

### Judgment is Pronounced on the Unbelieving Towns of Galilee

#### Matthew 11:20-30

Matthew 11:20-30 - *"Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: <sup>21</sup> "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to 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. <sup>22</sup> But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."*

*<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. <sup>26</sup> Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. <sup>27</sup> All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. <sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

#### Background Notes

The Gospel of Matthew is the Gospel of the King and His Kingdom. In the structure of the Gospel of Matthew, the credentials of the King were given in chapters 1-9: His birth, His baptism, His testing in the wilderness, His preaching, and His miracles. But a major transition took place in chapters 10-12, because the King and the Kingdom were rejected.

In Matthew 10, the Lord sent His disciples out with the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. They were to go only to the cities of Israel and proclaim, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" The Messiah is here! The Messianic Kingdom that was promised in Old Testament prophecy is at hand. The disciples, including Judas, were given power to do miracles in order to back up this genuine offer of the kingdom to Israel.

However, the religious leaders of the nation rejected the King and His offer of the Kingdom. They hated the King, who denounced them for their sin and hypocrisy. So they did their best to stir up the common people to reject their true King and the Kingdom that He offered. The leaders wanted a political kingdom of their own making.

In Matthew 11 we learn that the Galilean cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum rejected the King and the Kingdom message. And in Matthew 12 the religious leaders of the nation went so far as to attribute our Lord's miracles to the power of Satan. This was unforgivable!

The Kingdom that was rejected would now take a different form. In Matthew 13 we will see that, for the first time, the Lord began to talk of the Kingdom in parables. The present form of the Kingdom will include the wheat and the tares, the good and the bad fish, the wise and the foolish virgins - until the King returns. The gospel of Jesus Christ will go out to the whole world, as commanded in the Great Commission - not just to Israel, but to the entire world. And the Church will be formed, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

At the end of Matthew 11 we have a glimpse of the Gospel of the Great Commission going out to the whole world, because offer of the Kingdom was being rejected by Israel. Verse 28: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* This was not the offer of the Kingdom that was made to Jews only. This is the offer of salvation to **anyone who will believe**.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Judgment was pronounced upon the unbelieving cities of Galilee.

*“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to 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” (v21). “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” (v23).*

Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were all towns in the Galilee. Bethsaida and Capernaum were located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of these three towns, and you can visit the ruins in Israel today. I’ve been to these ruins a number of times, and the evidence of the Lord’s judgment pronounced on these cities is obvious. The evidence is chilling.

It’s significant that a fourth city was located in western Galilee at that time: Tiberias. Judgment was not pronounced on Tiberias, and Tiberias as a modern city is very much alive today. So the ruins of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum today are evidence of the fulfillment of the Lord’s pronouncement of judgment on those towns.

Judgment was pronounced on those Galilee towns because they rejected the King and His kingdom message. Even though the Lord did many wonderful miracles in them, giving the citizens overwhelming evidence that He was the Messiah, the people of these towns would not receive the King.

The Lord said that the evidence was so great that if the same miracles had been performed in Sodom, Tyre and Sidon, the people of those cities would have repented! Tyre and Sidon were pagan cities of Phoenicia, and we all know of the wickedness of Sodom. Those cities in Old Testament times were destroyed under God’s judgment because of their idolatry and wickedness.

The Lord said that if the people of those wicked cities had seen the miracles that Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had experienced, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and cities would have remained to this day! So, He said, it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for the people in those wicked cities than for the citizens of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.

This passage of Scripture indicates that there will be “degrees of punishment” in hell. There are other passages that indicate this as well. The teaching is: the greater the privilege, and the greater the light that is rejected, the greater will be the penalty. What does this say then about people who reject the truth in America today, in a land where the Bible is sold everywhere, and the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ is readily available? It’s a heavy thought, isn’t it? Judgment was pronounced upon the unbelieving cities of Galilee.

## 2. Rest is promised to those who are weary and worried.

*“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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (v29-30).*

In these well known verses the Lord promised two “rests” – the “rest of salvation,” and the “rest of soul.” Anyone who is weary and weighed down with the load of their sin and its guilt can come to the Lord Jesus Christ and receive the “rest” that comes from salvation. No payment or good works are necessary - just come! Put your trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior, because He died on the cross to pay for the penalty of your sins. The heavy burden of guilt and sin will be lifted, and you will experience “rest” as a result of salvation.

In verses 29-30 we also have the “rest of soul.” Maybe you’re a Christian and you’re experiencing rest as a result of your salvation, but your soul is not at peace. You’re anxious and worried about many things. You’re never satisfied. Maybe you’re jealous of people around you, and thus you have no peace. Your soul is always in a state of turmoil. Do you want to experience “rest” for your soul? How do you get it? The answer is in verse 29: **submit to the yoke of Christ.**

A yoke speaks of discipline and submission. Are you willing to submit to God’s sovereign will in your life? Are you willing to submit to His discipline so certain areas of your life can be corrected and changed to make you more Christ-like? Or do you chafe at the yoke, and question God’s ways for you and your life? If we are willing to humbly submit to the yoke of Christ. and learn the lessons that He has for us - in our easy times and in our hard times - then we will find “rest” for our weary and troubled souls.

And guess what? When we submit, we’ll find that the Lord’s yoke is not difficult to bear! It’s not heavy! He promised us, *“My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (v30).* As we submit to His yoke, we learn that our Father is gentle and tender as He leads His children. Have you discovered that? Rest is promised to those who are weary and worried.

## **Practical Application**

### **Praise the Lord in the midst of rejection and sorrow!**

*“At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes...” (v25).*

Can you praise God in the midst of rejection and sorrow? Our Lord did!

How do you think the Lord felt when He was rejected in the cities where He had spent so much time and done such wonderful miracles? He was human, and certainly He felt the sorrow and pain of rejection. Yet the Lord, as the perfect Man, was able to praise the Father in the midst of rejection and sorrow, because He knew that all that was happening was under the control of the Father. It was part of God’s program. We, too, can humbly praise and thank the Lord for His loving sovereignty over every aspect of our lives.

Furthermore, He was thankful for all those who had received the message of the Kingdom, like the disciples and other humble believers. We, too, can be thankful for many people around us who now know Jesus - and are growing in Him!

The Lord was thankful for His intimate relationship with His Father. *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him...” (v27).* Think of the mystery of the complete intimacy within the Trinity! Once again, *“...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him...”* We can be thankful for our close relationship with God as our Father, through our Lord Jesus.

Notice that no one can know God except through Jesus. He is the only way: *“Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him...”* People can know **about** the one true God, but to really **know** Him is only possible through a relationship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of these are reasons why the Lord was able to praise the Father in the midst of rejection and sorrow, and they certainly can be applied in our lives as well.

We, too, can praise the Lord - even in the midst of rejection and sorrow!