

# RESISTANCE TO THE KINGDOM

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 11

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done because they did not repent. (Matt. 11:20)

1. Communauté de Taizé, "The Kingdom of God in Justice and Peace," Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., 2004, [bit.ly/TPW-Taizé](http://bit.ly/TPW-Taizé)
2. "Vocation and history," Taizé, [www.taize.fr/en\\_rubrique2602.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_rubrique2602.html) (downloaded December 5, 2023).
3. Cindy Wooden, "Taizé superior says community has received five abuse allegations," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 5, 2019. [bit.ly/TPWCathReporter](http://bit.ly/TPWCathReporter) (downloaded December 5, 2023).

## Daily Bible Readings

M	Feb. 3	Josh. 1:1-9	Be Strong and Courageous
T	Feb. 4	Matt. 10:16-30	As Sheep among Wolves
W	Feb. 5	Matt. 10:31-42	Resistance and Reward
Th	Feb. 6	Ps. 35:1-14	God Is Our Salvation
F	Feb. 7	Ps. 35:15-28	Rescue Me from My Enemies
Sa	Feb. 8	Prov. 24:8-22	Don't Rejoice When Enemies Fall

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

The Taizé community has given us many meditative songs. The songs are brief, sung quietly, and repeated numerous times. One Taizé song focuses on the kingdom of God, tying together many of the themes discussed in this devotional:

The kingdom of God is justice and peace  
And joy in the Holy Spirit.

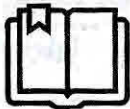
Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Taizé is an ecumenical community with more than 100 brothers, both Protestant and Catholic, living on their site in central France.<sup>2</sup> The community attracts around 100,000 pilgrims each year, many of them teens and young adults. Visitors participate in Bible study, fellowship, and long periods of silent prayer, punctuated by singing the simple, evocative songs the community has shared with the worldwide Christian community.

In 2019, community leaders announced that they had received five reports of sexual assault on minors committed by three of their members between the 1950s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup> French law requires that all cases be reported, even if they happened in the distant past, so the Taizé leaders made a legal report. They also expressed their commitment to hearing the stories of the victims and walking beside them.

“The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy.” These truths about God’s kingdom, so visible in Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom he inaugurates, coexist with a broken world. We see brokenness and violence in every corner of human life, including within Christian communities. We grieve at the presence of this evil. “Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.” Our role in God’s kingdom begins by opening ourselves to the new thing that God has begun in Jesus. We need God’s help to open our hearts to the kingdom’s presence.

*Loving and righteous God, we grieve the evil that attacks your kingdom on earth. We lament that some of that evil comes from within our communities of faith. Help us embrace your justice, peace, and joy. Open in us the gates of your kingdom. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Matthew 11:7–15, 20–24

**11:7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What, then, 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,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.’

<sup>11</sup>“Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the 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 suffered violence, and violent people take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came, <sup>14</sup>and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>Let anyone with ears listen! . . .”

<sup>20</sup>Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done because they did not repent.

<sup>21</sup>“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup>But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>23</sup>And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.



Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

“For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup>But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.”

## OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN

John the Baptist, imprisoned at the whim of Herod (Mark 6:17–29), is having doubts about Jesus. John sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Matt. 11:3). Jesus responds by describing the signs of the kingdom of God that he has revealed through his healing and miracles. Jesus then turns to those around him. His question to the crowd (vv. 7–8) foreshadows the point of this passage: the people didn’t go out to see something ordinary and unremarkable (a common reed), nor did they go to see a spectacle of human power or status. Instead, they went out to witness God intervening in history through John, the prophet and baptizer (see Isaiah 40:3–5, referencing the wilderness). Reeds were used figuratively for what was weak and undependable in times of trouble (1 Kgs. 14:15; 2 Kgs. 18:21).

“Let anyone with ears listen!” is the language of riddles, inviting the wise to consider the meaning. Israel was not always ready to hear (Jer. 6:10; Ezek. 12:2). Those who listen will realize that the one who comes after this second Elijah, a voice in the wilderness, is the Messiah, God’s Anointed Servant (Isa. 53). In the new kingdom era Jesus inaugurates, all of God’s people will have the indwelling Spirit and may be called to speak as prophets (Joel 2:28–30; Acts 2). Though such giftedness is not given universally (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 29–30), there are no impediments to the Spirit’s equipping any believer, not simply a select few.

As God’s activity increases through his people (John the Baptist, Jesus, and today his church), so does opposition to his work (Matt. 11:12). Opposition includes Herod’s imprisonment of John, the attacks by Jewish leaders now intensifying (see Matt. 9:34; 12:22–24), and the materialism that craved a political Messiah and the prosperity and worldly power he would bring. This opposition within Israel contrasts with the response to the Gospel by Gentile hearers (11:20–24).

In the Old Testament, Tyre and Sidon (11:21) and Sodom (11:23–24) had notorious reputations regarding both sinfulness and pagan devotion (see Isa. 23; Jer. 47:4; Gen. 19). The people of

