

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 38, Chapter 10 and 11

Of the several passages in Matthew chapter 10 that we studied last week, verses 26 - 31 dealt with fear, death, and the problem of evil. In context it had primarily to do with what Yeshua's 12 Disciples might face as they journeyed through the Holy Land taking the Good News that the Kingdom of Heaven had arrived to the Jewish population. In the ***P'shat*** sense, the plain literal sense, this concern was directly for the 12 and was a warning by Christ that they likely would encounter angry opposition, and some might not survive their mission. I have no doubt that this is how they all would have taken it. In the ***Remez*** sense, the deeper underlying sense, this was a message for all future disciples, wherever they may be, about what we could expect to face in the task of the great commission we've all signed up for when we first gave our hearts to Our Savior.... whether we realized it or not.

As we'll read a little later, Christ relates to all who choose to follow Him that we should expect to have tribulation just as He suffered. We should expect to be persecuted and shunned, just as He was. I remember decades ago that a Pastor I was listening to said: ***as Believers if we are not pariahs to this world, then we're not working at it hard enough.*** That has always stuck with me. If we listen carefully to what Yeshua tells us it is that if we are friends of this world more than we are to Him, and if we seem to belong to this world more than we belong to Him, then we can't also be His.

CJB ***Matthew 7:21-23*** <sup>21</sup> ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.*** <sup>22</sup> ***On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform***

***many miracles in your name?'<sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'***

This doesn't mean that in the name of Christ we are to try to find ways to offend others or to make unnecessary trouble for ourselves. This doesn't mean that we aren't to show respect to others who disagree with our stance on Christ. This also doesn't mean that we are to try for poverty as a lifestyle, or that we must go off into some commune in the wilderness that we might physically separate ourselves from corrupted society. Quite the opposite, actually. We can't be a light to the world if we disconnect and hide from it. But most importantly, we cannot tell others of God's love and Yeshua's sacrifice for them if we aren't among the world, interacting with the world, and dealing with the natural consequences that come from it.

A secular film entitled Into The Wild tells the true story of a young man, Chris McCandless, who immediately after graduating from Emory University left his family, friends, and all societal connections behind in order to gain what he saw as complete freedom; the only way he thought was the means to happiness. He disavowed money, possessions, and most importantly relationships with people other than for fleeting ones. During one conversation he had with an elderly man who befriended him, Chris explained that the reason that the man was lonely was because he wrongly felt that relationships with people was what mattered the most in life. Rather, says the young man, it is experiencing the physical world in all its bounty, diversity and beauty that brings contentment and happiness. Chris finally achieved his goal of living in solitude, free from all societal and human attachments, in the breathtaking wilderness of Alaska. He made home of a rusted-out hull of a bus that lay mysteriously, and so oddly out of place, miles beyond civilization, deep in the Alaskan bush. He died only a few months later, alone and in that bus, after having no luck foraging for food and accidentally eating some poisonous berries to satisfy his gnawing hunger. In the diary that he kept... the diary and his body accidentally stumbled upon by moose hunters... his final penned words were that it turns out he was wrong.

In his last hours of life, at only 24 years of age, Chris McCandless wrote a short sentence of personal discovery. It said simply: ***happiness only has meaning when it is shared with others***. This was, perhaps, his way of saying that he at last understood that true happiness only blossoms when we love our neighbors as ourselves. For followers of Christ hopefully the epiphany that the joy of our salvation only has meaning when it is shared with others, comes early in our faith

walk. Let us vow to do that at whatever the cost, and to not have to stand before God, after our inevitable death, and explain that we thought that living only within and for ourselves, safely in these rusting-out buses that we call our bodies, was where happiness resided. Because that means we never took Jesus's instructions to us seriously.

As for the issue of evil, and the perplexing question of how a loving and sovereign God could allow the world of His creation to become so sickly and full of wrong, Yeshua simply reminds His Disciples (through an illustration) that every human life matters to God, and that the Father values His human creations above His animal creations even though He places great value on them as well. In the end, the answer to this question of the ages is that God is a mystery and His ways are above our ways. Jesus also instructs that our bodies are temporary and can be destroyed in any number of ways. But our soul is separate, eternal, and only God the Father can destroy the soul; therefore, we should not worry about our lives.

So in response to this teaching Believers are to take on the attitude of Job who, in his darkest hour, comes to understand that whatever happens on earth, good or evil, happy or sad, God not only knows about it, it is only within His will that it can even happen. This is what true, honest, real, operable faith in God comes down to. We observe; we trust; and we don't demand answers that satisfy our preconceived perceptions.

Let's move on to the next section of Matthew chapter 10.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 10:32 - end**

I think if I was one of the original 12 Disciples I'd be both perplexed and startled at what Yeshua has just said. He says that there are **eternal** consequences for acknowledging Him, or not. I suppose I'd have to ask myself why this miracle working Holy Man thinks my relationship with Him as one of His disciples would determine some hazy vision of my eternal future. And yet, 2000 years in hindsight, we, His followers, understand that Yeshua was saying that God the Father isn't only His Father in the sense that we can all call God "Father"; but rather there is an actual, tangible one-on-one familial connection between Jesus and God. Jesus is not only God's son in the sense that all Israelite kings of the past have been imputed as His sons; rather it is that Yeshua and God are literally related in the same way that any son and his biological father are, and yet in

ways that no human son and father can be.

Yeshua also says that merely intellectually and secretly accepting Him is not sufficient; this acceptance must be visible and it must be public. For those who accept Him, then Yeshua says that when He stands in the Father's presence He will acknowledge them. This statement of standing in Heaven before the Father can only allude to Daniel chapter 7 and to Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man. Let's briefly look to Daniel yet again.

**CJB Daniel 7:9-14** <sup>9</sup> *"As I watched, thrones were set in place; and the Ancient One took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire flowed from his presence; thousands and thousands ministered to him, millions and millions stood before him. Then the court was convened, and the books were opened. <sup>11</sup> "I kept watching. Then, because of the arrogant words which the horn was speaking, I watched as the animal was killed; its body was destroyed; and it was given over to be burned up completely. <sup>12</sup> As for the other animals, their rulership was taken away; but their lives were prolonged for a time and a season. <sup>13</sup> "I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*

Undeniably, the 12 Disciples weren't entirely confident of what Yeshua meant; but for us there's no reason to wonder if only we'll consult the Bible. Yeshua is saying that He **is** Daniel's Son of Man who stands, in Heaven, before the Ancient One (The Father) and is given a Kingdom to rule forever. Jesus says that when He (the Son of Man) stands before The Father, He will claim those who claim Him. He follows this up by essentially saying the same thing only in the negative. The CJB has Jesus asserting that for those who disown Him, He will disown them before the Father. I can't go with that translation. The Greek word is **ameomai** and it means to deny or to reject. It means to reply "no" to something that is offered. The word disown has a sense of first having owned or accepted something, and later disavowing it, but that is not what **ameomai** means. Thus it is that when the 12 Disciples present the person and purpose of Yeshua to the Jewish people, there will be those who say "no" to it. And to those who say "no"

to Yeshua, the Son of Man, He will say "no" to that person in front of The Father.

So what are we to take from this? Let's take this in 2 stages. Stage 1 applies to the time of Christ: what would the 12 Disciples think Jesus means by declaring that they, and those Jews they encounter, must accept Him? Thus far into His ministry Yeshua hasn't proclaimed that He's the Messiah or that He is divine or that He is a deliverer, even though the implications of His words are heavy. So it can only be that to them He is saying that as their unquestioned Master they can have no other. He is demanding not only total allegiance to Himself, but even a public confession of that allegiance. He says that the allegiance to Him represents an allegiance to The Father.

By now the 12 must surely believe that Yeshua is much more than a **Tzadik** in some undefined way or there is no way they could accept such astounding claims and stipulations. And they must also believe that indeed He has a unique relationship with God unlike any who came before Him. Can they also accept all that Christ has implied and hinted at without Him further clarifying or saying things more plainly? Yes; this is indeed what Jesus expects of the 12, but also of all those Jews who will hear the message of Good News from the 12.

Stage 2, however, is that Yeshua is painting a much larger picture than the Disciples can possibly comprehend at this time. This picture is for those who are living in the future Latter Days..... the 2nd Latter Days..... not the Latter Days that the Disciples are living in. It is the Latter Days that we may be living in during the 21st century (although that cannot be said with certainty), which culminates with the 2nd appearance of the Son of Man. The 2nd Latter Days leads directly to the End Times, meaning the Apocalypse. So what Yeshua is explaining about whom He rejects and whom He accepts before The Father in Heaven can only be a depiction of the Final Judgment, which has at its focal point (according to Daniel) the Son of Man: Christ. Some years later the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation will confirm this understanding.

**CJB Revelation 1:10-13 <sup>10</sup> I came to be, in the Spirit, on the Day of the Lord; and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> saying, "Write down what you see on a scroll, and send it to the seven Messianic communities-Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea!" <sup>12</sup> I turned around to see who was speaking to me; and when I had turned, I saw seven gold menorahs; <sup>13</sup> and among the menorahs was someone like a Son of Man, wearing a robe down to his feet and a gold**

***band around his chest.***

Notice the timing of the appearance of the Son of Man in John's vision. It is during events contiguous with "the Day of the Lord", which is but one of several biblical terms that means Judgment Day. So the Son of Man is directly associated with, and involved in, Judgment Day.

Now notice what John sees a little later in on in his Revelation.

**CJB Revelation 14:14-16** <sup>14</sup> ***Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud. Sitting on the cloud was someone like a Son of Man with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.*** <sup>15</sup> ***Another angel came out of the Temple and shouted to the one sitting on the cloud, "Start using your sickle to reap, because the time to reap has come- the earth's harvest is ripe!"*** <sup>16</sup> ***The one sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.***

So in this scene the Son of Man, as depicted in Daniel, comes in a cloud on Judgment Day, and has a sickle in His possession. He uses it to harvest the earth of its countless inhabitants. Do you remember what Jesus said only 1 chapter earlier in Matthew 9?

**CJB Matthew 9:37-38** <sup>37</sup> ***Then he said to his talmidim, "The harvest is rich, but the workers are few.*** <sup>38</sup> ***Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out workers to gather in his harvest."***

So the Son of Man, harvesting the earth, coming on a cloud, and Judgment Day are all wrapped up in a nice neat package for us to see. But the timing for the Son of Man to do these things was not in the 1st century; it was also not during the lifetimes of the 12 Disciples, or of Jesus Himself, or even of the 2nd generation of Jewish Apostles like Paul. It would be at an unspecified future time; a time that obviously is even future to us.

The 12 Disciples had only the scantest of education and information from which to try to understand Yeshua's pronouncements. And yet, of what little they did know they had a faith in Him that could only have come from God. So they committed their lives to Christ and later traditions say that several went to their deaths on account that commitment. We of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not know everything about the future anymore than they did; but we can know from the



biblical record who Yeshua is in fine detail and what it means for all who accept Him..... and all who don't.

Let's move on to verse 34. Beginning with that verse, and on until the end of the chapter, there is such an important theme that often gets confused or is missed altogether and so it establishes wrong expectations among Believers. It is that the present age.... meaning our present time... is not, and will not be, a time of peace. There will be no utopian dream realized on earth no matter how hard mankind, or the Church, tries to establish one. Peace comes later; but not now. It occurs when the Millennial Kingdom arrives. The Millennial Kingdom is not a different kingdom from the Kingdom of Heaven; rather it is the final stage of development of the Kingdom of Heaven to its fullest and most complete that it will ever be on this present earth.

For Jesus to say that He brings a sword to inaugurate this Kingdom of Heaven on earth seems a bit strange. A sword is symbolic of division. But He goes even further and states unequivocally that bringing peace to the land (*Eretz Israel*) is not His current mission. I imagine this was sweet news to Simon the Zealot and Judas the *Siqariyim*. They both must have gleefully thought that Yeshua was implying that He was going to lead them in an armed uprising against the Romans. But His next words might have put a damper on those hopes because Christ says that the sword He brings is meant for a division within families. How are we to understand this? Is Jesus declaring war on households?

In 1st century Jewish culture the head of the household, usually the father or grandfather, decided about the form of religious belief the family would hold and practice. The issue for the Jews was not, of course, about which god to worship. Rather it was about which Master (which Rabbi, so to speak) and which synagogue to follow as their religious authority. So while family division over religion no doubt must have happened occasionally, it really wasn't much of a problem in Jewish society. Thus Yeshua has once again startled His 12 with His words. He claims that His presence inaugurates a new dynamic. A household will no longer practice its faith based on the choice of the head. In fact, different members of the household will choose differently on account of Christ. Even more, Yeshua demands that each member **MUST** choose Him on their own... no one can choose for them. It doesn't matter what parents or siblings might decide. I don't think an average gentile Christian today can even imagine the enormity of what Jesus is proposing. But just ask a Jew who has accepted Christ what that meant for them, and many will tell you stories of the high cost that

accompanied it.

Yeshua's words are emotionally charged to be sure; they are also structured for maximum effect. The words are in no way an attack on the family. The jaw dropping bottom line is that each family member is not only responsible to God for his or her own choice, but that allegiance to Yeshua may bring chaos to a formerly cohesive family unit. From here forward, Yeshua declares, no Jewish son can say: but I'm not responsible for whom I place my faith in; my father decides. No Jewish daughter can say: I want to choose Yeshua but my mother told me I can't; so she bears the responsibility, not me.

To emphasize His point, Messiah continues in verse 37 by saying that the highest allegiance of every family member must be to Him and not to the head of the household. In fact, if a person makes allegiance to the head of the household or to their parents the top priority above Christ, then they are not worthy of Him. Let me say this more plainly: such a decision to place anyone or anything above Yeshua disqualifies that person as His disciple. Those of us that are 2 millennia removed from when the 12 Disciples heard this severe instruction think of it in a kind of abstract, spiritualized way that may or may not have some tangible effect on our lives. But the 12 and their families, and those Jews and their families that heard the Good News took it in a physical, tangible way. They would have to practice it and live it out; and almost certainly much family strife could erupt.

Yeshua is clearly drawing upon Micah 7, which was associated with the End Times and Judgment Day even among the common Jews of Christ's day, as it should be.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Micah 7:5-6** <sup>5</sup> *Don't trust in your neighbor; don't put confidence in a close friend; shut the gates of your mouth even from [your wife], lying there with you in bed.* <sup>6</sup> *For a son insults his father, a daughter rises against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- a person's enemies are the members of his own household.*

Little brings long-term heartbreak to any person than marital splits and family strife. In the era when it was the norm that 3, even 4, generations of a family would live in the same household, the pain of family conflict was all the more severe. So Jesus's message is not a welcome prediction; it says that before the messianic age of peace finally arrives, every one will pass through some type of affliction..... and all the more so when one decides to follow Him. Even so, Christ



makes it clear that following Him is more important than marital or family harmony.

The message of the next 2 verses, 38 and 39, is the requirement of self-denial.... to the point of death.... in order to follow Christ. While perhaps some red lights might go off in us because of Matthew putting the mention of the Cross into Christ's mouth this early in His ministry, the reality is that crucifixion in His time was a nearly daily event. Because Romans were exempt from crucifixion, it was applied almost exclusively to Jews ...thousands of them.... in the Holy Land. Crucifixions were very public; they were always done on hilltops and along the most traveled roadways so that the most people would see them. It was intended to act as a deterrent against disobeying the laws of Rome or inciting rebellion. There is no getting around a hint at martyrdom. Yet I think this really has more to do with an all-in type of commitment to Christ and therefore is much less about our death than it is about prioritizing our lives around an unequivocal trust in Him. That is, the use of the word "cross" in His statement is not about an expectation of dying for the cause. Rather it is symbolic of a complete alteration of our lives to reflect our new-found faith.

Verses 40 - 42 provide me an opportunity to explain my regular use of calling Jesus an agent of God (which I know from emails bothers some of you). Notice how Christ uses a few different examples of the concept of agency in His instructions. He begins by saying that as the 12 Disciples go along their missionary journeys, those who offer them hospitality are doing it as though they were offering it to Him. But, He also reveals that He Himself was sent on behalf of someone higher than Himself. The implication from His earlier words is of His close personal association with The Father, so clearly He is stating that when He is received, it is as though the person is receiving The Father.

Next Christ uses the example of one who receives a prophet as obtaining the same reward a prophet receives. And anyone receiving a **Tzadik** (a Holy Man) will receive the same reward the Holy Man gets. Finally, if one of Yeshua's disciples cares for a "little one" (a child), then his reward will not be lost.

All of these illustrations are based on the concept of agency; a representative (an agent) is to be treated as the one whom he represents. An agent is the extension of the power and authority of the one who sent him. The agent is NOT the same as the one that sent him; but he wields the legal authority (within some preset boundaries) of the one who sent him. It is within that understanding that

we must view one of the most debated sayings attributed to Christ:

<sup>CJB</sup> **John 14:9** *Yeshua replied to him, "Have I been with you so long without your knowing me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

"Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father". This appears in no other Gospel than John's. Sadly, with disregard for context, it is commonly said in Christianity that the meaning of this is that Jesus is essentially (and mysteriously) a sort of spiritual clone of The Father. Or He has become the replacement of The Father for a new age. Therefore in a diagram of the Trinity The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit are all illustrated as co-equals because they are essentially all the same. I say in the strongest possible way; this is not biblical and therefore it is not true. This mindset was created as a doctrine sometime in the late 2nd century or later (because I can find no evidence of it existing before then) in order for the gentile controlled Church to separate themselves as far as possible from the Jews and from Yehoveh, God The Father, the God of the Jews. It was designed to declare that Jesus Christ is the new god for the New Testament Christians. Yet, Christ is not claiming in John 14:9 to **BE** The Father, but rather He is once again pointing to the concept of agency. He is the Father's agent who has been given divine authority to exert and extend God The Father's power to earth and its creatures on His behalf.

With that understanding, then the final 3 verses of Matthew 10 now have their intended context. We see how Christ has made agents of the 12 Disciples to wield the same power.... but not to hold the same position or same status... that He was given by The Father, as an agent of The Father. This expresses a well-known and accepted principle within 1st century and later Judaism call **shaliah**. A **shaliah** is an emissary, an agent, who is legally empowered to act on behalf of the one he is representing. The Greek word **apostolos** (which become apostle in English) embodies the same idea because the concept of agency was nearly universal in the world's many 1st century cultures.... and still is. Earlier in chapter 10, verses 1 and 8 specifically have Yeshua granting the powers of healing, exorcising demons, cleansing the unclean, and even resurrecting the dead to the 12. But I doubt that any Christian theologian would suggest that this makes the 12 Disciples 12 mini-me's. The 12 Disciples have not become 12 Yeshuas just because they have been granted the power to do things He did; but they are His 12 agents. The ICC Commentary on this section of Matthew 10 offers this: **"...behind the ever-changing preachers of the Gospel, there stands the**

***Son of God himself; and behind him God the Father".***

Let's move on to Matthew chapter 11.

### **READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 11 all**

The first 19 verses of chapter 11 revolve around John the Baptist. We find three subsections that each begin with a question. The first begins in verse 2 and the question is: ***"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for someone else?"*** The second question begins in verse 7: ***"What did you go out to the desert to see? Reeds swaying in the breeze?"*** And the third question comes from verse 16: ***"Oh, what can I compare this generation with?"***

The first verse has Yeshua going His separate way from the Disciples. He was done teaching them for now; I can only imagine that their heads were swimming trying to absorb not just what they heard but also to comprehend what it meant. Although the CJB has it that Yeshua went on to "preach in towns nearby", what it really literally says is that He went on to preach in ***their*** towns. Since the subject is the 12 Disciples, this must mean that Christ not only remained in the Galilee, but that He literally visited the hometowns where the 12 Disciples' families would have resided.

Why did Yeshua suddenly disengage from the 12? I don't think it is mysterious. I see the Early Church Father Chrysostom as getting it right. In his homily on the Gospel of Matthew, he says:

***After Jesus commissioned the apostles, he proceeded to separate Himself from them, to give them room and opportunity to do what he had called them to do. For while He was present with them and healing others, no one would be inclined to approach them.***

Any good leader understands that after he has trained up a person (a disciple), if he wants that person to grow and mature he's got to kick him out of the nest, and let him or her stand on their own. The reality is that whenever that leader is present.... especially one as charismatic and widely known as Yeshua... along with the individual he has trained, people will naturally bypass the initiate and gravitate to the leader. That is not good for the development of that person, and in the longer run it inhibits the spreading of a movement or an organization.

As the 12 Disciples were now deep into their own missionary work, having been sent out in pairs, and as Yeshua was intentionally going it alone for the moment as He visited towns in the Galilee region, John the Baptist suddenly re-enters the scene. However John is not present, he is in prison (Matthew does not give us the reason at this point). According to Josephus in his notable work Antiquities, John the Baptist was being held at Herod Antipas's hilltop fortress at Machaerus. This is not located in modern day Israel, but rather is in Jordanian territory, around 15 miles on the east side of the Jordan River. According to Josephus it was here that the Baptist was finally executed. Mark 6 and Matthew 14 both deal with his execution, and they say that it was a vengeful act by Antipas's wife, Herodias, because John (out of some unknown motivation) decided to publicly condemn their marriage. He was beheaded. However Josephus says that Antipas's real motivation was political; he feared John and his flock would incite Jews against him. I go with that; it makes far more sense because kings were always on the look out for people with a following who could foment a threat to the throne.

John instinctively knew he was never going to leave that jail alive. As he languished there, realizing that his days were numbered, pondering about who he was and what his life's legacy might be, he became troubled. He sent 2 of his own disciples to find Yeshua and to give Him a message. The message is one that has vexed...even dismayed... many Believers, including Bible scholars, for centuries. The message the 2 disciples are to present to Christ and then come back to John with a response (hopefully before he is executed), is in the form of a question: **"Are you the one that is to come, or are we to look for another?"** Such a question could only come from the agony of doubt.

The fallout of that question is what we'll discuss the next time we meet.