

09. Matthew 11:2 -13:53



A: Israel rejects its shepherd-Messiah : Matthew 11:2 - 12:50

Jesus the Messiah 11:2-6 (Luke 7:18-23)

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come (see 3:11), or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

And blessed is anyone who takes no offence (σκανδαλισθῇ) at me.

'Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come ... and save you'.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

then the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy' (Isaiah 35:4-6).

Matthew 11:7-11 (Luke 7:24-28)

But when they went away, Jesus began to say to the crowds about John: “Why did you go out into the wilderness? To see a reed shaken by the wind? Why did you go out? To see a man in soft clothes? Those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces. Why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, even more than a prophet!

This is he of whom it stands written: ‘Behold, I send my messenger before you who will prepare your way before you.’ (Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:2)

Truly, I say to you: Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist, but the smallest in the kingdom of heaven is greater (in relation to the reign of God) than he.

Matthew 11:12 (compare Luke 16:16).

From the days of John the Baptist until now
the kingdom of heaven has advanced itself forcibly
and the forceful seize hold of it.

Is Jesus saying that God is breaking through all resistance, and demands a corresponding determination of those who would take hold of the redemption offered them. They will need all the courage they can muster, for we can belong to the kingdom only by repenting, by leaving whatever we must leave to follow Jesus; we will have to take up the cross, even lose our life; and we must 'endure to the end'.

Matthew 11:13-15

All the prophets and the law prophesied until John came;
and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.
Let anyone with ears listen!

Jesus lays claim on John the Baptist, Israel's Elijah,
in order to call the people with final urgency to decision.

To what will I compare this generation?

It is the case with it, as with children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

For John came neither eating nor drinking,
and they say, “He has a demon”;
the Son of Man came eating and drinking,
and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard,
a friend of tax collectors and sinners!”

Yet Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

God's judgment on their rejection of his Messiah

Matthew 11:20-24 (Luke 10:12-15)

Then he began to reproach the cities in which many of his mighty deeds had happened, because they had not repented (see 4:17): “Woe to you, Chorazin, woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds had happened in Tyre and Sidon that have happened in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Truly I say to you: It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

And you, Capharnaum! Will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will descend to Hades (Babylon, Isaiah 14:14-15). *For if in Sodom the mighty deeds had happened that have happened in you, it would still be standing today.* Truly I say to you: It will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Matthew 11:25-27 (Luke 10:21-22)

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father,
Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have hidden these things from the wise
and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;
yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

All things have been handed over (παράδιδωμαὶ) to me
by my Father;
and no one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

“I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me
and I know the Father” (John 10:14-15).

Matthew 11:28-30



Come to me, **all** you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you **rest**. Take **my yoke** upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

‘You will find the **rest** that Wisdom gives.
Wisdom will become your joy’ (Sirach 6:28).

‘Why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a **yoke** that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?’ (Acts 15:10. Peter addressing the Jerusalem Assembly).

Torah interpreted by the Prophets

‘Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.” He said to them, “Have you not read what **David** did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests (see 1 Samuel 21:1-7).

Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? (Numbers 28:9-10) I tell you, something (mercy?) greater than the temple is here. If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13) you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.”

The Sabbath

‘You shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you ... Whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people ... Therefore the Israelites shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant’ (Exodus 31:13,16).

Sabbath observance was symbolic of the commitment of the people to keep their part of the covenant.

‘If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the Lord’ (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Sunday

‘Former adherents of the ancient customs have since obtained a new hope. So they have given up keeping the Sabbath, and now order their lives by the Lord’s Day instead, the day when life first dawned for us, thanks to Jesus and his death. That death is the mystery that has moved us to become believers and endure tribulation to show that we are disciples of Jesus Christ our teacher’(Ignatius of Antioch to the community at Magnesia n. 9).

‘Let no one be under any illusion; a person who excludes himself from the sanctuary is depriving himself of the Bread of God, for, if the prayer of one or two individuals has such efficacy, how much more powerful is that of the bishop together with the whole church’ (Ignatius to the community at Ephesus n. 5.2)

‘Do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another’ (Hebrews 10:25).

Curing a man with a withered hand

Matthew 12:9-14 (Mark 3:1-6)

Jesus left that place and entered their synagogue. A man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, “*Is it lawful to cure on the **sabbath**?*” so that they might accuse him.

*He said to them, “Suppose one of you has **only one sheep** and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.”*

Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

The Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

Matthew 12:15-21

When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them (see 8:16), and he ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4):

“Here is my **servant** (παῖς), whom I have chosen,
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. (see 3:17)
I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.
He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.
He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smouldering wick
until he brings justice to victory.
And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Matthew 12:22-23 (Luke 11:14)

They brought to Jesus a demoniac who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and said, “Can this be the Son of David?”

Matthew 12:24-26 (Mark 3:22-26)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul (2Kings 1:2-6 Baalzebub: lord of the flies), the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons.”

He knew what they were thinking and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?

Matthew 12:27 (Luke 11:19)

If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

Matthew 12:28 (Luke 11:20)

If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons,
then the kingdom of God has come to you. (see 4:17; 10:7)

Matthew 12:29 (Mark 3:27)

How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his property,
without first tying up the strong man?
Then indeed the house can be plundered.

Matthew 12:30 (Luke 11:23)

Whoever is not with me is against me,
and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Disciples are called to mission

I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin that seals itself off from the source of forgiveness, is far more common than we might think. Whenever we deliberately call good evil, we sin against the Holy Spirit, and so long as we persist in such wrong judgment, our sin remains.

Matthew 12:33-35 (Luke 6:43-45)

Either make the tree good, and its fruit good;
or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad;
for the tree is known by its fruit. (see 7:16-18)

You brood of vipers! (see 3:7)

How can you speak good things, when you are evil?
For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.
The good person brings good things out of a good treasure,
and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.

Matthew 12:36-37

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account
for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be
justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

Matthew 12:38-42 (Mark 8:11-12)

Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a **sign** (σημεῖον) from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet **Jonah**.

Matthew 12:40-42 (Luke 11:30-32)

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth (see 27:63). The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!

The queen of the South (1 Kings 10:1-13) will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!

Matthew 12:43-45 (Luke 11:24-26)

When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but it finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' When it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So will it be also with this evil generation.

Matthew 12:46-50 (Mark 3:31-35)

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’

But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’

And pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’

B: Parables of the kingdom Matthew 13:1-52

Granted the obvious authority of Jesus' words (5-7) and the marvellous liberation of his deeds (8-9), why is it that most people failed to accept him or profit by his ministry? (11-12)

A key to the answer is found in the parables which underline the fact that God's offer of salvation is never forced, and, to be effective, requires a free response. The fact that Israel rejected its shepherd Messiah does not imply any failure on Jesus' part. God respects human freedom. Salvation-history is not predetermined. The fault lies in our unwillingness to allow our hearts to be softened by grace, and to take the risk of being loved and of responding in love to God's offer of intimacy.

Matthew 13:1-3 (see Mark 4:1-2)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he spoke many things to them in parables and said:

Hebrew לִשְׁנוּת means “illustration, saying, fable, proverb, riddle.”

A parable is not an allegory. It has a single thrust, found in the part of the story that startles, intrigues. Its aim as practised by Jesus is to by-pass the controlling mind and appeal to the imagination. Jesus wants his listeners to ask a question, instead of locking his teaching into their fixed categories.

Matthew 13:3-4 (Mark 4:2-4)

And he told them many things in parables, saying:
“**Listen!** A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed,
some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.



Matthew 13:5-9 (Mark 4:5-9)

Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil.

But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears **listen!**”

Matthew 13:10-12 (Mark 4:10-11)

The disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets (μυστήρια) of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it has not been given*. For to those who have, more will be given, *and they will have an abundance*; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

Matthew 13:13-15

The reason I speak to them in parables is that “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.”
With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah [6:9-10] that says:
“You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.
For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.”

Matthew 13:16-17 (Luke 10:23-24)

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, *and your ears, for they hear.*
Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people
longed to see what you see, but did not see it,
and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

Matthew 13:18-23 (Mark 4:14-20)

An allegorical interpretation

Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Matthew 13:24-30

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed darnel (a weed) among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?” He answered, “An enemy has done this.” The slaves said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he replied, “No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Matthew 13:31-32 (Mark 4:30-32)

Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds (1mm), but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree (2-3 metres), so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Matthew 13:33 (Luke 13:20-21)

He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour (40 litres; 110 pounds; feed 150! ‘hidden’) **until all of it was leavened.**’

Matthew 13:34 (Mark 4:33-34)

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing.

Matthew 13:35

This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world' (Psalm 78:2).

Matthew 13:36-43

An allegorical interpretation

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:45-46

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 13:47-48

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

Matthew 13:49-50

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Conclusion : Matthew 13:51-52

‘Have you **understood** all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’

Jesus said to them, ‘Therefore every **scribe** who has been trained as a disciple for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’

Through his parables, Jesus directs our attention away from ourselves to focus on God and the power of God’s word. He encourages us to take hold of this word with all our hearts and to let it direct our lives. The ‘word’ is in no way impersonal. It is Jesus himself who is revealing God to us. Fullness of life comes to us if we open our hearts and minds and lives to him.

Matthew 13:53

When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.