



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Eleven

- VI. Matthew 10:1-11:1 - The Authoritative Mission of the Messiah's Messengers (Second Discourse) (continues/concludes)
- VI.c Matthew 10:26-11:1 - Characteristics of missionary disciples (continues/concludes)
- VI.c.iii Matthew 10:40-11:1 - Rewards (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Eleven

Having dispatched the twelve apostles on their first solo mission, Jesus now continues with his other work. It commences with the arrival of some disciples from the imprisoned John the Baptist, who asked if Jesus really is the Messiah. Jesus does not answer yes or no but leaves no room for doubt with the evidence and its relationship to prophecy he presents to them to examine and analyse for themselves.

Once the disciples had departed, Jesus went on to tell the crowd about John, praising his work and acknowledging him as the last great OT prophet to God's people, admonishing those people for their failure to accept him and his message of the coming Messiah.

Having reproached the crowd for their failure to accept John, Jesus then turned his attention to three Galilæan cities in which he had taught the Gospel, supported with mighty demonstrations of Kingdom power, and yet had been rejected by most of the inhabitants. He warned them of the judgement that would come upon them for that rejection.

Jesus then gave thanks to God for the revelation of the Kingdom that he had delivered through the sending of his Son, announcing that all authority had been given to him as the Christ of God. Jesus offered to take on all the wearisome burdens of people who would accept the Gospel proclamation and would turn back to God through him.

This chapter provides both the terror of the Gospel woes as a warning and also the great joy of the Gospel of grace that is so freely on offer to all.

¹ Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

Matthew 11:1

When Jesus had finished signals the conclusion of the Second or Mission Discourse (Matthew Chapter 10), providing a smooth transition into the next section.

Instructing his twelve disciples. Jesus always fully equips his followers for their work. This was the standard laid down from the beginning that will endure for all time: <<*He is mindful of his covenant for ever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations*>> (Psalm 105:8).

He went on from there to teach and proclaim his message. Jesus continued with his mission while the Twelve went out on theirs. It seems likely that Jesus was actually following in the footsteps of his apostles for their mission was to announce his coming. Although it was not specifically referenced here, Jesus would send a second group of disciples who would be instructed to directly precede him: <<*After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go*>> (Luke 10:1). It would also give him the opportunity to monitor the impact and effectiveness of their work.

In their cities. Jesus focused much of his work where the people gathered so that the net he cast would catch as many fish as possible: <<*Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish*>> (John 21:5-6).

VII. Matthew 11:2-12:50 - Opposition to the Messiah Emerges

Resistance to Jesus' ministry has appeared occasionally, e.g. <<*Then some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.' But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'*>> (Matthew 9:3-4), but now begins to build significantly, occasioned first by the innocuous questions of John the Baptist, then through the overt hostility of the Jewish religious leaders.

VII.a Matthew 11:2-30 - Jesus, John the Baptist, and ministry in Galilee

Jesus responds to John the Baptist's questions (vv.2-6) possibly with a mild rebuke but certainly with concrete proof that he is the Christ, and then gives a glowing tribute to the imprisoned John (vv.7-19).

He then speaks words of judgment on the unrepentant (vv.20-24), holding out an open invitation to those who would find their rest in and through him (vv.25-30).

VII.a.i Matthew 11:2-6 - Messengers from John the Baptist

John the Baptist had been arrested by King Herod Antipas, an event that brought Jesus' own ministry to the fore.

In this opening passage, he sent some of his own disciples to confirm that Jesus was the true Christ of God. Whether this was done through any doubts that had crept into this great man of God's own thoughts, showing his own natural human frailty; or whether it was done to cement his own teaching into the hearts and minds of his own disciples can only form the basis for speculation. Whichever it was, the words of Jesus would provide confirmation that he is the one to come.

² When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples

Matthew 11:2

When John heard in prison. John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas, and as he awaited death, which is described in Matthew 14:1-12, he presumably heard news of Jesus' ongoing ministry from his own disciples.

That he sent word by his disciples shows the loyalty they had for John during his time in prison and even after his death: <<*When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb*>> (Mark 6:29). This is a good model for all disciples of Christ to follow as well, i.e. to be prepared to serve him in times of peril as well as in the good times, not fearing the consequences of doing so but remaining faithful in all circumstances.

³ and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' **⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ 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.**

Matthew 11:3-5

Are you the one who is to come? John may have been concerned because his current imprisonment did not match his understanding of the arrival of the one who is to come, which was to bring blessing on those who repented and judgment on those who did not. Indeed, they could offer their blessings on Jesus for: <<*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord*>> (Psalm 118:26). However, since elsewhere in Scripture John clearly identified Jesus as the Christ: <<*The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*>> (John 1:29), <<*And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God*>> (John 1:34), it seems more likely that he sent his disciples so that they would be reassured by Jesus' response, for they must have been perplexed at their own master's plight. Also, John would have wanted them to readily follow Jesus once his own death had come about, something he probably thought would occur soon.

If John did in fact have doubts over Jesus, he would not be the last faithful disciple to have such thoughts in the face of adversity, for many throughout the ages have done so, such as Abraham: <<*And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. Then he said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.'* But he said, 'O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?'>> (Genesis 15:6-

8), and Gideon: <<Then Gideon said to God, 'In order to see whether you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said, I am going to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor; if there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you have said'>> (Judges 6:36-37). However, the call is clear to retain faith in God and be content with the present situation: <<Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me>> (Philippians 4:11-13).

Go and tell John. Jesus demonstrates at this early stage that it is enough for people to hear of his work in order for them to believe in him. They do not have to see it for themselves but can trust in the sheer volume of witness testimony that exists and has been passed on through subsequent generations through the NT Scriptures, written by those who were either eye-witnesses or who had received power and authority to continue the work of building the early church.

Jesus' ministry, however, is in line with prophetic promises about the time of salvation, as seen especially in these descriptions that recall the words of Isaiah, the blind receive their sight: <<and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see>> (Isaiah 29:18b), and: <<Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened>> (Isaiah 35:5a), supported by: <<the Lord opens the eyes of the blind>> (Psalm 146:8a), and which became a reality through the works of Jesus: <<As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you.' And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, 'See that no one knows of this'>> (Matthew 9:27-30).

The lame walk prophesied in: <<then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert>> (Isaiah 35:6), which is confirmed by: <<Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel>> (Matthew 15:30-31).

Lepers are cleansed prophesied in: <<Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted>> (Isaiah 53:4), which is confirmed by: <<When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.' He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed>> (Matthew 8:1-3).

The deaf hear prophesied in: <<On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll>> (Isaiah 29:18a), <<and the ears of the deaf unstopped>> (Isaiah 35:5b),

which is confirmed by: <<They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’ And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly>> (Mark 7:32-35).

The dead are raised prophesied in: <<Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead>> (Isaiah 26:19), which is confirmed by: <<While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live’>> (Matthew 9:18), with the outcome: <<But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up>> (Matthew 9:25), again by: <<Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, rise!’ The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother>> (Luke 7:14-15), and the raising of his friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days and was already in his tomb: <<When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’>> (John 11:43-44).

The poor have good news brought to them, for they were always close to God’s heart and would receive justice: <<May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice>> (Psalm 72:2), and it was to them that Jesus brought such great hope: <<The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners>> (Isaiah 61:1), which is confirmed by: <<Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven>> (Matthew 5:3), <<But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind>> (Luke 14:13), and: <<So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame”>> (Luke 14:21). Jesus’ deeds give more than sufficient proof of who he really is and that the prophesied time of salvation had come: <<to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn>> (Isaiah 61:2).

The poor here represent those who are poor in spirit, as much as those who live in relative financial poverty in the world. At this time, the financially deprived would also have been poor in spirit for they would not have had access to the teaching that the wealthier classes had, who could afford to pay the scribes and Pharisees to teach them. The prophet had noted this in his day too: <<Then I said, ‘These are only the poor, they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the law of their God’>> (Jeremiah 5:4).

Jesus may not yet have fulfilled the Messianic signs John had himself predicted: <<I baptise you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you

with the Holy Spirit and fire>> (Matthew 3:11). Yet Jesus is clearly able to demonstrate that the work he had been doing so far clearly fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, especially those given by Isaiah. John's prophecies would be fulfilled after both his and Jesus' own death with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: <<*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability*>> (Acts 2:1-4). This was an event that would change the world forever as it further equipped the early disciples to spread the Gospel and has continued to work through ordinary people ever since to ensure that the message will reach all people.

⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Matthew 11:6

Blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me. The beatitude is seen by some as a mild rebuke; John and his disciples must be open to God's unfolding plan, even though Jesus' ministry did not exactly match their messianic expectations. However, others see it as a sign of affirmation given by Jesus to John that the Scriptures were being fulfilled and John would have trusted in that response: <<*Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?'>> (Matthew 21:42). John personally witnessed or heard about very little of Jesus' work on earth, but would have been reassured that his own teaching about the Lamb of God was accurate, making his own joy complete: <<*I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete*>> (John 15:11). Sadly, too many people have taken offence at Jesus and his message, for he is: <<*'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall'*>> (1 Peter 2:8).*

VII.a.ii Matthew 11:7-19 - Jesus Praises John the Baptist

After John's disciples had departed, Jesus went on to speak of the work and commitment John had shown to God. Those who give honour to Jesus: <<*John answered them, 'I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal'*>> (John 1:26-27), will be honoured for doing their work: <<*Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour*>> (John 12:26).

He started by showing what John was not, that is, he was not a moral weakling swayed by the opinions of others who opposed him or had authority over the ordinary people.

Jesus clearly identified John as a prophet sent by God. In fact, he was more than the prophets of old for John had been given the task of announcing the actual arrival of the Christ; something he did boldly, honestly and with great conviction - to the point that would result in his own death.

Yet despite John being the long promised 'Elijah' who was to return, the generation that he came to in the main rejected him. Thus Jesus criticises them for their lack of understanding and faith in the message he had proclaimed.

⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?' ⁸ What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Matthew 11:7-9

As they went away refers to the disciples of John who had come to Jesus to question him about the authenticity of his authority and his claims to messiahship. He perhaps waited until after their departure to tell the crowds of his respect and admiration for John for the simple reason that it is not for a person to know their true Kingdom value until judgement. Flattery or praise for fulfilling one's calling by God is not required. The calling is reward in and of itself.

The wilderness was the Judæan desert where John had been raised: <<*The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel*>> (Luke 1:80). This was a familiar habitat for OT prophets: <<*Go from here and turn eastwards, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan*>> (1 Kings 17:3).

What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? The people had flocked to John in the desert when he called them to a baptism of repentance: <<*And people from the whole Judæan countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins*>> (Mark 1:5). But did they really understand why they were being drawn to him? Even those sent by the religious leaders did not understand who he was or what role he had come to perform: <<*Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?'*>> (John 1:22).

A reed shaken by the wind? This was an analogy often used for an individual or even a nation that was weak willed and easily swayed by public opinion or what was going on around them, or that which lacks moral fibre: <<*The Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; he will root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their ancestors, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their sacred poles, provoking the Lord to anger*>> (1 Kings 14:15), and: <<*See, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him*>> (2 Kings 18:21). John was a man who was firm and resolute in his conviction and faith, something called for by Paul: <<*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love*>> (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. This was something that the Jews would have known from the pomp of Israel's illustrious history: <<*When the queen of Sheba had observed the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his valets and their clothing, and his burnt-offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit left in her*>> (2 Chronicles 9:3-4). The reality of John's appearance was very different: <<*Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey*>> (Mark 1:6), something more fitting for a wilderness prophet and indeed reminiscent of Elijah: <<*He said to them, 'What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?' They answered him, 'A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist.' He said, 'It is Elijah the Tishbite'*>> (2 Kings 1:7-8).

There was a time in Israel's history when the God-fearing kings had allowed the true prophets to reside in their royal palaces and had sought their guidance, both good and bad: <<*David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die*>> (2 Samuel 12:13). David too was a prophet as well as a king: <<*The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue*>> (2 Samuel 23:2). Kings who did not follow the ways of God surrounded themselves with false prophets, who had always outnumbered the true prophets of God: <<*Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, 'Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?' They said, 'Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king'*>> (1 Kings 22:6), with the lone voice of the prophet Micaiah speaking the truth: <<*But Jehoshaphat said, 'Is there no other prophet of the Lord here of whom we may inquire?' The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, 'There is still one other by whom we may inquire of the Lord, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster.' Jehoshaphat said, 'Let the king not say such a thing'*>> (1 Kings 22:7-8).

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. John's role had been clearly defined in prophecy and angelic promise: <<*With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*>> (Luke 1:17), and: <<*He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"', as the prophet Isaiah said*>> (John 1:23). The other OT prophets had foreseen the day coming: <<*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son*>> (Isaiah 7:14b ESV), and: <<*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined*>> (Isaiah 9:2), whereas John had seen the day dawn: <<*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*>> (John 1:29b), and: <<*this is the Son of God*>> (John 1:34b), both noted earlier.

¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written,
“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.”

Matthew 11:10

This is the one about whom it is written refers to the messianic prophecy of Malachi 3:1.

I am sending my messenger to bring a report ahead of the arrival of the main person in order that the recipients can prepare for that arrival: <<*Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom*>> (Genesis 32:3), <<*Then Israel sent messengers to King Sihon of the Amorites, saying, 'Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field or vineyard; we will not drink the water of any well; we will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory'*>> (Numbers 21:21-22), and: <<*When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul, they reported the matter in the hearing of the people; and all the people wept aloud*>> (1 Samuel 11:4).

Ahead of you indicates that he would precede the Christ as a forerunner but one that would appear in his own time, unlike the OT prophets who were looking ahead to the dawning of a new era.

Who will prepare your way. John the Baptist was specifically raised for just that purpose; refer to comments made on Matthew 3:3 for details of how he primarily accomplished this.

¹¹ Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:11

Those born of women is a Jewish idiom for ordinary human birth: <<*A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble*>> (Job 14:1), <<*What are mortals, that they can be clean? Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?*>> (Job 15:14), and: <<*How then can a mortal be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure?*>> (Job 25:4), and Jesus implicitly contrasts this with the new birth into the Kingdom of Heaven: <<*Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above'*>> (John 3:3).

No one has arisen greater. John did not perform signs and wonders in the way that Elijah and Elisha had done. John's mission was uniquely privileged because he prepared the way for the Messiah and the Kingdom. His was a ministry of proclamation, although it would be immediately fulfilled with the coming of Jesus, unlike the previous prophecies that had seen the Messiah's day from a distance.

Greater than he. But those in the Kingdom of Heaven have the greater privilege because they have actually entered the Kingdom in its new covenant reality, to become partakers of that new covenant through the blood of Christ: <<*Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood*>> (Hebrews 13:12), <<*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish*>> (1 Peter 1:18-19), <<*If we say that we have*

fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin>> (1 John 1:6-7), and: <<To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen>> (Revelation 1:5b-6). The disciples in every era since the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, blessed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, have had an even greater ministry than even John's. Not because they are in any way more devout or better gifted, but that they now have a much fuller Kingdom picture that John had, and certainly much more so than men like Isaiah. The need for signs and wonders diminishes as the Kingdom message grows towards its full reality, for it has the full weight of history to support it. Those that pass from this life into the eternal realm of the Kingdom will be greatest of all saints, for they shall then become truly righteous in the knowledge and perfection of Christ.

With further reference to the salvation of believers in the OT, see Romans Chapter 4 on the website, where it is covered more fully.

¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

Matthew 11:12

From the days of John the Baptist until now is a relatively short period of time, perhaps two years at most.

That the Kingdom has suffered violence, Greek *biazō*, usually translated 'to force one's way in' can be interpreted either negatively or positively, depending on how the reader views the overall context.

When viewed negatively, it probably indicates opposition from the religious establishment, and the violent take it by force therefore refers to the actions of specific evil people like Herod Antipas, who had arrested John, and would be responsible for killing the apostle James, intending to do likewise to Peter: <<*About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also*>> (Acts 12:1-3), only to be thwarted by divine intervention in Peter's case.

In the third Gospel the wording is different: <<*The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force*>> (Luke 16:16), which can be interpreted as above. However, taking a positive view and translating *biazō* in the passive voice, meaning, 'many are fighting their way in', or the middle voice, meaning, 'the kingdom is forcefully advancing', it can then take the form that it is the spiritual warriors who have accepted the Gospel that are storming in on the true Kingdom of God. Matthew's wording also allows for such an interpretation that is held by many commentators and scholars. This view has its origins in Clement of Alexandria and was later popularised by Martin Luther.

This saying may be a wisdom teacher's riddle. Jesus regularly borrowed images from his society and applied them in shocking ways, and thus may speak

favourably here of spiritual warriors who were forcing their way into God's Kingdom now.

One 2nd Century Jewish tradition praises those who passionately pursue the law; God counts it as if they had already ascended to heaven and taken the law forcibly, which the tradition regards as greater than having taken it peaceably. Jesus was then likening the people who actively follow him and spread the Gospel in comparison to many believers whose faith is only passive, simply living out their lives in the expectancy of the eternal life to come in the future. Active faith is not achieved by works but by a Kingdom lifestyle.

¹³ For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came;

Matthew 11:13

John the Baptist was the last of a long history of OT prophets that looked forward to the coming of Christ. No prophet had spoken publically in Israel for more than 300 years in the period between Malachi and John's arrival, yet Jesus states that all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came. This is because the law and the prophets were still read each week, indeed each day by the pious, and therefore the foretelling of the Messiah was being replayed over and over until John announced the time had now come.

That the law prophesied as well as instructed is interesting but not surprising for Moses had said: <<*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet*>> (Deuteronomy 18:15), and: <<*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command*>> (Deuteronomy 18:18), and it was Moses who introduced the law. Jesus would confirm that the prophecies started with Moses as he walked along the Emmaus Road with two disciples following his resurrection: <<*Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures*>> (Luke 24:27).

¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

¹⁵ Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 11:14-15

If you are willing to accept it. The people expected Elijah in person to arrive. Instead it was another prophet in the spirit of Elijah who offered God's grace to those who would repent of their sins. The offer is free grace and is there to be accepted or rejected by all. Yet even free grace does not negate human responsibility. It is a matter of personal choice with opportunities for all people everywhere to come back into a right relationship with God through Jesus.

He is Elijah who is to come. Malachi had prophesied that Elijah would prepare the way for and announce the long awaited arrival of the Messiah: <<*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Malachi 3:1), and: <<*Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes*>> (Malachi 4:5). He did not actually imply a

literal reappearance of Elijah, and John's earlier denial that he was Elijah: <<*And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No'>> (John 1:21), was probably an attempt to correct a popular belief that Elijah himself would reappear. Before John's birth, he was designated as the one who would minister: <<*With the spirit and power of Elijah*>> (Luke 1:17a), thereby fulfilling Malachi's prophecy.*

Peter, James and John would see Elijah appear with Moses before Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, as recorded in Matthew 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36.

Let anyone with ears listen shows that the message is for those who are prepared to open their minds and ears to the Gospel message. It is not about hearing the message, it is about understanding and accepting it. The majority of mankind it seems have their ears and minds blocked either directly but the tricks of Satan or their personal desire to rule their own lives rather than submitting to the lordship of Christ.

¹⁶ **'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,**

Matthew 11:16

To what will I compare this generation? Jesus used similar language when introducing parables about the Kingdom of Heaven: <<*He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?>> (Mark 4:30).*

This generation refers to the crowds and the religious leaders who have rejected John's and Jesus' ministries. They are like selfish and stubborn children, always insisting on their own way. It is also possible that, just as a child's game makes no impact on the adults around them, so too this generation was not impacted by the messages brought to them through John and Jesus.

Sitting in the market-places indicates those engaged in commerce but it was also the hub of the community where people would gather, many of them out of work: <<*When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right" So they went>> (Matthew 20:3-4).*

¹⁷ **"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."**

Matthew 11:17

We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. The people rejected the Gospel because John and Jesus did not conform to their expectations or do what they wanted.

The flute would traditionally have been played as part of celebrations such as at weddings and the whole community would normally dance, sharing in the joy, but when called to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, that generation would not join in.

Women would wail at funerals and again the whole community would normally join in to demonstrate empathy with those in grief. Yet when Jesus warned them of the judgement that would befall the people of God who would reject him, then the community at large did not mourn as they were expected to do at such solemn revelation.

The generation was committed to refusing the truth, even if fickle in their reasons for doing so: <<*The vision of all this has become for you like the words of a sealed document. If it is given to those who can read, with the command, 'Read this', they say, 'We cannot, for it is sealed'. And if it is given to those who cannot read, saying, 'Read this', they say, 'We cannot read'*>> (Isaiah 29:11-12). Jesus does not condemn them for their sin but for their refusal to be healed of the influence and effects of their sin.

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; ¹⁹ 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.’

Matthew 11:18-19

Neither eating nor drinking. Some apparently accused John of demonic influence because of his appearance and ascetic lifestyle. Yet all he was doing was mourning Israel’s apostasy and continued sin.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking. Jesus’ association with those in need of spiritual healing, and his refusal to fast according to Pharisaic expectations: <<*Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast'*>> (Matthew 9:14-15), was turned into an accusation of his being a glutton and a drunkard. Jesus was simply celebrating the arrival of the Kingdom and the opportunities for all to join in the wedding feast.

However, God’s wisdom, Greek *sophia*, would be justified or vindicated by the righteous fruit of both John’s and Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus indicts his generation for the ultimate offence: they have consummated the sins of previous generations by rejecting God’s ultimate agent. Yet Jesus’ and John’s opponents were like many opponents of God’s message today: while claiming intellectual integrity, they merely use whatever argument works against the Gospel, giving no thought to its consistency with earlier arguments.

God has different kinds of servants for different missions, but each kind of servant God sends is needed. Neither Jesus nor John accumulated earthly resources for earthly pleasure; but Jesus accepted invitations to sumptuous banquets in order to influence those who attended, ranging from the religious leadership to tax collectors and sinners; while John was a wilderness prophet. Jesus came partly as God’s ambassador to initiate relations with sinners, whereas John primarily took the role of the biblical prophets in times of persecution; Jesus was a missionary within the culture, John a critic from the outside. Both models are biblical but suit different situations.

The message for today is that some disciples are called to work within their culture and should do so in order to win others to Christ, providing it does not compromise the Gospel message in any way. At times, other disciples are called to make a stance outside of that culture when there are issues at stake that oppose the Gospel.

VII.a.iii Matthew 11:20-24 - Woes to Unrepentant Cities

Having reproached the crowds for their failure to recognise the significance of John, he then went on to do the same for several key Galilæan cities; those in which Jesus spent much time teaching about the arrival of the Kingdom and in which he performed great signs and wonders to support his words. Their failure to accept the Gospel would bring judgement greater than that on Tyre, Sidon or Sodom; all of which had suffered past destruction for apostasy.

²⁰ Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.’

Matthew 11:20-24

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were the cities in which most of Jesus’ miracles were performed, and yet their occupants rejected Jesus’ mission and remained unrepentant.

Chorazin has been identified with Khirbet Karazeh, just northwest of Capernaum.

And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. The city where Jesus placed his name by making it his main base for ministry is highlighted for special attention. Because they have heard the Gospel so powerfully proclaimed and witnessed so many of the miracles that accompanied the teaching, they were first exalted to heaven as recipients of God’s grace, yet the ultimate reward for those who heard and rejected the message will be eternal hell. Or to put it a different way: <<*Even though they mount up high as the heavens, and their head reaches to the clouds, they will perish for ever like their own dung; those who have seen them will say, “Where are they?”*>> (Job 20:6-7).

Like the king of Babylon in: *<<You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit>>* (Isaiah 14:13-15), Capernaum thought highly of itself, but Jesus teaches that people's response to himself and his message will determine their standing at the coming judgment.

Excavations at Capernaum, modern day Talhum, have revealed residential structures, a synagogue, and an octagonal Christian site. Capernaum's prominent, well-preserved synagogue has been dated, based on thousands of coins found below its pavement, to the 4th or 5th Century AD, although some argue it is earlier.

Bethsaida was just northeast of where the River Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north. Research since the 1980s has focused on et-Tell as the site for Bethsaida. This site does have residential remains from around NT times, including an apparent fisherman's house with ancient fishing equipment. It is located above an earlier Iron Age, that is, Abrahamic OT-era settlement. Excavation geologists suggest that the Sea of Galilee originally extended closer to this site than it does today. At least three of the apostles originally came from Bethsaida: *<<Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter>>* (John 1:44).

They would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes as did Nineveh when Jonah brought God's condemnation upon them: *<<When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands>>* (Jonah 3:6-8). Nineveh listened and responded; Israel did not: *<<For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel – not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart>>* (Ezekiel 3:5-7). God could have done no more for his people than to send his only Son, he remains forever vindicated by his actions: *<<And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?>>* (Isaiah 5:3-4).

Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities in Phœnicia, yet they knew about Jesus: *<<From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice>>* (Mark 7:24), and they were often the object of condemnation by OT prophets for their Baal worship and arrogant materialism. Excavations have unearthed many remarkable finds at both Tyre and Sidon. Tyre evidences both Roman and Byzantine structures including, largely from after Jesus' time: a hippodrome; an immense bathhouse; a forum; a theatre; and tombs. Tyre was

originally an offshore island, later connected to the mainland during a siege in the days of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century BC.

The deeds of power done in you refer to all the healing and cleansing miracles that Jesus had performed, some of which accompanied his teaching, others purely as acts of compassion for individuals.

The day of judgement is a familiar phrase used by Matthew and other apostles: <<*But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the godless*>> (2 Peter 2:9), and: <<*Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world*>> (1 John 4:17), replacing the favoured 'Day of the Lord' used by the prophets in the OT, including: <<*Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty!*>> (Isaiah 13:6), <<*For the day of the Lord is near against all the nations. As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head*>> (Obadiah 15), and: <<*Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests*>> (Zephaniah 1:7).

It will be more tolerable shows that these peoples would not escape punishment but that there will be degrees of punishment depending on what people had done and whether their hearts had shown an inclination to come before God in all humility for their wrongful actions and thoughts.

Sodom, along with its sister city Gomorrah, was the epitome of a 'city of sin'. Yet, Jesus says, even Sodom would have repented if it had witnessed his miracles and the reality of the Kingdom. People everywhere have choices to make, for the Gospel produces polar states: <<*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?*>> (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

This narrative warns that God judges peoples according to the opportunities they have had to respond to his truth. This is not to say that anyone is without some light and therefore escapes punishment, but to say that those who know best, in modern times perhaps those who grow up in loving Christian homes, yet reject the truth will be punished most severely: <<*That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded*>> (Luke 12:47-48), and: <<*All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all*>> (Romans 2:12-16).

Those who claim to be God's people are often the most hardhearted hearers of all. Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would have repented, but God's people took all the signs for granted.

VII.a.iv Matthew 11:25-30 - Jesus Thanks His Father

Jesus gives praise to God the Father for the manner of Kingdom revelation and for the authority that he has bestowed upon the Son, offering to take on all the burdens of those who would turn to him and accept the Gospel he proclaimed.

²⁵ **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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.**

Matthew 11:25-26

At that time links this period of thanksgiving and offering of grace to come with the condemnation that has just concluded.

I thank you. Jesus demonstrates the need for all to be thankful for what they have and to be thankful that their situation is not as bad as it could be. In doing so, he gives God the honour of the title Father, Lord of heaven and earth, clearly acknowledging that he is the creator and sustainer of all things, visible and invisible, known and unknowable. Coming before God with a thankful heart is always a good way to open up communion. Prayer too often focuses on what people need and usually what they want, rather than being thankful for what they already have.

These things refers to the message and activities of the Kingdom of Heaven, which require faith and humility to grasp.

The wise and the intelligent are those who are considered to be wise in the eyes of the world, but are unrepentant, stubbornly refusing to accept the Gospel. Such people often believe they are infallible and invincible, without understanding the true ways of God in their life, which often leads to their eternal downfall, for: <<*He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in the dark without light; he makes them stagger like a drunkard*>> (Job 12:24-25).

Intellectual and spiritual pride defy the fear of God, for most people determine their own minds and lifestyle choices, rather than allowing God, the judge, the final arbiter of right and wrong, to lead them in right paths. The church today should take heed: Jesus' religious contemporaries stressed humility far more than do most of their own members today!

Revealed them to infants. God's revelations become the possession of his children when they accept his free gift: <<*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, to observe all the words of this law*>> (Deuteronomy 29:29).

For infants are those who receive and accept the Gospel in simple faith: <<*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the*

kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me>> (Matthew 18:1-5). Jesus uses such language to include those who are generally helpless and require support to survive, just as any young child would need the care of its parents, especially in its earliest years of life.

For such was your gracious will. Nothing good can happen, be given or be achieved without it being the will of God, for he is ultimately in control of all things although he does allow mankind to take control of their own lives, most often to their own detriment.

²⁷ All things have been handed over 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.

Matthew 11:27

All things have been handed over to me by my Father. This reveals the profound divine self-consciousness of Jesus, as well as the supreme authority of the Father within the Trinity, by which he has delegated authority over all things to the Son: <<After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him>> (John 17:1-2).

All things probably refers to everything needed with respect to the carrying out of Christ’s ministry of redemption, including the revelation of salvation to those to whom he chooses to reveal the Father.

No one knows the Son except the Father. In both Jesus’ incarnate state and his eternal state as Son, the Father and the Son share an exclusive relationship, including a direct and immediate knowledge of each other. Scripture indeed reveals that the Father and the Son are truly one: <<But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father>> (John 10:38), <<If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’>> (John 14:7-9), and: <<For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ>> (2 Corinthians 4:6). This shows also that the Son is knowable by those who enter into a personal relationship with him.

Anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him refers to those who accept the Lordship of Jesus over their lives and are subsequently baptised with the Holy Spirit. Such revelation will come to them in different ways.

Many Christian scholars suspect that Jesus' identity is a stumbling block even today for many of their colleagues among the wise and learned, who trust in scholarly tradition more than they fear the Lord.

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me is an invitation to trust Jesus personally, not merely to believe historical facts about him. Traditionally, only those summoned could enter the presence of the king: <<*All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law – all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days*>> (Esther 4:11), but Jesus calls all into his presence who would wish to come to him: <<*The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift*>> (Revelation 22:17).

All you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens refers in the immediate context to those oppressed by the burden of religious legalism imposed on people by the scribes and Pharisees: <<*And he said, 'Woe also to you lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them'*>> (Luke 11:46). But the wider application is that Jesus provides: <<*rest for your souls*>> (v.29); that is, eternal rest for all who seek forgiveness of their sins and freedom from the crushing legalistic burden and guilt of trying to earn salvation through their good works.

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.'

Matthew 11:29-30

A Yoke is the wooden frame joining two animals, usually oxen in its historic context, for pulling heavy loads. It is used here as a metaphor for one person's subjection to another, and was a common metaphor in Judaism for the law. The Pharisaic interpretation of the law, with its extensive list of proscriptions, had become a crushing burden for Jews, leading them away from rather than toward God, which was part of its purpose: <<*They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them*>> (Matthew 23:4), and was believed by the people to be of divine origin. Jesus' yoke of discipleship, on the other hand, brings rest through simple commitment to him: <<*For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome*>> (1 John 5:3). Paul commands: <<*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery*>> (Galatians 5:1).

Take my yoke upon you. By speaking of God's law as his own, Jesus implicitly claims authority from the Father greater than that of Moses himself; other Jewish

texts would have spoken only of God's yoke or of the yoke of Torah. Those who accept this offer acknowledge that they freely give themselves up to Christ's Lordship: <<**Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed**>> (1 Timothy 6:1).

Learn from me. This is a call common to any good teacher but Jesus goes further. Whereas his contemporaries taught strict adherence to the traditions of the elders, Jesus interprets the law in accordance with its original intention. For example, he taught that the Sabbath law was an opportunity to show devotion to God rather than a requirement to comply with a universal rule, and that the divorce laws offered an opportunity to show devotion to a faithful wife by staying with her, rather than a means of becoming rid of her for insignificant reasons.

For I am gentle and humble in heart. Jesus is the template for all of mankind. For those who accept his lordship and would call themselves his disciples must learn to become like him, for although he was God he humbled himself in order to serve others: <<**For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many**>> (Mark 10:45).

Rest for your souls. Jesus has never advocated a carefree existence, freedom from strife, problems such as hunger and poverty, sickness and even death. What he does offer is eternal rest for the faithful who answer the call of God.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. This does not imply that Jesus requires any less commitment from his disciples than was implied through the OT. In contrast to unconcerned religious teachers who prided themselves on their own position, just like some religious leaders today, Jesus was going to lay down his life for his sheep: <<**I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep**>> (John 10:14-15), demonstrating not just an act of pure love but one of great humility as well.