



Matthew 11:20–24

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon

on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Reflection

Imagine if you'd had front row seats to the Sermon on the Mount. You look back over your shoulder and there's a sea of people behind you, all come out to hear Jesus. You've never seen anything like it. Young, old, Jew, Gentile, beggars, synagogue rulers, Pharisees, Sadducees, Ro-

man centurions and tax collectors – all spell bound by this man. People from every background, every nationality, every religion, from all over the region listening on in hushed silence, craning forward to catch every word, hanging off his every word, utterly astounded at the wisdom and authority of Jesus.

Imagine that you'd followed him around Galilee. Watched him heal the sick before your very eyes, lepers returned home to their families cleansed by his touch, people possessed by demons returned to their right minds. Imagine witnessing the blind receive their sight back, storms calmed by a word, seeing those paralysed and suffering terribly, living at death's door, healed at a distance by a word. You even witnessed a young girl, raised from the dead, com-

ing back to life at her own funeral after Jesus reached out and took her hand. Jesus said he'd do it, the mourners laughed in his face, then he raised her from the dead – and then look on their faces! Can you imagine being there, seeing all this, being a part of all this?

One generation was. One very priveleged generation, in one special region of the world, over the course of one year, were treated to this. Billions of people from just hearing about these events, just reading about them in the bible, have come to faith. Millions and millions of people have given their lives over to Jesus just from reading about what happened to them. But they were there.

Yet by and large they rejected Jesus. They

just went on with their daily lives as if nothing had happened. ‘Woe to them, woe to them,’ says Jesus in our passage today.

21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Jesus spent the second year of his ministry based in Capernaum. Chorazin was less than an hour’s walk away. Bethsaida was a short boat ride across the lake, where Peter and Andrew and Philip grew up. He spent one year, his greatest, most public year, preaching freely in their region, performing miracles, proving that he was the Messiah, and they rejected him. Woe to

you, Chorazin, Woe to you Bethsaida!

Jesus compares them with Tyre and Sidon. These are two cities in the Old Testament that became proverbial for their pride and arrogance in their wealth and their pagan gods and yet even these wicked, pagan cities, if they'd seen what Chorazin and Bethsaida had seen in the past 12 months, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. They would have stripped off their finery, put on hessian sacks as their clothes, fallen to their knees, rubbed ash and dirt on their faces and cried out to God to ask for his forgiveness if they'd heard the son of God himself preach amongst them and back up his words with mighty works as he had done in Galilee.

And Capernaum, Jesus' second home, his

base for ministry to the whole region, the miracles he'd performed amongst them should have lifted them all up to heaven, the whole town. But no, for most of them, it was just life as usual. On the Day of Judgement, it will not be heaven for them but hell. The most wicked city in all of the Old Testament, Sodom, destroyed by God for its wickedness, if Jesus had done the same miracles in Sodom as he did in Capernaum it would still remain. On Judgement Day it will be more bearable for Sodom than for Capernaum.

If Jesus' words in this passage don't make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up then I'm not sure what will. Today Jesus is teaching us about judgment. He's taught us four things, did you catch them?

One. There will be judgment. We don't talk about much because we'd prefer it not to be true. But it is. That's why Jesus speaks about it so often; in our passage today he says that judgement is certain and it should be feared.

Two. There are degrees of punishment. One of the most frightening ideas in this passage is what it teaches about degrees of punishment. Did you notice that all the wickedness, all the moral evil, committed by Tyre and Sidon and Sodom will be punished, but even more horrible will be God's judgment poured out on Chorazin, and Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they rejected Jesus personally. Which leads us to our third point.

Three. The worst sin is unbelief. We don't

really think this way. We think the worst sinners are people like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Idi Amin. But there is no record in the bible of Chorazin, or Bethsaida, and Capernaum doing anything particularly morally wrong. They were just people going about their business. Yet they refused to repent and turn to Jesus, and Jesus says that this is a far worse evil than the sins of the other notoriously wicked cities. God will justly punish Hitler, and Stalin and Mao, but even greater than the atrocities that they committed in God's eyes is the sin of unbelief. It is the first and greatest sin out of which all the others flow.

Fourth, and finally. Did you notice that we'll be judged according to our life situations, according to what we know about Jesus? Capernaum had it better than Sodom. Je-

Jesus walked amongst them, they heard his preaching, they witnessed his miracles. They'll be judged commensurately against what they know, against what they experienced. For those of us who've grown up in the Western world with churches on every corner, freedom of religion, the gospel available and clearly heard by all ... this is a chilling thought.

Think and Pray

Take what time you have left today to think and pray about Jesus' words in this passage. Jesus is basically saying, 'You have been warned. I came to earth, I did extraordinary things, I died and rose again from the dead, for the sins of the world, I returned to heaven and I will come back again to judge the living and the dead.'

Because of what I did billions have turned to me in repentance and faith and will live forever with me in heaven. For the rest, you have been warned.'

As unpleasant as it is please take this time now to reflect over the certainty of judgment. Reflect over the fact that the greatest sin against God is the sin of unbelief. And reflect over the fact that the Christian West, who by and large in our generation have rejected Jesus, will stand alongside Capernaum on Judgment Day. These sobering thoughts should drive us all to pray daily and more fervently than ever for the lost in our city. And give us the urgency we need to take the good news of Jesus to those many, many around us who have been warned and who otherwise will stand alongside Capernaum on that day.