

Danger in Rejecting Jesus/Eternal Rest in Following Jesus Matthew 11:20-29

We continue this morning in our study of the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 10, we saw Jesus give 12 of His disciples, which He called apostles instruction and then sent them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Then last week we saw that when Jesus sent out the apostles, they went in one direction, and He went in another direction, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Which brings us to the last half of chapter 11.

Woe to Unrepentant Cities (11:20-24)

Matthew 11:20 (ESV)

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

The He here in verse 20 is Jesus. We always need to remember that the chapter and verse separations, as well as the headings for new sections, were not part of the original text. So, in verse 19 Jesus was speaking, then the next thing is commentary or narrative where Matthew speaks of “He” clearly referring to Jesus.

As Jesus went a different way from His disciples and was preaching about the kingdom, He began to denounce those cities who had rejected the work of Jesus.

What I find interesting in this verse is the statement that seems to lump most of His miracles to one geographical area. As we have seen most of Jesus ministry, up to this point in Matthew has been in the Galilee region, so it stands to reason that most of His miracles were in this region as well.

Matthew says that Jesus began to denounce the cities where His miracles had been done because they still rejected Jesus. Here was Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, very God Himself, present with them, during miracles with them and teaching them, yet there was no repentance.

The reality is that it was not yet time for Israel to accept the Messiah. Jesus had not failed in delivering His message. He did not fail in authenticating who He was. In fact, just the opposite is true. Jesus was obedient and was faithful in doing what the Father had assigned. But, it was not yet time for Israel to accept Jesus.

Matthew 11:21–22 (ESV)

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. 22 But I tell you, it will

be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Jesus now compares cities in the Jewish area that He had ministered in, to Gentile cities to the north. As I look at these verses, I see that Jesus is comparing cities that had been given a great deal of revelation to Pagan Gentile cities that had not received much revelation at all. The Jewish towns rejected Jesus in the face of overwhelming evidence that He was, in fact, the Messiah. Because of the considerable evidence, high accountability will be required from them. It appears that they were then failing.

Jesus says that Tyre and Sidon would have repented if the miracles had been done in their viewing. This is a very interesting statement that we need to spend a little time with.

We know that God has elected us and called us before Creation.

Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

And with Jesus being part of the triune Godhead, He knew who had been called before creation, and Jesus was certainly not speaking against the knowledge within the Godhead. He was not saying that they had been called. He was simply making a

comparison that was focused on the Jewish cities and not the Gentile cities.

What we need to see here is that these gentile cities were wicked cities who had violated the character of God and received punishment for it. Yet those cities that saw the messiah in the flesh, right in front of them, saw the messiah perform miracles and were still not responding, not repenting, how much more would they be punished. They had been given a great deal of evidence and yet they still rejected Jesus.

The point of this comparison is to reflect on how bad it is to reject the Messiah when He is right before you. Jesus mentioned that the Gentile pagan cities would have even mourned at their sin when confronted by the Messiah.

We also see that Jesus is giving us an indication that there will be degrees in punishment in eternity. Look again at verse 22.

Matthew 11:22 (ESV)

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

Jesus says that it will be more bearable on that day for Tyre and Sidon than for you. They will still receive punishment, but it will not be quite as bad as those Jews who have rejected their Messiah, standing right in front of them. From this, we can see that eternal punishment will still be eternal and it will still be punishment but in some way not quite as bad as it could be.

Remember, however, that it is still separation from God and His glory for eternity. There is no potential of salvation after death, just eternal separation from Jesus. How it will be better, while still separated from God we do not know. Some have suggested that it won't be as hot, some said it won't be as physically painful. The bottom line is we just do not have information to know in what way it will be better. We just need to remember that it will still be eternal separation from God, which is the spiritual definition of dead.

Matthew 11:23–24 (ESV)

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.

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

Jesus again makes the same comparison. This time Jesus asks the rhetorical question if Capernaum will be exalted to heaven. Jesus then quickly answers the question in the negative by saying that Capernaum will be brought down to Hades.

Hades is the Grecco-Roman place of the dead. Hades or Pluto, depending on Greek or Roman systems was the god of the dead and the place he took the dead was Hades. Jesus was not condoning the Grecco-Roman mythological system but was

using a word they all would understand there was no coming back from. In verse 24, Jesus again eludes to the degrees of punishment in eternal punishment.

In this section from 20-24 Jesus is making the point that despite evidence was given to the people of Israel, they were rejecting the Messiah they had been told was coming and they had looked for. Jesus, the Messiah was right in front of them, performed many of the miracles they had been told the Messiah would perform, yet they rejected Him. As a result of the reject of the Messiah, their future punishment would be harsher than those gentile pagan cities who were very evil. Rejection of the Messiah is worse than the evil of pagan cities including the city of Sodom. Just ponder on that for a while.

[Come to Me and I Will Give You Rest \(11:25-30\)](#)

Jesus follows up the warning given to the cities of the Galilee region who had seen Jesus but were rejecting Him with an invitation.

Matthew 11:25–26 (ESV)

25 At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

I find vers 25 fascinating. This verse reveals to me that there much about our salvation and the revelation of truth that we do not understand. Jesus thanks the Father that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and understanding, but revealed it to little children.

First, we need to figure out what “these things” is. In the context of verses 20-24 it seems clear that “these things” refers to an understanding of who Jesus is and what He was offering. Jesus had just talked about the cities that had rejected Jesus, despite the evidence that was presented to them.

Jesus was thanking the Father that the truth, the gospel, was hidden from some people and not from others. The Apostle Paul would say a few years later:

2 Corinthians 4:3–4 (ESV)

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Go back to verse 26.

Matthew 11:26 (ESV)

26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

It is God's will that the truth not be clear to everyone at all times. The reality is that God's will, as we saw in Ephesians chapter 1 is that some were called before the foundation of the world. To those called the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, will be revealed at the appropriate time in the appropriate way.

Matthew 11:27 (ESV)

27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus makes clear here in verse 27 that the Father has given control of the release of the truth to Him. Access to the Father comes only through the Son to those the Son has chosen to reveal Him to.

Jesus also makes clear that it is only the Father and the Son who truly know each other. The grammar of this verse indicates that Jesus was not speaking of passing knowledge but of complete or thorough knowledge. There is an intimacy in the relationship between the Father and Jesus. To know the Father with such intimacy come only through the Son.

Matthew 11:28 (ESV)

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

But wait, Jesus told the apostles, as they were being sent out in chapter 10, that their life would be difficult. It is hard to follow Jesus. So how do we square what Jesus told His disciples about their life and what He says here?

To accurately answer this question, we have to think about the historical context He was making these statements in. The Jews had a tremendous burden imposed upon them by the false understanding of the law given to them by God. Just think about the world of the Jews Jesus was talking to.

They were told they had to keep the law perfectly to appease God. They would have to perform ritual and sacrifices constantly to deal with their sin before God without ever completely dealing with their sin. They could not do it, they could not ever keep the law and provide themselves with salvation.

So Jesus tells them that following Him, in comparison is easy. There is no burden of the law on them. In fact, what we have learned is we can't even contribute to the salvific process. It is all the burden of God.

The Jews were burdened by the keeping of the law and turning to Jesus, relieved them of that burden. Let me make it perfectly clear that Jesus is not saying here that being a follower of Jesus is simple and does not require any work. It requires a great deal of work and is very hard. But becoming a follower of Jesus is different from being a follower of Jesus. Being is what we are

after we have become a follower of Jesus. Becoming a follower of Jesus is the work of Jesus and so no burden on us.

Matthew 11:29–30 (ESV)

29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus quotes from Jeremiah 6:16 when He says that in following Him, we will find rest for our souls. In Jeremiah 6 Jerusalem was in the middle of a disaster that was the direct result of their violation of the covenant with God. Jerusalem, all of Israel, was about to be in that same situation. In fact, you could say that Israel was still in the time of rebellion from God that was present in Jeremiah’s time.

Jesus says that we are to take my yoke upon you and learn from Him and we will find rest for our souls. What is the yoke of Jesus? Yoke is often used in Scripture to speak of submission. By placing a yoke on the cows, donkeys, other animals, they can be attached to instruments to accomplish work. It also provides an amount of submission by the animal to the one who drives them or the yoke. So I think Jesus is telling us that we are to submit to Him completely and we are to learn from Him. What do we learn? We learn to submit to the will of the Father, we learn to do what He has given us to do. I think Jesus is not

talking about the process of salvation here but the process of life after salvation.

There are some scholars that view this as being only about salvation. If that is accurate then Jesus is telling us to take the light and easy way of salvation that He provides so that we can have eternal rest.

Conclusion

We have seen this morning a comparison between the people that reject Jesus, despite having seen fantastic miracles from Him and those who have been given to the Son for salvation. We have also seen that there will be degrees in punishment in eternity with greater punishment going to those who have rejected Jesus.

Then Jesus told us that we do not need to live under the burden of providing salvation for ourselves. Think about the burden felt in having to provide for your own salvation and eternal security. Knowing that there is a great punishment coming on those who reject Jesus, the burden has to be extremely high.

Contrast that with the way Salvation is actually received. As a gift from God through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. A gift is given after Jesus made it legal and just for God to forgive us, for God to see us through Jesus' righteousness. Since we have been called by the Father before He created the world, the

burden we have for eternal life is simple. But then we have to learn from Jesus to be obedient and to serve Him.

As Jesus was talking to the Galileans here in Matthew 11 He told them that they by in large had rejected Him and the punishment for that would be great. But all is not lost. There will always be some who turn to the Messiah. The time of blessing for Israel will begin when the entire world is prepared for the second coming of the Messiah through the tribulation. I look forward to that time and recognize that I have no burden to get there, Jesus has taken care of that. By I have accepted the yoke of Jesus and look toward Him to learn from Him and be led by Him as I strive to do the good works He has appointed beforehand for me to accomplish.

Let's Pray!