

## Heeding Wholly

I'll think about it," Darius said.

"What is there to think about?" Andre replied. "God has been so good to you."

Andre and Darius were sitting on the bleachers in the gymnasium following a friendly game of basketball.

Darius's team had won, in large part thanks to him. Half an hour after the game had ended and Darius still only wanted to talk about how good the game was. "Anyway," Darius said, "I could have played last week too, I'm telling you. We didn't have to lose."

But Andre didn't want to talk about the games anymore. Barely three weeks had passed since Darius had been broadsided in his car by a semi-trailer truck. Darius's car flipped over and spun several times, finally landing in a ditch. Emergency responders were shocked that Darius had been able to unbuckle himself and exit the car without help. Even more surprising was the fact that Darius only suffered scrapes and bruises. A few bandages and a few weeks of recovery were all he needed.

"The hand of God protected you in that crash last month," Andre said, looking intently at his friend. "That's gotta be it. I saw the pictures of your car. You shouldn't even be here."

Darius sat quiet for a few moments. "Yeah, I guess so."

"You guess so?" Andre said in shock. "Man, if I didn't already know the Lord, I'd be running to an altar after all the ways God has shown up for you. What is it? Why won't you accept Christ?"

"I don't know," Darius said, unwilling to look up at his friend. "I'm just not ready."

**1. What do you notice in your life that takes your gaze off of Jesus?**

**2. Why are worldly possessions unstable and temporary?**

**3. How does looking to Jesus satisfy our desires?**

LESSON FOCUS: Look to Jesus to find what God desires.

## Resisting God's Messenger

*Matthew 11:7–10 KJV*

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

*Matthew 11:7–10 NIV*

<sup>7</sup> As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John:

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? <sup>8</sup> If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces.

<sup>9</sup> Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

<sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

At the beginning of Matthew 11, John the Baptist, while in prison, sends two of his disciples to Jesus. John instructed them to discover if Jesus was the coming king, or if they should look for another. During John's ministry, many people wondered if John might be the Messiah. He answered them, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). John knew that he wasn't the Messiah, but he was looking to see if Jesus was the Christ.

Some of Jesus' listeners apparently did not expect John to speak so boldly. The people were not prepared for God's messenger to wear camel's hair and a leather belt, or to eat locusts and honey (Matt. 3:4). If they were

looking for someone with political power, they should have looked among royalty rather than gone out to a prophet in the wilderness.

Jesus pointed out that John was not only a prophet. He fulfills the words of Malachi: "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3:1). The Savior came humbly into this world. Likewise, the one who would prepare His way would not be encumbered by great wealth or reputation.

4. *Why were John's disciples there?*
5. *What did some of Jesus' listeners expect from John?*
6. *How was John more than a prophet?*

## Violence against God's Messengers

*Matthew 11:11–15 KJV*

11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

*Matthew 11:11–15 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup> And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. <sup>15</sup> Whoever has ears, let them hear.

No one born of women has been greater than John the Baptist. Apart from Jesus, no one has been born who is

due more respect than John. Nevertheless, Jesus says, those who have entered the kingdom are greater. But how? At this time, the majority of Jewish people were not convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. John still had many disciples and was well-respected, and even John wasn't sure if Jesus was the Christ. Jesus' comparison emphasizes that His ministry supersedes John's. Jesus' ministry saw the inauguration of God's kingdom.

From the beginning of John's ministry, there was resistance and violence against the kingdom of heaven. Throughout human history, there has always been resistance to God's ways. Even today, in many parts of the world, Christians are persecuted. Thankfully, believers can trust that God is with them, no matter the circumstances.

John fulfilled the promise that Elijah would come (see Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6). After Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples asked about this. Jesus told them that Elijah *had* come. Jesus' enemies had done what they wished to him, and "the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:10–13).

**7.** *John was greatest of what group of people?*

**8.** *Who is greater than John, and why?*

**9.** *What other Old Testament prophet did Jesus declare John to be?*

## Woe to Those Who Reject God's Message

*Matthew 11:20–24 KJV*

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in

*Matthew 11:20–24 NIV*

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed

Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus called out three cities where He had performed many miracles: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. They continued in their sins despite what they had seen. Because of this, He pronounced woes on them. If the same miracles had been done in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (non-Jewish areas), the people in those cities would have repented.

In another context Jesus told His disciples, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). Considering all Jesus had done in the three towns, the people were without excuse for their resistance. Despite the world's resistance to God's ways, when believers look to Jesus and His Word, they can find what He desires of them.

**10.** *Upon whom did Jesus pronounce woes?*

**11.** *Why did He pronounce those woes?*

**12.** *Why might Jesus' rule as king disappoint some people?*

## Standing Strong against Resistance

Throughout history, people have rejected God's prophets, apostles, disciples, and even Jesus. According to Jesus, John was the greatest of God's human messengers. He was the one who prepared the way for the Messiah. People today continue to reject Jesus as Messiah.

In this week's Scripture passage, Jesus compared earthly perspectives with heavenly perspectives. Believers put their faith in Jesus for salvation from God's wrath. They declare their trust that Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are sufficient to reconcile them to God in forgiveness for their sins. In this way, they are born again to enter the kingdom of God. The least of those in the kingdom are greater than people who have only experienced physical birth. As believers follow Jesus, they learn more about God's heavenly perspective. They then share His love and truth with others.

People do not always embrace the truth of their sin. They do not want to be held accountable, and they lash out against those who declare God's truth. Resistance to God and His message sometimes escalates to violence. Some unbelievers will attack God's messengers, in word and in action. No matter how unbelievers treat them, believers are accountable for what they have seen and heard from God. They can look to Jesus for strength to stand in the face of opposition. He will show believers what He has in mind for them, for their role in His kingdom.

**13.** *How can we stand faithfully, as John did, in the face of resistance and opposition?*

**14.** *What does it mean to be born again to enter the kingdom of God?*

**15.** *Why does God hold us accountable for what we know?*

## Set Your Heart and Mind on Jesus

With a partner, discuss practical ways you can put the lesson focus into practice (inspired by Col. 3:1–2).

► *What does it mean to set our hearts on Christ and heavenly things?*

► *How does looking to Jesus help us discover what God desires?*

► *Reflect on your discussion to complete the sentences below to commit to look to Jesus and follow Him this week.*

*I will look to Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will ask what God desires by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will set my heart on Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

*I will set my mind on Jesus by \_\_\_\_\_.*

### KEY VERSE

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. —Matthew 11:20 KJV

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

—Matthew 11:20 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of February 3 through February 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Joshua 1:1–9—Be Strong and Courageous.

**Tue.** Matthew 10:16–31—As Sheep among Wolves.

**Wed.** Matthew 10:32–42—Resistance and Reward.

**Thu.** Psalm 35:1–14—God Is Our Salvation.

**Fri.** Psalm 35:15–28—Rescue Me from My Enemies.

**Sat.** Proverbs 24:8–22—Don't Rejoice when Enemies Fall.

**Sun.** Matthew 11:7–15, 20–24—The Kingdom Presses On