

January 31, 2010/Matthew 11:20-24, 13:54-58 (ESV¹)

we've got one of these 2-part lessons this morning ... 5 verses from Matt 11 and 4 verses from Matt 13 ... these concern the rejection of Jesus by those to whom He preached and taught and who He healed ...

Mat 11:20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

"then" ... maybe more a logical "then" than reference to a specific time referring to events in the previous verse ... logically, Jesus has been preaching, teaching, and healing in Galilee ... He's drawn crowds, but the real nature of His person and work has not been accepted/appreciated ... in particular, though He's come preaching the arrival of the Kingdom of God, there has been no serious repentance ... we've said this several times in the past weeks, but it bears repeating ... all Biblical preaching involves a call to repentance ... the nearness of the King ought to cause His subjects to live respecting that presence, and in harmony with His rule, reign, and law ... and there has been no general repentance ... and Jesus grieves over the towns where He has been ...

Mat 11:21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

woe/alas Chorazin ... woe/alas Bethsaida ... these are expressions of grief on the part of Jesus, not warnings at this point ... there are a number of contrasts between these little towns of Galilee and the formerly great Phoenician coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon that Jesus mentions ... for one, there is a huge difference in size and worldly importance ... it's Nevada Iowa and Los Angeles ...

Isaiah 23 and **Ezekiel 26-28** speak about Tyre and Sidon and give the picture of proud, money-mad, wicked, cruel people ... **Amos 1:9** says that the people of Tyre sold the people of Israel into slavery to the Edomites ... **Joel 3:6** talks about the Phoenicians selling the children of Judah and of Jerusalem to the Greeks ... these were not nice people ... they are a symbol of pagan arrogance ... but the light those people had was relatively small ...

Chorazin and Bethsaida were of little worldly account ... and they were without doubt far more moral than were ancient Tyre and Sidon, in all probability not much different from or any worse than any other Jewish town ... but Jesus had preached in them and had healed in them, so their light was great ... and with light, always always always comes responsibility ...

Jesus mentions specifically the testimony of His "mighty works" ... it seems He's likely referring to miracles, probably mostly healings ... in these acts of mercy, there is ample testimony to who He is ... and Jesus, the only One in the universe that can with certainty say what would have been "if," says that "if" they had light equal to the Jewish towns, the pagans would have recognized the presence of God and repented ... they would have prostrated themselves before the King, and grieved over their foolish flaunting of His law and rebellion against Him ... they would have shown good sense ...

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Mat 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

by human religious standards, this is a surprise ... Tyre and Sidon were notorious, their people were bold brazen big sinners ... by contrast, there surely wasn't much outward evil going on in Chorazin or Bethsaida ... but Jesus says that God's judgment will be more awful for the Jewish towns of Galilee than for the pagan Tyre and Sidon ... amazing ... how can that be? ... well, there is stupid uninformed crass flagrant rebellion against God's law, and while that is not a good or pretty thing, Jesus plainly says that it pales in comparison to the seriousness of willfully ignoring His direct presence and invitation to salvation ... the regret on the day of judgment will be far more bearable for the former than the latter ... for both, the loss will be absolute, but those with more light will fall farther and the misery be greater ...

Mat 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

and there is the contrast between Capernaum and ancient Sodom ... Capernaum was Jesus' base of operations, seemingly an adopted home ... and commentators' best guess seems to be that the folks of Capernaum were sort of proud of having their own "home town prophet" in Jesus ... but that's the wrong reaction! ... if the Kingdom of God is near, there ought to be humility, reverence, repentance ... but there really hasn't been any on a large scale ...

again, Jesus, the only One who could say with certainty how things would have been if roles were reversed, says that notorious sinners of Sodom, given the light that had been seen in Capernaum, would have repented and avoided the destruction of God's judgment ... for Capernaum to miss the real implication of the presence of Jesus is no small thing ... you will be brought down to Hades/the abode of the dead/Sheol ... these words are very close to those used by God in **Isaiah 14:13-15** speaking about the arrogant King of Babylon ...

Isa 14:13 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;

Isa 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

Isa 14:15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

Capernaum's practical indifference to the presence of the King is as damnable as the arrogance of the King of Babylon ... the Isaiah passage is even thought to be applicable to Satan himself ... imagine, a small Jewish town of maybe 2000 being characterized this way ... fail to respond to the presence of Christ and all is lost ...

Mat 11:24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

the light that Sodom had was pretty dim ... Lot didn't exactly brighten up the night sky with it ... Capernaum had the pure white light of Christ in its midst ... the regret of missing that will be far

worse than Sodom's regret ... France: "Arrogance and immorality will be punished, but not so severely as the rejection of God's direct appeal. Only the rejection of forgiveness is unforgivable."
...

now jump to Matthew 13 ... this is the account of the final reaction in Nazareth to Jesus ... Luke 4 has the account of Him being given the Isaiah scroll in the Nazareth synagogue and the attempt to throw Him over the cliff ... that is perhaps a separate incident? ... they seem to be somewhat different in detail, if not in the core reaction of the people ...

Mat 13:54 and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?"

the people think they know who He is ... but they don't really know ... natural contempt for the familiar blinds them ... they see wisdom and power, but rather than make the obvious inference that this is God with them, they presume that their wrong ideas about Him are more important than the evidence ... the "where did this man/fellow get this wisdom" is contemptuous ... the question is not an honest one ... if it were, there would be hope ...

Mat 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

Mat 13:56 And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

the wording of verse 55 is commonly taken to indicate that by this time Mary is widowed ... the word rendered "carpenter" might be more clearly rendered "builder" ... chances are that Joseph had been a small time contractor, and has left a family business ... the notion is then that we've seen this guy mixing cement and cutting timbers, doing ordinary stuff, stuff that maybe we've even hired him and the boys to do ... come on, he's just an ordinary builder! ... who, then, does he think he is? ... they're not judging honestly what He's said or done ... Ryle; "We are all apt to despise mercies if we have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books, which are so plentiful in England, the means of grace, of which we have so abundant a supply, the preaching of the Gospel, which we hear every week, --all, all are likely to be undervalued. It is mournfully true, that in religion, more than anything else, 'familiarity breed contempt.' Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound, --and despise it because it is old. Alas, by doing so, they provoke God to take it away. ... Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom."

Mat 13:57 And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."

human beings by fallen nature are haters of God, haters of the Son ... they take offense at Him ... Jesus quotes a standard proverb of the day ...

Mat 13:58 And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

this is the end of Matthew's account of the Galilee ministry of Jesus ... He's been rejected in Galilee ... He's headed for Jerusalem and rejection and crucifixion there ...