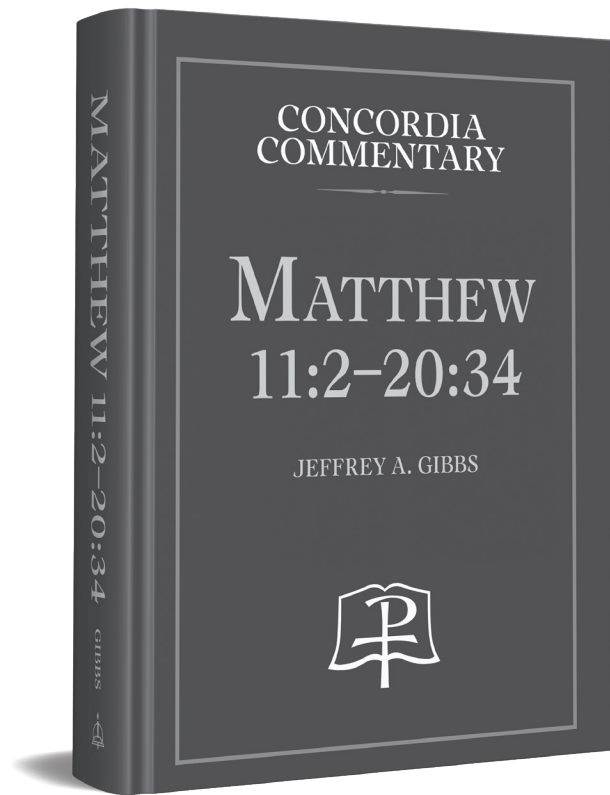




CONCORDIA COMMENTARY
BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Daniel E. Paavola





Copyright © 2026 Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Written by Daniel E. Paavola

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The commentary quotations are from Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 11:2–20:34*, Concordia Commentary © 2010 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Manufactured in the United States

CONTENTS

Participant Guide

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?	v
SESSION 1: WHO IS JESUS? <i>Matthew 11</i>	1
SESSION 2: NOW'S THE TIME TO DO GOOD <i>Matthew 12</i>	15
SESSION 3: SEVEN PICTURES OF GOD'S KINGDOM <i>Matthew 13</i>	27
SESSION 4: FEEDING THE PEOPLE OF GOD WITH ABUNDANCE <i>Matthew 14–15</i>	41
SESSION 5: A DIFFICULT LESSON TO LEARN <i>Matthew 16</i>	57
SESSION 6: LISTEN TO HIM! <i>Matthew 17</i>	69
SESSION 7: WHO WILL BE THE GREATEST? <i>Matthew 18</i>	81
SESSION 8: ARE YOU COMING INTO THE KINGDOM? <i>Matthew 19–20</i>	95

Leader Notes

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?	109
---	-----

Answer Key

SESSION 1: WHO IS JESUS?	111
SESSION 2: NOW'S THE TIME TO DO GOOD	117
SESSION 3: SEVEN PICTURES OF GOD'S KINGDOM	123
SESSION 4: FEEDING THE PEOPLE OF GOD WITH ABUNDANCE.....	129
SESSION 5: A DIFFICULT LESSON TO LEARN	135
SESSION 6: LISTEN TO HIM!	141
SESSION 7: WHO WILL BE THE GREATEST?	147
SESSION 8: ARE YOU COMING INTO THE KINGDOM?	153

Bonus Activities

SESSIONS 1-8.	159
--------------------	-----



PARTICIPANT GUIDE

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

For decades, the Concordia Commentary series has been a blessing to pastors, church workers, and readers around the world. Drawing from great theologians and experts in biblical languages and Lutheran tradition, the many volumes of this series have helped illuminate God's Word to countless Christians. The Concordia Commentaries are extensive in length and offer great depth of study for pastors and teachers, but that doesn't mean these commentaries have nothing to offer Christians who may not know Hebrew or Greek.

This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to you individually or in your group Bible study. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help you better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give.

We hope this Bible study deepens your understanding of God's Word, builds within you a desire to dig deeper into God's Word, and helps you more clearly see your Savior, Jesus Christ.



PARTICIPANT GUIDE FOR SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS?

Primary Text: Matthew 11

Key Takeaways

In chapter 11, Matthew focuses on the identity of Jesus and the consequences of knowing or denying Him. Those who ask with earnest hope hear the best news centered on the miracles of Jesus. He is the healer who welcomes the weak, giving them direction and strength. But He warns those who reject Him that they will face eternal condemnation. Therefore, watch carefully the miracles He does and listen well to His words of care. In His power and love, you will know that Jesus is the Christ, the very one the world has been expecting.

Opening Prayer/Hymn

Heavenly Father, by Your Holy Spirit, You've given us the certainty of knowing who Jesus is. He is Your Son, true God and also true man. By His life, death, and resurrection, You have given us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Help us share this certainty with the world, which is still asking who Jesus is. Bring those still doubting to a lively faith. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn Suggestion: "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" (*Lutheran Service Book* 524)

Introducing the Lesson

When you first see someone, you might not remember who he is. You have that uneasy feeling that you should know him, but you hate to guess and get it wrong. It would be so good if he would introduce himself to you first.

Matthew 11 presents a similar question: Who is Jesus? Both His friends and His opponents wrestle with that question. Jesus gives clear answers through His powerful miracles and His inviting words.

Opening Questions: When have you struggled to remember someone’s name or their connection to you? When did their name or their connection to you become clear?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Historical Considerations

The first key background issue is the identity of Jesus. The identity of Jesus has been a central theme from chapter 1 on. However, in chapters 11–16, the question grows in importance as the ministry of Jesus accelerates. His teachings and miracles raise the question and give the answer. Who is this Jesus who does all these things? The more miracles He does and the more teachings He delivers, the more urgently this question is asked: Who is this teacher and miracle worker?

WHAT IS JESUS’ IDENTITY?

Jesus’ identity is questioned in chapters 11 and 16, framing these chapters with the truth of Jesus’ identity. Along with the questions about Jesus’ identity, there is the promise of blessings when, by faith, Jesus is recognized as the Son of God.

A discernable *inclusio* [enclosure] marks off these chapters via its first pericope (11:2–6) and its final one (16:13–20). In 11:3 John the Baptist directly raises the question of Jesus’ identity: “Are You the Coming One, or shall we expect another?” After responding to the question with allusions to Old Testament promises of salvation and restoration that He Himself is now performing, Jesus concludes with a promise (11:6): “And whoever is not caused to stumble because of Me is blessed!” (Gibbs, 551, emphasis added)

Knowing who Jesus is brings blessings to those who ask Jesus to verify His identity in chapter 11 and to Peter, who volunteers rightly the answer that Jesus is the Son of God in chapter 16.

Not everyone will confess Jesus' true identity, but those who do will be blessed, that is, saved and rescued eschatologically. Significantly, the evangelist himself has confessed Jesus' identity by how he has introduced the unit: "Now John, when he had heard in prison the works of *the Christ*, . . ." (11:2).

Jesus speaks the same pronouncement of "blessed" again in the final pericope of this major unit (16:13–20), and, significantly, in 11:2–16:20 this verbal adjective occurs in singular form only in the first and last pericopes (11:6; 16:17; cf. the plural in 13:16). There in 16:17 Jesus speaks blessing and salvation to Simon Peter. Through the gift of divine revelation, Peter is not (for the moment!) stumbling over Jesus, but rather is confessing the answer to the Baptist's question: Jesus is the one who was to come; He is the Christ and the Son of God. (Gibbs, 551)

While the key question in chapters 11–16 centers on the identity of Jesus, the varied responses to who Jesus is all follow naturally. The message concerning Jesus began with John the Baptist's ministry and proclamation of the Messiah to come. A key section in chapter 11 then is John's disciples questioning Jesus, followed by Jesus' insistence that John is the Elijah who was promised in Malachi 3:1. When you understand John the Baptist as God's witness, you will be able to see Jesus as God's Son. Reject John, and you will come under judgment. These sharp contrasts point to the severe consequences that come with knowing the truth of John:

Israel must come to receive the truth that John is the eschatological "Elijah" promised in Malachi 4:5 (see Matthew 11:7–15); and in thus acknowledging John, Israel would also know the identity of Jesus as the "Lord" who would "suddenly come to His temple" (Malachi 3:1). But this generation is like petulant children (Matthew 11:16–19), and the unrepentant villages of Galilee are thus bringing near to themselves the threat of final judgment (11:20–24). (Gibbs, 551–52)

The opposition to Jesus will increase in the coming chapters. Pharisees will resist Him in chapter 12. In chapters 15 and 16, scribes and Sadducees will also reject His ministry. But despite the hardness of heart shown in His opponents, Jesus gives the kindest invitation to the brokenhearted in Matthew 11:28–30. He calls the weary and heavy-laden to come to Him. His heart is gentle and lowly so that all who need healing might come to Him. This call

had no barriers of intelligence, education, or spiritual accomplishment. His call was not to those who saw themselves on the heights, but those who were at the bottom. If they were rejected, they could come to the One who would also be rejected by many. But even as He carried the cross, He gave rest to the souls of all who come to Him, drawn by His healing words.

Theological Considerations

READING 1: MATTHEW 11:1–6 WE SHOULD KNOW WHO YOU ARE

KEY INSIGHTS FOR READING 1

Jesus has just finished a long lesson for the disciples in chapter 10, in which He makes it clear that they will experience both faith and rejection. Chapter 11 begins with John's messengers asking if Jesus is the one or if they should look for another. Gibbs notes that it has long been debated whether this was John's actual question or a question asked for the sake of his disciples. Given the dangers that he was facing, John, in prison, could have very well asked this question:

Did the Baptist ask this question for his own sake or merely to assist his disciples in their understanding and faith? With the apparent exception of Tertullian, the church fathers and early commentators held that the Baptist could not possibly have entertained doubts about the identity of Jesus. Yet in terms of grammar, near context, and even the wider sweep of Scripture's story, there is no compelling reason to reject the obvious sense of the text. Grammatically, it is John who is the subject of the verb "he said" in 11:3. Further, Jesus replies, "Go and announce *to John* . . ." (11:4). Finally, the closing beatitude is singular and in the first place refers to John himself. Grammatically, John has asked a question, and Jesus has answered him. (Gibbs, 555–56)

Besides the grammatical evidence, Gibbs points out that John certainly could ask this question since he was now in prison. John had railed against the evil reign of Herod and his supporters. But now, John is in prison, and the future looks very dark. John might well have asked if Jesus is truly the one, given the upper hand that Herod has.

John heard the deeds of Christ while he was *in prison*. John had announced that Jesus was the eschatological Judge, far mightier



LEADER NOTES

WHAT IS THE CONCORDIA COMMENTARY BIBLE STUDY SERIES?

For decades, the Concordia Commentary series has been a blessing to pastors, church workers, and readers around the world. Drawing from great theologians and experts in biblical languages and Lutheran tradition, the many volumes of this series have helped illuminate God's Word to countless Christians. The Concordia Commentaries are extensive in length and offer great depth of study.

This Bible study series pulls excerpts and ideas from the Concordia Commentaries to bring these treasures to readers in an individual or group Bible study setting. Consider these Bible studies to be guided tours of the books of the Bible by experts. Though not exhaustive, this study will help learners better understand key themes and insights that only commentary authors can give. In creating this series, some editorial decisions are factored in.

Within the different sessions, key passages from the Concordia Commentaries have been curated to help the learner gain insight into the biblical text. Thus, not every chapter nor verse covered in the commentary is covered in this series, simply for the sake of length and pacing for each session. By collecting and modifying key reflections from the commentary text, this study gives a straightforward taste of the rich treasure of the commentaries. That said, this Bible study series is not comprehensive, and learners may raise questions not covered in these study materials.

Additionally, each session has been arranged in a threefold manner to engage learners. After an introductory question, the study delves into a section on historical considerations. This provides a critical, general background on the text studied in each session. You can read this section with participants to help set up the text. In the second section, the study digs into theological considerations. This includes two to five main pericopes to be studied in the session, with key insights and discussion questions at the end of each reading to facilitate deeper reflection within your group. The third section focuses on practical considerations, which show us how the text applies to our daily

lives. The discussion questions are designed to break up the reading of the text and bring out key points in the study materials.

The Answer Key provides prompts for you as a facilitator when guiding discussions. The questions in this study are designed to be broad and open-ended, meaning that there is generally not one prescribed answer for each question. The prompts provided are there to give you information and context for discussion, not to be the only “right” answers. Use these materials as you see best for your context. Here is a suggested pattern for conducting a session with your group:

1. Welcome learners. Ask learners if any of them had questions from the previous week.
2. Open with prayer, and the suggested hymn can be read or sung. Then, read through Introducing the Lesson together, including the Opening Question(s). Give learners time to consider the question(s) on their own or in groups to get them primed for the text to come.
3. Read through Historical Considerations together, perhaps asking volunteers to read paragraphs one at a time as others follow along.
4. For the Theological Considerations section, read each Bible reading together. How you decide to utilize the Key Insights is up to you. You may want to pause at appropriate times to read through the insights, you may want to read them as a group after the reading, or you may want to give learners time to digest the Key Insights silently on their own after you read the biblical text. The Reflection Question(s) for each reading section are designed to draw the learners back into the text, and the prompts in the Answer Key may be beneficial for you as a leader in drawing out new or different understandings as you facilitate discussion.
5. The Practical Considerations section returns to the key questions of the study at the end of each session, with some commentary and reflection questions.
6. The Final Thoughts section wraps up the theme of the main text.
7. A Deeper Look provides a glimpse of the next session.
8. If you have additional time, the Bonus Activities at the end of this guide can be used to generate discussions and apply the material from each section to our lives.
9. Finally, you can lead your group in a Closing Prayer.

ANSWER KEY FOR SESSION 1

WHO IS JESUS?

Introducing the Lesson

Opening Questions: When have you struggled to remember someone's name or their connection to you? When did their name or their connection to you become clear?

The identity of Jesus is the key issue in Matthew 11. His disciples and the followers of John the Baptist should know that He is the Son of God, the Messiah. But doubts arise for some while others are determined that Jesus can't be the Savior. Discuss the times when we should know someone, remembering their name and our shared connection. Expect stories that range from trying to remember a high school classmate to remembering someone you met last week. After discussing those examples, lead the discussion to the larger issue of the identity of Jesus and how His miracles and teaching define Him. You might anticipate verses 4–5 and the miracles and teaching of Jesus, which answers John the Baptist's disciples' questions.

Theological Considerations

READING 1: MATTHEW 11:1–6
WE SHOULD KNOW WHO YOU ARE

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 1

Jesus' answer to John and his disciples has three parts: the healing miracles, the resurrection from the dead, and the preaching of good news to the poor. What is the value and power of each of these as evidence for John and his disciples and us that we might know that Jesus is the Messiah?

Jesus' three-part answer begins with the many people who were blind, people who could not walk, people who had leprosy, and people who were deaf. All were healed by Jesus. Even Jesus' opponents couldn't deny the range and abundance of these healings. Jesus had raised to life the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–17) and a girl, and He healed

a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years (Matthew 9:18–26). There is a natural sequence from healing diseases to overcoming death itself.

Resurrection of the dead might seem to be the ultimate proof of Jesus' identity. However, the preaching of good news to the poor is the most sweeping and immediate evidence of Jesus' identity. We might not need the healings that were done for others, and, while living, we have not yet experienced the bodily resurrection, but we all welcome His good news that comes already to all who are in need.

READING 2: MATTHEW 11:7–19

WHAT DID YOU COME TO SEE?

REFLECTION QUESTION FOR READING 2

John the Baptist lived in the desert, wore a garment of camel's hair, and ate locusts and wild honey. Yet his message was that the kingdom of heaven was near (3:1–4). How does John's life in the wilderness match his message and his role as the forerunner of the Messiah?

John comes as a voice crying in the wilderness (3:1–3), so we would expect him to have a rugged, lean life. While John lived in the dry wilderness, he is most associated with the flowing water of the Jordan. What a man of contrasts. We find him in the desert and in the flowing river, living alone and, later, being in the center of the crowds.

John's life of contrasts matched his message of the Messiah. The greater One has come, but He's also the carpenter from Nazareth. When others ignore Jesus, John knows Him, baptizes Him, and then hears the Father's voice and sees the Holy Spirit come as a dove. John and Jesus, men of great contrasts, together gave the world the message that the Savior had come.

READING 3: MATTHEW 11:25–30

COME, ALL WHO ARE WEARY AND HEAVY-LADEN

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR READING 3

When we feel burdened and heavy-laden, what do we learn from Jesus that eases our burdens? How does Jesus, the mighty and holy Son of God, show Himself to be “gentle and lowly in heart”?

Jesus welcomes every person who is weak and burdened to come to Him. His rest comes not from distancing us from our troubles but by

bringing us near to Him. Our troubles may remain, but we are no longer alone. Jesus' power and direction come as His yoke settles on us. But that yoke is not a new weight. Jesus puts His tremendous power and endurance to the tasks that overwhelm us. Along with this power, Jesus also shares His gentle and humble spirit. What a surprise that the mighty Son of God invites us, the weakest, to come learn from Him. We are not the elite filled with knowledge, but our weakness draws us to Him who is "gentle and lowly in heart."

Practical Considerations

KEY QUESTIONS

A key issue in Matthew 11 is the ability to recognize the true identity of both John the Baptist and Jesus. How does Jesus give evidence that He is the true Son of God, the Savior of the world? Why might His identity as the Son of God be questioned by some?

What will demonstrate the immediate presence of the Messiah, the very Son of God? We might expect miracles. In that regard, Jesus points out His many acts of healing and even resurrection. We might also expect that the arrival of the Messiah would bring rejoicing, so Jesus puts the preaching of good news to the poor as His final sign.

While the miracles and preaching are expected, we might still debate the appearance of the Messiah. Jesus notes that John the Baptist came in rugged clothes, a man of the wilderness. Is that remote and harsh life what we expect of the prophet and the Messiah? Perhaps, but then there is also the carpenter from Nazareth who is the friend of sinners. We cannot restrict the places and actions of God's prophet and Messiah. They do their work in all settings and in all ways.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION

Read 11:16–19 again. Jesus came as a friend of sinners and not as one aloof from the world. How do we see Him acting as a friend of sinners throughout His ministry?

Beginning with His incarnation in the womb and His birth in the stable, Jesus comes in humility so that He might reach the lowly. He continues to be the friend of sinners, such as His saving of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) and His reassurance of paradise given to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40–43). Jesus is fearless when He touches the leper

and heals him (Matthew 8:1–4). He welcomes Matthew, the tax collector, to follow Him, even though many are scandalized that Jesus would welcome and even eat with sinners (Matthew 9:9–13). At the Pharisee’s house, Jesus points out that the woman who had been forgiven much also loved much while the Pharisee, who felt no need of forgiveness, loved little (Luke 7:36–50). Jesus sums up His purpose with this contrast: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. . . . For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12, 13).

KEY QUESTIONS

In 11:16–19, Jesus contrasts the complaints leveled against John the Baptist and Himself. What do their opponents expect of a prophet or the Messiah? How does Jesus’ ministry show a greater wisdom?

Should the Messiah live at a distance from the people or be in their midst? The opponents of John the Baptist and Jesus are conflicted by this choice. John the Baptist lived a severe life without riches or comfort. He was courageous so that none of their attacks would frighten him. But that strength led his opponents to say John had a demon (11:18). How else could they explain his lonely survival in the desert? On the other hand, Jesus came from among the crowd, an ordinary carpenter, connected with the common people. We might remember His changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana as an example of this. His opponents, therefore, say that He is too common to be the Messiah. They are not satisfied, but John and Jesus carry on their ministry with the wisdom and balance only God can provide.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION

Jesus is the holy Son of God and yet also the friend of sinners. How can He remain holy even when He associates with sinners, touches lepers, and even holds the hand of the little girl who had died?

The Pharisees were noted for maintaining an outward holiness through ritual washings (Mark 7:1–4) and their avoidance of those who were ritually unclean. Jesus understands that holiness is not found in avoiding others. Jesus makes this clear with this contrast: “And He called the people to Him again and said to them, ‘Hear Me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him’” (7:14–15). The inner sins of evil thoughts, immorality, theft, murder, and more define and

defile a man (7:20–23). Therefore, when the holy Son of God touches a leper or the little girl who had died, He does not lose His holiness. Rather, as a healing physician, He brings physical and spiritual health to others.

KEY QUESTION

Jesus gives both rest and a yoke to be carried in 11:28–30. How can a yoke bring about rest for our souls?

Jesus' yoke is not a new burden or a moving prison. The yoke is shared with Jesus so that we might learn His pace and direction. He clearly guides us in the way that will bring rest, even while we continue to move. His rest is not a simple lying down, but His rest comes as we continue forward, linked with Jesus. He has forgiven us, so the yoke is not a hopeless treadmill attempting to justify ourselves. Rather, we are forgiven and in step with Jesus by His grace. We find that He is the one who is gentle and lowly in heart. No matter how life has lowered us, He finds us and fits His yoke on us, even in our weakest state.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION QUESTION

The Father reveals Jesus' identity to us in 11:27. How does knowing the true identity of Jesus as the Father's Son give us strength when we are weak and heavy-laden?

When we are weak, what greater power could we desire than that of God's own Son? When we know that Jesus is the only Son and that all the fullness of God dwells in Him bodily (Colossians 2:9), then His words of comfort resonate with the entire power of God. He is not a frail help or a leader who Himself needs to be supported. He is the tireless God Himself. He can carry all the world despite our weakness. We can invite others to find refuge and strength in Him, while His strength and comfort never leave us. His strength is never overtaxed—there is always room and power for all who know their weaknesses.

Notes

This image shows a full page of a document template. It consists of approximately 30 evenly spaced horizontal dotted lines across the entire width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.