

Session 9

Jesus meets Opposition: Mt 11-12

Context

In the first two chapters, Matthew presents Jesus to the evangelist's Gospel audience, who are Jewish. Jesus is a faithful Israelite—a child of Abraham, David, Israel and God (Mt 1-2). Jesus' identity in his relationship to God and Israel is confirmed in his baptism and, unlike Israel in its desert wanderings, covenantal fidelity despite temptation. He begins to proclaim the nearness of God's Reign (Mt 2-4). The first teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) reveals what is important for authentic discipleship, deepens the value of Torah teaching, and how to act towards others, especially the "enemy." His teaching becomes solid as God's Word—it is the real foundation of the house "build on rock". Jesus' Word in Mt 5-7 continues to be expressed through his deeds of healing in Mt 8-9. This leads to his second discourse in Mt 10 about missionary endeavours and the challenges that are being experienced by Matthew's Gospel addressees. Now the evangelist reflects on Jesus' rejection and opposition and its implications for the future proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 11-12).

Video Teaching Session 9

As a result of this video, you will:

- Note the defined relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus in Matthew's narrative;
- See how Matthew portrays Jesus' rejection, especially in the Sabbath controversies;
- Know how Jesus identifies for Matthew's audience where God's blessing truly resides—in "infants" (11.25);
- Appreciate who belongs to Jesus' true family;
- Reflect on the experience of opposition and rejection.

Mt 11-12: Rejection of Jesus

Narrative Development

There are five main themes in this section of Matthew's Gospel:

1. *In 11.1-19* the Gospel focuses on John the Baptist and Jesus. Both are shunned for different reasons. They simply won't "dance" to the tune of the religious authorities. They are out of step with the social and religious expectations of the powerful.

Jesus says,

"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,¹⁷ 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'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." (11:16-19, NRSV)

2. *In 11.20-27*: Jesus' experience of rejection continues, as he also names God's good will for those who are open to true wisdom, namely "infants".
3. *In 12.1-14*: Opposition continues in the form of rejection of Jesus' teaching and practice about the Sabbath. Jesus is "Lord of the Sabbath" (12.8).
4. *12.15-37*: Matthew presents Jesus as God's servant, in the spirit of Isaiah 42.1-4, imbued with God's Spirit that brings healing and reveals God's Reign present.
5. *12: 38-50* concludes this section identifying the nature of Jesus' true kinship group, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (12.50).



The Preaching of St. John the Baptist by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1566
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Summary

- The teachings and insights that emerge out of Mt 11-12 reflect experiences within the Matthean Gospel household: conflict with authorities and Jewish teachers, especially those named as the “Pharisees.” It is important to remember the tension that existed between Matthew’s Gospel community and leaders representative of main-stream Judaism in the post-70 CE era. These tensions and experiences are read back into the story of Jesus. They appear here in Mt 11-12. They are not historical snapshots of Jesus’ day, but reflect Matthew’s time.
- What emerges is a clear identification of those who belong to Jesus’ true kinship group. This is founded on doing God’s will—openness to the presence of the Kingdom, despite the challenges and opposition faced. Humility (those symbolised by “infants”) is the primary quality of discipleship.

For Reflection

- Have you ever experienced rejection or opposition, or witnessed others being rejected?
- How might Mt 11-12 speak into this experience?