



Walk | Read | Pray | Join | Commit

Matthew's Gospel Connect Group Resources: **Jesus – A Life**
Matthew Chapters 11-14

The aim of this session is to explore the question: how do we respond to Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God and what important place does judgement have within it?

COLLECT

Think of a time when someone had the courage to tell you something you needed to hear, even though it was hard to say it. What did they say? How did you respond? Was there a difference between your immediate response and your considered response?

Jesus sometimes says things that are tough to hear. This activity helps us process what it is like to hear good news that can hurt or come with a cost.

CHALLENGE

John the Baptist, who Matthew established as preparing the way for Jesus back in chapter 3, preached a message and lived a life so challenging that it placed him in prison.

Read 11:1-11.

- ***Why do you think John was wondering if Jesus really was the Messiah?***
- ***How does Jesus respond to John?***
- ***What might this passage have to say to a discouraged Christian?***

Last week we looked at how Jesus' miracles revealed new aspects of God's kingdom. In these chapters, Matthew unpacks more of Jesus' kingdom message by focusing on Jesus' use of parables and his responses to opposition. Read 11:11 and 13:24-29, 36-52.

- ***What do these verses teach us about what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like?***
- ***What challenges do they provoke for those hearing Jesus, both in 1st century Palestine and today?***

When clashing with those who opposed or ignored his message, Jesus speaks multiple times on a coming judgment. Read 11:20-24, 12:39-42, 13:36-43 and, 13:44-50.

- ***Why does Jesus say the judgment of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum would be more severe than Tyre, Sidon and Sodom?***
- ***What excuses do people use today to avoid the message of the kingdom?***
- ***What challenges and questions does the parable of the weeds and the catch of fish present you with? How does the Cross and Jesus' resurrection help in response?***

CONNECT

Jesus confronts those who doubt his message with a stark warning of how damaging it is to downplay or deny the truth of God's kingdom. These parables prompt us to new understanding and new action, to root ourselves in Jesus' word and respond.

Leave 15/20 minutes to pray for one another and to pray for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done, that we will see fresh fruits of the kingdom in our lives and around us.



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CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF CHAPTERS 11-14

[You may choose to read this as a whole group, or just use it as preparation to inform and facilitate group discussion.]

As Jesus spread the good news concerning the Kingdom of God, he was met with opposition and suspicion. Even John the Baptist wasn't entirely sure if Jesus really was the Messiah he had been preaching in the wilderness of Judea.

We are afforded a unique, amazing position – readers who can approach the challenging parables, warnings and teachings of Jesus with his death and resurrection sitting at the forefront of our journey. While those who misunderstood Jesus and his kingdom message did not yet know of what was to come, we ourselves can still miss the point of Jesus' teaching if we are not mindful to balance what Jesus was saying to his immediate, Jewish audience and its lasting impact on those who would inherit his message after his resurrection.

This week's section of Matthew's Gospel follows and expands on Jesus' second hugely challenging 'sermon' in chapter 10: it places major emphasis on the cost of discipleship, as he sends out the 12 disciples to share that 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Jesus then proceeds to do many amazing miracles (e.g. 12:9-13, 12:15, 12:22, 13:58, 14:13-35), fulfilling prophecy after prophecy along the way (12:18-21, 13:35). But the responses are very mixed, as Jesus warned his disciples they would be. Some who hear and see are tragically disappointed (11:16-19, 11:20-24, 13:53-58) that Jesus isn't the Messiah they were expecting, that the kingdom wasn't about taking up arms and overthrowing foreign powers. Towns like Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida had heard the message, seen the acts of the kingdom, and yet were still unrepentant, uninterested in all Jesus had shown them.

Other audiences, such as the Pharisees, are downright hostile toward what he is saying and doing. Just as the words and actions of John the Baptist were met with aggression from ruling powers, the actions of Jesus result in the ruling classes plotting to kill him (12:14). The teaching in these chapters is a striking juxtaposition of themes, with some of Jesus' strongest teaching on judgment sitting alongside some of his most precious promises and boldest claims of what the kingdom of God is like: it is a pearl, a hidden treasure, a cause of growth, those who hear it will act upon it will shine, they will cause the message to spread throughout the lands.

Throughout these chapters Jesus consistently declares his identity and authority in ways that would amaze any Jew who knew their Old Testament, pulling on prophecies and visions that are helpful to read alongside these teachings. Read over:

- Isaiah 42, 53, 60
- Daniel 7:11-14

There are significant challenges amongst these chapters of Matthew, but we can face them knowing that the death and resurrection of Jesus brings us into eternal life, that we can live and declare this kingdom in our lives – we are to give people as many signposts to Jesus as we can in all our words and deeds.