”. As an (intransitive) middle voice the negative meaning “has been coming violently” has been suggested, although the way in which the violence occurs is not clear. Another possible intransitive middle meaning in this passage (this one positive) is “to use force” which here might mean “makes its way with (triumphant) force”. Still another possible positive meaning is “to seek fervently”. Resolution of the problem is not easy, but the presence of the noun βιαστής in the following clause (meaning “violent person” or “impetuous person” suggests a negative sense is more likely here…” [END]

I spent a good amount of time looking at the Greek in commentaries and various translations. And here are the four common ways this is understood --- although the first two appear to have the most followers.

Since the time of John the Baptizer until now…
1) The Kingdom advances powerfully and eager people seize it.
2) The Kingdom suffers violence and hostile people attack it.
3) The Kingdom advances powerfully and violent opponents try to seize it.
4) The Kingdom suffers opposition and determined believers nevertheless press into it.

As we consider which we think is most accurate, consider the following:
This section opens with the phrase, “from the days of John the Baptist until now…” and this phrase deserves attention.
In what way were these days a significant period? John’s message was “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!” And Jesus preached the same message (Matthew 3:2, 4:17).
As we see in Matthew 11:13, both the prophets of God and God’s law itself have been pointing forward to the coming Kingdom of God. Now with the arrival of John, the teaching has shifted. No longer is the

Kingdom coming, it's right here among them with the presence of the Son of that Kingdom. Jesus is the living embodiment of everything that Kingdom is about.

The response of different people to this preaching of John and Jesus is significant. Up until now the religious leaders, their traditions and their representation of God has been the influencing factor on God's people. The arrival of John and Jesus has been met with both excitement --- but also major aggression. One of the big focuses of this whole section of scripture is that John is in prison, that he's not getting out, but that he's done a great job and everything he's given to God throughout his life will be worth it. While it's true that the Kingdom of God was advancing during this time, I think the Greek and context leans more toward the fact that Jesus is describing the violent/forceful opposition that has arisen against the Kingdom's proclamation. John's been imprisoned. Jesus Himself has already and will continue to face opposition and be eventually crucified. And Jesus warns His disciples that they too will face persecution for this Way. Despite this violent/forceful resistance to the message of John and Jesus, John had still fulfilled his calling, Jesus and His apostles would as well, and the Kingdom's proclamation would continue despite those who sought to oppose or suppress it.

Obviously, no human efforts can overthrow God's ultimate plan or purpose, but the messengers of that Kingdom can still be imprisoned, resisted, attacked, and persecuted. I believe this fits the greater message of Jesus in Matthew 16:18 that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church.

In the end, it's possible that God inspired the Koine Greek here purposely to contain all the meanings laid out up above, because all in a sense are true. The Greek of Matthew 11:12 does not allow us to settle this debate with absolute certainty, but I believe the combination of the Greek, together with John's imprisonment and the surrounding

context of opposition, makes the negative/negative interpretation particularly persuasive (which was listed as interpretation #2 up above).

Matthew 11:15 – Some would hear and understand, some didn't want to. Jesus is doing more here than telling people to pay attention. He's challenging them to be receptive to something they might find difficult to accept and hear. Biblically, hearing meant more than simply receiving the sound. It can mean listening attentively, comprehending and then appropriately responding. Jesus has just told His audience that John the baptizer was the foretold prophet of Malachi 3. This to some would be a bold claim and challenge their expectations. In the previous verse Jesus said, "if you are willing to receive it" that John was the "Elijah who is to come". Jesus was pointing His listeners to Malachi 4:5 where it says "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ". Jesus was clearly saying that John fulfilled this role. Some were willing to accept this, some weren't. Jesus is essentially saying, "If you're willing to receive what I'm telling you, then listen carefully and understand what it means."

Luke 7:29-30 – Notice then the two responses "when the people heard Him…" One group which represents sinners, but even more pointedly, "the tax collectors" --- this group "justified God". The other group which represents those who would not hear and contemplate the words of Jesus --- "the Pharisees and lawyers" --- "rejected the will of God". So the contrast is between those who "justified God" and those who "rejected the will of God".

- What does it mean that this first group "justified God"? The Greek δικαιόω (dikaioō), means to justify, declare righteous, or acknowledge as right. The people were not obviously making God righteous. They were hearing, comprehending and acknowledging that God's message and actions were right. By accepting their need to repent and be baptized, they were

responding to God's call, Way and will for their lives. The second group rejected the call to repent and be baptized. These were the ones who were deeply familiar, experts even, in God's Scriptures --- and yet they rejected the very messengers and message which those Scriptures foretold. This is a sobering warning that transcends time. All of us, regardless of our Bible knowledge, positions or authority, must always remain humbly receptive to hearing and deeply considering the message of God's Word and God's servants. The moment we think we know it all (even though we would never say that we think that way), is a moment we are in real danger of being blinded by our own pride and wisdom.

Matthew 11:16-19 and Luke 7:31-35: Both of these accounts end here with the same teaching. The image is of children who complain to their companions for not participating, no matter which approach the children take --- that of celebration or that of mourning. Jesus uses this to show the hypocrisy and inconsistent responses from some who heard His and John's messages. John the Baptizer came with a message of repentance and self-denial (characterized by mourning and being sober minded). Jesus came celebrating and being friendly. Both were rejected by some (namely the religious leaders and experts). It wasn't that either approach was wrong or missed the mark. The problem was with the people themselves who wouldn't hear no matter what approach was taken. There wasn't an approach that was going to penetrate their hard hearts.

This can happen today, even in God's Church. Sometimes some are determined to work against specific people or groups no matter what. It's not the approach that's the problem. And frankly it doesn't matter if that person or group approached it this way or that way, they would find some fault and failing. This is not who God called us to become. We should be people who root for people, want to see the good and

see people succeed. The Bible warns against a root of bitterness forming in our lives --- and the various fruit that can spring up and develop as a result.

Both accounts end with “But wisdom is justified by all her children”. The basic idea here is that “true wisdom” is “made right” (or shown to be right) by the results. What was the results of John’s and Christ’s ministries? It produced repentance and change in many people who heard the messages. Although critics rejected both of them, the fruits it developed in people’s lives were the proof of God’s purpose and work.

Can our expectations keep us from seeing the positive fruit being produced? All of this ties back to our reading on Sunday. John the Baptizer had expectations of the Coming One. His expectations were clearly different than reality. It wasn’t wrong that he sought clarity from Jesus. He sought understanding. Jesus responded through John’s disciples by showing the “fruit” that was being done (“wisdom is justified by all her children”). Jesus was the Messiah prophesied to come. John sought clarity --- and I’m sure he received it and responded appropriately. This was in contrast to the religious leaders who did not seek clarity. Their questions were to justify or trap. They sought to reject the messages of both John and Jesus, which ultimately revealed a deeper spiritual problem --- an unwillingness to accept God’s work unless it aligned with their expectations.

This passage reminds us that we must be careful not to reject God's instruction --- simply because it challenges our expectations or preferences. True wisdom is demonstrated by its fruits. And those who humbly seek God's will are far more likely to recognize His work than those who are determined to find fault.

Day 828 – WEDNESDAY: November 18th

Matthew 11:20-24
Daily Deep Dive:
We now enter a section of scripture without a parallel account. Matthew places this event right after the correction that Jesus just gave between those who heard and responded to the message of John the Baptizer and Himself and those who wouldn't hear (no matter the approach).

In this section Jesus begins to correct whole cities where mighty works were being done and yet, they were not responding with repentance.

Verse 20 – The word translated "rebuke" (ὀνειδίζειν -oneidizein) in the Greek is stronger than simply correcting someone. It contains the idea of censuring or expressing disapproval. Jesus is holding these cities accountable for their responses.

Also, in verse 20 and 21 Jesus does not use the common word for "signs", He uses the Greek word δυνάμεις (dynameis) translated "mighty works". This contains the idea of "mighty power". As a side note, this is the Greek word that "dynamite" was named from when in 1867 Alfred Nobel figured out how to make nitroglycerin more stable by absorbing it into a porous material. He named it "dynamite" from the same Greek word "mighty power".

Jesus is not saying he did a few miracles in these cities. He's clearly saying He performed amazing, mighty things that could only be attributed to the Almighty God working in Him. Even though He did these "mighty works" they "did not repent". The Greek, μετενόησαν (metenoēsan), means to change one's mind or turn in repentance. This is important for all of us to understand because it involves a change of direction, not just acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Jesus' miracles weren't intended solely to alleviate suffering or impress people; they also were intended to impact the direction of people's lives. This is

important in the context of these cities --- because I'm sure there were some who saw the miracles and did not reject the reality of them, even though they failed to appropriately respond.

Verse 21 – Chorazin and Bethsaida were Jewish communities in the regions around the Sea of Galilee where Jesus often worked. While Chorazin is mentioned, it's interesting because the Bible doesn't record a large number of miracles occurring there, yet Jesus indicates that "mighty works" had been done there. We just have to understand that very little of all that Jesus did is actually recorded. God inspired intentionally that we have just what was needed (John 21:25). Bethsaida was the hometown of Philip, Andrew and Peter (John 1:44). Tyre and Sidon are cities commonly associated with pagan worship, wealth and opposition to God's people. Both cities had been the subjects of prophetic judgments (Isaiah 23; Ezekiel 26–28; Joel 3:4–8). And yet, similar to the story of Jonah and Ninevah, Jesus says that these two cities would have repented in sackcloth and ashes had the same miracles been done there.

This is actually quite interesting. Jesus isn't saying "probably" this would have happened. He's saying that this "would have" happened. In the Greek verb form (past indicative) this is a statement of fact. What does that tell us? That God is not calling everyone now. God is not giving everyone equal access or opportunities to respond. And we see that this has a bearing on their judgement in the next verse.

Verse 22 – The Greek for "more tolerable" (ἀνεκτότερον - anektoteron) is a comparative form that means "more bearable" or "more endurable".

What do these two verses teach us? One thing is that judgement will take into account the opportunities people have received and experienced and what they have not. Judgement is not presented here

as being identical for everyone. A second thing is that the more we know and understand the more expectation is placed on us (compare Luke 12:47-48). Lastly, not all judgments will be equally severe or equally difficult to endure. Even within judgement there are a range of experiences that will occur in the second resurrection. I say second resurrection because all of this is about people who didn't respond during this lifetime (some who saw "mighty works" and didn't respond and others who didn't see those same works but also didn't respond), and they all come up together in the same Great White Throne judgement (Revelation 20:11-12).

Verse 23 – Capernaum is thought to be the "home base" for Jesus during His ministry. He performed many miracles there. Therefore, this city had front row seats to both His ministry and His mighty works. The language of "exalted to heaven" speaks to their position of great privilege. John Gill's commentary supports this as it states: "which has respect to the very great privileges this place enjoyed, it being the city where Christ chose to dwell, and for a time fixed his abode in; where he first began to preach, and where such a train of miracles were done;" [END] Regarding the fate of this city to be brought down to Hades, in this context, the expression primarily conveys a dramatic reversal from exaltation to humiliation and destruction. John Gill's commentary states: "meaning, it should be attended with very humbling providences, be reduced to a very low condition, (see Isaiah 14:13-15) be destroyed and laid waste, as a city, as it was in the times of Vespasian [END] In this context, the expression primarily conveys a dramatic reversal from exaltation to humiliation and destruction.

Verses 23-24 – Here Jesus uses one of the most well-known wicked cities of the Bible. A city so wicked that God destroyed it. And yet, Jesus doesn't just say they would have repented, but that the city would still exist today had those same "mighty works" been done there as it has been in Capernaum. Similar to what we saw in verse 22, here

too it will be more tolerable for the individuals of Sodom than for Capernaum in the day of judgment.

In Ezekiel 16:53 God speaks of a future time when God will bring back the captives of Sodom and her daughters and Samaria and her daughters. What a time it will be when all of mankind finally has the opportunity to learn and grow. God's final judgment considers more than simply whether someone committed terrible sins. It also considers their knowledge, and opportunity that person had or had not received.

This section of scripture should cause us to examine our own response to the truth God has allowed us to understand.

Day 829 – THURSDAY: November 19th
Matthew 11: 25-30
Daily Deep Dive:
Verse 25 – This verse opens with the phrase "at that time". I'm not sure if I have talked about the two Greek words for "time" here in this reading program or not. Briefly I'll mention that one word commonly used in the Greek for time is χρόνος (chronos). Chronos refers to a passage of time or duration of time. I often refer to this as "clock time". That's not the word used here in Matthew 11:25. The word Jesus uses here is the Greek καιρός (kairos). This word is used to talk about how events and details come together to form a moment. The focus is on the significance of the moment. Back in 2022 I gave a sermon going through the difference of these two Greek words if anyone is interested: https://www.ucg.org/sermons/reading-or-misreading-time

Here in this specific moment of time (kairō) Jesus responds not to a question or a person, but to this moment/situation/circumstance. What is this moment? Jesus has just described the rejection of His message by those who had witnessed His mighty works. Further, Jesus

has just criticized cities that received extraordinary evidence but failed to repent. Jesus now takes this moment to praise His Father for revealing spiritual truths to individuals who most in this world might conclude are the least qualified to receive those truths.

The Greek for "I thank you", ἐξομολογοῦμαί σοι (exomologoumai soi), contains not just thanks, but also praise, confession and acknowledgment. Here Jesus isn't just thanking His Father, but also praising and acknowledging God's wisdom for how spiritual understanding and opportunities to respond are given/revealed.

Let's talk about the "wise and prudent". The Greek for wise means likely what you would think, which is wisdom, knowledge, skill. The word prudent in Greek, describes a person who possess insight or discernment. The Bible encourages all of us to seek wisdom and to be wise (Proverbs 4:7 & Matthew 10:16). Jesus is not being critical of those who are wise and put that wisdom into practice. This is a comparison between those who the world would call wise. This is consistent with 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 where Paul explains that God hasn't called many that are mighty or noble from a worldly standard. Instead, God has revealed His Truth to "babes". Literally in Greek, νηπίοις (nēpiois) this refers to infants or very young children. However, figuratively it can describe those who are inexperienced, uneducated or lacking social importance.
Jesus is praising God for choosing those who the world would overlook as opposed to choosing those that the world would consider worthy of such special spiritual understanding. We should notice this is all directed by God. People cannot come to the truth on their own. Truth has to be revealed by God.

Verse 26 – I'm not sure if the NKJV comes across very clearly. The key word in the Greek expression is εὐδοκία (eudokia) --- and it means

good pleasure, favorable intention or what is pleasing. The NLT captures this well as "Yes, Father, it pleased You to do it this way!" Jesus acknowledges that the Father's decision about how and to whom truth is revealed reflects His good pleasure. Each of us should meditate on what this means in our own lives. What a special calling and revelation we have each received. We weren't chosen or called because we were the best --- but instead because it pleased God to call us. This should always ground us in humility.

Verse 27 – God has handed over and entrusted to Jesus "all things". This is consistent with statements of John 3:35 and Matthew 28:18. The word "knows" in "no one knows the Son except the Father" contains the meaning of recognition, knowledge and understanding. In this context, it describes the Father's profound knowledge of His Son's identity and relationship. Likewise, Jesus had a profound and unique knowledge of His Father. In verse 25 Jesus showed that it's God the Father who chooses to reveal spiritual truths to babes, but here in verse 27 we see that Jesus has a role in revealing the Father to those He wills/intends. The important lesson is that coming to know God is not merely an independent human achievement. It requires a divine invite.

Verse 28 – Immediately after showing the necessary divine invite that is required, Jesus extends an invite. "Come to Me". The word "come" in Greek is δεῦτε (deute) which is a command or invitation. It is a personal directive.

"All you who labor" means in the Greek those who have grown weary or become exhausted through effort. This is in the present tense, and therefore is portraying people who are actively working hard and growing tired or becoming weary through their current effort. This can be physical for sure --- but also can refer to spiritual or emotional exhaustion. The Greek for "heavy laden" refers to being loaded down or burdened. The first phrase "all you who labor" emphasizes

individuals who are exhausted from activity, and the other phrase "are heavy laden" emphasizes the burdens placed upon someone by others. The common understanding is that Jesus is referring to the fact that the burdens placed upon people by the Pharisees and religious leaders was leading to exhaustion. This is consistent with Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46. I think this is likely a correct way to understand this passage, but I think it's also important to understand that Satan's world itself is weighing down and exhausting people in general. Jesus promises to be the answer to this exhaustion. He is the source of becoming refreshed and rested.

Matthew 11:29 – This verse is packed with important information. A yoke was a wooden device that went over the shoulders of draft animals that joined them together for pulling a load. Often a more seasoned animal was yoked with a younger animal to learn. In addition to this meaning, a yoke could represent submission, service and being under one's authority. Even more specific to discipleship is the idea that when one became a disciple under a rabbi, that person was taking on the "yoke" of their master. That yoke included learning and adopting their view on passages of scripture and their understanding of God's Word. Whole lines of disciples would have the same understanding because they all took on the yoke of their rabbi.

Discipleship isn't a student/teacher relationship. A disciple is to learn to become EXACTLY like their master. Jesus is calling people to come and learn to be like Him. That's our great calling too. Yet, in Jesus calling us and others to be yoked to Him and come under His authority, it is not like most of the religious leaders. He wasn't heavy-handed and oppressive. He didn't lord His authority over them. He had authority, it was given to Him by God, and yet, He was gentle/meek and lowly (humble/modest). That's really amazing. The One who has the most authority and honor, is humble and gentle with us. That's not how the world typically operates. It's who Jesus IS. The word "soul" simply

means our “lives”. We can find rest/refreshing from our spiritual, emotional and physical exhaustion in and through our Savior.
The Greek Septuagint uses similar wording for Jeremiah 6:16 where it states: “Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" God offered His people to walk in the good way, promising them rest, but the people refused. This is similar to what Jesus showed about the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. They refused the Way. True rest and refreshment from this world is found through responding to God’s Way.

Verse 30 – The chapter ends with “For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” In no way is Jesus saying that being a follower of His will be easy and effortless. That doesn’t fit the rest of Scripture.
The Greek word translated “easy” can describe something that is good or beneficial, as opposed to harsh or oppressive. The context of this passage is to contrast God’s Way with the burdens and harshness of the religious leaders and the world on people (that lead them feeling beat down and exhausted). God’s Way is not designed to be burdensome (compare 1 John 5:3). Obedience to God is not oppressive. When properly understood, God’s Way, including all His laws, are expressions of His love and wisdom. Remember, all of this comes after Jesus says He has a unique and special understanding of the Father. We shouldn’t miss that. Others have claimed to represent God, and yet they laid burdens on people that were heavy and oppressive. People tried to live under those burdens and became exhausted. Jesus has real understanding of the Father and He wants them and us to come to Him, learn from Him, and truly live and experience what God really intended.

Day 830 – FRIDAY: November 20th
Preparation Day

Day 831 – SATURDAY: November 21st
Sabbath