

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – PART ELEVEN

Although His ministry had beautifully demonstrated the truth of the Sermon on the Mount, it was now obvious as the demands on Jesus continued to spiral that in His one body He could not be everywhere with time for everyone. He encouraged His disciples at the end of chapter 9 to ask God to show them a better way, and to be prepared to be part of God's plan. The answer came quickly. First He called them to Him, then He gave them His authority over the Devil and sickness.(10:1) Next He sent them out having instructed them.(10:5) Jesus cannot send us if we have not first come to know Him. He will only give us His authority to carry out His instructions, not our own, but we need to know those instructions.

The apostles were an interesting group of ordinary people. The first four were fishermen, rough and probably illiterate. Peter and Andrew, though brothers, were very different personalities. James and John were also brothers, famous in the early days for their arguments with each other.(Mk.3:17) Thomas was the doubter;(Jn.20:25) Simon the Zealot was a nationalist guerrilla. Matthew was a traitor to his people. Imagine how Simon and Matthew got on together! Judas seemed the smartest of all and was trusted with the money.(Jn.12:4-6) What is exciting is to see what God can do with such ordinary people. Apart from Judas, Jesus would turn His team into one which changed the world.(10:1-5)

Their first mission was only to their own people. Later it would be expanded.(Matt.28:18-20) If we do not learn how to let God use us at home, we are not going to be of any use overseas. Their message was very simple – God wants to be the king in us now. In confirmation of their message, the Lord would use them during this mission to meet spiritual and physical needs. This was not a guarantee that they would be miracle workers on all future occasions. That was up to God. Financially they were to trust God not themselves, and they were to travel light. God would provide through those who were blessed by their ministry. The most important provision would come through hospitality in homes. When they were welcomed they were gratefully to accept the kindness shown. When they were rejected, they were to move on without resentment. The problem was not with them but with the heart attitude to God of those who rejected Him. Those who ignored their teaching were no better than the perverts of Sodom and Gomorrah!(10:5-15)

The disciples of Jesus would not only be ignored by some, they would be actively persecuted by others. They would be attacked in court, in religious buildings, and sometimes even by family members. At root it would be Jesus that people were wanting to silence and destroy. He urged them to trust Him to speak through them so there would be no need for anxiety. This way they could be clever but absolutely honest. If they were persecuted in one place, they should move on to the next town where there were people who needed to hear the gospel. They would never run out of new places to go until Jesus returned.(10:16-23)

If a disciple is to be like his teacher, the big question for us as Christians is – who is my teacher? If Jesus is our teacher we will grow more and more like Him. If not the result of learning only from men is that we will become little images of them. Jesus repeated again more strongly His warning that if they called Him, Beelzebub, which

literally meant 'Lord of the Flies' or 'Lord of the Dung Heap', a term of abuse which related to a false god and so to the Devil, we would not be regarded any better. Faced with this treatment what are we to do, go underground or be open about our faith? We have nothing to fear in eternity because we are in the hands of a loving Creator who cares for all He made. Do we want Jesus to be open about us in being our advocate before the Father in heaven? If we do, then let us be open about Him on earth. Otherwise it may be that we do not really know Him in which case He cannot represent us in heaven.(10:24-33)

He did not come to earth to have an easy time but with a sword, a message that divided people.(Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12) Again He warned His disciples that the most painful opposition would come from within our families, whose rejection of the gospel would hurt most deeply. We would have to make up our minds whom we loved most, Christ or family. Only if He came first could we truly love family with God's love. Letting go of life run by ourselves as He did at the cross is the only real way to be one of His followers. We suppose we have let something precious go but the truth is that we have received a life, God's life, which is so much better.(10:34-39)

Jesus ended His instructions to His team on a positive note. Receiving the gospel is receiving Jesus which is receiving the Father. Receiving Him will show in our practical care for the needy whom He sends our way.(Matt.25:34-40; Heb.13:2; Matt.10:40-42)

Chapter 11 opens up the vital question – how will we know if the one we hear about is the real Christ?

11:1-6 Q.1 Why did Jesus send the disciples away on their own to preach rather than going along with them? What did they learn from this? What question was John the Baptist wanting answered? How could he be doubting after all he had preached and seen? Why do even experienced preachers have doubts at times? In what way did he do the right thing with his doubts? How did Jesus respond to John? How does He respond to our honest doubts? What would John learn if he looked up Isa.35:4-10 and 61:1-3?

11:7-19 Q.2 How had the Jewish people's expectations of John affected their response to him? What should they have expected according to Mal.3:1? What should we expect of those who teach us? What testimonial to John did Jesus give? How had he fulfilled the Old Testament promise about Elijah coming again?(Mal.4:5) Yet why then did Jesus regard John as below the least in the kingdom of heaven? How again did Jesus show the contradictory expectations people had of John and of Him? Give examples of how contradictory people can be today in their expectations of God.

11:20-24 Q.3 Why was Jesus so tough on His own people compared with the heathen from neighbouring countries or from the past? Whose sins were greater? Will there be different standards of judgement for different people?(Rom.2:11-16)

11:25-30 Q.4 Do you agree that often babies understand the gospel better than university professors? Why is this so? Why has God chosen to make it this way? What according to verse 27 is the only way to know God? What does this say about other religions? Again why has God chosen to make it this way? Who is invited to come to Jesus? With what are we 'weary and heavy-laden'? What does Jesus promise to those who come? What illustration did Jesus use to explain His invitation? How can taking on a burden relieve us of a burden?