

Thank You. Next

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[0 : 0 0] In St. Matthew chapter 11 we read from verse 20, Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.

Woe unto the Chorazin, woe unto the Bethsaida, and so on. Thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shall be brought down to hell, and so on. The contrast here Jesus is making is between those who have been so favoured by his presence, and by his works, and the blessing of his ministry, and those who, never having had that opportunity, would, although lost in the day of judgment, yet be treated, as it were, more favourably in that day of judgment, than those who, having had all these privileges, have allowed them to pass away.

The context of this, of course, is that Jesus sent out, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, sent out his twelve apostles with a message of the gospel into the towns and cities of Israel and Judah.

He himself, likewise, continues to do that work also. After he made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed then to teach and to preach in their cities. And then John asks him, you know, well, or through his disciples, are thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

And he doesn't say, well, yes, it's me. You know, go and tell John, it's okay, yes, it is me, Jesus. I'm the one that he should trust in. He told them rather to go by the evidence. The blind receive their sight.

[1 : 3 5] The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The dead hear. The dead are raised up. And the poor have the gospel preached in them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Now, we then go on to have this testimony to John's faithfulness, his greatness, that he is the ultimate and last of the prophets with a capital P.

There is this slightly, we might say, difficult verse, that the kingdom of God, now those who are the violent, take it by force.

Verse 12, from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffered of violence, and the violent take it by force. It's not an ideal translation that we have here. What it rather means is that because of John's message, some have been stirred up to zeal and energy and a burning desire for the kingdom of God.

And they're working at it. They're really sort of fighting to get into the kingdom of heaven. That's the message that's meant to be. It's not an ideal translation. Suffereth violence.

[2 : 4 1] It's not in the sense of, oh, the kingdom of heaven is being injured by the violence of those seeking to storm its doors. But rather, in the sense that Jesus says, Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.

Allow. You know, the kingdom of heaven allows those zealous and desiring to get in. It allows them to come. That's the sense of it. And the violent, those who are stirred up, those who are burning with desire, take it, not by force, but because of their zeal, they can't be stopped from entering the kingdom of God.

Such is their desire toward the Lord. And that's, of course, a good desire. But as Jesus says, you know, what will I like in this generation? John came, you know, in the guise of a genuine prophet.

He was a bit scary. He was very sort of in the wilderness. He was a bit wild. He said all the things a prophet should say. And he really struck the fear of God into people. And yet still, he didn't repent.

So Jesus came, being very much a normal person, eating and drinking, befriending those who are the outcasts and so on, and he still gets criticized. So people will make excuses not to repent and turn to the Lord.

[3 : 55] Now, I want us to hold on to verse 5 that we just made reference to. When Jesus wants to convince John's disciples of the truth of his own messiahship, he says, The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. In other words, he wants them to go back to John and say, Look, this evidence of the kingdom of God having come.

This is the truth of what's happening. And John is enough of a man of God to know that these things don't just happen by normality. These things are not symptoms of everyday life.

This is evidence that something supernatural is happening. And these things are happening with such frequency and such rapidity, and they are all centered around one person in whom the kingdom of God is personified.

The kingdom of God has come. The Messiah has come. That is the evidence. The blind receive their sight, the lepers are cleansed, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

[5 : 08] This is evidence that something is happening which is unheard of. It is a work that can only be of God. It cannot be of mere men. Go back to John with that evidence.

Give him the evidence. And give him the evidence and let him draw his own conclusions. He's enough of a man of God to know where that evidence is leading him. But then we've got what we really want to focus on today.

And that is the situation of these villages and towns where Jesus had done these things. Chorazin, which, you know, this is the only reference to it.

We don't know anything about Chorazin except that it's mentioned here. It's probably not too far away from Capernaum. Some commentators and Bible authorities think it's slightly to the northwest of Capernaum.

But also Bethsaida, which was slightly just to the east of the Jordan River at the top of the Sea of Galilee. All of these places are concentrated in the sort of top left corner of the Sea of Galilee, the northwest corner there, where Jesus had lived and worked and done most of his amazing works during the time of his earthly ministry at that stage.

[6 : 21] So, 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. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven. How is it? Capernaum is lifted unto heaven because Jesus has chosen to dwell there.

God the Son has made his, however temporary, he has made his home in Capernaum. It is the dwelling place of God the Son. It is exalted to heaven in that sense.

And yet, it still remains unmoved. That the mighty works which have been done in thee have been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee. Now, what have these towns and cities done that was so terrible? Had they turned against Jesus?

[7 : 24] Had they tried to stone him or run him out of the city or the town? No, they were quite happy with the things that he had done. You know, we read, going back again to verse 5, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor are the gospel preached to them.

We think of what we read, we would turn back a few chapters, Matthew 5, we think of crowds gathering around Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. We think of all his teaching there, we think of all the people that he healed, we think of the crowds that followed him, wanting to have their sick healed, people who let down the paralyzed through the roof so that they could be healed by Jesus.

And, do we think that were these people ungrateful? Did they think, oh, what a terrible thing he went and healed out of sin? No, they are very pleased. Thank you that Jesus has done these things.

They are delighted, no doubt, to have such a man of God amongst them who is able to do these things. Thank you very much, Jesus, for opening the eyes of life.

Thank you for unstopping the years of the deaf. Thank you very much. You've raised the dead, you've cleansed the lepers. That's great. Now we can get on with our lives. Thank you.

[8 : 39] Next, is really how we could sum up the attitude of these times. It's not that they're against Jesus. They're very happy to have him in the midst. They're very happy to have him benefiting them.

But here's the thing, that what Jesus has described to John the Baptist's followers is evidence that the kingdom of God has come.

that in the person of Jesus, God is amongst them. Now that ought to make people, not only, thank you very much, let's move on to the next thing, grateful in that sense, but it ought to make them think, this isn't normal.

This doesn't happen by nature. some kind of power in this man is enabling somebody who is half dead from leprosy to be completely cleansed, to be restored to life in its rooms, for lots of lepers to be cleansed, for those who were born blind, to be able to see, for those who were deaf, which is a fearful affliction, far more than we probably recognize, most of us, to have the deaf, able to hear again, to have those who are lame, in a day when there wasn't, you know, orthopedic surgeons, and there wasn't, you know, there wasn't any kind of, help in hospitals, or medical care, or physiotherapy, or anything like that, you know, if you got lame, if you got sick, it meant you couldn't work, it meant you couldn't earn money, it meant your family starved.

So, all these things that are tended upon ill health, and sickness and disease, these things are all being rolled back, all being undone, that doesn't happen by nature.

[10 : 29] And the logical conclusion, is for people to think, this is actually pretty incredible, this is, this is almost frightening, of what has happened here. What kind of power is in this man?

What kind of individual must this be? God must be amongst us. This is the power of God, truly, we are seeing incredible things, and who are we, that the Lord should be amongst us?

Remember when, when Jesus, had that miraculous catch of fish, for Simon Peter, at the beginning of his ministry, Peter, he threw himself down at Jesus' feet, and he said, depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.

In other words, he recognised, that this could only be, the power of God, which had brought this miraculous, catch of fish, and he was a professional fisherman.

He knew what happened normally, and what didn't happen. He knew this was not nature. He knew that, a catch like this, in the middle of the day, as opposed to at night, was completely, out with the bounds of nature.

[11 : 33] He knew this was bound up with Jesus, and frankly, he was terrified. This could only be God, and God is a holy God, God is a pure, and a loving God, and to contrast, what he knew himself to be, in the face of this God, he threw himself, at Jesus' feet, said, depart from me Lord, I am a sinful man.

In other words, I can't be in your presence Lord, I am so unworthy, I am so, so sinful, you can't, you can't stay where I am.

Thankfully, of course, Jesus wanted him, to be his disciples. Jesus has come for sinners, but there was repentance, with Simon Peter there, a repentance, an awareness, of God's coming into their midst, which, by and large, these times, just did not exist, Chorazin, and Capernaum, and Bethsaida, the mighty works, that Jesus did, were done, in their midst, in their very presence, but, they didn't repent, what is he looking for, well, should we repent, of wanting our sick healed, should we repent, of following Jesus, hoping he'll open the eyes, of the blind, or help our sick relative, no, that's not the problem, and the problem is, that all these mighty works, have been treated, by these towns, and cities, and peoples within them, simply as a means, of topping up, the difficulties, the problems, the challenges, of their life, thank you very much, Lord, that's fine, thank you, next, because, the main concern, for their lives, is their lives, their main concern, in their, their day-to-day business, is themselves, and their business, and this is typical, of the human race, really, when we consider, all the vast array, of religions, there are in the world, and all the, the multitude, of deities, that men worship, most of which, of course, are complete inventions, out of their own minds, or all the attitudes, they may have, of humanism, or atheism, whatever, it all really boils down, to one of two things, either, men acknowledge, the true God, and their place, before him, or, they think of themselves, as the most important, beings, in the world, and all the other, gods that men, invent, all the other, statues they worship, all the other, false gods, they pretend, to give allegiance to, or perhaps, they genuinely, give allegiance to, all of these, are essentially, man-centered, they are all about, making man feel better, they are all about, exalting man, to the ultimate position, the ultimate promise, of half of these, false religions, is simply, how good things will be, for you, how good things will be, if you do this, if you do this, you'll get on well, you'll be blessed, you'll be encouraged, you'll have glory, and so on, it is not about, a relationship with God, it is not about, ultimately loving, the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, it is ultimately, about what works for you, so you've got, man-centered, if you can call it religion, it might be, absence of religion, let's call it, ideology, you've got, man-centered ideology, on the one side, and you've got,

God-centered faith, on the other side, and all religion, or lack of it, boils down, to one of these two, this is how we discern, false religion, from truth, that which is, Christ-centered, that which has, the Lord, at the heart of it all, that will be true religion, that which exalts Christ, that which glorifies him, that which puts, anything else, in his place, is simply, seeking to, seeking to further, the interests of men, it is man-centered, it is, keeping God, whatever they say, about, oh of course, we honour God, of course, and we, we accept them, of course we honour him, these towns and cities, would have said, of course we're happy, to have Jesus, in the midst of us, we're very glad, that he heals the sick, we're very glad, that he feeds people, and raises the dead, of course we want him, to stay, but we want him, to stay, for what he can do, for us, rather than in terms, of repenting, before God, of how we are, and what we need, the Lord, to save us from, you see, coming face to face, with the power of God, ought to make us humble, ought to make us, fall upon our knees, like Simon Peter did, at the beginning, of Jesus ministry there, ought to make us repent, of who we are, of what we've done, and what we know, we are guilty of, the sheer contrast, between the holiness, of Jesus, and the power of God, in him, and what we ourselves, are, and all the things, that pass, for righteousness, with us, it's just pathetic, it's just like, if I were to, if I were to say, get a footballer, and start doing, a few keepy uppies, and say, oh look,

I can do it again, a dozen, this is how good I am, and I'm really, quite a spectacular footballer, and then they would, bring in say, a captain of the Brazil team, or something, and all the fancy stuff, he could do, with a ball, and the way his team, would play, and I would just want, to slink off, into the corner, and think, who was I, fully, I was only kidding myself, I'm nothing, as long as I'm alone, and doing my keepy uppies, I look good, I look fine, as long as I'm only, comparing myself, with myself, but if the best, of the best, comes and stands, alongside me, I see, what I am in reality, and I just want, to slink off, away, into the corner, and when the best, of the best, comes into the presence, of these towns, and these villages, call us, in Bethsaida, Capernaum, what they ought to do, is want to repent, what they ought to do, is want to be humbled, before the Lord, and say, Lord, how have we been fooling, ourselves, we thought we were, the people of God, we thought we were, you know,

[17 : 51] Israelites indeed, we thought we were, doing a not bad job, we thought we were righteous, but we see, the power of God here, we see the holiness, of Jesus, we see, the power of what he does, now, in raising the dead, in opening the eyes, of the blind, this is a power, which we know, is not of this world, we know is not a man, this is the kingdom of God, which has come to us, who can stand, before the kingdom of God, who can stand, before the holiness, and the power of God, the only ones that can, are the ones, that don't believe in it, and who think, it doesn't matter, because more important, is getting on, with everyday life, I don't imagine, those in Chorazin, or in Capernaum, or in Bethsaida, were just being idle, and lounging about, the shores, of the Sea of Galilee, they were getting on, with their work, they were getting on, with business, they were making, their daily bread, they were earning, their trust, they were working away, at their business, they were doing, all the stuff, that they have to do, drawing their water, making their bread, and working away, they were being busy, they were getting on, with life, life wasn't being interrupted, just because Jesus, was around, life, themselves, their own life, was, more important,

Jesus, yes, thank you very much, if you can help us, if you can, yield somebody, if you can, top up, the work of our life, and help us, to get along, thanks very much, Jesus, we'll take that, we'll take, what you can give, we'll take, what you might offer, to us, but, we're not going to, give anything to you, we're not going to, repent, we're not going to, turn, we're going to, take whatever you bring, whatever you give, thanks very much, that'll be fine, thank you, next, this is the attitude, of these towns, and what Jesus, is saying, is look, if Tyre, and Sidon, which were, notorious, not perhaps, for especially, being, anti-Christian, or anti-the Lord, but they were just, given to great, business, and, and, all the, the work of the merchants, and all the, the wealth that was created, where wealth is generated, you tend also to get, depravity creeps in as well, degeneracy comes, where there is more wealth, there tends to be more degeneracy, because people, no longer need to work, as once they did, they've got everything they want, they've got all their luxury, they've got all their ease, so they look for things, to divert them, and normality, doesn't divert them, anymore, so they look for that, which is deviant, to divert them, they look for that, which is out of the normal, to divert them, because they've got everything else, and they look for diversion, they cannot find, fulfillment in this world, by normality, so they look for that, which is depravity, if they turn to the Lord, they will see, the greatness, the goodness, the love, the fulfillment, the glory, that is in him, and would repent, before him, and would seek, that relationship, with him, that honors him, yes it blesses us too, but ultimately, it puts God first, tired and siding, would have repented, long ago, in sackcloth and ashes, if they had seen, the kind of evidence, that you've seen, but I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable, for tired and siding, at the day of judgment, than for you, and thou,

Capernaum, which art exalted, unto heaven, shall be brought down, to hell, for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, and would have remained, until this day, but I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable, for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee, now, Sodom of course, isn't just a place, of merchandise, and business, and work, and wealth, as tired and siding were, it was a place, of great evil, and great depravity, we read, that all they had, for a witness, was lot, returning the cities, we read, 2 Peter chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, turning the cities, of Sodom and Gomorrah, into ashes, condemned them, with an overthrow, making them, an example, unto those, thereafter, should live ungodly, and delivered, just lot, doesn't mean, only lot, it means a man, who was just, righteous, vexed with the filthy, conversation of the wicked, for that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds, all he had, for a witness, was lot, and we know, from the witness, of Genesis, lot was not, exactly, a paragon of virtue, as much as he should have been, although he may, may have perhaps, loved the Lord, and perhaps he was, just by comparison, with them, he wasn't the most, brilliant example, but, the Perlian, has Jesus, dwelling, amongst them, doing wonderful, works amongst them, and still, they are unmoved, they are not, as they pray, as they saw him perhaps, but, their righteousness, is an obstinuous, filthy rags, before God, they see no need, to repent, even when the Lord,

Jesus himself, is present, in the midst, even when they see, works, that can only be, the evidence, of the kingdom of God, having come, and still they shrug, and still say, okay, well, whatever you can do, for us Jesus, that's very nice, thank you, but, life goes on, the question, for every soul, that encounters, or hears, of the gospel, of Jesus Christ, will be, whether or not, life goes on, as normal, whether it's just, okay, thanks Jesus, that's fine, on with my life, or whether, it's a life, changing experience, nobody expects you, to stop living, we're not going to, drop dead, just because, we've encountered Christ, but it will, mean a complete, change around, a complete, change of direction, which is what, repentance means, it means, putting God first, Christ at the center, of our lives, and we repent, of our sins, and all else, that we do thereafter, follows on from that, we see the kingdom, of God, having changed us, having transformed, our lives, by his, sheer power, by his, sheer righteousness, and holiness, which we know, that we do not, have ourselves, and we are changed, because we put God first, and having put God first, and Christ, at the center, of all things, we repent, we want to slink off, into a corner, but Jesus says, no come back, come back,

I want you, in my life, I want you, in my kingdom, I want you, to be saved, so we can only, throw ourselves, at his feet, and say, Lord, what was that, having to do, this is the repentance, that Jesus, seeks, this is the repentance, the change of life, that he, expects, might be the result, of his ministry, his work, his healing, his miracles, in their midst, and it may be, perhaps in that context, that when we think, of you know, the five thousand, following Jesus, and then the four thousand, after that, and we read, despite how tired, he must have been, and despite how, he's trying to get his disciples, away for a bit of peace, still we read, that he looked on them, with compassion, because they were, sheep without a shepherd, these were people, who had come, seeking out, Jesus, in a day, when most people, even in Galilee, still just, went about their ordinary lives, as though nothing had changed, these were they, who came seeking Jesus, who came wanting, to hear his teaching, who came needing, his presence, and so yes, he had compassion on them, yes, he fed them, yes, he provided for them, yes, he looked on them, with mercy, because these were they, who came, seeking Jesus, who all want to be, cause him, where do we stand, in relation to, cause him, to Capernaum, in relation to Bethsaida, what have we seen, the Lord Jesus do, what do we ask, the Lord Jesus to do, what do we want, of Jesus in our lives, is it just, to sort of, top up a little bit, that's missing, because that's what, a lot of people, regard Jesus as, or I'll do my best,

[26 : 03] I'll seek to be, a good person, and I'll do the very best, I can in my life, but you know, I'm bound to fall short, a wee bit, so that's when I need, Jesus to come in, and just, top up the last wee bit, if that's your hope, if that's your answer, then friend, you're heading, for a lost eternity, because, Sodom and Gomorrah, will do better, in the day of judgment, than the likes of us, if that is our attitude, but rather, we come recognizing, that we have nothing, we are a sheep, without a shepherd, we are lost, we are hopeless, we are blind, we are deaf, we are leprous, we are dead, without the healing, that Christ, only can give, and having seen, and worked in the lives, of others, we want that, for ourselves, and having Christ, present in our midst, or present in our lives, nothing can be, more important, than him, it begins, with repentance, begins with, recognition, that we are sinners, we are deaf, we are blind, we are dead, in trespasses, and sins, and we ask, his forgiveness, and we begin, to repent, and then, in the last day, where shall we be, if we are, with Christ, we shall have, the glory, that he has laid up, for them, that love him, but the glory, for his people, is not the streets, of gold, in paradise, it is not, the garnished stones, that are dawning, the foundations, of Zion, in glory, it is the presence, of Christ, it is to be, with him, to desire him, to have him, as their centre, and soul, that is what, he is looking for, that is where, repentance, will take us, to the feet, of Christ, and to be with Christ, for all time, and for all eternity, because without, that joy, there is only, woe, and we may, want to go on, with our lives, and not have Jesus, interfere with it, but if we don't, want Jesus, to interfere, with the time, that we have now, then nor, will he interfere, interfere, or intervene, in the eternity, that we will have chosen, without him, let us pray,