

## Matthew 11:20-30 – “Yoked To Jesus”

We're in this section of Matthew where Jesus is dealing with those who were closing their hearts to who Jesus was. They were questioning and doubting the things of God to where it was preventing them from receiving the life God had for them through Jesus. They were missing out on this abundant life that Jesus came to bring.

- People don't realize the jeopardy they are putting themselves in when they doubt who Jesus is and reject His claim as the Messiah.
- They put a callous on their heart which over time loses its ability to be convicted over sin and it allows the person to drift away from the Lord without any remorse.
- But Jesus is a loving Saviour who doesn't want to leave you in that state. With love He calls you to repentance. He desires for you to come and experience the life He has for you. We see that clearly in this chapter.

### 1. The Condemnation of the Unrepentant

**11:20-21 - *Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.***

Jesus said in Matthew 10:14-15 that the disciples were just to move on from a city if it did not accept them or the gospel message. They were to shake off the dust from their feet.

Well, we're seeing now some of these cities that had rejected the testimony of Jesus and the work done among them.

Chorazin and Bethsaida were two cities that were located in the Galilee area. They are up on the northern side of the Sea of Galilee, close by Capernaum which was Jesus' ministry headquarters and adopted home. Much of Jesus' ministry took place around these areas.

- In other words, these people weren't left with reports *about* Jesus, they *witnessed* Jesus first hand! They saw the mighty works He had done.
- What's interesting is that we have no accounts in the gospels of Jesus ministering in the city of Chorazin. And yet they had mighty works done there. This just adds weight to what we read in **John 21:25**, *"And there are*

*also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen."*

- When we read the gospels, we're really just scratching the surface of the great things Jesus has done and the grandeur and glory He holds.

The sad thing is that of all the great things about Jesus these cities witnessed, they did not repent. And this is why Jesus is rebuking them and publicly condemning them. Certainly, it's acting as a warning to those listening to this.

And this is what's required for all people to experience the blessing and life that God has for them through Jesus Christ – repentance.

Now this is a word we throw around a lot in Christianese, but do we really know what is implied with this?

- Repentance is a change of mind which leads to a change of action. "In its biblical sense repentance refers to a deeply seated and thorough turning from self to God. It occurs when a radical turning to God takes place, an experience in which God is recognized as the most important fact of one's existence."<sup>1</sup>
- This is the message that begins the gospels. Jesus began His ministry with that theme of repentance. **Matthew 4:17**, "*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*"
- This was the call for all people. *Repent, and believe in the gospel* (Mark 1:15). It's when we turn from going our own way, or thinking we're good enough to be saved, and surrender ourselves completely to Jesus, that we will then experience His life saving grace.

I love what Peter said in **Acts 3:19**, "*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*"

Who doesn't want times of refreshing? This comes about through repentance. It's by repentance that we can be reconciled to the Lord and experience the blessed peace of God. That is a refreshing thing indeed!

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<sup>1</sup> Palmer, C. (2003). Repentance. In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1376). Holman Bible Publishers.

But as we're seeing here, there can be people that are surrounded by the things of God, they can feel like they've got it made because they know Jesus, but if you have not repented of sin and turned in faith to Jesus, you are still dead in your sins. You are still under judgment.

So, Jesus says, ***Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!***

- Woe is a cowboy term meaning to stop. Stop going down that path you are on Chorazin and Bethsaida!
- Actually, it's a term used to convey a warning of doom or pity. They are on a path that is leading to inevitable judgment and death.
- It reminds me of the Christian rancher that had horses which people could rent for riding. A customer came who wasn't too familiar with horses but knew that *Giddyup* meant go and *Whoa* meant stop. The Christian rancher quickly corrected him and said not with my horses. My horses go when they hear 'Praise the Lord' and they stop when they hear 'Amen'. That was a bit to get used to for this novice rider but he was game. So, he got on the horse and said 'Praise the Lord' and the horse started moving. He soon had this horse in a full gallop out in the countryside. But the rider noticed the horse was heading straight for a cliff. The rider in a panic started yelling 'Whoa', but the horse didn't respond. He yelled louder, 'Whoa' as the horse got closer to the cliff. Still nothing. Then the rider remembered the special instructions so he quickly yelled 'Amen!', and the horse screeched to a halt right at the edge of the cliff. As the shaky rider peered over the precipice, he wiped his brow and sighed, 'Praise the Lord'.

Chorazin and Bethsaida, who had the great honor of witnessing the Messiah and the miraculous, should have stopped right in their tracks and said, *this should matter and make a difference in our lives!* But they continued on their way unchanged and without repentance.

And Jesus brings up another couple of cities that will be under judgment, ***Tyre and Sidon*** – two Gentile cities on the Mediterranean coastline. They were under the judgment of God because of their idolatry and immorality. Yet, if Jesus had done the things there that He had done among Chorazin and Bethsaida, then Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago.

As a result, their judgment will not be as harsh as it will be against Chorazin and Bethsaida. This next verse makes that clear...

**11:22 - *But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.***

Tyre and Sidon did not have the same privilege these other cities had.

**11:23 - *And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.***

Capernaum was in the same boat, but it gets singled out because it had even greater opportunity. Matthew 9:1 identifies Capernaum as Jesus' *own city*. Jesus may have been born in Bethlehem, He grew up in Nazareth, but Capernaum became His adopted home and ministry headquarters. He did many great works in this place. This is why Jesus says they were exalted to heaven. But the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility. And because of Capernaum's rejection of Jesus, or indifference to Jesus, they will be brought down to Hades.

- Many of these people could have claimed, *I know Jesus!* But it's not enough to just know Jesus, you need to repent of sin and put your faith in Him as your Lord and Saviour.

Now bringing Sodom in as a comparison seems pretty unbalanced. Sodom stands as the poster city of wickedness and sin. Yet if they had the same opportunity as Capernaum had, Jesus says it would still be standing today.

**11:24 - *But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.***

Because Capernaum sinned against a greater light, their punishment will be stronger. Sodom will be judged, but not under the same weight as Capernaum.

John the Baptist was questioning Jesus because he was wondering when judgment was coming to their enemies. The topic of judgment is never a pleasant one to think about. In fact, many people ignore it or make themselves believe that God is not in the business of judging any more. That God only forgives, and that God will be gracious in that day of judgment. But people fail to see that God is also a God of justice. If justice was not carried out, then God would not be good. According to J.M. Boice, these verses teach us 4 important but difficult lessons: <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 197). Baker Books.

1. **There will be a judgment.** We don't like to think about this, but it should cause us to take stock of what we do with our lives. All things will be brought into account before a Holy God.
2. **There are degrees of punishment.** We will be held accountable for what we know. And if a person sins against the knowledge of God, there will be a greater punishment than the one who has not had the same knowledge. Sin is sin and it leads to death. It's not as though there will be pleasant places of hell, but there will be degrees of severity of judgment.
3. **The worst sin of all is unbelief.** This is what causes a person to be cut off. This is what made the sin of Capernaum so great. They had the very Son of God in their midst, teaching and doing significant miracles, yet they still would not believe.
4. **God does not owe salvation to anyone.** Jesus mentions cities that would have been spared if Jesus had done the work there that He did elsewhere. But He didn't do the work there. We like to think that gives these people a pass, but it does not. God doesn't owe salvation to anyone. Everyone and at every era has had the opportunity to believe and be saved.  
 "The only thing God actually owes us is justice, and we will get it if we do not commit our lives to Christ. God *is* merciful to many, but God *owes* mercy to none." <sup>3</sup>

It's interesting that in Jesus' day, 4 cities around Galilee were prominent – Chorazin, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Tiberias. The first three were given a pronouncement of woe or doom. But Tiberias was not. What's the only functioning city of these 4 today? Tiberias. In fact, nobody is completely sure of the exact location of Chorazin and Bethsaida. All of this reveals the omniscience of Jesus, the preciseness of prophecy, and the Bible's inerrancy.

## 2. The Consolation of the Humble

**11:25-26 - *At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. <sup>26</sup> Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.***

Here we get a glimpse into the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

<sup>3</sup> Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 198). Baker Books.



Jesus says He is thankful that these things have been hidden from the wise and prudent. Those that think themselves to be something don't typically express their need for another. It's not that God is keeping these people from receiving the Gospel, but it's keeping them from greater judgment. That's what has been evident in the previous passage. But now things have been hidden from those who don't have ears to hear.

- This was a prominent way of teaching as demonstrated by the parables (ie. Matthew 13). Jesus was able to cast a truth out to people but those who didn't have their hearts open to the truth would just think it was a nice story about earthly things.
- Jesus spoke in parables so as to not cause them further condemnation or judgment for their rejecting of God's truth. Parables were in a sense a show of God's mercy in bringing His message to those who wanted to receive it, but allowing others to walk away thinking they just heard some interesting story without any spiritual ramifications.
- That is what's happening here. Jesus wasn't purposefully keep the truth away from certain people, but he was keeping it from those who would have only brought further judgment upon themselves for rejecting it.

The truth came to the babes, the young children. Those who had greater faith than their questions. They weren't trying to reason or explain everything. They just humbly accepted the truth.

**11:27 - *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 the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.***

We only know the Father through the Son. He has revealed the Father to us. Here we see God's sovereignty. He chooses! But before you take a hard stance on election or say we have no part or responsibility, look at the next verse...

### 3. The Calling of the Repentant

**11:28 - *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

The invitation is given, and it's given to all! Nobody is excluded from receiving God's gift of salvation or coming to Jesus and finding peace and rest.

- And everyone needs this rest because sin is a heavy burden. It drives you further than you want to go and takes more from you than you want to give. Sin will never add to your life. It's laborious. We need saving, we need to find the rest that is only provided through Jesus.
- Jesus was also confronting people who were being burdened down by the law and rules that were hard to bear. **Matthew 23:4**, "*For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*"
- We try to manufacture this rest through many means. There are things in the world that will be counterfeits to this rest. But we find it only leaves us more restless. Jesus gives this rest through coming to Him and receiving the blessing of forgiveness and life in Him.

**11:29-30 - *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. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***

This is the only autobiographical statement Jesus gives of Himself. He is gentle and lowly in heart. He's meek. He doesn't weigh you down and make life burdensome.

A yoke was a wooden harness that joined two animals together to pull a load (typically an ox). And one ox usually bore the brunt of the load. Jesus says, '*I will carry the brunt of the load for you. My yoke is easy, it's light.*'

- But we are called to yoke ourselves to Him. It's only as we do that we will find life a breeze rather than a burden.
- It's not always going to be easy, we're not promised a life of comfort. But we're to learn of Him and see that life with Him is far greater than anything apart from Him.

"But to refuse Jesus' yoke is not to be burden-free, but to retain a much heavier burden. Everyone in life must carry a burden; the question is whether we will carry one that is within our capacity, or one heavier than we were designed for."<sup>4</sup>

The question is have you accepted this invitation? Have you come to know the grace of Jesus and the blessing of being yoked to Him?

<sup>4</sup> Weber, S. K. (2000). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, p. 169). Broadman & Holman Publishers.