

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

**Subject:** Jesus was rejected and opposed by the vast majority but a precious minority embraced Him.

**Main Idea:** It is impossible to be neutral in regard to Jesus.

**Principles:**

1. *We can safely bring our sincere questions to Jesus.*
2. *Apart from God's work of regeneration, our sinful human condition naturally causes us to take offense at Christ.*
3. *Humility and gratitude are proper responses to Jesus.*

**Introduction**

A few months ago my parents received a call from someone who claimed that my father had won a great sum of money and that their bank account information was needed in order to have the money wired into it. Thankfully, my parents recognized this as a scam. Con artists have been around for as long as time has existed. I wonder, if we had lived in Jesus' day, would we have recognized Him as the unique Son of God or would we have considered Him just another con artist? Consider the radical claims He made. He claimed to be God (John 5:18, 10:30, 33; 19:7)! Imagine yourself hearing about His miracles and His claims. Would you have thought Jesus was mentally ill? Or perhaps an arrogant but exceptional con artist? C.S. Lewis wrote to this point:

*I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic— on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg— or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising [sic] nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>1</sup>*

Yet today, all across the world where Jesus' name is known, many think of Him as a great moral teacher. Truly, He was perfect with regard to morality, and He was certainly a great teacher. However, Jesus claimed to be so much more.

So who is Jesus? That was the question people in Jesus' day were asking. It is the most important question we will ever answer. Is Jesus a liar, a lunatic, or is He Lord? Neutrality about Him is impossible. Jesus Himself said, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). We must decide who He is.

In this lesson, we discover that as Jesus headed into His third year of ministry, many decided He was not who He claimed to be and opposition to Him intensified. John 1:10-11 summarizes, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him." Only a precious minority did. One of these was John the Baptist.

## I. Questioning Jesus – Matthew 11

### A. Background

- i. John's Role: John the Baptist was the last of the prophets who preached under the old covenant (Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6, Matthew 3:1-3, 11:9-10). The unusual circumstances surrounding his birth (Luke 1:5-80) were indicators of the very special role he was to play. As we already learned, he preached a message of repentance and as the forerunner of Jesus, announced the nearness of the kingdom. John lived a very ascetic lifestyle (Matthew 3:4). He was recognized as a prophet by the people of his day (Matthew 14:5) and was fiery in his presentation (Matthew 3:7-12). Jesus endorsed John's message by having John baptize Him.
- ii. John's Arrest: Eventually, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, imprisoned John. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee as a tetrarch from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. John rebuked him for stealing his brother's wife Herodias, and apparently this rebuke was the precipitating factor in his arrest (Matthew 14:3-4).

**B. John's Question– 11:1-3**: From John's prison cell, he sent his followers to Jesus with a question: "Are you the One who is to come or should we expect someone else?" Why would John have asked Jesus such a question? The text does not say, but we can consider three possible explanations:

- i. Confusion about Jesus' Work: John had told the crowds, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear his threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11-12). The picture is one of a farmer who separates the good wheat from the worthless chaff and then burns the chaff. Fire is often used as an illustration of judgment in scripture. Clearly, John expected the Messiah to bring judgment. It seems that he was waiting for Jesus to *do* something Jesus wasn't doing.
- ii. Difference in Style: John was aggressive and self-denying, while Jesus was meek and merciful and participated in feasting (11:17-19). John's disciples reported these things to him (11:2). This too may have confused John.
- iii. Expectation of Deliverance: John may have been expecting Jesus (if He was indeed Messiah) to come rescue him. Yet John continued languishing in prison.

### C. Jesus' Response – 11:4-19

- i. Answer to John – 11:4-6: Jesus answered John by pointing out the ways in which He was fulfilling specific Old Testament Messianic prophecies: He gave sight to the blind, healed the lame, cleansed lepers, gave hearing to the deaf, and proclaimed the good news to the poor (Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1-2a). His current mission might be different than John had expected but He urged John not to stumble on account of this.
- ii. Jesus' Commendation of John – 11:7-16
  1. *John's Greatness*: Lest anyone think less of John for having asked this question, Jesus quickly followed up with the highest commendation of John, affirming him not only as a prophet, but the prophet predicted to appear just prior to Messiah's coming (11:14).
  2. *Whoever Is Least In the Kingdom Is Greater*: Jesus stated that among those born of women, there has not risen anyone greater than John, "yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." To understand what Jesus meant, we must look ahead to chapters 14 and 27 of Matthew and see that Herod put John to death prior to Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, John lived and died under the Old Covenant and never in his lifetime knew the privileges believers have known since Pentecost (such as the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit). John lived at the end of an era (11:13-14).
  3. *The Kingdom Subjected to Violence?*
    - a. Verse 12 is very difficult to understand and as a result, has been variously interpreted. Many translations say the Kingdom of Heaven "suffers violence and violent people have been raiding it" (or something close to this), but the 1984 New International Version translates the first part of the phrase, "the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it." Obviously, one translation interprets the Greek in a negative sense and one in a positive sense. Interestingly, the 2011 N.I.V has changed the phrases to the more negative sense. However, Luke's version of this saying (Luke 16:16) is different still. Luke has Jesus saying that "the good news of the kingdom is being preached and everyone is forcing their way into it."
    - b. Perhaps Matthew's wording indicates that while the kingdom seemed to suffer a setback by John's imprisonment (the negative sense in which the kingdom is subject to violence), in reality, the kingdom continues to advance (the "violent men raiding it" is a positive reference to the forceful determination of faithful individuals like John to stand firm

[see Luke 13:24 and Matthew 7:13-14]). Or perhaps Jesus was simply referring to violent opposition of His kingdom by violent people. The religious community in Jesus' day was unhappy with John and with Jesus and opposition against them was increasing. One needs only to visit places where Christianity is illegal today to see that the Kingdom of Heaven has suffered violence and violent people are still attacking it.

#### **D. Jesus' Generation – 11:16-24**

- i. Fickle Children: Jesus gave an assessment of the crowds and critics who doubted Him and doubted John. He says they are like fickle children who at one moment insist on playing wedding and at the next, insist on playing funeral but aren't happy with either. John was an ascetic. His ministry had a somber undertone and the public criticized him as harsh. Jesus' ministry had a celebrative undertone, yet they called Him a glutton and a drunkard. The masses couldn't be pleased and ultimately, rejected both John and Jesus (12:20). If we follow Jesus only because of what He can do for us, we will eventually be disillusioned, like the crowds. They were initially awed but turned against Him when He did not do what *they* expected. We must follow Jesus because He is who He claimed to be!
- ii. Failure to Repent
  1. Jesus denounced the towns in which most of His miracles had been performed, because the people there did not repent. Chorazin and Bethsaida were very near Capernaum, a center of Jesus' ministry, yet these people, who had the Old Testament scriptures and the very Son of God performing miracles among them, did not repent. Jesus said that even the people of the pagan Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon and the wicked ancient city of Sodom would have repented if they had witnessed His miracles. Since these Galileans had greater knowledge and opportunity, they would be judged more harshly than those who sinned terribly but had done so with some degree of ignorance.
  2. Perhaps the attitude of many in Jesus' generation was one of indifference. Despite anything they saw and heard, they had no genuine interest in truth. Jesus condemned them for not repenting because neutrality about Him is impossible. Does some area of your life reflect indifference to Jesus? Have you been thinking it possible to remain neutral with regard to His Lordship?

**Summary Statement:** John the Baptist responded very differently than those in several Galilean cities. In his depressing circumstances, he may have had doubts, but he took them directly to Jesus. Jesus didn't condemn John for his sincere question and He will not chasten us for bringing our sincere questions to Him either.

**Principle:** *We can safely bring our sincere questions to Jesus.*

**Application:** Do you have questions for Jesus? John sent his questions from prison. Perhaps you are imprisoned, if not actually then symbolically. Perhaps you are currently imprisoned by ill health, depression, financial difficulty, or a burden for someone you love. Have you wondered, "Where is God in all of this? How can He really be good? Have I made a mistake in receiving the Gospel and bought into a lie?"

Satan's very first lie to Eve was the suggestion that God was not good since He was withholding something good from her, the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:1). In reality, things are not always as they appear. God has the bigger picture, and when He instructed Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit, it was to protect them. Why then did He put that tree in the garden in the first place? Perhaps to give Adam and Eve the opportunity to exercise faith. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God."

I don't know all the reasons God has in allowing your trials and right now, you may not see any purpose in them either. However, your trials and mine offer us the opportunity to prove our faith by trusting God's promises and resting in Him. When we suffer, we can choose between faith and fear (or anger). Have you thought to bring your sincere questions directly to Jesus or do you only voice them to others or perhaps keep them to yourself?

**Transition:** John took his doubts to Jesus. Some of the Galileans were simply indifferent. Others, like the religious leaders, were altogether offended and hostile toward Jesus.

## **II. Offended by Jesus** – Matthew 12:1-50, 13:53-58, 15:1-20, 16:1-4; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18, 6:66, 7:3-5, 10:22-39

### **A. Sabbath Controversy** – Matthew 12:1-14, Luke 13:10-17, John 5:1-16:

#### i. Keeping the Sabbath

1. One accusation the Pharisees leveled repeatedly against Jesus was that He failed to keep the Sabbath. Sabbath observance was a distinctive of Jewish life and the Pharisees prided themselves for their scrupulous observance of it. The Old Testament forbade work on the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest. Many legal discussions arose concerning what constituted work and the end result was a list of thirty-nine categories (each with sub-groupings) of prohibited activities. It was not the Old Testament command that Jesus failed to keep but these burdensome, manmade traditions.

2. It is relevant for us today to note that Jesus never overruled the Sabbath principle. He came to fulfill the Law, but the Sabbath predates the Law of Moses. God ordained it immediately after Creation (Genesis 2:3). 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 it. In other words, Sabbath rest should not be viewed as a restriction but as a gift.
  3. Hebrews 4 tells us that a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God (4:9-10). In that passage we also discover that the Sabbath is a sign of something greater: spiritual rest or in other words, rest from one's efforts to obtain salvation by works. We acknowledge and keep this greater principle by putting our faith in Christ alone for salvation. Understanding this symbolism adds even greater joy to the literal aspect of Sabbath rest.
  4. In terms of Sabbath day habits, perhaps the most meaningful approach is to cease from our usual activities for the express purpose of celebrating Christ's work on our behalf. The symbolism behind the Sabbath is our motive for celebrating! Jesus has done it all! He paid the price of our salvation in full and there is nothing we can add! Sadly, today we have gone the way of the world with regard to Sabbath Day rest and celebration, substituting empty entertainment and other forms of self-indulgence for true rest. It has become a day about "me" instead of a day to celebrate the Lord and His works. Ironically, nothing the world offers can ever refresh us like turning our attention to Jesus. We only find *true* rest and renewal in Him.
- ii. Picking Grain and the Healing of the Man's Shriveled Hand – Matthew 12:1-14
1. The Pharisees saw Jesus' disciples picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath. The Mosaic Law allowed for hungry persons to help themselves to as much grain in a neighbor's field as they needed to feed themselves (Deuteronomy 23:25). Thus, the disciples' actions as such were not the problem. The problem was that they did so on the Sabbath and the oral traditions (later written in the Mishnah) forbade Sabbath reaping and threshing. The picking of the grain constituted reaping and rubbing it together between their palms constituted threshing.
  2. Jesus answered the Pharisees' accusation in three ways:
    - a. First, He reminded them that David and his men had eaten the sacred bread within the Tabernacle (which was only to be eaten by the priests) when David was fleeing from Saul. Thus, preserving life is a greater principle than technicalities.

- b. Second, the priests themselves worked on the Sabbath in presenting the required Sabbath sacrifices, yet they were considered innocent.
  - c. Third, Jesus claimed that He was greater than the Temple and Lord of the Sabbath. This would be an awful claim for anyone other than the Son of God to make, and it surely shocked and offended the disbelieving Pharisees! As Lord of the Sabbath, if Jesus did not condemn His disciples' actions, then they were blameless.
- 3. Jesus pressed the point further by healing the shriveled hand of a man in the synagogue. He told the Pharisees that if the law permitted them to rescue an endangered animal on the Sabbath, how much more important was it to show mercy to a hurting person.
- 4. Matthew tells us that after this, the Pharisees, who were looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, plotted to kill Him (12:10, 14).
- iii. The Crippled Woman – Luke 13:10-17 Luke tells of Jesus' Sabbath day healing of a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. The synagogue leader chastened her and others with needs for coming to be healed on the Sabbath. Jesus challenged him, reminding him of the freedom the law gave to meet the needs of animals on the Sabbath. How much more valuable was this woman? According to Luke, when Jesus said this, His opponents were humiliated.
- iv. The Paralytic at Bethesda – John 5:1-18: John tells of the Sabbath day healing of a paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda. On this occasion, Jesus explained that even His Father is always at work (a reference to God's providence) and therefore, He too is always working. In other words, Jesus' works should be recognized as the works of God. John comments, "For this reason they tried all the more to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). Jesus wasn't calling God His Father in the general sense of being a child of God, but in a unique sense, and the Jews understood that this was what He was claiming. Thus, the religious community charged Jesus with a second and even more serious offense: blasphemy.

## B. Blasphemy – John 5:18, 10:22-39

- i. The Question and Jesus' Answer: Ultimately, blasphemy was the charge for which Jesus was crucified. Blasphemy is maligning God by making Him out to be less than He actually is. In John 10:24, the Jews' question is straightforward: Was Jesus the Messiah? Jesus stated that He had made the answer clear enough. His works and words (the Shepherd's voice) testified that He was indeed from God. In fact, He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), "I am God's Son" (10:36) and "The Father is in me and I in the Father" (10:38). Again, such claims would be the height of arrogance, unless they were true. Twice, Jesus' opponents attempted to seize and stone him, but He escaped.
- ii. A Precious Assurance: In this passage, Jesus also states, "I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." How precious is the promise that God preserves His own! However, Jesus' life and teachings belie the possibility of a casual faith, a "cheap grace," in which one prays a prayer and is baptized, but fails to consider the cost of discipleship and live in obedience to Him. Such a person has no assurance of salvation. However, those who are truly His own can never be lost to Him.

## C. Other Accusations – Matthew 12:22-45, 15:1-20, 16:1-4

- i. Aligned with Satan's Power – Matthew 12:22-37
  1. *Accusation and Response*: The Pharisees defensively claimed that Jesus exorcised a demon by the power of Beelzebub. "Beelzebub" was the name used by the Jews for the ruler of the abode of the demons, or Satan. Ironically, by their very accusation, the Pharisees were acknowledging Jesus' miracles. Jesus appealed to their common sense, saying that no ruler builds their kingdom by tearing it down. He turned the tables on them, calling them blasphemers of the Holy Spirit and saying that this kind of blasphemy was an unforgivable sin.
  2. *The Unforgivable Sin*: Jesus said blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was unforgivable.
    - a. Some kinds of blasphemy are forgivable. Before his conversion, Paul actively tore down Christ's kingdom, trying to force believers to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). He called himself the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15-16), yet he was forgiven. We may rebel against God and verbally denounce Him, but if we repent, this too can be forgiven.

- b. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit involves stubborn persistence in refusing the prompting of the Holy Spirit with regard to one's own dead spiritual condition up until the end of one's life. At that point, there is nothing left for such an individual. They have lost any opportunity to be saved and are thus unforgivable. We should note that the Book of Hebrews repeatedly warns against the hardening of one's heart that ultimately results in this condition. There may come a point in this life where, after repeated rejection of Christ and hardening of the heart, the Holy Spirit no longer convicts of sin (this was obviously the case with the Pharisees Jesus condemned). However, only God knows when this line is crossed and for our part, we are to continue praying and witnessing to the lost with the hope that "God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). If a person is concerned that he or she has committed the unforgivable sin, the concern in itself proves that they have not committed it.
- ii. Failed to Honor Tradition – Matthew 15:1-20: Jesus was accused of not following tradition with regard to other things besides the Sabbath. One example involved ceremonial hand washing. The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus why His disciples didn't keep the tradition of the elders.
1. *The Talmud*: The traditions the Jews have followed for centuries began developing in Old Testament times as scribes copied and taught God's word. In Jesus' day, the traditions were still oral, but after the destruction of Jerusalem and the second Temple in A.D. 70, they began to be put into writing. The Talmud of today is over 6,200 pages long and consists of the Mishnah (a series of rabbinic interpretations of the meaning of the Law) and the Gemara (a commentary on the Mishnah and also on the Hebrew Bible). Orthodox Jews today consider it authoritative.
  2. *Jesus' Accusation*: Jesus stated that the word of God supersedes manmade tradition. He called the Pharisees hypocrites and accused them of nullifying God's word by favoring tradition. As an example, He addressed their refusal to help meet the financial needs of their own parents by deferring to a tradition that allowed them to claim their money had already been committed to God as a gift. God's word told them to "honor their father and mother" (Exodus 20:12), but they had used traditions to get around the law.

3. *Jesus' Explanation Concerning Hand Washing*: Returning to the original attack against Him, Jesus then stated that spiritual cleanliness is far more important than physical cleanliness, even when it is performed for religious purposes. Sin results from unclean hearts, not failure to perform perfunctory rituals. Jesus clearly taught that empty rule keeping does nothing to gain favor with God. This is no different than what the Old Testament prophets declared. God requires that we “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him” (Micah 6:8). He looks at the heart.
- iii. Refusal to Give A Sign – Matthew 12:38-45, 16:1-4
1. *The Request and Jesus' Answer*: Yet another accusation the religious leaders made against Jesus was that He refused to give them a sign that would prove His authority to make the claims He made. The irony of their request for a sign is nearly laughable in light of Jesus' many miracles. However, they may have been looking for an act of creation or some very unusual alteration of nature.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, that is exactly what Jesus said He would give them. He said the sign they would get was the sign of Jonah, a reference to His resurrection on the third day after His death.
  2. *Another Condemnation of Jesus' Generation*: Earlier, Jesus condemned the people in the cities where He had performed miracles for their failure to repent (11:20-24), comparing them to the wicked in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. On this occasion, Jesus condemned the Pharisees and teachers of the law, contrasting them with Gentiles, such as the men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba who heard and received the prophetic word. Neither she nor the Ninevites had the very person of Christ before their eyes, and yet they repented. Jesus said these people would rise up at the last day and condemn His generation for their failure to recognize and receive Him.

#### **D. Others Who Disbelieved Jesus**

- i. Jesus' Brothers – John 7:3-5: Mark 6:3 names Jesus' half-brothers (sons of Mary and Joseph) as James, Joseph, Judas and Simon. It also mentions sisters without naming them. John 7:5 makes the sad statement that “even his own brothers did not believe in him.” However, after Jesus' resurrection, He made an impactful personal appearance to His brother James (1 Corinthians 15:7). We know that His brothers changed their minds and acknowledged His Lordship. Eventually James became the leader of the Jerusalem church and Jesus' brother Judas authored the epistle Jude.

- ii. Jesus' Hometown – Matthew 13:53-58 We have already learned that the people in Jesus' hometown took offense at Him. Jesus didn't do miracles there because of their lack of faith. It is possible that Matthew 13:53-58 refers to a second, later occasion on which they rejected Him.
- iii. Many Who Initially Followed – John 6:60-71: Many of those who followed Jesus at the beginning of His ministry turned back and no longer followed Him once they decided His teachings were too hard. Even Judas, who was one of the Twelve, ultimately betrayed Him.

**E. Satan's Opposition Throughout History:** From the beginning of human history, Satan has been behind the scenes, opposing and seeking to destroy the work of God, God's Messiah, and God's people. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). One day in the future, Satan will use antichrist ["the beast" of Revelation) to deceive the nations into gathering for battle and surrounding God's people. But in the end, he will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur to be tormented forever and ever. All those who have opposed Christ will also spend eternity there.

**Summary Statement:** Jesus stated that neutrality about Him is impossible: "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). The Pharisees could not pretend to be neutral judges of Jesus and His actions. They were offended by Him and began privately plotting to kill Him.

**Application:** Almost certainly, all of us have people in our lives who are offended by Jesus. Undoubtedly, some of these outwardly oppose Him. How should we respond to people like this? Let's consider Jesus' example in these chapters.

First, Jesus proclaimed truth, but once it was rejected, He withdrew to focus on those who received Him (Matthew 12:15). Once we are confident that a person has clearly heard the truth, if his or her heart remains hard, we should not continue to press the point. Later in Matthew, when individuals with hard hearts questioned Jesus insincerely, He simply remained silent (Matthew 27:12, 14).

Second, Jesus acknowledged that God's Spirit had revealed the truth to those who received His message and He praised the Father (Matthew 11:25). Therefore, we should pray, asking the Spirit of God to regenerate spiritually dead hearts and renew spiritually clouded minds, and we should rejoice that *in God's time*, He will answer this prayer on behalf of specific individuals.

**Principle:** *Apart from God's work of regeneration, our sinful human condition naturally causes us to take offense at Christ.*

In our unsaved, spiritually dead, sinful condition, we are selfish at the core. The idea that Jesus deserves to be Lord over us is offensive. We want to rule our own lives. Only God can change a person's thinking so that he or she begins to see Him as their friend and not their enemy. Regeneration is the "secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to us."<sup>iii</sup> Sometimes, it is called being "born again" (John 3:3-8). We must act in response by willingly by putting our trust in Christ for salvation. That response to the Gospel constitutes our conversion. But first, God must act upon us so that we have a new point of view.

**Illustration:** God can reach anyone, anywhere, anytime. Recently, a friend told me joyfully of the regeneration and conversion of her brother, a brilliant, middle-aged lawyer who had vehemently insisted his entire life that Christianity could not be true. Earlier that year, the man suffered a brain bleed. According to his own testimony, as he lay on the hospital gurney headed for the operating room, not knowing whether he would live or die, a moment of clarity came over him. He thought to himself, "Buddha cannot help me. Mohammed cannot help me. I cannot help myself. Only Jesus can save me!" And that was it! Jesus not only saved his life; in that very moment He also saved the man's soul.

Perhaps someone you love has rejected Jesus and even works against Him. There may be no visible sign that he or she is softening in the least. Take heart, dear brothers and sisters! What is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27)! Things are not always as they appear. God may regenerate him or her at any moment!

**Transition:** While the vast majority rejected Jesus, a precious minority responded very differently. For these, Jesus praised His Father (Matthew 11:25).

### **III. Grateful for Jesus** – Matthew 11:25-30, 15:21-28; Luke 7:36-50, 17:11-19; John 6:66-71

**A. Foreigners:** Among this precious few were also a few foreigners. A Canaanite woman from the Phoenician region of Tyre and Sidon begged the Lord for mercy, asking Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). Initially, Jesus refused because she was a "Gentile dog."<sup>iv</sup> But because she humbly persisted, acknowledging Jesus as the "Lord" and "Son of David" (Messiah), Jesus rewarded and commended her. Among ten lepers Jesus healed, only one, a Samaritan, threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him (Luke 17:16).

- B. The Sinful Woman** – Jesus said that He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) and the Gospels give us specific examples of sinful individuals who deeply loved Jesus. One such individual was a woman with a reputation for a sinful lifestyle who wept as she washed and perfumed Jesus’ feet, drying them with her own hair and kissing them (Luke 7:36-50). Simon, a pious Pharisee in whose home this took place, had failed in his obligation as host to bathe the dusty feet of his guest. Jesus told her those who have been forgiven much love much (Luke 7:47). Like a precious minority, this sinful woman loved Jesus much. She humbled herself out of gratitude to Him.
- C. Jesus’ Inner Circle** – John 6:66-69; Matthew 11:25-30
- i. The Return From Their Mission – Matthew 11: By cross-referencing Matthew 11 with Luke 10, we discover that it was just after Jesus condemned some of the Galilean towns for rejecting Him that Jesus’ disciples returned from their mission (Luke 10:13-22). These precious few refreshed and encouraged Jesus’ heart. Luke wrote that Jesus broke into praise to His Father upon hearing their reports. Full of joy through the Holy Spirit, He said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do” (Luke 10:21).
  - ii. The Disciples’ Loyalty to Jesus – John 6: Except for Judas, the apostles were part of the humble and grateful minority. After many from the larger group of Jesus’ followers turned away from following Jesus, He asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

**Summary Statement:** A precious minority received Jesus with humility and gratitude.

**Principle:** *Humility and gratitude are proper responses to Jesus.*

**Illustration:** Ann VosKamp longed for a fuller life in Christ but it seemed to elude her until she was dared to record 1000 gifts God had given her. In order to accommodate such a lengthy list, Ann began considering “small things” for which she had never before thought to give thanks: the smell of fresh, crisp, autumn air; the curl of hair that fell naturally on the forehead of one of her children; the glow of the moon; the luxury of a bath. As her list grew, she found that expressing gratitude was revolutionizing her walk with Jesus. She began seeing God’s grace even in the hard things of life.<sup>v</sup>

**Application:** Humility and gratitude are not only the proper responses to Jesus; they are also the secret to a fuller life in Him.

## Conclusion

In every generation, only a few have responded to Jesus with humility and gratitude.

One of Jesus' many hard teachings was this one: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). It is impossible to be neutral in regard to Jesus. There are only two roads and we cannot take both.

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<sup>i</sup> Lewis, C. S. (2009-05-28). *Mere Christianity* (C.S. Lewis Signature Classics) (p. 52). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Schroeder, David E., *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*, p. 72. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995.

<sup>iii</sup> Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 699). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>iv</sup> Jesus' response sounds so harsh to our ears, but this may be due to the inadequacy of written language to communicate the full picture. F.F. Bruce suggests: "...*what if there was a twinkle in his eye as he spoke, as much as to say, "You know what we Jews are supposed to think of you Gentiles; do you think it is right for you to come and ask for a share in the healing which I have come to impart to Jews?" The written record can preserve the spoken words; it cannot convey the tone of voice in which they were said. Maybe the tone of voice encouraged the woman to persevere.*" Bruce, F. F. (1997). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 424). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

<sup>v</sup> Voskamp, Ann (2011). *1000 Gifts: the Dare to Live Life Fully Right Where You Are*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.