

LESSON 11
February 9, 2025

Unit III: Life in God's Kingdom
Stand Up

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 10:31-42
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 11
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24

KEY VERSE

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. (Matthew 11:20, KJV)

.....

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. (Matthew 11:20, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Evaluate the resistance that Jesus and John the Baptist faced as an attack on the kingdom of heaven.
- Identify sources of resistance in the world toward the kingdom of heaven.
- Exercise Christian practices that produce righteousness in the face of opposition.

***Key Terms**

Behold (verse 8)—Greek: *idou* (id-oo'): look at, view; "Lo!"; "see" (NIV).

Claim (verse 12)—Greek: *harpazó* (har-pad'-zo): to seize, catch up, snatch away; obtain by robbery; "take" (KJV); "raiding" (NIV).

Greater (verse 11)—Greek: *meizōn* (mide'-zone): larger; elder; stronger; more.

Messenger (verse 10)—Greek: *aggelos* (ang'-el-os): an angel, envoy; one who is sent from God.

Prophet (verse 9)—Greek: *prophētēs* (prof-ay'-tace): an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will; a person gifted at expositing divine truth.

Shaken (verse 7)—Greek: *saleuó* (sal-yoo'-o): agitated; stirred up; excited; disturbed in mind; "swayed" (NIV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)



The Biblical Context

Matthew, a former tax collector and a disciple of Jesus Christ's, is the uncontested author of the gospel book that bears his name. Composed as early as AD 50, Matthew's gospel is an account of Jesus' life written for Jewish people. Matthew's primary purpose was proving to his Jewish readers that Jesus was their Messiah. Hence, the book references Jewish culture and the Old Testament more than the other gospels. Another significant difference is Matthew's systematic focus on Jesus' teachings: the well-known Sermon on the Mount (see chapters 5–7), the disciples' commission to service (see chapter 10), kingdom parables (see chapter 13), the church (see chapter 18), and judgment and end times (see chapters 23–25). Matthew 11, this lesson's background Scripture, immediately follows Jesus' instructing and sending forth His disciples (see chapter 10) and focuses on several key themes and events, including John the Baptist's ministry and His testimony about him, woes (condemnation) against the unrepentant, and an invitation to find relief and peace in Him.

Introduction

The saying “If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything” emphasizes the importance of holding and defending personal beliefs and convictions. While the phrase's exact origin remains unclear, its significance is undeniable, particularly for the faith community. This adage serves as a crucial reminder for believers to steadfastly uphold the Gospel's teachings and fulfill their divine mandate to evangelize, produce, and nurture “Great Commission Christians” who are committed to living out and sharing Christ's teachings. Regrettably, carrying out this divine mandate encounters various forms of resistance within the “mission field,” including dwindling memberships, lax standards, growing skepticism about core Christian beliefs, and questioning Christ's divinity and sinlessness. In this context, the hymn “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” becomes a call to action, urging believers to steadfastly confront these challenges by adhering to the truths of righteousness and goodness taught in the Bible.

To effectively meet these forms of resistance and opposition, the faith community needs believers deeply rooted in God's Word, possessing unwavering biblical convictions and the integrity to remain unshaken by internal and external opposition. The example set by John the Baptist is instructive here. His steadfast commitment to God's kingdom and the promised Messiah—amid opposition from religious and political

authorities—ultimately led to his martyrdom. Still, his example is a powerful model for believers today, underscoring the need for courage in upholding our convictions grounded in an intimate and obedient relationship with God.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

An Unparalleled Witness (*Matthew 11:7-11*)

KJV

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.
10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

NIV

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind?"

8 "If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.

9 "Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

10 "This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11 "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

Matthew 11 opens with then-imprisoned John the Baptist's sending his disciples to ask Jesus a pivotal question: *Is Jesus the expected Messiah, or should they wait for another?* This inquiry likely stemmed from John's misguided expectation that Jesus would immediately judge Israel and establish His kingdom, as John had previously foretold (see Matthew 3:2-12). The delay in these events might have sowed doubts in John's mind. In response, Jesus pointed to His teachings and miracles, highlighting their alignment with the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, particularly those in Isaiah 61:1. He then addressed the surrounding crowd, shifting focus to John's role. Jesus acknowledged and celebrated John's significant contribution to His messianic mission, using a series of rhetorical questions to underscore the importance and authenticity of John's work. He portrays John as a robust and exceptional figure (verse 7), far exceeding a typical prophet (verses 8-9). By referencing Malachi 3:1, Jesus identified John as the foretold herald of the Messiah, affirming His messianic identity (verse 10).

Jesus concluded His discourse by praising John's unique position as the greatest of the prophets and the most eminent person born, chosen by God to pave the way for the Messiah (verse 11a). However, Jesus clarified that while John's role is unparalleled in its significance, those who embrace faith in Christ and enter the kingdom possess a more significant status and understanding than John (verse 11b).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What had John the Baptist done to earn and receive this tribute from Jesus?

Resisting the Kingdom (*Matthew 11:12-15*)

KJV

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

- 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.
14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.
15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.**

NIV

- 12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it.
13 “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John.
14 “And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.
15 “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”**

After commending John and his ministry, Jesus made a statement interpreted in various ways by biblical scholars and theologians (**verse 12**). These interpretations range from illustrating the dedication and spiritual effort necessary for overcoming temptation and entering the kingdom, to the turbulent sociopolitical struggles of John’s time, which caused resistance and opposition to his message of judgment and the coming kingdom. Jesus emphasizes that Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled through John the Baptist. He stated that all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if people were willing to accept it, John was the Elijah who was to come (**verses 13-14**). Summarily, Jesus underscored John’s significant role in God’s redemptive plan by stating that John symbolically represented the prophet Elijah. These verses also highlight the continuity between Old Testament prophecies and New Testament revelation. Jesus concludes His defense of John’s ministry by challenging those listening to go back and review his underlying message (**verse 15**). By holding up John and his ministry, Jesus was doing more than applauding John the Baptist; He was supporting John’s work as a forerunner for the Messiah, and establishing His claim to be the Messiah of whom John bore witness.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What are some sociopolitical and religious challenges to the Gospel’s message today, and how should the faith community address them?

Resistors’ Fate (Matthew 11:20-24)

KJV

- 20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:
21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.
22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.
23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.**

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

NIV

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 “But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

23 “And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

24 “But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Matthew 11:20-24 contains Jesus’ pronouncement of judgment on the Jewish cities of Chorazin (Korazin), Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they refused to repent despite being eyewitnesses to the miracles, or mighty works, He performed in them (**verse 20**). First, Jesus proclaimed woe (doom) on Chorazin and Bethsaida (**verse 21**). Chorazin was located north of the Sea of Galilee, near Bethsaida and Capernaum. Bethsaida was a fishing village near the Sea of Galilee’s northern shore, the home of Jesus’ disciples Philip, Andrew, and Peter. Jesus compared their failure to repent to the anticipated repentance of Tyre and Sidon if they had witnessed His miracles. These cities, located on the Mediterranean coast, were often condemned by Old Testament prophets for their worship of Baal. Jesus said that the inhabitants of these idolatrous cities would have repented long ago with authentic humility and mourning characteristics among people during Old Testament times.

Consequently, the Jewish towns witnessing His miracles firsthand were all the more liable for judgment because they could not deny seeing what Christ could do, yet chose to remain unrepentant. Jesus continues His scathing condemnation of these two cities by declaring their deserved judgment will be more severe than Tyre and Sidon’s (**verse 22**). Most likely, the religious Jews believing that being God’s chosen people was enough security to guarantee a place in the kingdom, were enraged and resented Jesus’ pronouncement. However, they failed to realize that only repentant Israelites who acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah avoid facing judgment. In **verse 23**, Jesus condemns Capernaum for the same reason—refusing to repent and accept Him as the Messiah. Capernaum had the unique privilege of having the Son of God choose it as His adoptive hometown. Yet, despite the mighty works He performed there, most of its inhabitants refused to repent and accept Him as the Messiah. Shockingly, Jesus tells them if the people of Sodom witnessed His miracles, they would have repented, and God would not have destroyed it. Finally, in **verse 24**, Jesus echoes **verse 22** and applies it to Capernaum—God’s final judgment against Sodom will be more bearable than His judgment against the city in which He chose to do much of His ministry on the earth. His message is clear to believers and unbelievers today: confess and turn from sin—it is the difference between eternal salvation and condemnation.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What is the rationale some Christians offer for casually refusing to believe God and/or turn (repent) from a sinful habit?

A Closing Thought

Obedience matters. Today, billions of people openly reject and oppose the Gospel simply because they don't want to obey God—that is, change their thoughts or behaviors. Jesus' rebuke of the cities that refused to acknowledge the Gospel message challenges the faith community to be diligent in teaching its disciples the doctrine of salvation and other principles for Christian living. Our mission is to draw lost souls to Christ and build them up in Christian faith.

Your Life

This week, consider what challenges you to consistently stand up for the Gospel and your responsibilities to its message. Then, identify a spiritual discipline revealed in Jesus' defense of John the Baptist's life and ministry and apply it daily.

Your World!

Jesus' acknowledgment of those cities that would have repented if they had experienced His miracles should make us more aware of those among diverse humanity who have not heard the Gospel. Consequently, the faith community must prioritize intentionally reaching those considered least likely to repent and accept Christ as their Savior.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, we desire to be among those like John the Baptist who will stand up for the Gospel despite resistance and opposition. We pray for the Holy Spirit's empowerment, direction, and spiritual discernment to assist You in fulfilling Your mission in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week, we will explore how pursuing wealth might stand in the way of a spiritually purposeful life. Read Matthew 19:16-30.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, February 10	"God Is Generous to All"	(Matthew 20:1-16)
TUESDAY, February 11	"Those Who Are Generous Are Blessed"	(Proverbs 22:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, February 12	"Blessings and Woes"	(Luke 6:20-26)
THURSDAY, February 13	"Be Rich in Good Works"	(1 Timothy 6:17-21)
FRIDAY, February 14	"God Sets All Things Right"	(1 Samuel 2:1-10)
SATURDAY, February 15	"God Lifts Up the Poor"	(Psalm 113)
SUNDAY, February 16	"All Things Are Possible with God"	(Matthew 19:16-30)