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# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

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**SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 11:2-12:8**

To understand the value of Scripture to believers today.

## Strikeout!

I'll never forget the first playoff baseball game I attended. Living in a football town (*How about them Cowboys?*), I am fortunate to have seen some really great baseball teams as well. Our home team has seen some of the most preeminent sluggers in the modern era. The likes of Adrian Beltre and Josh Hamilton make



hitting a baseball look easy. However, even their percentages are bad percentages by almost any other standard. Hit a .300 average and you'll make the Hall of Fame, no doubt. But, would you see a surgeon who was successful 30% of the time? No chance. In baseball, striking out is a reality much more than possibility.

In Matthew chapter eleven, Jesus criticizes the several cities He has visited because of their lack of belief even in spite of the miracles He performed, "because they did not repent" (Matt. 11:20). They struck out. They had the opportunity to hit the home run, and they failed! Thus, one of the purposes that Jesus' miracles served was to reveal a lack of belief in those who witnessed them.

**"Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done..." (Matt. 11:20)**

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## A Notable Missing Detail

In the beginning portion of chapter 11, John the Baptist sends an inquiry to Jesus while he is imprisoned. He is trying to discern whether or not Jesus is really the Messiah. In verse 3 he asks, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” What had happened that led John to such a crisis of faith? After all, John was convinced that Jesus was the Anointed One (Matt. 3:11-16).

In order to understand this, we have to understand what was expected of the Messiah. The Jews believed the Messiah would be a political redeemer more than a spiritual one. The fact that John had remained in prison likely warred against his very definition of who the Messiah was. Jesus’ response to John, however, is very clear. Jesus has the messengers send a message back to John, *and His response is mostly a quote from the Old Testament*. Jesus cites a sort of mash-up of several verses from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:18; 61:1). We will examine the details below.

### ***THE BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 29:18)***

The first thing Jesus says comes from Isaiah 35, “the blind will receive sight.” This occurred with the two blind men that came to Jesus in Matthew 9:27-31.

### ***THE LAME WILL WALK (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 35:6)***

The second detail that Jesus mentions is the healing of the lame man, which occurred in Matthew 9:1-8 with the paralytic lying in his bed. Jesus first forgives his sins, and when questioned by the Pharisees, Jesus heals him totally and completely to prove His authority.

### ***THE LEPERS ARE CLEANSED (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 35:6)***

The third detail is the cleansing of the leper, which Jesus accomplished in Matthew 8:1-4, right after Jesus came down from the mountain where He delivered the famous, “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5-7).

### ***THE DEAF HEAR (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 35:5)***

The fourth detail concerns deaf people being able to hear. In Mark 7:31-37, a man is brought to Him who was deaf and had a speech impediment and Jesus heals him.

### ***THE DEAD ARE RAISED (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 26:19)***

The fifth detail escalates to an even greater level. Jesus declares, “the dead will be raised,” a seemingly impossible task. However, in Matthew 9:18-19; 23-26, Jesus raises the daughter of a synagogue official.

### ***THE POOR RECEIVE THE GOSPEL (MATT. 11:5; ISAIAH 61:1)***

The final detail is the one that likely would have been the most interesting to John. Jesus says, “the poor have the Gospel preached to them.” This is no doubt a nod to Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.” This is demonstrated in so much of Jesus’ ministry. No doubt, Jesus’ target are the sick, not the healthy (Matt. 9:12). However, there is one notable aspect of this passage from Isaiah 61:1 that Jesus did not include...

### ***THE CAPTIVES SET FREE (ISAIAH 61:1)***

The final portion of Isaiah 61:1 says, “To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.” Why would John be interested in this part of the verse? He was in prison! Why didn’t Jesus include this in His message? Because John would die in prison, and Jesus knew it.

The message of Jesus to John is a strong one for more than one reason. For one, it lays out the legitimacy to Jesus’ claim as the Messiah. Everything the prophet Isaiah prophesied concerning the Messiah had been

fulfilled by Jesus. But the message also served as a farewell to John from Jesus, and John would have likely put that together.

## The Greatest?

Jesus declares that John is the greatest human that has lived. He says, “among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11). Perhaps even more shocking is the next thing Jesus says: “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Jesus is juxtaposing two eras in this statement. John signals the last generation of those who proclaimed the coming Messiah. John is in fact, Elijah, a fulfillment of Malachi 4:5. He is not the physical recreation of him, but he comes in the spirit and power of the prophet (Luke 1:17). Because of this, John is extremely important, as he is the one who prepares the way for Jesus to come and usher the kingdom of heaven and the age of grace. Because of this kingdom, where the Holy Spirit will indwell in believers, even the least in the kingdom are greater than John because they walk in the reality of what was merely a shadow to John.

## More Rabbinic Language

Jesus, after prescribing His woes to the cities who have not believed as a result of His miracles and then subsequently praising the Father, issues a call to His disciples to come to Him, and there are some heavy rabbinic undertones. He says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me.” There are two types of yokes that are referenced in the Old and New Testaments. The animal yoke is one that binds two animals together for pulling power. The other is the human yoke, and awkward device worn by an individual to evenly distribute the weight of a load across the person’s shoulders. While it is an unwelcome discomfort and is often synonymous with something that is burdensome, it is nevertheless effective in getting the work done in a more efficient manner. Work with a yoke is easier than without.

Jesus’ yoke, like the yoke of the Torah, is that of learning. Being a disciple of Jesus entails a life-long journey of learning from Him and His Word. The difference in Jesus’ yoke is that it is restful. It brings refreshing and renewal, not weariness, unlike the yoke of the scribes (Matt. 23:4). If Bible study becomes burdensome, it’s not because the Bible is burdensome. So often, Christians will try and start to study the Bible and it becomes more of a task than a privilege. This is likely the result of a law-driven mindset that dictates to us that our behavior determines God’s satisfaction with us, and that if we don’t, “get it right,” we will be punished. Therefore, learning becomes burdensome because of the stress and pressure that comes with it. Jesus’ yoke is meant to bring satisfaction to us even during the toughest of times.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Matthew 11:2-6. Now, read Isaiah 26:19, 29:18, 35:5-6, and 61:1. What do these have in common with Jesus’ quote? What is different? Why are there likely differences?
2. Read Matthew 11:7-15. Now, read Malachi 4:5. In what way does John the Baptist fulfill Malachi’s prophecy? Why is John the greatest, and why will the least in the kingdom be even greater?

### Day Two

1. Read Matthew 11:16-19. Summarize this passage in your own words, and write down anything that is confusing to you and talk about it in class.

2. Read Matthew 11:20-24. Why are these cities being rebuked by Jesus? Why is Sodom mentioned? What's Jesus' big idea here?

### Day Three

1. Read Matthew 11:25-27. Summarize Jesus' prayer. What is His relationship to the Father? What is our relationship to the Father and how is it impacted by our relationship with Him?
2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. What does it mean to take upon the yoke of Jesus? Why is learning such an important factor in the life of a believer?

### Day Four

1. Read Matthew 12:1-8. Summarize this passage in your own words. What does it mean that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath?
2. A major distinction is being made here between Jesus and the Pharisees. What are the differences between Jesus and the Pharisees up to this point? What are the similarities?

## Week 15 Discussion: Difficult Times Are Coming

John the Baptist was no doubt a believer of Jesus from the start. He prepared the way for the Messiah in the spirit and power of Elijah, just as Malachi said would happen. Jesus affirms this. Yet, in a time of despair, he questions the legitimacy of Jesus' Messiahship. Jesus' response indicates that John will pay the ultimate price for following him: death. The reality for the church today is we all will experience difficult times, and not out of punishment or carelessness on God's part. Therefore, the way we view difficulty is important.

1. Icebreaker: What's the most difficult circumstance you have faced, and did it have an affect on your faith?
2. Why does difficulty challenge our faith so much?
3. When we have a crisis of faith as a result of trials in our life, what does that ultimately reveal about our trust in God? What did it reveal in John the Baptist's life?
4. How did Jesus counter John's doubts during his imprisonment? How should we counter our doubts? How should we comfort others when they struggle?
5. How can difficulty and trial be seen as a positive in the life of a Christian? Use Scripture to answer this one if possible.

## Takeaways:

1. Scripture is a powerful tool to counter doubts we may have when we experience difficult circumstances.
2. Scripture is something that should bring refreshing and renewal, not weariness.

### *PRAYER REQUESTS:*