

Gospels Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Five: Opposition and Other Responses to Jesus – Matthew 11-16; Luke 7, 13, 17; John 5, 10

Read Matthew 11:1-24 and 14:1-12.

- 1) Based on what you have learned so far in the *Gospels* study, why might John the Baptist have been looking for confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah? **Jesus had not taken political action to set up an earthly kingdom nor had He brought about the judgment of God, which John specifically foretold (Matthew 3:11-12). This was probably confusing to John, who may have been waiting for Jesus to do something more. Secondly, Jesus' ministry style was much different than John's (11:17-19). John's style was more aggressive and self-denying, while Jesus came healing and joining in feasting. John had heard reports of these things from his disciples (Matthew 11:2). Finally, John may have been expecting Jesus (if He was indeed the Messiah) to come rescue him. But that was not happening.**
- 2) According to Matthew 11:16-24, how did most of the people of Jesus' day respond to Him? **Matthew 11:16-24 points out the people's fickleness. The masses could not be pleased. They criticized John for being an ascetic and criticized Jesus for preaching liberty from legalism. Ultimately, the majority rejected both John and Jesus (12:20 "did not repent").**
- 3) Jesus confused both John and the crowds, but John's response to his confusion was very differently than the masses'. Contrast their attitudes. When you face something in God's plan that you find confusing, do you respond more like John or the masses? **John asked sincere questions. He was a truth-seeker. The masses were at times fickle and at other times indifferent. Despite anything they saw and heard, they doubted because they had no genuine interest in truth. Personal sharing**

Read Matthew 12:1-14, Luke 13:10-17, and John 5:1-18, 10:22-39.

- 4) List the attitudes and responses to Jesus in these accounts. Include verse numbers.
**Matthew 12:2: The Pharisees questioned Jesus about His disciples' Sabbath activities (picking grain to eat).
 Matthew 12:10: The Pharisees were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.
 Matthew 12:14: The Pharisees plotted to kill Jesus.
 Luke 13:14: A synagogue ruler was indignant because Jesus healed on the Sabbath.
 Luke 13:17: Jesus' opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted by His healings.
 John 5:16: The Jews persecuted Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath.
 John 5:18: The Jews tried to kill Jesus, not only because of His Sabbath activities, but also because He claimed to be equal with God.
 John 10:31: The Jews picked up stones to stone Him.
 John 10:39: Jesus' opponents tried to seize him.**
- 5) What were the Jewish religious leaders' specific allegations against Jesus? For each allegation, try to find one verse that best represents Jesus' response. **The religious leaders' two most specific allegations against Jesus were that He did what was unlawful on the Sabbath (picking grain and healing [Matthew 12:2, 10; Luke 13:14; John 5:18]) and He claimed equality with God (John 5:18, 10:33). Jesus responded to these allegations by saying that He is Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8) and by affirming that He is indeed God (John 10:38).**
- 6) Consider Jesus' teachings about the Sabbath in the previously listed passages along with what the following passages reveal: Exodus 20:8-11, Isaiah 58:13-14, Matthew 5:17, Mark 2:27 and Hebrews 4:9-10. What do these passages teach that helps you better understand Sabbath observance? **God ordained Sabbath rest immediately after Creation, long before the Law of Moses was given. Jesus came to fulfill the Law, but He did not say that He came to do away with the Sabbath. When Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27), He was not abrogating the Sabbath principle but clarifying the priority. It should not be viewed as a restriction but as a gift. The Book of Hebrews tells us that a Sabbath**

rest still remains for the people of God. Therefore, the principle of Sabbath rest is still in effect. Hebrews 4 also teaches that the Sabbath is a sign, a sign of spiritual rest, rest from one's efforts to obtain salvation by works. We keep this Sabbath Law by putting our faith in Christ alone for salvation. Perhaps the most meaningful way to approach a day of Sabbath rest is to cease from our usual activities for the express purpose of celebrating Christ's work on our behalf.

Read Matthew 12:22-45, 15:1-20, and 16:1-4.

- 7) Explain how Jesus' response to each confrontation with the Pharisees relates to their accusation.
 - a) How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' accusation that He drove out demons by Satanic power (Matthew 12:24), according to the following passages?
 1. Matthew 12:25-29 Jesus used logic to dispel their accusation. No ruler or power tears down his own kingdom as a means of building it up.
 2. Matthew 12:30-36 Jesus said that neutrality about Him is impossible. The Pharisees could not pretend to be neutral judges. Just as the condition of a tree's fruit is determined by the health of the tree, the Pharisees' accusations came from the posture of their hearts (they directly opposed Jesus and the Spirit of God). Jesus said this heart condition, in which they firmly and repeatedly opposed the work of the Spirit, was unforgivable, and they would have to give an account for it on the Day of Judgment.
 - b) How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' accusation that He did not honor tradition (Matthew 15:2), according to the following passages?
 1. Matthew 15:3-9 Jesus responded to their accusation with His own accusation. He accused them of nullifying God's word by favoring tradition. He stated that the word of God supersedes manmade tradition. As an example, He spoke of their refusal to honor their parents (15:4). They found a way to avoid offering their parents financial assistance by deferring to a tradition in which their resources were considered "devoted to God" (15:5).
 2. Matthew 15:11-20 The Pharisees accused Jesus of not honoring tradition, but the specific offense regarded ceremonial hand washing. Jesus responded by prioritizing principles over rules (the "spirit of the law" over the "letter of the law"), explaining that spiritual cleanliness is far more important than physical cleanliness, even when performed for religious purposes. He told His disciples that spiritual blindness kept the Pharisees from understanding that sin results from unclean hearts, not from failure to perform perfunctory rituals.
- 8) What do you find ironic about the Jews' demand for a miraculous sign from Jesus in Matthew 12:38-45 and 16:1-4? What kind of sign did Jesus say they would get? (See Jonah 1:17, 2:10 with 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 and Matthew 12:40.) Jesus had already performed so many miraculous signs! They certainly had noticed because they attempted to explain them as performed by magic or satanic power (Matthew 12:24). Jesus said the only sign they would receive was "the sign of Jonah," meaning that He would be raised back to life on the third day following His death. If they were looking for an act of creation or an alteration of nature,¹ they would indeed eventually be given that very kind of sign.
- 9) The Pharisees' response to Jesus was defensive, angry, and self-righteous. Reread Matthew 12:34b. What has come out of your mouth recently that makes a statement about the condition of your heart? **Personal sharing**

¹ Schroeder, David (1995). *Matthew* (p. 119). Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications.

Read Matthew 12:46-50, 13:53-58, 15:21-28, Luke 7:36-50, 17:11-19, and John 6:66-71.

- 10) Matthew 12:46, 13:53-58, and John 6:66 mention groups close to Jesus: His family, His hometown, and His larger group of disciples.
- What does John 7:3-5 tell us about the response of Jesus' own brothers to him? **They did not believe in Him at first.**
 - Assume Matthew 13:53-58 refers to a second opportunity Jesus gave His hometown after their earlier rejection of Him (recorded in Luke 4:14-30). What position did the people of Nazareth take on this occasion and what was the result? **Matthew 13:57 says that they took offense at Him and 13:58 says Jesus did not do miracles there because of their lack of faith.**
 - According to John 6:66, how did a great number of Jesus' disciples eventually respond to Him? **They turned back and no longer followed him.**
- 11) The following accounts reveal the responses of a precious minority. Briefly describe the response of each.
- Matthew 15:21-28 **A foreign woman (a Canaanite) responded with a desperate faith.**
 - Luke 7:36-50 **A sinful woman responded with humility and penitence.**
 - Luke 17:11-19 **A Samaritan (foreign) leper responded with faith and gratitude.**
 - John 6:66-69 **Jesus' own inner circle (the Twelve, minus Judas [verse 71]) responded with humility and commitment.**
- 12) How do you need to respond to Jesus' work on your behalf in your life today (be specific)? **Personal sharing.**

Concerning Opposition to Christ (including Matthew 11:25-30 and 12:14-21)

- 13) According to the following verses, what are some of the ways that God's enemy has opposed the person and work of the Messiah throughout human history: Genesis 3:15, Exodus 1:15-16, Matthew 2:16, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 23:33, Acts 8:1, 1 Peter 5:8, and Revelation 19:11-21, 20:7-10? **Genesis 3:15 foretold Satan striking the heel of the Messiah at the Cross. Through Pharaoh, Satan attempted to thwart God's Messianic promise by killing all Jewish baby boys (Exodus 1). Herod tried to kill any baby who may have been the Messiah (Matthew 2). Satan attempted to prevent Jesus from completing His most holy work on the Cross by succumbing to temptation (Matthew 4). In putting Jesus to death on the Cross, Satan may have thought he snuffed out God's plan of salvation (Luke 23). Satan has persecuted the church of Christ throughout the Church Age, attempting to stamp out the work of the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 8). Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, tempting Christ's followers into sin (1 Peter 5). One day, Satan will use the antichrist and his false prophet to make war against Jesus. After that, Satan will deceive the nations into gathering for battle against God and His people. In the end, the devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, to be tormented forever and ever (Revelation 19-20).**
- 14) Jesus said, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). Which person who is "against Christ" needs your intercession in prayer for them this week, and considering Matthew 11:25-30, how will you pray? **Personal sharing**
- 15) According to Matthew 11:25 and 12:14-21 and any other passage in this lesson, how did Jesus handle opposition? How could you benefit by following His example (relate this in a specific way to your own present life)? **Jesus fearlessly presented truth, without being defensive. He stayed focused on His mission, continued to heal those who came to Him, and praised God for the few who showed spiritual insight and interest (Matthew 11:25). He avoided those who planned to kill Him, knowing His time to die had not yet come (Matthew 12:15-21). Personal sharing**