

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON L : CHRIST PRONOUNCES WOES UPON THE CITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
11:20-30				Lk 10:13-15

What Jesus now speaks naturally follows topically the verses immediately preceding. Jesus had just extolled John the Baptist as a great prophet (Matt 11:1-6). To offset any thinking John was merely fickle, Jesus expounds on John's place in scripture and condemned those who rejected his teachings (Matt 11:7-19). As an outgrowth of this rejection, Jesus condemns the cities most blessed by His presence (Matt 11:20-24). Like the prophets of old however Jesus ends His words of condemnation with words of hope and forgiveness (Matt 11:25-30).

"The wonderful portion of Scripture which makes up the rest of this chapter deals with three things, about which there has been great disputing: namely, the responsibility of man, the sovereign election of God, and the free invitations of the gospel. They are all here in happy combination." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

v20 Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: When this occurred is not given but the context demands many miracles have already been done in these cities, yet they did not repent.

upbraid = oneidizein (ὀνειδίζειν) meaning to reproach. The same word is used in Matt 5:11 and whereas it is used there in unjustifiable accusations against believers, here it is justifiable: the Lord justifiably denounces those people who had hardened their hearts against Him. "The more God has done to draw men unto Himself, the less excusable are they if they continue in iniquity." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

The cities of course is a reference to the inhabitants; buildings, streets and walls cannot be expected to repent. "It is true, nevertheless, that what is done by the citizens is bound to affect the place where they life." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

v21,22 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, 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 unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. : Chorazin: northwest of the Sea of Galilee is the ruins of Kerazeh, all that is left of the ancient Chorazin. Bethsaida: either Bethsaida Julias located southeast of the point where the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee; or Bethsaida situated closer to Capernaum. Since both are mentioned together, the latter is more probable. If so, it was the hometown of Philip, Andrew and Peter. Tyre / Sidon: Phoenician cities located northwest on the shore of the Mediterranean. From Isa 23; Ez 26-28 we receive the impression they were proud, money-mad and cruel. Amos denounced the Tyrians for selling the Jews into slavery to the Edomites (Amos 1:9); and the Phoenicians sold the Jews to the Greeks as slaves (Joel 3:6).

Many practical applications might be gleaned from this situation. **Regardless of the depths of sin, grace can reach still deeper.** Pagan, idolaters, those who committed sins which should not be written yet the Lord said if those cities had been as favored as Chorazin and Bethsaida, they would have repented! Also note what angers the Lord: not just sin although the Lord hates sin, but **the Lord's judges in direct relation to privileges.** The cities near to where the Lord kept His headquarters were highly privileged, but **privileges bring responsibilities.** Being more blessed they were in like manner more responsible and therefore more guilty for rejecting their opportunities. What a condemnation upon America, a country with gospel church throughout, Bibles readily available, Christian ministries broadcasted on the radio and TV, good Christian magazines and books, etc. These are great blessings but will all be used to forge a larger millstone around the necks of those which reject such blessings. "Every thing will help to overwhelm the impenitent at the tribunal of God — the benefits and favors which they have received, as well as the sins which they have committed." [Clarke, *Commentary*] "Some cities were more favored with the Lord's presence than others, and therefore He looked for more from them. These cities ought to have repented, or Christ would not have upbraided them: **repentance is a duty.** The more men hear and see of the Lord's work, the greater is their obligation to repent. Where most is given most is required. Men are responsible for the way in which they treat the Lord Jesus and 'his mighty works.' ... Terrible as the hell of these two sinful cities will be, their punishment will be more bearable than the sentence passed on cities of Galilee where Jesus taught and wrought miracles of love. **The sin is in proportion to the light.** Those who perish with salvation sounding in their ears perish with a vengeance. Assuredly **the day of judgment will be notable for surprises.** Who would have thought to see Bethsaida sink lower than Sidon?" [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] One practical application might be our attitude towards the lost. How often do believers become disgusted and look down their noses self-righteously at those who dwell in sin. Is their sin awful? — of course it is. But scripture portrays the lost as blind to the things of God and deaf to His word. Believers may not do many things that as bad in our eyes as the lost, but how often is our heart hardened to the things of God. **How often do believers willingly turn from the Lord's will. And we are not blind but saved, have His word, have the power of the Holy Spirit yet still rebel. To whom does the greater judgement belong?** This should humble His people and make us more compassionate unto unbelievers.

sackcloth and ashes: symbolic of mourning. Sackcloth was dark coarse kind of cloth. The sackcloth worn by mourners were a kind of shirt with openings for the neck and arms and slit down the front.

One question often asked when confronted by these verses is why didn't the Lord do those miraculous works in Tyre and Sidon if that would have been the results? "Great privileges were lost on Chorazin and Bethsaida, but would have been effectual had they been granted to Tyre and Sidon. According to our Lord's declaration, God gave the opportunity where it was rejected. and it was not given where it would have been accepted. This is true, but how mysterious! The practical point was the guilt of these favored cities, in that they remained unmoved by visitation which would have converted the heathen Sidonians; yes, and would have made them repent quickly 'long ago'; and in the most humiliating manner, 'in sackcloth and ashes.' It is a sad fact that our impenitent hearers do despite to a grace which would have brought cannibals to the Savior's feet!" [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

v23,24 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. : Christ now turns to the center of His activity, the city where He had taken up residence. **Exalted unto heaven:** "A Hebrew metaphor, expressive of the utmost prosperity, and the enjoyment of the greatest privileges. This was properly spoken of this city, because that in it our Lord dwelt, and wrought many of his miraculous works." [Clarke, *Commentary*] Note **the presence of the Lord exalts a city**. Capernaum is condemned because they were so highly blessed. How? By the very presence of Christ Himself. This city so exalted will be brought down to Hades, reminiscent of the Lord's condemnation of Satan himself who thought he was exalted but the Lord said would be brought low (Isa 14:13-15).

Hades is emphatic here, coming before the verb (reversing the normal order of words). "The original word is Hades, ᾗδης, from α, not, and ἰδεν idein, to see; the invisible receptacle or mansion of the dead, answering to sheol in Hebrew; and implying often, (1) the grave; (2) the state of separate souls, or unseen world of spirits, whether of torment, Lk 16:23, or, in general, Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. The word hell, used in the common translation, conveys now an improper meaning of the original word; because hell is only used to signify the place of the damned. But, as the word hell comes from the Anglo-Saxon, helan, to cover, or hide, hence the tiling or slating of a house is called, in some parts of England heling, to this day; and the covers of books by the same name: so the literal import of the original word hades was formerly well expressed by it. Here it means a state of the utmost woe, and ruin, and desolation, to which these impenitent cities should be reduced. This prediction of our Lord was literally fulfilled; for, in the wars between the Romans and the Jews, these cities were totally destroyed, so that no traces are now found of Bethsaida, Chorazin, or Capernaum." [Clarke, *Commentary*]

v25,26 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight. : "This oft-quoted paragraph, dear to the heart of every true believer, forms a striking contrast with the preceding one. There a withering denunciation, here tender invitation; there the curse, here the blessing." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Jesus precedes His invitation with a moment of *thanksgiving* (or *praise*). "Burdened ones are going to be urged to come to Jesus. Yet no one can come unless the path which in so doing he must tread has been revealed to him (v25,26). Nor would it make much sense to come unless the One who invites knows what those invited need and unless He has whatever it takes to satisfy this need (v27). So, with a feeling of serene trust in His Father, an attitude of mind and heart similarly reported of Him on another stirring occasion (Jn 11:41), the Mediator between God and man, Himself man (1 Tim 2:5), probably lifted His eyes to heaven, says, I praise Thee, Father..." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] "I thank: compare Matt 3:6, of confessing sins. Literally, *I confess. I recognize the justice and wisdom of Thy doings*. But with the dative, as here ('to Thee'), it means *to praise, with an undercurrent of acknowledgment*." [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Jesus does not say "Our Father" as He had taught His disciples to pray; rather He addresses Him as He often did as "Father". Sometimes Jesus would say "My Father". **Even His enemies interpreted this to mean that He was claiming equality with God** (Jn 5:18).

The praise Jesus had for His Father was not merely for revealing the way of truth to some. That would be entirely understandable and we of course would join in that praise. But Jesus praises His Father as well for *hiding* these truths from some. "Perhaps a satisfactory way of dealing with the question would be: (a) to admit that in our present state of knowledge it cannot be fully answered. Is not God 'the Lord of heaven and earth'? **Are not such passages as Dt 29:29; Job 11:76,8; Dan 4:35; and Rom 9:20 applicable here?** (b) in so far as a *partial* answer is possible, to view this praise of the Father as the thankful recognition of the latter's righteousness shown in punishing those who are 'wise in their own eyes' (Prov 26:5; Rom 11:25; 12:16), the very opposite of 'babes'." [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] **"Sovereign grace is the answer to abounding guilt.** With rejoicing spirit Jesus sees how sovereign grace meets the unreasonable aboundings of human sin, and chooses out its own, according to the good pleasure of the Father's will. Here is the spirit in which to regard the electing grace of God: 'I thank Thee.' It is cause for deepest gratitude. Here is the author of election: 'O Father.' It is the Father who makes the choice, and reveals the blessings. Here is His right to act as He does: He is 'Lord of heaven and earth.' Who shall question the good pleasure of His will? Here we see the objects of election, under both aspects; the chosen and the passed-over.... Here we see, also, the reason of election, the divine will: 'So it seemed good in Thy sight.' We can go no further than this. The choice seemed good to Him who never errs, and therefore it is good. This stands to the children of God as the reason which is above all reason." [Spurgeon, *Matthew*] "This expression implies two things. First, that **all do not obey the Gospel arises from no want of power on the part of God**, who could easily

have brought all the creatures into subjection to his government. Secondly, that some arrive at faith, while others remain hardened and obstinate, is accomplished by His free election; for, drawing some, and passing by others, He alone makes a distinction among men, whose condition by nature is alike.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

We could say the “babes” Jesus speaks of here are **those who are conscious of their utter dependance on others**. Empty of what it takes to survive they cling entirely upon the Lord. **The contrast therefore is not between the educated and the uneducated, between those who are smart enough to come to Christ and those who reject; but rather between those who in their own mind are superior in learning or righteousness to have a claim on God, and those who can make no such claim but rather confess their helplessness**. To the surprise of those who think themselves righteous, Christ says the way of God is hidden from them by an act of the Father’s will but revealed to the helpless ones. “Babes see because sacred truths are revealed to them, and not otherwise. They are weak and inexperienced. They are simple and unsophisticated. They can cling and trust, and cry, and love; and to such the Lord opens up the treasures of wisdom. The objects of divine choice are such as these. Lord, let me be one among them! The truths of the heavenly kingdom are hid, by a judicial act of God, from men who, in their own esteem, are ‘the wise and prudent.’ They cannot see, because they trust their own dim light, and will not accept the light of God.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Lingering on such a lofty thought of the majesty of God, Jesus continues to give the reason for such actions: **not due to the foreseeing of all events and therefore accommodating His plans to suit, but rather the source finds itself in God’s own good pleasure**. We must be careful not to go overboard on this. “In a certain sense, the fall, sin, and eternal punishment are included in God’s decree and are willed by Him. But this is true *in a certain sense only*, and not in the same sense as grace and salvation. There are the objects of His delight; but God does not delight in sin, neither does He take pleasure in punishment.” [Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*; quoted in Hendriksen, *Matthew*] Cp Ez 18:23,32; 33:11.

v27 All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. : In response to the thought of whether or not Jesus has what it takes to meet the sinner’s needs, Jesus continues by describing His character.

- He beings by saying **all things have been delivered unto Him by the Father**. What things? During His incarnation we see Jesus has authority over Satan, demons, human ailments and handicaps, winds and waves, body and soul, life and death, His own disciples and all people to save them and judge them. As He ascended into heaven He declared all authority / power in heaven and earth had been given unto Him (Matt 28:18). “This is a great truth, and the key of the science of salvation. The man Christ Jesus receives from the Father, and in consequence of His union with the eternal Godhead becomes the Lord and sovereign Dispenser of all things. All the springs of the Divine favor are in the hands of Christ, as Priest of God, and atoning Sacrifice for men: all good proceeds from Him, as Savior, Mediator, Head, Pattern, Pastor, and sovereign Judge of the whole world.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

These ‘things’ were His from all eternity. “The tense [of the verb ‘delivered’] says nothing whatever about the length of time in which the indicated action took place, nor does it tell us when it took place. In the immediately preceding context (v26), however, there was a reference to the Father’s sovereign *good pleasure* regarding the revelation of the matter of salvation to babes. This *good pleasure* is by Paul linked with the election and foreordination ‘in Christ’ that took place ‘before the foundation of the world’ (Eph 1:4,5). What was decided from all eternity was realized in time (Eph 1:7ff). It would seem, therefore, that also here in Matt 11:27 it is not necessary or even advisable to connect the action indicated by [‘delivered’] with one particular moment in Christ’s existence.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

- **Jesus knows what the sinner needs**. “So great and so fathomless is the heart of this Mediator that none but the Father can fathom its riches of knowledge, wisdom, and love.... As if to say, from a reservoir so inexhaustible that only the Father knows its capacity weary and heavily burdened ones are urged to replenish their needed supply.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Knoweth: the compound indicating full knowledge.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] “None can fully comprehend the nature and attributes of God, but Christ; and none can fully comprehend the nature, incarnation, etc., of Christ, but the Father. The full comprehension and acknowledgment of the Godhead, and the mystery of the Trinity, belong to God alone.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

- **The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus** as is evidenced by Jesus alone having full knowledge of the Father. The sinner’s inner self and therefore his needs are known by God alone (Ps 139; Jer 17:9,10). Therefore only One who knows the Father in His fulness is capable of meeting the sinner’s needs. This Person is the Son and Him alone.

- **Jesus alone reveals the Father to the sinner**. As the Father is sovereign in the bestowing of salvation to those to whom He wills, so is Jesus sovereign. This will is totally harmonious with the Father’s will.

v28 Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. : “The Son *has* and He *knows*, and now He also *offers* and *gives* what is needed by those who are weary and burdened.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Come: a combination of two words with the meaning “*come here*” or “*come*” with “*here*” implied. The intended meaning is to believe on Him, including knowledge, assent and confidence all in one. “Here is the gracious invitation of the gospel in which the Savior’s tears and smiles were blended, as in a covenant rainbow of promise. ‘Come’; He drives none away: He calls them to Himself. His favorite word is ‘Come.’ Not, — go to Moses, ‘Come unto me.’ To Jesus Himself we must come, by a personal trust. Not to doctrine, ordinance, or ministry are we to come first; but to the personal Savior. All laboring and laden ones may come: He does not limit the call to the spiritually laboring, but every working and wearied one is called. It is well to give the largest sense to

all that mercy speaks. Jesus calls me.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

The offer is given to those that *labor* and *heavy laden*. “The first an active, the second a passive participle, exhibiting the active and passive sides of human misery.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] **Labor** = weary. A form of the same word is found in Jn 4:6 when Jesus sits by the well being weary from the long journey. **Heavy laden** = burdened. Who these people are may be explained in the context of Matt 23:4, those oppressed by the heavy load of rules and regulations placed upon their shoulders by the scribes and Pharisees. In that context the sense is **those carrying the burden of attempting to earn their salvation may come to Christ and find rest.**

The promise is that of **rest**. “Such rest is not only negatively absence from uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and despair; positively it is peace of mind and heart; assurance of salvation.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Give rest: originally *to make to cease*; Tyndale, *ease*; Wycliffe, *refresh*. The radical conception is that of relief.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

v29,30 Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. : “First, we rest by faith in Jesus, and next we rest through obedience to him. Rest from fear is followed by rest from the turbulence of inward passion, and the drudgery of self. We are not only to bear a yoke, but His yoke; and we are not only to submit to it when it is laid upon us, but we are to take it upon us. We are to be workers, and take His yoke; and at the same time we are to be scholars, and learn from Him as our Teacher. We are to learn of Christ and also to learn Christ. He is both teacher and lesson. His gentleness of heart fits Him to teach, to be the illustration of His own teaching, and to work in us His great design. If we can become as He is, we shall rest as He does. We shall not only rest from the guilt of sin — this He gives us; but we shall rest in the peace of holiness, which we find through obedience to Him. It is the heart which makes or mars the rest of the man. Lord, make us ‘lowly in heart’, and we shall be restful of heart.” [Spurgeon, *Matthew*]

Yoke: in Jewish Rabbinical literature the *yoke* represents the sum-total of obligations which a person must take upon himself. The Rabbis spoke of the “yoke of the Torah”, “yoke of the commandments”, “yoke of the kingdom of heaven”, etc. What Jesus is therefore doing is placing His teachings in contrast with that which the Jews were accustomed. **To accept Christ is to accept His teachings and become His disciples, to live in obedience to His laws of the kingdom.** “Rabbinical figure for going to school. Jesus thus definitely pictures Himself as the expert on God in a Johannean passage (cp Lk 10:21-24). He conceives Himself as the Teacher who alone is able to interpret the Father.” [Robertson, *Harmony*]

Meek and lowly in heart: Christ’s appeal is that of humility rather than power and strength. The meek, as pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount, is one who wholly casts his dependence upon the Lord for all things. The heart is so often used in scripture to refer to the core and center of man’s being.

Rest for your souls: Note the parallel: “I will give you rest” (v28) with “you shall find rest” (v29). “Men can never obtain unless Christ gives. They can never discover what He has not disclosed.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Yoke is easy, burden is light: a literal yoke was a wooden frame placed upon the shoulders to distribute the weight evenly, making a load easier to carry. But a load could be so enormous even a yoke might not be sufficient help to the bearer. Therefore Christ’s assurance is not only that the yoke is *easy, kindly, adjusted to the shoulders, not chafing* but that the burden being carried is not heavy. **“What He is really saying, therefore, is that simple trust in Him and obedience to His commands out of gratitude for the salvation already imparted by Him is delightful. It brings joy and peace. The person who lives this kind of life is no longer a slave. He has become free. He serves the Lord spontaneously, eagerly, enthusiastically. He is doing what he (the ‘new man’ in him) wants to do.”** [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Easy: not a satisfactory rendering. Christ’s yoke is not easy in the ordinary sense of that word. The word means originally *good, serviceable*. The kindred noun, occurring only in Paul’s writings, is rendered *kindness* in 2 Cor 6:6; Titus 3:4; Gal 5:22; Eph 2:7 (Rev), and *goodness*, Rom 2:4 (Rev)... Three meanings combine in the word, though it is impossible to find an English word which combines them all. Christ’s yoke is wholesome, serviceable, kindly. ‘Christ’s yoke is like feathers to a bird; not loads, but helps to motion’. “ [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

“Many persons, we perceive, abuse the grace of Christ by turning it into an indulgence of the flesh; and therefore Christ, after promising joyful rest to wretchedly distressed consciences, reminds them, at the same time, that He is their Deliverer on condition of their submitting to His yoke. He does not, He tells us, absolve men from their sins in such a manner, that, restored to the favor of God, they may sin with greater freedom, but that, raised up by His grace, they may also take His yoke upon them, and that, being free in spirit, they may restrain the licentiousness of their flesh. And hence we obtain a definition of that rest of which He had spoken. It is not at all intended to exempt the disciples of Christ from the warfare of the flesh, that they may enjoy themselves at their ease, but to train them under the burden of discipline, and keep them under the yoke.” [Calvin, *Commentary*]

This rest is not only spiritual but mental and physical as well, in the sense that true service to Christ arising from a heart of love for what He has done provides peace. This peace is the opposite of the aggravated mental stress that sends so many people to doctors, hospitals and death. Putting things in the hands of the Lord relieves the “lust to get even”, anxiety and rancor.