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Matthew 11:25 - 11:27



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this exegesis of Matthew 11:25-27, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of humility in seeking God's truth. He highlights the danger of forming opinions based on intellect and reputation rather than biblical evidence. According to Gregg, those who possess a childlike openness and teachability are more likely to accept Christ as their Savior, as it is only through Him that we may truly know the Father. Ultimately, Gregg concludes that it is God's will that determines whether or not people will come to know Him.

Transcript

Today we're going to take those last few verses of Matthew chapter 11. And Jesus, in the previous portions before those that we're going to take today, this chapter, had been speaking rather critically of his own generation. And he means, of course, his countrymen, the Jewish people of his time, because, as he began to say it initially, they had had the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus himself.

Both of them very remarkable ministries. John, living a very unusual life, having a tremendous message, arresting the attention of almost everybody in Israel. John became a household word, but his message of repentance did not necessarily take hold in a great many of the Jewish people.

And then comes Jesus, and he too has a remarkable message. The kingdom of God is at hand, and he demonstrates it by tremendous signs and wonders. Casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, doing things like that.

Now these people who saw all of this happening should have been signally impressed and should have been very responsive. Jesus, in fact, had said that had some of the Gentile cities outside of Israel had the opportunity to see such things, they would have repented. He said that about Tyre and Sidon.

He said that even about Sodom and Gomorrah, that if they had seen these things, they would have repented. But the thing that Jesus is concerned about is that they didn't repent. And they have no excuse for it, and therefore he rebuked them soundly.

And he's still in the same vein when we pick up his words at Matthew 11 and verse 25, where it says, At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. Then he said, All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father.

Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Now, when Jesus, in verse 25, said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. He was no doubt naturally brought to this thought by what he had just said earlier.

That here we had these Jews in these cities who knew God, or I shouldn't say they knew God personally, because that's his complaint, they didn't, but they knew God's word, they knew the law, they were acquainted with the things of God, and yet they rejected his message. It was ignored by them, they just didn't have the capacity to respond to it for some reason. And yet there were people outside of Israel who knew very little.

The people of Tyre and Sidon, the people of Sodom even. He said they would have received it. Now, this reflected on the fact that the people who seemed to know the most and had the greatest opportunity and were the most learned in the things of the Old Testament were not necessarily the ones who were getting on board with his movement.

The truth of his movement was not revealed to them. He says that God had hidden these things from the wise and the prudent. But the people who knew very little, the babes, as he puts it, you've revealed them to babes, were the ones who were receiving.

Now, this might be because, you know, the intellectuals, the scholars of Israel had, as intellectuals must invariably do, had formed opinions about things, they had thought through a lot of issues and they had reached their conclusions, and they had settled on them. And Jesus came along challenging all their conclusions. Now, it's much easier for somebody who's not a scholar and has never gone out and propounded certain ideas to change their mind publicly.

You know, if I had never taught on any controversial point and taken a strong stand upon it, it would not be hard for me to change my opinion if someone provided convincing reasons for me to do so. But suppose I had built my whole ministry supporting some kind of a proposition that I thought was biblical, and I had found all kinds of support scriptures for it, and I had developed arguments for it, and I had convinced people of it, and I was

sort of enjoying my ability to convince people of this. I mean, you know, knowledge puffs up, scholarship tends to accompany a degree of egotism and pride.

And suppose I had become somewhat proud of my ability to defend this particular view that I had become notable for, and then someone began to show me convincing biblical evidence that I was wrong and that another view was better. What is my reaction going to be? Well, of course, what my reaction should be is that I should humble myself and say, wow, I've been wrong all this time, and repent of teaching the wrong thing and embrace the truth. That's what everyone should do.

But if I have been a recognized expert, if I have built a reputation either among my peers or maybe in the eyes of the general public as one who knows spiritual things, for me to come out and say, oh, all those things I said, all those convincing arguments I gave, all those proof texts I used, I misused them. They were wrong. I misunderstood everything.

I was mistaken. This was not right. I mean, that would take eating a lot of humble pie, wouldn't it? And yet, of course, I should be prepared to do that.

Eating humble pie is what people will do if they're humble. And by the way, God calls us to be humble. But scholarship, at least those who are professional scholars, often are not the humbler sort.

And that's because knowledge, as Paul said, does tend to puff up. Knowledge tends to make people feel arrogant. If they know things that other people don't know.

And especially if they circulate within a community of scholars. There's a certain camaraderie, a certain acceptance, there's a certain eliteness in that fellowship that makes one not really eager to come out and say, oh, I was totally off the mark. I was really wrong.

Boy, was that stupid of me. I mean, if you privately hold an opinion, but no one views you as an expert. No one's ever asked your opinion.

You've never stated it, it may be. And then someone shows you that that opinion is not correct. It doesn't take an awful lot of humility to change.

As long as you can see that the new idea presented to you is true and the evidence is for it. You can change without much of a blow to your pride. But if you're a scholar, you've got a great deal invested.

I mean, I've sometimes thought, I don't want to name names, but there are certain men in ministry who built their whole ministries on supporting a particular view, let us say, of Bible prophecy. You know, there's these guys who have radio shows, some of them have written books that have sold millions of copies. And their whole area of expertise that's made them famous is Bible prophecy.

Well, many people don't realize that there's a lot of views out there of Bible prophecy. And not all of them agree with these men who've become famous for teaching Bible prophecy. As a matter of fact, in my opinion, some of the men who teach Bible prophecy and have made it the whole focus of their ministry and career are holding to a view of Bible prophecy that doesn't have as much support scripturally as some other views do.

But it's hard to imagine them changing. I mean, some of these guys have been on TV for 30 years promoting their view. It's the only thing they teach about.

And if somebody would persuade them biblically that a different view of prophecy, entirely contrary to theirs, was actually the view that the Bible teaches, well, how difficult it would be for them. I'm not saying they couldn't turn around and change their mind and admit they were wrong, but it would be mighty hard because they are men of a reputation of expertise. And when someone has a reputation for expertise, it often goes to his head and it makes him less teachable.

Now, the reason I'm saying all of this is because Jesus was reflecting on that very phenomenon among the scholars of Israel. He says that God hid these things from the wise and the scholarly, and he has revealed them to babes. What I think he means is that the kingdom of God and its mysteries came in a manner differently than the Jewish scholars thought.

The rabbis had their ideas of what the Messiah would do, what he would be like, what he would accomplish, what it would look like when he had been here, and they simply had reached the wrong conclusions. They had misunderstood the scriptures. They had speculated a great deal without light, but they had great confidence in their opinions, and they had taught these things in the synagogue.

So the men who were reputed as experts were wrong. Now, Jesus came along and presented the kingdom of God rightly. He fulfilled the prophets the way the Messiah was supposed to fulfill them, but it was different than the scholars thought.

Now, I believe that people like the apostles, who were fishermen and tax collectors and ordinary peasant types, who had never had any reputation for scholarship or religious expertise, they found it easy to change their opinion. Maybe not real easy, but easier, because their only expertise was in fishing, and therefore whatever religious opinions they had picked up from going to synagogue, they might have liked those opinions, they might have embraced those opinions, but they had never really formed a reputation for their championing of those opinions. And so when Jesus comes along and challenges their presuppositions about the kingdom of God, they're in a position to say, well, maybe I was wrong about that, no big deal.

I mean, maybe it is a big deal, but it doesn't hurt my ego too badly to say, wow, I've learned something new here. And so these unschooled laymen, these babes as Jesus

calls them here, who recognized his messiahship and recognized that the kingdom of God was indeed breaking in, just as he announced, they were the ones who were not typically your scholars. The scholars had more trouble.

Remember Nicodemus? He was one of the noted scholars of Israel, and he came to visit Jesus in John chapter 3, and Jesus was trying to teach him what the essential things of the kingdom of God were, and the man could not receive it, couldn't understand it. Now later on, I believe Nicodemus did become a believer, but he had more difficulties with it. And, you know, scholars sometimes do, and the reason is because scholars think they know, and more so because other people think the scholars know.

Those are two things that can really hinder you from accepting a contrary opinion to that which you're familiar with, that if you already think you know something, and then of course the opinion that you're presented with is different than what you think you know, obviously it's much harder to embrace the new idea, because it goes against what you know or what you think you know. But it's even worse if it's not just you who think you know, but everybody else thinks you know. In other words, you are viewed as an expert, and you are the one who everyone thinks, now this guy knows.

If anyone knows, this guy knows. And then you're presented with something contrary to what you've been teaching or what you believe. Suddenly there's a great deal more ego involved here, because it's not just me admitting I was wrong and admitting this to myself.

I'm going to have to admit this to everybody who thought I was right. And that is much harder to do than many leaders would like to do. I believe that pastors of churches and men who have spoken publicly for God, and those who've taught the Bible or preached, are among those who are the hardest to reach with the truth.

Now, I'm not saying that the pastors don't have truth. I'm sure they do. But none of us has all the truth.

Paul said, we know in part, and we prophesy in part. And the part we don't know is the part where we need to be corrected. The part we don't know is the part that we need to learn.

But once we have become reputed by our congregations or by our audiences or by our readership, as men who know, then, of course, it's much more difficult to change our opinion publicly, because it means that we have to say, well, you thought I knew, and I thought I knew, and I liked the idea that you thought I knew, but guess what? I didn't know. Now I know better. That is a humbling thing, and that is a measure of humility that scholars and public speakers and so forth often do not have.

Some do, but most do not. And I think that is why the leaders of Israel did not accept

Christ largely. They had taught for generations, actually, their ancestors had taught, and they had taught all their lives these opinions about the Messiah and about the kingdom of God.

But when the Messiah came, they found themselves wrong, and therefore they refused to accept Him. And they held on to their opinions rather than eat humble pie and say, okay, we were wrong. Hey, everybody, we were wrong.

This is the way it really is. That kind of humility is not that common in men who are leaders and scholars. And Jesus said, that is why, no doubt, God had hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and only been able to reveal them to babes.

You remember that Jesus once said that in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God, you have to humble yourself like a little child. What does it mean to be humble like a little child? I've had several little children of my own, and I've been around children a great deal, and in some ways I would not describe children as all that humble. A lot of times children seem to have all the flaws of character that adults have, only sometimes they think they know a great deal, and they don't know how audacious and ridiculous it looks for them to act so expert.

Children are not always really humble. But very, very little children typically are teachable. And that is perhaps what Jesus has in mind when he says you need to be humble yourself like a little child.

A child has everything to learn. A little toddler or a child who's just learning to talk even, says one thing more than they say any other thing. Why and what and what is that and why is that and so forth.

And little children are full of questions, because there are things they don't know and they want to learn. They're teachable. And these are the ones that God can reveal things to.

God has revealed these things to babes. Now Jesus wasn't talking about literal babies. He was talking about his disciples.

He was talking about men who had a teachable attitude unlike the scholars and leaders of Israel. Now this is something that Jesus had pleased God to do, because he says you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes even so father for it seemed good in your sight. That is God took pleasure in doing this, hiding things from the scholars and revealing them to the babes.

Why did God like to do that? Well because God resists the proud and he gives grace to the humble. It pleases God to help men discover their own inadequacies. These scholars were proud and God humbled them or intended to humble them, gave them occasion to be humble, let's put it that way, by causing them to miss the point entirely.

And God does not like pride in man. It's simply because pride is uncalled for. Pride is a high self-opinion.

And man simply doesn't deserve to think well of himself. Man is puny. Man is frail.

Man is weak. I realize that man, because he's made in the image of God, has tremendous mental capabilities and has demonstrated that by great technological achievements. But these hardly count for anything when it comes to eternity.

I mean the fact that we can put a man on the moon doesn't mean that we can put a man in heaven. And going to the moon is not anywhere near as important as going to heaven. And unfortunately man focuses on his strengths, like his great scientific advancements, and congratulates himself that he's a great being.

But really what makes a person great is great love of God, and great knowledge of God, and great obedience to God. And man is not typically great at that. Remember what Jeremiah said over in Jeremiah chapter 9 in verse 23.

He said, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the mighty man glory in his might, and let not the rich man glory in his riches, but if anyone wants to glory, let him glory in this, that he understands and knows me, says the Lord. The greatness, the true greatness in a man is that he knows God and is submitted to God, and that he is one of God's people. Man is not good at that.

And the people who have something to boast in, the wise and the prudent who are proud of their wisdom, are not as likely to look for something genuine of value because they think that they have it. And what is really of value is God. Now the babes, those who don't think they have anything, those who know that they don't know much, they are the ones who are more likely to be searching, to be teachable, and to be open to new ideas, to be capable of accepting Christ when they see him.

And that is what Jesus found to be so. This was God's policy. Now in verse 27, Jesus said, All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him.

Now, this piece of, well this paragraph, or this couple of sentences, really seems out of place in the Gospel of Matthew in one sense, because it sounds much more like something from the Gospel of John. In fact, the statement, All things have been delivered to me by my Father, is found in the Gospel of John about four or five different times. And the other statement, Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, is also found a couple of times in the Gospel of John.

Now, many people have said that the Gospel of John presents a Jesus who teaches differently than the Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and yet we

can see that even Matthew acknowledges this style of teaching in Jesus. Jesus was versatile. But the point he makes here is that no one can know God unless Jesus chooses to reveal him.

Now, the fact that it says that no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal him, some have concluded that God's will is the only factor in whether people know God or not, because Jesus is the one whose will it is to reveal him. But Jesus does not say here on what basis he wills to reveal his Father to some and not to others. It is not necessarily an unconditional election that leads Jesus to reveal his Father to some and not to others.

It's entirely possible that certain conditions are part of the picture. For example, could it not be that Jesus reveals his Father and wills to reveal his Father to those who are humble like children? But he does not will to reveal his Father to those who are proud and arrogant and think they know it all. Is it not possible that Jesus wills to reveal his Father to those who will repent of their sins and put their faith in him? But he does not will to reveal his Father to those who won't repent and won't put their faith in him.

The fact that Jesus says no one knows the Father except those whom the Son wills to reveal him does not mean that this willing to reveal is an unconditional thing. It just means that if you do not meet whatever conditions Christ requires, you will not have the revelation of the Father that he is able alone to give. When he goes on and says, come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and learn from me, it's very clear that he does expect something from people.

There are conditions for knowing God. Coming to Christ being one of them. And he wills to reveal his Father to those who do come to him.

We'll take those following verses next time. But as usual, we have run out of time today for our consideration of this passage. So join us again next time and we'll continue our study through this chapter of Matthew.