



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 11

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

In this Chapter We Will Focus on:

- Jesus and John the Baptist
- Jesus' judgment on three cities of the Galilee
- Jesus' thanksgiving, revelation and invitation
- The Savior's tender invitation to those with troubled souls



Introduction

- While the apostles were fulfilling the limited commission, Jesus was approached by messengers from John the Baptist who received confirmation that He was *The Coming One* (1-6)
- Jesus revealed that John was "The Messenger" foretold by Malachai and that many were inconsistent in their opposition to both Jesus and John (7-19)
- Jesus then rebuked cities which did not repent at His teaching (20-24)



Introduction

- At the same time He extended a tender invitation to those who would accept His teaching (25-30)
- This chapter can be summarized in 2 key words: judgment and rewards
- As Jesus' ministry moves forward we can see that He is becoming a cause for scandal among the people
- He has already offended the Scribes and Pharisees and those Jews who thought of themselves as God's "righteous" by not seeking out their company and by eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mt 9:10)



Introduction

- He has also caused scandal by failing to observing the customary days of fasting (Mt 10:14)
- He has even gone so far as to forgive sins
- When the Pharisees accused Him of blasphemy (Mt 9:3), Jesus told them that He was acting with divine authority (Mt 9:6)
- They must either conclude that Jesus is blaspheming by making Himself equal to God or they must conclude that He is the fulfillment of the prophecies of the prophet Ezekiel 34:10-16



Introduction

- However, if they conclude that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecies of Ezekiel chapter 34, then they must admit that they are the corrupt shepherds of the same prophecy
- Chapter 11 marks a major turning point in Jesus' ministry
- The chapter begins by addressing the impact of Jesus' words and deeds on the people and what His actions reveal about His identity
- In a section that extends from 11:2 to 16:16, the focus becomes the contrast between how the people either believe that Jesus is the Messiah or how they reject Him and His teaching

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- After commissioning His disciples and sending them on their first missionary journey, Jesus separates Himself from them to give them the ability to do what He taught them to do in announcing the Gospel of the kingdom and in curing the sick
- St. John Chrysostom writes that Jesus did this because if He remained with them everyone would seek Him out and would not have approached His disciples
- Our Divine Redeemer never was weary of his labor of love

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- John had now been a year in prison, to which he had been sent by Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, because he had rebuked his adulterous marriage with his brother Philip's wife
- There are two interpretations concerning the significance of this passage:
 1. In his suffering in prison, St. John began to doubt that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah
 2. Knowing that his death was near, St. John wanted his disciples to see for themselves that Jesus is the Messiah and to join Jesus in His mission
- St. John Chrysostom and St. Jerome embraced the second interpretation



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

➤ John Chrysostom wrote:

Jesus knew the mind of John who sent them, for he knew, as God knows, our inner thoughts. There he was, actively healing the blind, lame, and many others. He healed not to teach John, who was already convinced, but those who had come to him doubting. Having healed them he said, "God and tell John what you hear and see ..." In this way Christ drew them all the more closely to himself (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 36.2)

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- St. Jerome wrote:
John asks this not because he is ignorant but to guide others who are ignorant and to say to them, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"
- Jerome points out that St. John knew he was going to die soon; therefore, he was sending his disciples to Jesus so they could have answers to their questions, come to know Him, and become Jesus' disciples
- Jerome believed the problem wasn't with St. John "the problem was that John's disciples doubted

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- St. Luke states that at that same hour He cured many of their infirmities (Lk 7:21)
- In Luke, the raising of the widow's son at Nain immediately precedes this message (Lk 7:11-17); and in this Gospel we have seen the ruler's daughter raised (Mt 9:18-26)
- After permitting the messengers to see His work, he pointed to it as His answer (Lk 7:22)
- His work was a more convincing answer than words
- To John's question Jesus gives no direct reply

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- It adds to the force of this testimony that the poor had always been overlooked by Pharisees and the Jewish doctors
- The ancient philosophers and theologians had no gospel for those who could not pay for it
- Verse 6: Jesus was referring to the inward offense the disciples of St. John were taking against Him in questioning if Jesus was indeed the Messiah
- St. John Chrysostom writes that Jesus was gently reprimanding John's disciples for doubting and being silently offended by Him

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- The purpose of verse 7 & 8 is to convince the scribes and Pharisees of the inconsistency of their conduct in acknowledging John Baptist for a divinely authorized teacher, and not believing in the very Christ which he pointed out to them
- He also shows, from the superiorities of John's character, that their confidence in him was not misplaced, and that this was a farther argument why they should have believed in him, whom the Baptist proclaimed as being far superior to himself



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- The reed of Egypt and Palestine is a very tall cane, growing twelve feet high, and is easily bent by the wind
- John was not like the reed
- He could not be bent by every breath of applause or displeasure
- *Kings' houses* may be an allusion to Herod Antipas who had arrested and imprisoned John the Baptist
- The desert was not the place to expect this fine clothing
- John was a man of a different character – coarse in his exterior, hardy in his character, firm in his virtue, suited to endure trials and hardships, and thus qualified to be the forerunner of the toiling and suffering Messiah

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- He was more than a prophet, because he was a reformer, forerunner and way-preparer, as well as prophet
- No other prophet ever had so honored an office
- He prepared the way to the Lord; being the instrument, in God's hand, of preparing the people's hearts to receive the Lord Jesus; and it was probably through his preaching that so many thousands attached themselves to Christ, immediately on his appearing as a public teacher
- The quote is found in Malachi 3:1
- The substance of it is contained also in Isaiah 40:3

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- There had never been a greater man than John
- John is the greatest of the Old Testament/covenant prophets because he was chosen by God to prepare the way for the Messiah and to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom
- He had the privilege of showing the fulfillment of their prophecies, by pointing out that Christ has now come, which they foretold should come
- However, since the coming of the Kingdom has not yet been fulfilled, he is still with those not yet glorified by the Passion and Resurrection of Christ



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- As St. John himself, Jesus, and the Twelve under the first commission, preached, the Kingdom was at hand (Mt 3:2, 4:17, 10:7)
- However, St. John will also receive the Infinite Merit of the grace of salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and will also be admitted into the gates of heaven with all the other righteous souls who will be liberated by the Messiah's perfect sacrifice on the altar of the Cross
- St. John Chrysostom says that the least is Christ Himself



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- So when Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, it's likely that He was referencing Micah 2:13
- This passage pictures a shepherd pinning up his sheep for the night
- He builds a sheepfold out of rocks or branches, perhaps up against the side of a mountain
- In the morning he lets the sheep out by breaking a hole or making a gap, or breach, in the fence he has made
- He then steps through this "gate" with the sheep following close behind



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- The sheep have been pinned up all night and can hardly wait to get out of their crowded quarters
- In their pushing and shoving, all trying to squeeze through the gate at the same time, they break the gate open even more, causing it to become wider and wider
- Finally they break out into the open pastures, rushing head long after their shepherd
- John the Baptist was the breach-maker
- He opened the gate
- He prepared the way



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- He preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.”
- The people were pinned up in the prison of sin, but by responding to John’s message of repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, the power of the kingdom of heaven began to be manifested
- Then, Jesus, the Messianic King, came along and personally led His sheep out of darkness and into the marvelous light
- *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence*, It also means to be obtained by main force, by using violence upon ourselves, by mortification and repentance, and resisting our wicked tendency



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- *the days of John the Baptist until now*, is the period of the beginning of the end of the fulfillment of the old covenants
- The gates of heaven have been closed since the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden in Eden, but now, with the baptism of the Messiah, the gates of heaven are being violently torn apart, Mark 1:10
- *the violent*, would be the followers of Jesus who stand violently opposed to the rule of Satan and His forces and who will suffer violence in order to bring about the kingdom of Jesus Christ
- The eager and enthusiastic followers of Christ seize the kingdom—win it as a prize of war
- It is compared to a walled city that men try to storm and enter

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- St. John brings the Old Testament era of the previous covenants and missions of the prophets to a close
- He is the only successor of the last prophet Malachi
- St. John's mission is a continuation of Malachi's mission and he fulfills Malachi's last prophecy as the one who comes in the spirit of Elijah in Malachi 3:23
- St. John is the last prophet before the fulfillment of "the prophets and the law."
- By the "law" is meant here the five books of Moses; by the prophets, the remainder of the books of the Old Testament
- Malachi predicted that Elijah would come to prepare the way for the Lord

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- Christ explains that this was fulfilled in John
- He was not the literal, but a spiritual Elijah, Malachi 4:5
- Jesus concludes His teaching on John the Baptist with a formula used by Him to give emphasis to a statement of especial importance: *15 Whoever has ears ought to hear."*
- This and similar statements are repeated by Jesus nine times in the Gospels (Mt 11:15, 13:9, 43; Mk 4:9, 23; 7:16; 8:18 in the negative; Lk 8:8, 14:35)
- Jesus has come as the supreme prophet, fulfilling the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15-19

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)



- Jesus Rebukes His generation
- One set of children is represented as having invited another set to play, first in a mock wedding, then in a mock funeral, but the dissatisfied children were pleased with neither, and would neither dance nor lament
- John ascetic lifestyle, living frugally and fasting in the desert, identifies him as the "funeral" game, while Jesus came eating and drinking and identifying Himself as the Bridegroom (Mt 25:1-13) like the "wedding game."



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- Those in opposition in "this generation" could not be satisfied with either John or Jesus, rejecting both John's aesthetic lifestyle and rejecting Jesus' lifestyle, making some charges against Jesus (Mt 9:3,11,14,34)
- Jesus was at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:2); at Matthew's feast, (Mt 9:10), etc.
- A winebibber: Like all the people, he drank the light, harmless wine of Palestine, either free from, or with a very slight percentage of, alcohol



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- Our modern wines are very different
- A friend of tax collectors and sinners, Matthew 9:12,13
- They were loud in their complaints of the Baptist because he would not share their self-indulgent joy
- They were bitter against Jesus because He would not live according to the rules of their great hypocritical
- If they admired fasting and penance, then John the Baptist's words should have led them to the Son of God
- If fasting appeared sorrowful and forbidding, why did they not join themselves to Jesus, who came eating and drinking?



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- Whichever way they chose they might have arrived at salvation
- Those who are wise will approve both the course of John and his Lord
- In this passage, Jesus describes those who stand in opposition to both John the Baptist and Jesus and therefore in opposition to God's plan for man's salvation
- In refusing to accept the example of either John or Jesus, the Jews are turning away from the wisdom of the Messiah and His forerunner whose mission is vindicated in their works



John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus (11:1-19)

- Those who are wise will approve both the course of John and his Lord
- The spiritual recognizes the wisdom of God, both in the austerity of John and in the loving mercy of Jesus who condescends to eat with publicans and sinners

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- No other generations in salvation history had witnessed so many miracles to bring them to faith and trust in God
- The Scriptures assure us that these were only a very small part of the mighty works He did, Matthew 9:35
- If our blessed Lord had not done every thing that was necessary for the salvation of these people, He could not have reproached them for not having any regrets about their sins
- The great end proposed by the gospel is repentance and a new life
- A "woe" is a curse judgment in a covenant lawsuit issued by a prophet of God against people or places who refused the prophet's warnings to repent their sins

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida are important towns at the north end of the Sea of Galilee (also see Lk 10:13)
- These three Galilean communities not only had the privilege of hearing the Son of God preach and witnessing His miracles, they actually had the opportunity to see Him, to talk to Him, and to touch Him, a gift very few people would receive in salvation history
- Each of these towns received a "corporate" judgment, but that does not mean that those few within the communities who accepted Jesus were condemned

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- Tyre and Sidon were two prosperous pagan trading centers on the Mediterranean coast north of the Galilee
- They were originally prosperous Phoenician cities where human sacrifices to Baal were offered, but after the conquest of Alexander the Great they became Hellenistic trading centers on the Mediterranean
- These former Phoenician cities that were Greek culture cities in Jesus' time were considered to be centers of corruption and pagan worship
- God had previously placed these cities under divine judgment in the time of the prophets
- It was shocking to hear that these pagan centers would receive a less severe judgment than the Israelite towns of the Galilee

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- The Israelite citizens of the Galilean towns were God's covenant people who had been taught over the centuries to recognize the Messiah when He comes
- The prophet in the spirit of Elijah came, calling the people to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, and the Messiah came but many in those communities did not accept John's message of repentance nor did they recognize the authority of Jesus, the promised Redeemer-Messiah
- Wearing coarse "sackcloth and putting ashes on one's head (2 Sam 13:19) were outward signs of inward repentance and sorrow
- Jesus statement also prefigures the acceptance of Jesus' Gospel of salvation by future Gentile communities

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- There will be a day of judgment for all cities, nations and men
- Men will be judged according to their opportunities
- Those who have had and neglected opportunities will be held most guilty
- There will be different degrees of future punishment, according to guilt and opportunities; that those whose opportunities have been greatest will receive the greater punishment, if these are neglected
- Every man will be judged and punished according to his opportunities and works
- The idea of a hell of the same severity for all the unsaved is nowhere taught by Christ

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- Capernaum was at that time a city of 30,000 inhabitants
- It enjoyed signal advantages as being the Galilean home of Christ, who taught in its streets, houses and synagogue, and worked many miracles there
- Within less than forty years Capernaum was destroyed by the Romans, and for many centuries has not had an existence
- Sodom was destroyed for its sins
- Had it not been sinful it would have remained
- Therefore it is sins that destroy cities and nations

Woe to the Impenitent Cities (11:20-24)



- Jerusalem, Babylon, Sodom, Capernaum, and other extinct ancient cities have perished on account of their sins
- Modern cities which scoff at God and revel in iniquity will be brought down to hades also
- Sodom had poor opportunities
- It had fallen two thousand years before Christ, and had been destroyed ever since, yet the Lord speaks of a future day of judgment for both Sodom and Capernaum
- There is a judgment after death
- Temporal punishment for wickedness does not satisfy eternal justice
- The Sodomites were held to a future judgment

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- Jesus reveals that He is revelation of the Father; He and the Father are One
- From the worldly wise Pharisees and Jews
- The scribes and Pharisees, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, and having their foolish hearts darkened, refusing to submit to the righteousness of God (God's method of saving man by Christ) and going about to establish their own righteousness, (their own method of saving themselves)
- They rejected God's counsel
- God sent the peace and salvation of the Gospel to others, called here babes, (his disciples), simple-hearted persons, who submitted to be instructed and saved in God's own way

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- It was the divine purpose, in sending the Son, to deliver all things, the gospel, salvation, judgment, the rule of heaven and earth, to Him
- Christ is the revelation of God to man
- *He that has seen me has seen the Father* (Jn 14:9)
- Those who know Christ by humble obedience and submissiveness learn to know the Father also
- None can fully comprehend the nature and attributes of God, but Christ; and none can fully comprehend the nature, incarnation, etc., of Christ, but the Father
- The full comprehension and acknowledgment of the Godhead, and the mystery of the Trinity, belong to God alone

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- This is one of the sweetest passages in the New Testament
- It shows the willingness of the Lord
- The kings and the great are usually difficult of access, while Jesus is not only willing, but invites us, to come to him
- Note how gracious is the invitation!
 - (1) It is the Lord who speaks
 - (2) He invites to come to him
 - (3) The invitation is to those who labor and are heavy laden
 - (4) He promises, to all these weary ones who come, rest

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- The offer is not that of a man, but of the Divine Savior
- Millions in all ages since can bear witness that the promise is sure
- That labour and are heavy laden are those who feel heavily the burdens of life, of sin and sorrow
- Rest: Peace of soul

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- Strange paradox! that a man already weary and overloaded must take a new weight upon him, in order to be eased and find rest!
- But this advice is similar to that saying, Psalm 55:22
- Wherever pride and anger dwell, there is nothing but mental labor and agony; but, where the meekness and humility of Christ dwell, all is smooth, even, peaceable, and quiet; for the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever, Isaiah 32:17
- He has first asked us to come, and made a gracious promise
- He next shows us how to come

Jesus Gives True Rest (11:25-30)



- We are to come by taking HIS yoke upon us
- Taking on the yoke is a symbol of submission
- The two steps by which we come, and secure the promise of rest unto our souls are then Submission to Christ and then Becoming His disciples
- As Christ's willingness to empty Himself to the farthest of His Father's requirements was the spring of indescribable repose to His own Spirit, so in the same track does He invite all to follow Him, with the assurance of the same experience
- That rest which the soul experiences when once safe under Christ's wing makes all yokes easy, all burdens light
- His burden, even if it be the cross, is light, because He helps us to bear it



Conclusion

- Why did St. John send two disciples to Jesus?
- What did St. John's disciples ask Jesus?
- What was the significance of Jesus' reply to St. John's disciples in verses 4-5?
- What two O.T. prophecies did Jesus say that St. John fulfilled?
- Why does Jesus compare Capernaum unfavorably with Sodom?



Conclusion

- What does Jesus mean by saying “among those born of woman, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist”, then adding that the “least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”? Does Jesus criticize the saintliness of his cousin in this verse?
- What does Jesus mean by saying that men of violence take the kingdom of heaven by force?
- The word “yoke” connotes drudging, plodding work, yet Jesus is offering rest. What is the difference between his yoke and the heavy burden he is inviting you to lay down



Conclusion

For Application:

- When you ask Jesus a question, does He answer with words, or does He point to His deeds in your life? How have these deeds provided the answer you were looking for?
- Do you tend to measure how the Gospel should be lived against the standards of religious or social practice around you? Or do you measure religious or social practice around you based on the standards of the Gospel? Which is harder to do?
- How has your level of education helped or hindered your response to the words and deeds of Jesus? Would you consider yourself one of the “wise and learned” or one of the “infants”? Which should you be?