



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 24, 2010
Released on Wednesday, January 20, 2010**

"Declared in Prayer"

Lesson Text: Matthew 11:25-30

Background Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30

Devotional Reading: John 11:38-44

Matthew 11:25-30

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

26 Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.

27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

28 Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to examine statements by Jesus regarding who received divine knowledge and who finds rest in Him.

Principle: to sense that humility before God and His Son brings believers spiritual rewards.

Application: to invite believers to find the inner peace promised to them in the midst of life's many challenges.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 28

Place: Galilee

As the opening phrase "at that time" of Matthew 11:25 indicates, Jesus' remarks in today's text are closely tied to their immediate context. In 11:2 (last week's study) we see that John the Baptist had been imprisoned. From his prison cell, John sent his own disciples to ask Jesus whether He was really the Messiah.

John's question seemed to be prompted by doubt since Jesus did not appear to be leading a revolution against Rome. Further, if Jesus really was the Christ, then why was His faithful forerunner (John the Baptist) languishing in prison? Jesus' response implied that John's expectations were wrong. While John seemed to be looking for someone who would fight Caesar, Jesus was bringing God's kingdom in the form of

miraculous healings and the proclamation of the good news of redemption to the poor (Matthew 11:2-6).

Jesus ended His remarks on this topic by criticizing those who seemed to think that God should live up to their expectations rather than the other way around. He told them that their generation was like children playing in the marketplace who rejected every idea presented (vs.16,17).

He compared those attitudes with the way people had viewed John and his ministry as well as Him and His ministry. John stayed within very narrow guidelines of living, and they accused him of having a demon. Jesus lived much more freely, and they accused Him being a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (vs. 18,19). He followed this with a rebuke of cities where He had ministered and been rejected.

Suddenly Jesus' tone changed. We find that the message we study this week is entirely different from those criticisms. After speaking His warnings to those who were rejecting Him, He reached out to those who were paying attention.

JESUS REVEALED (Matthew 11:25-27)

1. How did Jesus address His Father in this prayer, and what was the tone of His prayer? (Matthew 11:25)

In this verse, Jesus addressed His Father as "Lord of heaven and earth." The Greek word *kurios*, translated "Lord" here, refers to someone supreme in authority and thus in complete control and power.

Many people have missed the point of Jesus' ministry. As a result, they have refused to accept that God might be doing something not quite expected. Yet some realize the truth. Ironically, Jesus summarizes this situation by comparing those who reject Him to *the wise and prudent* while likening His disciples to little children, (*babes*) discussed in question #2. Several terms in this verse are particularly significant and require special comment.

First, Jesus does not specify what *these things* consist of. But *these things* must refer to the entirety of Jesus' proclamation. This includes His message about the kingdom of God and the things Jesus has revealed about His own identity. Matthew 11:20-24, just preceding today's text, refers to His miracles. Verse 25 shows that people respond to these in two ways: some receive this revelation of truth and accept Jesus' claims, while others refuse to listen.

They refuse because they don't accept that God's kingdom can come in the way that Jesus is introducing it. This fact sheds light on the meaning of several other key words. Essentially, *the wise and prudent* are those who reject Jesus' words, the *babes* are those who accept Him, while the words *hid* and *revealed* refer to the different effects on the two groups as a result of Jesus' preaching.

2. What contrast is mentioned in Jesus' prayer, and why is this unusual? (vs. 25)

In His prayer, Jesus mentions that His Father has hidden certain things from the wise and prudent and revealed them instead to what Jesus called "babes" (Matt. 11:25). It is an interesting and unusual contrast, for we would not normally contrast wise and prudent people with babies. We would instead contrast those who are wise with those who are foolish. This must be a contrast of those who know things with those who do not.

In fact, Jesus' thought was a contrast of those who think they know things with those who realize they do not. Those who accept Jesus' message are willing to set aside their preconceived ideas. They are willing to set aside what they claim to know. They are willing to consider that God may be doing something that goes beyond

what they can conceive. Because the disciples are willing to humble themselves rather than depend on their own wisdom, they can see God at work in Jesus' healings and in His association with sinful people (compare 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5).

This understanding of *the wise* and *babes* in turn sheds light on the terms *hid* and *revealed*. In this context, these verbs should not be taken to refer to some supernatural process. Jesus is not saying that God has made it absolutely impossible for some people to understand what He is doing while giving others a special gift of faith that makes it absolutely impossible for them to misunderstand. Remember that this entire discussion takes place before the full truth of the gospel is revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection. Thus any faith possessed by anyone at this point is only preliminary to the fuller revelation of Christ yet to come. God has "hidden" these things by revealing His plan in a way that the world does not expect.

First-century Jews expect a very different kind of Messiah from what Jesus proves to be. This expectation blinds most of them to the truth. The phrase *it seemed good in thy sight* (Matt. 11:26) stresses that God's plan is no accident. God makes no apologies if our expectations don't live up to His reality.

3. What childlike qualities do you need to have that will enhance your Christian walk? How will you go about cultivating those qualities?

Wonder, joy, and trust are childlike qualities to aspire to. Spending time playing with children can help us keep in touch with what it means to be a child. Admiring nature and praising God for His creativity can help restore a sense of wonder to our lives (Psalm 19:1-3; 148). We can pray more honestly - telling God exactly how we feel and what we are thinking in simple and direct language. The key is to offer them in the trusting, unpretentious spirit of a child (Romans 8:15, 16, 26, 27).

4. What did Jesus mean by saying all things had been given to Him? (vs. 27)

As in John's Gospel (see John 3:35; 5:19–26; 6:40; 8:36–38), Matthew emphasizes three special privileges that Jesus enjoys as the Son of God.

First, *all things* have been given to Christ by *the Father*. This means that Jesus bears full authority to proclaim God's truth. This claim reflects Jesus' rights as "the heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). Obviously, an only child will inherit all the father's wealth. Since Jesus is God's "only begotten Son" (John 3:16), Christ receives *all* the truth, grace, and power that God himself possesses (see John 1:14–16; Colossians 1:15). The word *delivered* shows us that God allows Jesus to enjoy the benefits of the inheritance now, as is evident by His miraculous power.

Second, Christ as the Son has a special knowledge of God that no one else can grasp fully. This is only logical: obviously, a child knows his or her father better than a stranger does. Jesus alone is in a position to speak about God's nature and will since Jesus alone has seen the Father (see John 1:18). In this context, the phrase *no man knoweth* marks a sharp contrast between Jesus and those who claim to be "wise and prudent." Ultimately, Jesus is the one who knows what He's talking about.

Third, God has given Christ the authority to *reveal* the Father in whatever way Jesus deems appropriate, as Jesus says at the end of the verse. In this context, Jesus is referring to the fact that His unexpected methods confuse those who claim to be "wise" about God while at the same time attracting "babes." Those children are the humble sinners who simply accept His miracles and teachings at face value.

JESUS APPROACHABLE (Matthew 11:28-30)

5. Why would the invitation to come and find rest encourage the Jews? (v. 28)

The Jews listening to Jesus that day were trying to live successfully and acceptably under the religious load imposed upon them by their religious leaders. Not only did

the scribes teach God's Word as they understood it, but they also added many other regulations to it. Their list of over six hundred "interpretations" of the law made it almost impossible for people to feel they were truly righteous and thus accepted by God. Imagine the sense of relief upon hearing this invitation from Jesus!

If anyone felt they were laboring to be righteous and were heavy laden with unrealistic expectations, it was the Jewish people trying to fulfill all they were being taught. The concept of finding spiritual rest in such a situation was unthinkable. But here was Jesus offering rest, and He was not haranguing them about adhering to a long list of regulations. Instead, He was simply inviting them to come to Him. He was there offering Himself as the One who could put them into a right relationship with God; all they had to do was accept.

6. What makes this invitation meaningful to today's society?

How many in the world today would recognize themselves in this picture if they would read and understand Jesus' invitation? The Greek word translated "labour" in Matthew 11:28 means "to feel fatigued." The word translated "heavy laden" means "to be overburdened." In the case of the Jews, many felt overburdened with legalistic ritual. In our culture, many are very tired of life the way they are living it and are longing for some kind of meaningful change and relief. In their search for meaning to life, many turn to everything but God.

It is only a matter of time before excessive partying, drinking, taking drugs, and illicit sex become dissatisfying. Solomon spent the entire book of Ecclesiastes explaining that it is impossible to find meaning in life apart from God. He had the financial resources and contacts to try everything his heart desired, but nothing satisfied until he came to the realization that "the conclusion of the whole matter" was to "fear God, and keep his commandments" (12:13). This, he said, was "the whole duty of man."

Jesus' offer remains today. There is no spiritual rest apart from a relationship with God, and that relationship must come from receiving Jesus as Saviour. It is possible that there are some studying this lesson who have never established a relationship with God through Jesus. You might have come to the point where life is no longer fulfilling or meaningful. You do not have to be without hope, for Jesus still reaches out and says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). You can find the spiritual rest you desire today by acknowledging you are a sinner in need of a Saviour and receiving Jesus as the One who has paid for your sins. The invitation is real. Have you come?

7. Where did Jesus get the analogy of being yoked with Him, and what is the reason for His invitation? (vs. 29,30)

Jesus' listeners would have understood His reference to becoming yoked to Him. All of them would have seen a farmer plowing his fields with a pair of oxen yoked together. The yoke was placed upon a pair of animals to ensure that they would pull together instead of going their separate ways. When combined in this way, they made a much stronger team than if they were used individually. The implication of Jesus' invitation to the people to take His yoke upon them is very clear. Connected with Jesus, they could be assured of succeeding in life. In fact, He would personally teach them as they lived life together. Trying to go it alone would be very difficult, but with Jesus, life could be managed well.

Jesus then gave the reassurance that He is gentle and humble-fully able to provide the spiritual rest that people desperately seek. The truth of His claim cannot be overstated; yet multitudes miss it and endeavor to live life without Him. Jesus' claim "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30) must be accepted by faith.

After we know Him as Saviour and learn how to turn our lives over to His direction, allowing Him to be the Lord of our lives, we begin to experience what He said.

Life is full of inconsistencies, disappointments, failures, and turns of events that have the potential to devastate or destroy us. We will experience those things as long as we remain in our human bodies, for they are part of the consequences of Adam's fall. We do not, however, have to face the uncertainties of life alone. When we have Jesus as our Saviour and God as our Father, we have deity on our side, and the reality of knowing victory and joy in the middle of despair becomes very real.

8. Is it possible that Jesus' yoke for you is actually easier than the yoke you have taken upon yourself? What are some ways your life might need to be adjusted in a more restful direction?

Again, Matthew 11:28–30 should not give us a picture of wearing a yoke while Jesus drives us along with a whip. Rather, we should think of a two-animal yoke because Jesus bears the load with us.

There are many ways we may make bearing the yoke with Christ more difficult than He intends. Sometimes we try to pull in a different direction than Christ, causing Him to nudge us back in line. Sometimes we may add unnecessarily burdensome activities and responsibilities upon ourselves in addition to Christ's yoke. Sometimes we try to pull ahead, moving the entire load with our own strength rather than letting Christ bear the greater part of the weight. As we learn from Christ, we will find rest knowing that He is bearing the lion's share of the load.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** God is not impressed by human wisdom but delights in dependence upon Him (Matthew 11:25).
- 2.** God's delights are not ours. He highly values what we discard and discards what we treasure (v. 26).
- 3.** Anyone who claims to know God but does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior is either deceived or a liar (v. 27)
- 4.** To know Christ is to find relief from the toil of ambition, anxiety, and self-justification (v. 28).
- 5.** To know Christ we must first know true humility (v. 29).
- 6.** Christ's yoke is joyously light compared with the endless futility of self-righteousness (v. 30).

CONCLUSION

Wise Fools

In 1910, only 13.5 percent of people in the U.S. age 25 and over had completed high school or its equivalent. By 2006 that figure had risen to nearly 86 percent. The percentage of those holding a bachelor's degree or higher rose from about 3 percent to 28 percent over the same time frame. One organization reported in 2004 that more than half of young adults across the globe will enter college at some point.

This increased learning clearly has not fixed our serious social problems. The most destructive wars of the twentieth century were fought between the most educated countries on earth. The World Health Organization reported in 2004 that suicide claims more lives yearly than homicide and war combined. It seems we still have a lot to learn.

Our passage today stresses that earthly wisdom ultimately cannot teach us what we most need to know: that peace comes from admitting that God is smarter than we are. While we often may think that we know better than He does, real relief comes only when our confidence in our own knowledge ends. Relief comes when we

abandon our expectations about how God "should" operate. Only then can we lay down our burdens.

PRAYER

Father, we know that we must come to You on Your terms, but in our pride we often try to force You to meet our expectations. Break our arrogant spirits so that we can enjoy the peace that comes from living under Jesus' yoke. We pray in His name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Cast all your burdens on Christ.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Revealed in Rejection**" and shows how even great preaching and miracles were not enough to overcome unbelief when Jesus went home to Galilee. He was not accepted even as a prophet. Study Matthew 13:54-58 and Luke 4:16-30.

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