

OpenTheo

Matthew 11:20 - 11:24



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 11:20-24, Jesus rebukes the cities of Corazin and Bethsaida for not repenting after witnessing his miracles. The speaker, Steve Gregg, explains that repentance means a change of mind and direction in one's life. Failing to repent after being given the opportunity puts a grave responsibility on those who reject the light. Jesus teaches that those who reject the gospel will be judged less severely but still be held accountable for not recognizing the handiwork of God.

Transcript

In Matthew 11, Jesus had just made a criticism of the Jewish people, his contemporaries in his generation, saying that they had had the benefit of two remarkable prophets of God in their generation. One was John the Baptist and the other was Jesus himself. However, he said, they had not used their advantage to any benefit because they had rejected essentially the message of both.

Now, they had found excuses to do so. The religious people said John the Baptist was too withdrawn, too ascetic, too much of a hermit. And they said that Jesus was too little of that and he was too much free in his associations socially and he ate freely with tax collectors and sinners.

Now, this was just two ways of making excuses for not coming into the kingdom of God. That's what Jesus said. Now, he turns then in Matthew 11 and verse 20 to rebuke the cities of the Jews where he had especially done a lot of miracles and where most of his ministry had been performed.

And he does this because they have had, as he mentioned in the previous paragraph, tremendous opportunity to know the truth, but they have not chosen to avail themselves of it and they have not chosen to embrace the truth. And this, he says, puts them in a situation that is worse than cities that had never seen or heard the things that these people have heard. In other words, since they have had opportunity, they have a greater responsibility and their rejection of that opportunity puts them under a grave responsibility that most cities would not have because Jesus had given them so much

light.

They turned from a greater amount of light than most do. In Matthew 11 and verse 20, Jesus began to upbraid, the word means scold, the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. He said, Woe unto you, Chorazin! Woe unto 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.

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

But I say to you, that it should be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you. Now, there are some interesting things we learn here from this passage. It says that these cities that he named were the cities where most of his mighty works had been done.

And it seems to imply that the majority of his miracles were done in the cities that he named here. Now, one of them, the last city he names, is Capernaum. And we have record of many miracles being done in Capernaum.

Because Capernaum is a place where Peter owned a house and where his fishing business had originated. It was on the coast of the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus spent a lot of time there. And many of the recorded miracles of Jesus are done in Capernaum.

However, these other cities, Chorazin and Bethsaida, that he mentions in verse 21, these ones, we don't really read much of miracles being done in these places. And what this tells us, of course, is there were a lot of things Jesus did that are not specifically recorded and itemized for us. Matthew here tells us that Chorazin was a city and Bethsaida was a city, one of those cities where Jesus had done more than usual miracles, more than in most cities.

And yet we don't have a single reference in the Bible to a particular miracle that Jesus did in Chorazin. And that being the case, it does not mean that Matthew is mistaken, of course. What it means is that Matthew is telling us there were a lot of miracles done by Jesus in places that simply didn't get recorded.

Because the record cannot... it would be too full. It would be impossible to record all the things Jesus did and where he did them. So, we're told here that the account of the Gospels and the miracles he did is really a sketchy account.

Because there were multitudes of miracles done in some places which we don't read any of them in the Gospels about. Okay, now he says, he began to reproach or scold the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. Now,

Jesus obviously had called Israel to repent.

That's why he scolded them for not repenting. What does it mean to repent? Well, repent means you change your mind. And, of course, as a result of changing your mind, there's a consequent change of direction of life.

Generally speaking, you pursue a course of life that agrees with your values, that agrees with your preferences, that agrees with your mind. You know, your mind approves of a certain thing, and so you essentially do that thing. Now, there are exceptions, of course, and Paul points that out in Romans chapter 7. Sometimes we do things we don't approve of.

But, in general, when we choose a course of life and live it, it is because our mind approves it. We see either virtue or value or something desirable in it, and we choose it. We embrace it, and we live it.

And, therefore, our values and our morals are essentially those which we agree with, or at least which we find some way to justify. Now, repentance means we change our minds. And, in particular, it's not just any change of mind that's of value.

In fact, it's possible for someone who has a right opinion to change his mind to a wrong opinion. That's a changing of the mind, too, but that's not a good one. Repentance specifically means that you change your mind about sin so that you change from a position of rebellion against God and His standards to an acceptance and agreement with God on His standards.

So that, for example, if you are, let's say you're a fornicator. That is, you're a womanizer. Now, if that is the case, you apparently think that's okay.

And if you don't think it's okay, you nonetheless find some way to justify it because your mind approves it at some level. Now, God does not approve it. God says that that is sin, and His Word tells us that that is sin.

So you and God, in this case, are in disagreement with each other. Now, repentance means that you change your mind and bring it into agreement with God. And that means that instead of continuing to believe that your sin is all right, you acknowledge it's not all right and God is right when He says it's wrong.

That's what repentance involves. That's essentially what the word metanoia, the Greek word for repentance, means, to change the mind. But the change of the mind, if it is genuine and sincere, will result in a change of behavior.

Once you decide that fornication is indeed wrong, then if that is a sincere change, you will change your patterns of life and you'll stop chasing women. You'll stop sleeping with women who are not your wife because that is wrong. And you believe it's wrong.

Now, I'm not going to say that people who believe that fornication is wrong never fall into occasional sin that they disagree with. As I said, there are times that the Bible acknowledges where people do the things they disagree with. But in general, a person who lives in sin and finds ways to justify it, and it is his way of life, has not repented.

And he needs to repent. He needs to bring his life and his thoughts around to agreement with what God says on these issues. Now, Jesus was rebuking these cities because they had not repented.

From this we gather that Jesus had called them to repent and they didn't respond. Jesus had presented to them God's way of seeing things in contrast to their way of seeing things. And they should have embraced God's way.

They should have changed their mind and repented, but they didn't. They did not come into the kingdom of God. They did not choose to agree with God about his authority in their lives.

And they did not choose to give up the sins of their lives. This is what it means when it says they did not repent. Now, by the way, Jesus has done a great deal for this part of the world, too.

And by this part of the world, I mean America, where I'm sitting. There's been a great deal of blessing. There's been a great deal of not only financial blessing, but there's been great spiritual blessing.

God has sent revivals, multitudes of revivals to America. He sent the preaching of the word. There's some very choice and gifted advocates of Christianity in this country.

And we have been very blessed to have a lot of light given to us. In many cases, it could be said that many have seen miracles that God has done and answers to prayer. These things being so, of course, we need to realize that God's not just putting on a carnival for us.

He's not just trying to entertain us. He's trying to call us to repentance from our sins. And if we do not repent, the fact that we've had so much light given to us and so much advantage given to us only makes us more responsible for not repenting.

And God calls all men everywhere to repent. It says in Acts chapter 10, I'm sorry, Acts chapter 17, where Paul is talking on Mars Hill. He says God in times of men's ignorance was willing to wink at that ignorance.

But he says now he commands all men everywhere to repent. So this command to repent was not obeyed in most of Israel. And these particular cities that had had the greatest opportunity to see what Jesus was about by seeing so many miracles were particularly responsible for their blindness because Jesus had come and brought them

the ability to see what was going on and they did not choose to embrace it.

And so he speaks to these cities. And the first two he mentions are Chorazin and Bethsaida. And as I said, we don't really read of specific miracles done in these cities.

So we have to assume there were a lot of miracles done there that simply never were recorded. But he says of these cities, Woe unto you, Chorazin, woe unto 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. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

Now, Tyre and Sidon were two cities that were north of Israel. They were not Jewish cities. Of course, Israel is a land situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

And it's a narrow strip of land on the east coast there of the Mediterranean. And just above it on the sea coast is the city of Tyre. And Tyre and Sidon were sister cities up in that area.

They were part of another country called Phoenicia at one time or Lebanon. And they were enemies of Israel at times. But in addition to being enemies, I mean, they were not always enemies.

I mean, through the history, Tyre was sometimes antagonistic toward Israel and sometimes friendly toward Israel. But the point is they were Gentiles. That's the important thing.

To the Jews, Gentiles were totally filthy. Gentiles were totally unacceptable. On the day of judgment, those Gentiles were going to really have to pay the piper because they were Gentiles.

They were a lesser breed without the law. Now, Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, and therefore the average Jew figured, well, those people are in real trouble with God. They're Gentiles.

And Jesus said, well, you know, on the day of judgment, Tyre and Sidon are going to receive a lesser judgment. It'll be more tolerable for them on the day of judgment than it will be for you. You, Chorazin and Bethsaida, these Jewish cities, you may be Jewish, but you are not any better off with God than these Gentile cities are.

And why is that? Because you are more resistant to truth than they are. Jesus said if these mighty works that were done to you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented, and you didn't. Now, what this tells us is that God is very mindful of a person's openness to the truth.

Because although Tyre and Sidon never did get the advantages of seeing and hearing

Jesus, Jesus knew that they were disposed in such a way mentally, or their attitude was such, that had they seen such things, they would have responded. And therefore, he said, on the day of judgment, their judgment will be less severe than those who had opportunity and did not respond. Now, that's what Jesus said, and that tells us something that we might otherwise have wondered a great deal about.

We have often heard the question, and I'm sure many of us have asked it ourselves, what is God going to do about those who have never heard the gospel? How is he going to judge them? Well, according to Jesus, less severely. That's right. He's going to judge them less severely than he's going to judge those who have heard the gospel and rejected it.

That's exactly what Jesus said. Jesus said the people of Tyre and Sidon, who never saw these things, never heard these things, their judgment day will be less severe. That's what more tolerable seems to mean.

It'll be more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than it will be for these Jewish cities who saw and heard a great deal and rejected it. Now, what that means is that rejection of light is a greater sin than never having had light. Now, everyone has some light.

I should point that out. Everybody has some opportunity to know that there is at least a God. Anyone can look up at the sky and see the handiwork of God.

In Psalm 19, the opening verses say that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utter speech, night unto night show forth knowledge. There's no people, no nation, no tongue in which their voice is not heard.

What it's saying is that the stars in the heavens, the very orderliness of creation, declares to the whole world that there's a God. But having said that, it does not necessarily follow that everybody knows what the gospel is just because they know there's a God. And therefore, everyone has a bit of light.

Everyone has enough light even from nature itself to know that a God exists. But not everybody knows what God has done. Not everybody knows what standards God has laid out.

Not everybody knows what sins are. People may have a conscience, but that doesn't mean that they fully understand all the things that God considers to be objectionable. And certainly not all people know about the message of salvation that Christ has brought.

Some people have had greater advantage than others. Some have had greater light than others. And greater light, according to Jesus, incurs greater responsibility.

And those who have had great light and rejected it will have a less tolerable experience in the day of judgment than those who have had very little light and have not rejected it. In fact, Jesus made it clear that the people of Tyre and Sidon, Gentiles though they were, were persons of spiritual receptivity. That's right.

He said if they had seen these miracles, they would have repented. That means that Jesus knew that these people, at least many of them, were persons who would be receptive to the truth if they had an opportunity to hear it and see it. They did not have that opportunity, and therefore their judgment would be less severe than those who had that opportunity.

But what Jesus is saying is that his own generation was obstinate. They had great opportunity and rejected it. But there was sensitivity to truth on the part of the people of Tyre and Sidon, and therefore their generation would, I should say, their day of judgment would not be as severe.

In Luke chapter 12, in verses 47 and 48, Jesus said this, And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself, or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.

And to whom much has been committed, of them they will ask the more. Now what Jesus is saying is, if you've been given a great deal of opportunity, much more will be expected from you. You have greater responsibility.

He says, To whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. And he's speaking in terms of a stewardship here. If some master commits to his steward ten talents, he expects more back than if he commits only five talents to him.

The more that you are given, the more opportunity you have to use it for good, and you'll be expected to do so. Now, we live in a place where we have had tremendous opportunity to know the truth. And yet, the United States is a nation that, to a large extent, certainly a great number of persons in this country, have had great opportunity to know the truth, but they don't want it, and they do not respond to it, and they do not repent.

And therefore, I dare say that the United States is worthy of a more severe judgment than, let us say, the people of, let's say, Pakistan, or Nepal, or some country where the gospel has not been widely preached in recent generations. And these people may be judged as well, but they will not be judged as severely. Did you see what Jesus said there in Luke 12? He said that the servant who knew his master's will and did not do it will be beaten with many stripes.

That is, he'll have a severe punishment because he knew what was expected, but he didn't do it. But the servant who didn't know, but still committed things worthy of stripes, he'll be beaten with few stripes. That is, he'll have a lesser judgment.

He may be guilty because everybody who sins and does not repent has enough light. I mean, when you look at the sky and say, there's got to be a God, when you look at nature and say, someone must have designed this, you know there's a God. You have to somehow convince yourself otherwise against logic.

And there are people who do that, and the theory of evolution has helped some people along in this to ignore logic, and to ignore reason, and to convince themselves that they have rational basis for not believing in God. And they can live with that delusion for a little while more, probably. But the fact is, they are rejecting light.

There is light given, and God's light is rejected. Now, not everyone rejects it. There are people who have never heard the gospel, and all they know is there must be a God.

And their heart responds and says, I would like to know this God. There are people in other countries who have never heard the gospel who are seeking God. Now, what is God going to do about that? Well, all we can say with certainty is that Jesus said that those who have had no opportunity will not be judged as severely as those who have.

He says the same thing about Capernaum in verse 23. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. That usually translated hell in the King James Version, but it's a place of death.

They'll be brought down to destruction. For if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day, implying that Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities that were destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven back in Genesis chapter 19, that those cities, if they had seen the kind of impressive display of God's power that Jesus had, if he had brought it to them, they would have repented and not been judged. They would have remained to this day, Jesus said.

Now, once again, he's saying that the people of Sodom were more spiritually receptive than the people of Israel, and this was a real slap in the face of his own countrymen because they really looked down on Sodom, not only because they were Gentiles, Sodom, but because Sodom was an exceedingly corrupt city. But Jesus said, corrupt it may have been, yet had it had the opportunity to repent that you've had, they would have done so and they would have remained. He says, but I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.

Now, Sodom didn't have a very tolerable judgment. The fire from brimstone came and consumed them all. But Jesus said, the day of judgment for Israel is going to be more severe than that day of judgment for Sodom.

And when you read, particularly of the temporal judgment that came upon Israel in the year 70 AD, at the hands of the Romans, if you read Josephus' account of it, you could certainly believe that it would have been more preferable to die the way that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah died, than to die the way that the Jews died in that siege of Jerusalem, which was a horrendous thing. It was so horrendous that Jesus elsewhere said, its tribulation was like none before, and never would come afterwards. It was a horrendous thing that came upon the generation that Jesus was rebuking here for rejecting his ministry.

But we are a generation that needs to heed that warning too, because we have a great deal of light. We too will be held greatly responsible for what we know. What are we doing about it?