

**The Gospel of Matthew**  
**Week Thirteen**  
**Matthew 11:20-12:21**

**Day One**

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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 up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. 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."

v. 20 – We learn from this verse that Jesus did not come to put on a miracle show. He was not present just to take care of physical needs. He came to announce the kingdom of God and that the entrance to that Kingdom required (and requires) repentance. Repentance literally means changing one's mind or direction. Jesus declared that the inhabitants of Israel needed to change directions where God was concerned. They had turned to legalism but needed to return to faith. Yet many were unwilling to do this. They were glad to receive God's power but did not want to change their heart-attitude toward God. Because of this, Jesus denounced the cities where He had been to minister.

v. 21 – Jesus pronounced woe and sadness for the cities of Galilee, for they did not respond to God while Jesus was in their midst. They did not acknowledge their personal sins and turn to God, asking forgiveness and seeking mercy. When they touched God's power in and through Jesus, they determined that they deserved such miracles because of their right-standing with God as Jews. They were badly mistaken and blinded by unbelief and hardness of heart.

Or are you [so blind as to] trifle with and presume upon and despise and underestimate the wealth of His kindness and forbearance and long-suffering patience? Are you unmindful or actually ignorant [of the fact] that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repent ( to change your mind and inner man to accept God's will)? (Romans 2:24 AMP).

vs. 22-25 – Jesus announced that it would be more tolerable for the residents of Sodom than Capernaum in the day of judgment! Sodom was a wicked city and God destroyed it with fire and brimstone. It represented the essence of wickedness to Israel, yet Jesus said it would be better at the final judgment for Sodom than Israel since Israel did not repent when they beheld Jesus' works and message. Jesus' adopted home, Capernaum, perhaps thought that they were favored of God when Jesus moved there. Yet they had Jesus in their midst, were the recipients of many miracles, but did not change their mind-set toward God. That made them eligible for God's wrath! **Is there any area in which you need to repent, having seen and received God's grace and mercy? Are you**

**enamored with God's power, but resistant to change your ways? Don't answer too quickly.**

## Day Two

25 At that time Jesus 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. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. 27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

vs. 25&26 – **What things had been revealed to the little children?** The poor and “simple” had understood the need to repent and get right with God. The leaders of Israel remained for the most part stiff-necked and hard-hearted. They refused to acknowledge Jesus or their own need for God, while those little children, probably referring to the tax collectors and prostitutes, gladly repented and turned to God.

Jesus worshipped the Father because of God's ways, for He had blinded the eyes of the proud and opened the eyes of the needy and humble. Jesus didn't mourn the fact that the leaders rejected His message and mission; He thanked God for it. He did not pursue the leaders with any special strategy. I point this out because it is essential that you accept the ministry results that God grants you. I don't do much in my hometown of Pittsburgh, but I do a lot in Africa. I am received with joy in Africa; I am welcomed with a yawn in Pittsburgh.

I can spend more time trying to “win Pittsburgh over,” or I can go to where God grants me abundant results. **What about you? Are you fighting to make something happen where God doesn't intend it to happen? Or are you willing to go “where the action is” for you and your ministry work?**

v. 27 – Jesus here sounded like He had a measure of independence to do what He saw needed to be done. Yet in another place He said He could do nothing:

By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me (John 5:30).

Which one was more accurate? Of course, both statements were. This gives a picture of the relationship between the Father and the Son, perfect harmony and submission, perfect communication and clarity. The Trinity is the ultimate team, but even saying that has the potential to diminish their relationship. Men have denied or limited the Trinity, simply because our finite minds cannot fathom how the Three can be One, united yet distinct. I don't pretend to understand it, but I am in awe of the reality.

I don't just decide to see spiritual things, however. God Himself has to open my eyes. That's why He is the author and finisher of our faith (see Hebrews 12:1-2). It all starts and ends with God. I must cooperate, yet even my cooperation is a gift of God. I say yes

to God, but God gives me the grace to do so. It is similar to what Jesus said in this verse: God gives us authority yet without God we could not exercise or even see that authority.

### Day Three

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

v. 28 – **Who are the weary and burdened? Who needs rest?** It is those who have not repented, who are still carrying the burdens of their sins or the burden of trying to earn favor with God so they can be forgiven! The Jews in Jesus' day were toiling under a heavy load of legalistic regulations, none of which were able to remove guilt and condemnation long-term. Jesus was the answer to the heaviness and ineffectiveness of the Jewish system, but many were not interested. They preferred the comfort of the system to faith in Jesus. When I think of rest, my mind always goes to Hebrews 4:

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:1-11).

v. 29 – **Are you tired and weary?** If so, then whose yoke are you carrying? You must have someone else's! This is a principle that applies to salvation – you cannot earn or work for it – but a principle that can also be applied to all of life. I am not saying that you will never be fatigued when you function in your purpose, but I am saying that you will have a joy and strength that goes beyond explanation.

“Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

v. 30 – **Whose yoke are you carrying?** Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is not a taskmaster, for He is gentle and humble and that is how He responds and reacts to you, even in your failures and weakness. When you come to Jesus, you learn from Him and you find rest from your own labors to try and please God. **Are you learning from Jesus, becoming more like Him in the process? Where can you cooperate with God's grace more fully to be more like Jesus?**

12:1 – To exemplify what Jesus had just said, He and His disciples went through a grain field and pulled off some grain to eat from the stalks. The legalists were watching and immediately objected, saying that the disciples had just performed work on the Sabbath. What foolishness! Yet this was just what Jesus had said. Those who don't come to Him are weary and burdened, tired from trying to please God through rules and regulations.

**Didn't these Pharisees have anything else to do but watch Jesus and His men? What a futile lifestyle? What useless activity? What did these men do to make a living?** They thought they were serving God, but they were really self-serving their own religious system. Rightly did Jesus say about what they were doing:

Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them (Luke 11:46).

#### Day Four

3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. 5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

v. 3&4 – Jesus “beat them at their own game,” so to speak, by going to the Scriptures to refute their complaint. Jesus referred to a story from David's life found in 1 Samuel 21:1-4. David faced an emergency and the consecrated bread wasn't doing God any good, so he and his men ate the bread. That makes perfect sense, except to a legalistic fanatic who was looking for an excuse to condemn Jesus, or anyone else for that matter, who broke the “rules.” Why would the bread be spared for God, who cannot eat it, and not given to men who were famished?

The Pharisees were acting like God needed the Sabbath to be kept perfectly, but the Sabbath, along with the bread and grain, were for man's sake and not for God's. Don't ever think you are doing God a favor when you obey Him. And don't ever think that God needs you. He loves you and will use you, but He can do without you (and me).

Also, it is of note that there is always someone who knows more Bible than you do. The Pharisees thought they had “right” on their side, but Jesus outmaneuvered them by referring to a story for which they had no response. They could only get angry with Jesus, but they could not refute Him. That is another hallmark of religious people: anger. When someone breaks the “rules,” they are furious with righteous indignation.

vs. 5&6 – Jesus referred to another story that vindicated His actions on the Sabbath. I always laughed at people who would come to me suggesting that we should keep Sunday a holy day, free from work. I would say, “What about us in ministry? Why is it alright for us to work hard on that day, while everyone else enjoys the fruits of our labors on their Sabbath?” Their position made no sense to me then or now. The priests continued with their work in the Temple because service to God in the Temple was a higher priority, something that needed to continue no matter what day it was. Jesus indicated that He was greater than the Temple and was worthy of the same attitude: a high priority no matter what.

vs. 7&8 – The Pharisees felt that sacrifices in the Temple were a higher priority than meeting the needs of people. This wasn’t just evident in this incident of picking grain, it was evident in almost all their dealings with people. They were hard and legalistic, more committed to religious duty than the needs of people. Jesus always evidenced a commitment to people over religious duty, yet Jesus was never “soft” on the people. He would heal them but urge them to go and sin no more.

Then Jesus finished the teaching by declaring that He was (and is) Lord of the Sabbath. What He did was correct on the Sabbath because He understood the meaning and implications of the Sabbath. He could not do wrong because He was all “right.” Yet the Pharisees attributed evil to the holy and good Son of God. They were a silly group of men, were they not? I don’t want to be like them in any way, yet I know I must work with people like them today. I don’t want to judge them; I just don’t want to be like them.

### Day Five

9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? 11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

vs. 9&10 – Jesus was already in trouble for picking grain on the Sabbath, but then He entered the synagogue and was confronted by a man with a physical need. **What was Jesus to do?** He was already being criticized. **Would He back off doing what was right? Would** Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow"—when you now have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you (Proverbs 3:27-29).

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

### Day Six

13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. 15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, 16 warning them not to tell who he was. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

v. 13 – Jesus was not content to have a theoretical discussion about healing, so He ordered the man to stretch out his hand. Remember that the man's hand was withered, but Jesus required the man to do something in faith. I'm not sure He ever had those He healed jump up and down or run through the auditorium as some modern-day healers do. I think Jesus wanted to provide evidence for the doubters not proof for the believers.

There is no indication that the man had come for healing. There is no evidence that the man had faith for healing. It seems that this man was in the right place to help Jesus demonstrate an important principle that it is always the right time to do good. **What good have you been putting off doing that you can do today? What need is in your power to meet?**

v. 14 – Fascinating! Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath and the religious Pharisees went out to plot Jesus' death. What evil men they were! Yet they were just cooperating with God's plan that would have Jesus put to death. Yet these men cannot be excused or exonerated for their role, which they embraced willingly. They were only too glad to plot evil against a decent man, who also happened to be the Son of God!

Jesus knew that this would cost Him His life, but He healed the man anyway. That is what I call courage in the face of intense cultural opposition. **How do you handle cultural opposition, whether it is family or societal pressure? Do you stand firm or do you compromise and avoid conflict?** I am not saying it's always wrong to do that, but at times you must stand for right and do what you know you must do, even if family or friends oppose you.

v. 15 – Jesus did not stay around long enough for His opponents to carry out their plot. His time had not yet come to depart, so He withdrew. If you notice, most New Testament characters who faced persecution fled where possible. They stood strong if they had no choice, but otherwise they did not risk their lives needlessly. Don't ever feel like fleeing is cowardice. You are of no use to the Lord if you're dead, so don't go before your time.

v. 16 – It was hard for Jesus to hide, since He was a celebrity. Plus He had the power to heal, so people were eager to find Him so that their needs could be met. Most were not following Him because of His message, but because of His power – what He could do for them. This didn't seem to deter Jesus from healing, but His real interest was in making

disciples, not only in meeting the needs of the people. **Why are you following Jesus? For what you can get or what you can give?** It's not wrong to follow if you have needs, for Jesus is happy to heal you. Yet He would expect you to follow Him once your needs are met.

v. 17 – When Jesus healed them, He warned the people not to reveal who He was. I have pointed out before that Jesus was not interested in drawing attention to Himself, although at times it was unavoidable. He did not come to build a ministry, but to do the Father's will. Jesus' attitude was described by Isaiah 700 years before Jesus was born in the verses we will study tomorrow. But to give you a preview, here is a the best New Testament summary of what you see tomorrow:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

**Do you have this same attitude, as Paul directed you should? What can do you, with God's help, to improve?**

### Day Seven

18 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. 19 He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. 21 In his name the nations will put their hope."

v. 18 – Matthew explained that Isaiah was recording the Father's testimony concerning Jesus. We have "third party" affirmations about Jesus, recorded by a prophet, uttered by God Himself. So if Jesus was God (and He was and is), then we have a veiled reference to the Trinity here. The Father is giving reference to the Son through the prophetic voice of Isaiah. The Father promised that He would put the Spirit upon His Servant that would empower Him to preach justice to the nations. Yet in doing so, He would not be a rabblrouser or noisy politician, but gentle and humble, just like Jesus had said He was in Matthew 11:29.

v. 19&20 – Jesus preached publicly, so in some sense His voice was heard in the streets. Yet He spoke truth with grace and sinners were glad to hear Him. It is interesting that the mob chose Barabbas, a rabblrouser, over Jesus when Pilate released a Passover prisoner (see Matthew 27:16). The world believes that this is the kind of behavior necessary to make changes. Yet Jesus indicated that wasn't and isn't true. Jesus was a revolutionary

leader but He did not come to start a revolution. He was meek and gentle while He accomplished His mission. You can be, too.

It is important to know who you are and what style works best for you as you fulfill your purpose. **What are your values? Have you ever thought and written them out?** Don't try to imitate anyone else's style, for what works for another won't necessarily work for you.

Jesus was so gentle that He did not extinguish a smoldering wick or break off a bruised reed. Now that's gentle! I want to be like Jesus, while being true to who He made me to be. Jesus worked with the most fragile of people, yet always built them up and encouraged them to repent and follow Him. Jesus was only harsh with one group of people and those were the religious legalists who thought they had God all figured out. With everyone else, He was kind and compassionate.

Jesus is our model for ministry and leadership. He is not just someone to be admired, but one to be studied and emulated. The good news is that we can call on the Spirit to give us the power to be like Jesus; we don't have to try and be like Him in our own ability (which is impossible to do). We need the Spirit's help!

v. 21 – Notice that Isaiah indicated that Jesus was going to be the hope for all nations, not just for the nation of Israel. Yet Israel was looking for a Messiah that was exclusively theirs. That was another incorrect expectation that Israel had, which caused them to look past Jesus for someone who better fit their ideal of the Messiah. It is best to put your expectations in God and leave them there, that way you won't be disappointed when God does what He wants to do.