



FOR *OR* AGAINST

NO MIDDLE GROUND

Matthew 11-12

1	Doubting John	Matthew 11:1-19	Feb 7-13
2	The gentle revealer	Matthew 11:20-30	Feb 14-20
3	Only by the master's generosity	Matthew 12:1-14	Feb 21-27
4	Behold my servant	Matthew 12:15-21	Feb 28-6
5	More than words	Matthew 12:22-37	Mar 7-13
6	Stick with the family	Matthew 12:38-50	Mar 14-20

Opposition at every angle

What has happened so far in Matthew?

The gospel begins with an impressive genealogy showing us that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of David, God's chosen forever King, the Christ. From that point on Matthew attempts to justify that claim by showing us key parts of the life and ministry of King Jesus.

Matthew tells us Jesus was born in Bethlehem near Jerusalem (down south), but due to a threat from Jerusalem's ruler his parents took him north to the region of Galilee where he lived in a town called Nazareth (Matthew 2:22-23). When it came time for him to begin his ministry he went back down south to Bethany beyond the Jordan to be baptized by John (Matthew 3:13; John 1:28). After the baptism he was tempted in the desert (along the west bank of the Jordan river) for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:1) before returning to Galilee and beginning his preaching/miracle ministry (Matthew 4:12). It is in this area (Galilee) Jesus called his first disciples (Matthew 4:18-22), gave the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29), and went healing and performing significant miracles (Matthew 8:1-9:38). He then sent his 12 disciples from Galilee to go do as he had done among the 'lost sheep of Israel' in Galilee and beyond (Matthew 10:1-42).

Jesus was driven into exile in the north by Herod, and since his baptism by John the Baptist the bulk of his ministry has been in the north in and around Galilee trying to gather people into the kingdom of heaven starting with the lost sheep of Israel (spoiler alert: eventually Jesus did make his way back down south in Matthew's gospel to Jerusalem (Matthew 16:21). In Jerusalem he reclaimed his rightful status from Herod, being crowned as the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37) and King of all (Matthew 28:18)).

Beginning with his baptism by John (although his Kingdom was advancing through his teachings and miracles) even in the north in Galilee he began to face strong opposition. This opposition seemed to come from so many angles no matter what he said or did. John the Baptist experienced this opposition too – he was possibly in prison from the time he baptized Jesus up until where we are here in Matthew 11 – the entirety of Jesus' Galilean ministry! The opposition to Jesus as he advanced the Kingdom grew and grew through the remainder of Matthew's gospel.

The opposition to the advancing of Jesus's Kingdom continues to this very day. If you have put your faith in Jesus you will face opposition from many angles. But hopefully what we will learn as we look at Matthew 11 and 12 is that, despite the opposition, if we come to Jesus we also receive refuge and rest (Matthew 11:28-30) and we will be welcomed into the eternal family of the King (Matthew 12:48-50). It will be hard to hold on to Jesus, there will be a lot against us, but it will be entirely worth it.

If you are feeling the weight of opposition bearing down on you as you try to live for Jesus today, hopefully these studies will help point you to the King who came to give you rest.



Kick off: Why do you think many people dismiss the idea of hell?

Read Matthew 11:1-6

1. Think back to the start of Matthew's gospel. What reason does Matthew give us for Jesus being in Galilee in the first place (see Matthew 2:19-23)?
2. In verse 1 we learn that Jesus went on to 'teach and preach'. Look back to Matthew 4:17 and find out what Jesus was preaching and teaching about.
3. John (the Baptist) was expecting big things from Jesus. Read Matthew 3:11-12 and explain what John was expecting from the coming of the Messiah.
4. John was in prison we are told in v 2 when he heard about the deeds of the Christ/Messiah. Skim over chapters 8 and 9 (just looking at the headings will reveal a fair bit). How have the deeds of Jesus (and John's present situation) contrasted to what John the Baptist was expecting of the Messiah?
5. What has Jesus's ministry lead John to wonder about Jesus?
6. In the book of Isaiah chapter 35:5-6 and chapter 61:1, Isaiah talks about a future time when the Lord himself will come to his people Israel and the eyes of the blind will be opened, the lame will leap, the deaf will hear and good news will be preached to the poor. How is Jesus responding to John's doubt?
7. What is Jesus telling John and his listeners in verse 6?
8. Have you ever had doubts about Jesus? Share them with the group. How does Jesus's interaction with John here model a healthy way to deal with our doubts?

Read Matthew 11:7-15

9. Having responded to John's questions, Jesus now turns to the crowd. He reminds them in verses 8 to 10 that they all went out to see John in the wilderness because they believed he was a prophet. But here, he explains to them that John is the greatest there has been (see v 11). What is it, according to verse 10 (and all of Malachi chapter 3:1 and 4:5), that makes John such a great prophet?

10. In defending John's authority before the people, who else's authority is Jesus defending?

My preference for the translation of verse 12 is the one put forward in the NIV foot note: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been trying to take hold of it". In the original language the verse is difficult to understand. After working through my old college Greek grammar book I'm convinced by D.A. Carson's explanation of the translation (see the Expositor's Bible Commentary volume 8). Verse 12 is Jesus explaining to the crowds the reason for John's situation. The kingdom of heaven has been forcing its way into this fallen world ever since John's ministry of pointing to Jesus began – chapters 8 and 9 show a litany of ways the Kingdom is breaking in (casting out demons, healing, teaching other miracles). But its breaking in is coupled with opposition. That's why John is in prison – it's not because he's not the Elijah who was to come – it's because violent opposition faces those who want to advance the Kingdom of heaven. If even John himself doubted Jesus was the one, how much more will the enemies of Jesus – the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, those in positions of power who feel threatened by him, those expecting him to be a military ruler, Satan himself, how much more will they intentionally work to undermine the work of Jesus. Jesus is making it clear, John is definitely the one Malachi called the 'Elijah' who would precede the Lord's coming, and Jesus is definitely the Lord. They just had to believe it.

11. How have you seen the Kingdom of heaven advancing in the world today?

12. How have you seen opposition from the world to the teaching, miracles and person of Jesus?

13. How have you experienced opposition to the Kingdom of heaven in your life?

Read Matthew 11:16-19

14. Why was 'this generation' cynical of John? Why were they cynical of Jesus?

The statement, 'But wisdom is proved right by her deeds' in verse 19 is a bit cryptic. What Jesus is saying is, God's wisdom is proved right by those who live according to it. While the people see a demon possessed man and a drunkard in Jesus and John, what they're actually seeing is two men who live according to God's wisdom. John and Jesus are living out God's word. The crowds should be seeing two godly men who Jesus says are at the center of God's salvation plan. But, sadly... even though they're seeing it... they can't see it. Often when opposition mounts against Christianity, even the followers start to wonder whether or not they're being conned, or naïvely believing Christianity. As the opponents challenge Jesus claims, the crowds start to wonder if they're actually true. As opponents of Jesus speak out more and more in our world today, the same can happen for many in the church.

15. As opposition against Jesus continues to this very day in our world, it is easy to listen to the voice of opposition and to turn our doubts about Jesus into cynicism, and to turn cynicism into unbelief. What can we do to ensure that we don't just let the voice of the opposition win us over? How like John, can we seek assurance in the face of doubt from God himself? Give some practical examples of how Christians can work on their doubts (Philippians 2:12 and 2 Peter 1:10 implore us to make our calling and election sure—we need to deal with our doubts!).

Pray

Kick off: Where/when did you first hear about Jesus?

Read Matthew 11:20-24

1. Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were in Galilee, whereas Tyre and Sidon were in Phoenicia (and regularly denounced by the Old Testament prophets for idolatry). Throughout the Bible Sodom was known for wickedness. What advantage does Jesus say Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum have over Tyre, Sidon and Sodom?
2. What will be the result for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum on judgement day because of their privileged position?
3. Those of us who have grown up in Australia (the same could be said for other countries) have had religion in our schools and significant Christian influence in our society. Of what eternal value will that be for us?

Read Matthew 11:25-26

4. How could we possibly justify God not revealing the message about Jesus to everyone?
5. Clearly Jesus is attributing the acceptance or lack of acceptance of his message to the hiding and revealing of his message by his Father. This means we don't cleverly work out the message of salvation, God alone reveals it to us. At the same time, Jesus clearly holds 'this generation' (v 16) and these cities (v 20 to 24) accountable for not hearing and repenting. In this section of scripture we see the twin claims of the Bible on how salvation works: 1. God is sovereign/in control of who is and isn't saved; 2. Humans are entirely accountable for whether or not they receive the message and turn to God. When we talk about God 'choosing some and not others' we have to ensure that we also talk about the clear responsibility the Bible says we have to respond to the message. It is an error (and a common one) to hold up one of these truths and not the other. What might be some practical consequences of saying:
 - Only God has a role to play in salvation?
 - Only humans have a role to play in salvation?
6. Explain in your own words the difference between 'the wise and learned' and 'the little children'.
7. Why do you think the message is hidden from 'the wise and learned' and revealed to 'the little children'?
8. How does Jesus feel about his Father's revealing and concealing?

Read Matthew 11:27

9. The 'all things' that have been entrusted to Jesus by his Father, are primarily 'all divine knowledge'. The Father may choose to conceal and reveal knowledge to his creatures, but he has entrusted Jesus with all divine knowledge. The relationship between the Father and the Son is perfectly intimate in a way that is beyond our comprehension – there is a sphere of intimacy and knowledge that exists between them that our finite sinful minds cannot fathom. How does Jesus say it is possible for anyone to gain access to knowledge of the Father?

10. In verse 25 Jesus praised his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, for revealing and concealing. Here in verse 27, Jesus says he has the same ability to reveal or not. What is Jesus saying about his own authority here?

11. Last week we saw that there has always been much opposition to Jesus, even today. How could these words of Jesus give us confidence to press on with living for him when so many of our friends and family think it is a waste of time?

Read Matthew 11:28-30

12. Jesus has just told us the Father has concealed true knowledge of him from 'the wise and learned'. He has also just told us he himself has the authority to 'reveal and conceal'. Who does Jesus invite into his rest here?

13. Despite Jesus's divine authority, what does Jesus tell the weary and burdened he is like?

14. A yoke was a piece of equipment that bound oxen together to enable them to share the load. The pharisees/religious rulers were charged by Jesus with putting heavy loads on people's shoulders (Matthew 23:4). This was probably a reference to all of their traditions and regulations. What can people expect by comparison if they yoke themselves to Jesus?

15. Despite the 'woes' in this passage, and the emphatic statements about Jesus and his Father's authority in salvation, Jesus wants to leave those weary and burdened in the crowd with the invitation to come to him, for he is gentle and humble in heart, and find rest for themselves. Have you accepted the invitation of the gentle revealer to find rest in him? How can you remind yourself what Jesus is like and grow your sense of rest in him this week?

16. Who do you know that is weary and burdened? How can you help them to hear the invitation of Jesus to find rest in him?

Pray

Kick off: Name some rules children are expected to keep at home.

Read Matthew 12:1-2

1. In chapter 11 Jesus lamented the cynicism/opposition of this generation toward his message (11:16-19). He specifically mentioned that the 'wise and learned' (11:25) were blinded to the knowledge of him. How do we see the cynicism/opposition to Jesus played out here?

Read Matthew 12:3-4

2. The incident Jesus is referring to here with David is from 1 Samuel 21:1-9. If you have time to read that it will help a little with understanding what Jesus is talking about. But the important thing about the example Jesus uses is the context in 1 Samuel. David and his disciples are eating the consecrated bread in the tabernacle at Nob because they are famished. They are famished because they have been on the run for their lives from king Saul. The Lord has chosen David to be his King, but he has not yet been anointed as King over Israel. Saul knows David has been chosen by God and so he is vehemently opposing David to try and kill him before he is anointed as King. This incident is one of many where God's chosen King's life is put at risk. What may be some of the reasons Jesus cited this example to respond to the Pharisees' accusation?

Read Matthew 12:5-8

3. The priests do work on the Sabbath in the temple, yet they are innocent of law-breaking. They have to work in order to mediate between the people and the presence of LORD in the temple. The Pharisees would defend the righteousness of David and also the priesthood because they sort of understand the role God's King and God's priests play in God's plan for his people. What does Jesus want them to understand about him in verse 6?
4. Read all of Hosea 6:6. This is a prophecy against Israel. From this verse, how would you explain the problem with Israel?
5. How does this quote from Hosea 6:6 help us to understand the problem with the Pharisees in their exchanges with Jesus?
6. When the Pharisees condemned Jesus's disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, he said in verse 7 that they were condemning the innocent. Why does Jesus say his disciples are innocent?

7. The Sabbath was meant to be a day of 'rest' for the people of God. Ironically, the Pharisees had turned it into a day of wearisome attention to their strict Sabbath rules and regulations (not picking grain was one of 39 separate rules the Jews had around the Sabbath). Instead of finding rest on the Sabbath people were weary and burdened in their efforts to meet the Pharisaic standards. If not the Sabbath, where could people turn to find rest for themselves?

8. How do we see Jesus giving rest to those who have come to him in this passage?

9. If we come to Jesus, acknowledging that he is God's chosen King, he gives us the rest our souls need. He intercedes with his Father on our behalf, he protects us from accusation, and he takes away the guilt that weighs us down for falling short of God's perfect standard – he brings us into the presence of God. How can we remind ourselves that true rest and peace with God comes from trusting in Jesus and not in strict adherence to traditions and rules?

10. How can we ensure that we communicate to our children and to other people in society that rest for their souls is only found in coming to Jesus and not in strict adherence to traditions and rules?

Read Matthew 12:9-14

11. What does Jesus see that the Pharisees don't see?

12. What claims are the Pharisees hearing from Jesus in 12:1-14 that would make them want to kill him?

13. What is Jesus in the process of doing for all those who come to him needing to be restored?

14. How can we ensure that the picture of Jesus we are giving to the world is of the one who came to give rest to the weary and burdened, and not one who is all about rules and traditions?

Pray

4

Behold, my servant

Kick off: Describe your character when you are involved in an argument.

Read Matthew 12:15-16

1. Looking back to last week, what is it that Jesus was aware of?
2. Jesus's response to the Pharisees' death threat in verse 14 is to withdraw and get on with healing the sick in verses 15-16. Remember John the Baptist's question about Jesus from his prison cell in 11:3, "Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?". John wondered why Jesus hadn't brought the judgment associated with God's Messiah. What would John think of Jesus's response to the death threat here?
3. It seems in verse 15 that Jesus 'had the numbers' to lead a revolution against the Pharisees. Why do you think he chose not to do this (Matthew 26:50-56 may help with your answer)?
4. In the gospels Jesus regularly warns those that he has helped not to tell others about him. But then, in Matthew 28:18-20 he commands his disciples to go and tell others about him. What does Jesus want his disciples to see/understand before they talk to others about him?
5. What can Christians learn from the way Jesus responds to his opposition in this section?

Read Matthew 12:17-21

6. It may look like Jesus has been intimidated by his opposition and is now on the run, but what does verse 17 give for what is happening?
7. This quote from Isaiah 42:1-4 has been alluded to earlier in Matthew's gospel. In Matthew 3:17 at Jesus's baptism as the Spirit descends upon Jesus, the voice from heaven declares 'This is my Son (Greek – hwee-os), whom I love, with him I am well pleased'. The emphasis at the beginning of Jesus's ministry seemed to be on his status as the

Son of God, the chosen one of God, the new Israel and the Davidic King. As opposition to Jesus continues to mount against Jesus, Matthew needs to clarify something about Jesus's identity. He is not just God's Son, he is God's servant (Greek pa-is). Isaiah gives an in depth description of what the servant will do for the people of God in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and summarise the work the servant of God will do for his people, and the way he will be perceived.

8. How will Jesus bring/proclaim justice to the nations according to Isaiah?

9. What will be the fundamental nature of Jesus's character as he undertakes this work of bringing justice and giving hope?

10. How do we see Jesus 'bring justice through to victory' in Matthew's gospel? And, how does this help us to answer question 4 above?

11. Consider Jesus's servant hearted and humble character. In what areas of your life do you struggle most to follow Jesus's example?

12. The heart of the servant's humility lay in the fact that he trusted completely in the one he was serving. Discuss how a lack of humility, a lack of willingness to lay down our life, could reflect that we do not really trust the Lord.

13. What do we learn from this passage about how we ought to face those who oppose us?

Pray

Kick off: What kinds of things do non-Christian people say about Jesus?

Read Matthew 12:22-24

1. Jesus's healing of this man leaves the crowds wondering who Jesus is, but the Pharisees are certain of who Jesus is (it is unclear where the title 'Beelzebul' came from. It is clear that it is a title given to Satan/the prince of demons in the New Testament. The 'Son of David' on the other hand is title the people used for the Messiah/God's promised King). Explain how and why their opinions of Jesus differ.

Read Matthew 12:25-28

2. Jesus says the accusation made by the Pharisees makes no sense. What is wrong with their accusation according to Jesus?
3. Rather than a servant of Satan doing Satan's work, what does Jesus say is happening with this driving out of demons/healing?
4. Somebody once asked me, 'What if Jesus is Satan and he came to lead us away from God?'. Does this passage help us to answer that question? Explain your answer.

Read Matthew 12:29

5. We learnt in Matthew 11:12 that since the days of John the Baptist the kingdom of God has been forcefully advancing in the world. How does the idea that the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing help us to understand Jesus's words here in verse 29 and the driving out of demons by Jesus?
6. In this section we are seeing Jesus clearly engage with a different kind of opposition. Who is the primary opponent in view here?

Read Matthew 12:30-32

7. What does Jesus say to those who are sitting on the fence regarding their opinion of him?

8. Jesus said not just being 'with' him, but doing his work (gathering people into the kingdom with him) is essential. Would you say you are gathering with Jesus? Or scattering?

9. 'Blasphemy' is extreme slander, or speaking against. What will be forgiven? What won't be forgiven?

10. Blasphemy against the Spirit is perceiving the truth yet stubbornly rejecting it. So in this passage for example, Jesus claims to have driven out the demons by the Spirit of God. If the Pharisees have seen Jesus drive out the demon and understand that it must be the work of the Spirit, but out of spite, jealousy or arrogance ascribe it to Satan, they are committing the unforgivable sin. They see the truth of the Spirit's work testifying to the identity of Christ, but they refuse to acknowledge it and instead attribute its work to Satan. There can be no help for them if they continue in their rejection of Jesus. If they reject the Saviour how can they be saved? Often people will understand the gospel and its blessings for a long time, only to reject it later on for various reasons. But, they are rejecting the Spirit and its testimony by denying the Lordship of Christ. Hebrews 3:14 says 'We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first'. If we continue in the gospel we are not blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. If you are continuing to accept the Spirit's testimony about the identity of Christ, you are not blaspheming against the Spirit. It was perhaps jealousy or pride that lead the Pharisees to reject the testimony of the Spirit – what things in your life or in the world can you see that might cause you to reject the truth about Jesus as it has been revealed by the Spirit?

Read Matthew 12:33-37

11. Jesus knows that the hearts of the Pharisees are evil because their mouths speak evil. It is not that their words have reshaped their hearts, but out of the overflow of their evil hearts come their evil words. What are the evil/empty words the Pharisees been using?

12. What words that the Pharisees have spoken will leave them condemned?

13. Where do our hearts need to go in order to ensure that good words overflow from our mouths (Romans 10:9 is possibly influenced by this teaching)?

14. Words that oppose Jesus have consequences, as do words that endorse him. What do your words reveal about your heart and about your future on the day of judgment?

Pray

Kick off: Apart from dna, share an attribute that you think clearly shows your connection to your family?

Read Matthew 12:38-42

1. The religious rulers had already seen Jesus perform miracles and attributed his work to Satan. Here they ask him for a sign. They're asking for him to do something specific that they request in order to prove his authority is his authority – not just him doing Satan's bidding. Do you think Jesus performing a sign on request for the religious rulers would really change their opinion of him? Why/why not?

2. The authenticity of Jonah's preaching was attested to by the miracle of him coming in and out of the belly of the fish (three days and three nights in Jewish tradition can mean 'three days' or it can mean a combination of any part of three separate days). What does Jesus say will attest to the authenticity of his preaching? What is he talking about (see Matthew 28:1-7)?

3. What will be the consequences of this generation's rejection of Jesus?

4. Jonah was a prophet of God and Solomon was the son of David. In what sense is Jesus greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon and therefore more worthy of being listened to?

5. If Jesus appeared and performed a sign on demand today, do you think people would turn to him and change their lives? Why/why not?

6. How can we help people to see that Jesus really is worth listening to?

Read Matthew 12:43-45

7. Jesus has been driving out demons in this chapter (12:22) as he seeks to advance the Kingdom of heaven in the world. He has

also been warning people that if they are not with him they are against him (12:30). In that immediate context Jesus tells this parable—it's not sufficient to have our demons driven out and kick back and relax, we still need to fill the house with Christ. What will be the outcome for those who don't necessarily reject, but also don't receive Jesus and his words?

8. We know there are both satanists and atheists in our world. But Jesus words here heap everyone who doesn't follow him into the same situation – they're empty houses that will be occupied and left in a terrible final condition. Is this how you perceive of people who don't follow Jesus?

9. What are the consequences of seeing the true condition of those who don't follow Jesus in terms of how we act toward them, what we speak to them about, and how we pray for them?

Read Matthew 12:46-50

10. At first glance this passage can seem as though Jesus is disowning his family. That is not the case. What he is doing is letting people know how they can ensure they are part of his eternal Kingdom 'family'. What does Jesus say is the essential qualifier for belonging to Jesus's Kingdom family (see John 6:29)?

11. It is easy to join the rest of the world (this generation) and reject Jesus's authority, but it is very clear that if we want to be part of his eternal Kingdom we need to stand firm in the face of opposition and obey the will of God. Jesus could stand firm because he was confident that the Lord would vindicate him on the third day at the resurrection. How can we be confident as we face opposition for standing firm with Christ today? Try to give some practical answers.

Pray