

Sunday, June 30, 2024

Matthew 11:12-24: Criticism and Indifference

12From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. 13For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15Whoever has ears, let them hear.

16“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17“ ‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ 18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ 19The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

20Then 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. 22But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23And 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. 24But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

1. Remember as we come to Chapter 11, there is a shift from people accepting Jesus' Message to various 'other' negative reactions. The first we saw was DOUBT, and this from none other than John the Baptist. We talked that DOUBT is something we all will struggle with. DOUBT in and of itself isn't sin, but what you do with that DOUBT is what is dangerous and can lead to sin. Fight through the DOUBT. How? Refer to the 5/26/24 message.

Today we see two other negative reactions to Jesus' Message. While DOUBT is a natural reaction to the BELIEVER, what we will see today are reactions of

UNBELIEVERS. The passage we are studying today begins with Jesus giving an indictment of the heart of the people (verses 12-19).

Jesus has been preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven since the start of His ministry. Essentially, the kingdom of God is righteousness. The kingdom is a heart issue. The outward manifestations that we see, start in the heart. The Kingdom also manifests itself in compassion, Throughout His Ministry, Jesus demonstrates compassion with people by healing them, teaching them, delivering them, and other ways. The Kingdom is also seen in Jesus' training others in the Ministry and sending them out. We saw that in Chapter 10.

Jesus' Ministry is advancing, but there is an enemy force working too. Paul describes it in Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We don't need to be afraid of this, but we do need to be aware of it.

II Corinthians 10:3 or though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 6And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

Jesus' Ministry is advancing and opposition is now being seen. The prophets and EVEN THE LAW prophesied this. Even though John the Baptist doubted, Jesus still called him the greatest. He was the Elijah who made the way for the Messiah.

Jesus makes an emphatic statement, 'if you have ears, you need to listen to this...' Jesus is the Messiah. He takes away the sin of the world. Whoever would believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life, and if you have ears, you need to listen to that and BELIEVE.

Here is where we find the next response to the Gospel:

2. CRITICISM

Matthew 11: 16-19

What we have here is a kind of parable or illustration like Jesus often uses to teach. He is speaking of the public or town square found in cities and towns, still today. Jesus says, 'you're acting like kids... you're playing games with your eternity... and you're also thinking like a child...'

Verse 16 begins with the statement "But to what shall I compare this generation?" How can he describe the nature of this generation that has been privileged to see and hear both John the Baptist and Jesus, and yet still reject them and their message? In what way can Jesus describe their behavior? Jesus chooses a comparison that demonstrates their childishness. Children like to play games and what is being described here are two games that were often played by the children who gathered in the market place while their parents transacted business. If you have watched a group of children for any length of time, you have seen what Jesus describes here occur. Some children want to play one game and others do not want to play that game so they criticize the first game. Then other children think of another game and some of the children do not want to play that game so they criticize it.

We saw the disciples saying to Jesus that John wasn't doing it right. Today, we see people (maybe us?) who, rather than accepting the Message, find reasons it is incorrect. Remember, the context here is that of UNBELIEF. There are common CRITICISMS of the church today (unloving, hypocrisy, etc). They lead to UNBELIEF. Jesus is pointing out their CRITICISM. This is a stumbling block. It has always been a problem and Jesus emphasizes this by saying, 'if you have ears, you better pay attention to this...' If God is God, He gets to determine right and wrong. He sets the rules.

The second negative response in this passage is:

3. INDIFFERENCE

Matthew 11: 20-24

Based on the context here, this INDIFFERENCE is clearly directed to UNBELIEF. While CRITICISM is a sin of 'commission,' INDIFFERENCE is a sin of 'omission.' What people DON'T DO is enough to condemn them.

Jesus 'denounced the towns' and says 'Woe to you...' He is cursing them because of what they DIDN'T DO! Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are all towns in Galilee where Jesus spent most of His time. The area was lively and all these cities are within 2-3 miles of each other.

Matthew 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Jesus went through ALL THE TOWNS and VILLAGES teaching and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom AND healing every disease and sickness. Not only did He teach, he performed MIRACLES to prove His Divine nature, to prove He is God.

Reminder that Matthew wrote this Gospel as an attorney making his case that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The book begins with the genealogy, then the immaculate inception, then the earthly king makers, then fulfilling prophecy. He illustrates His divine authority of Satan through overcoming temptation and then over the spiritual world and the physical world by illustrating the miraculous signs of healing and spiritual deliverance of demons. Jesus is God. He is God in human form. If He is God, then He would have the power of God. He shows that power by doing miraculous signs and wonders. He does it out of compassion and to help the people understand that while Jesus understands our earthly struggles, He sees through that knowing that we are Spiritual in nature and therefore, ETERNAL. Out of compassion, He shows His divine nature through miraculous signs to reveal that He is God.

Knowing our tendency to DOUBT, knowing our tendency to CRITICISE, knowing our HUMANITY and our WEAKNESS, He helps us by providing tangible evidence

that He is the Messiah. This is done for one reason, so that we will REPENT. In His compassion and love, He is constantly reaching out to show us more of Himself. Romans 1: 20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God wants everyone to come to repentance! Salvation comes through REPENTANCE. The problem with INDIFFERENCE is that every time you say no to the Holy Spirit, you close a door, the volume gets lower, the sensitivity to The Spirit gets less until finally, you simply don't hear it anymore, you don't feel it any more. You think you are safe, but Jesus says: 'woe to you...'

Matthew 11: 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

Tyre and Sidon were well known to the Jews of this day as pagan Baal worshipers who would sell Jews into slavery before God destroyed them (reference Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26, 27 and 28; Jeremiah 25 and 47, Joel 3 and Amos 1). Jesus says to those who have tasted and seen and shared in the Holy Spirit and seen the POWER of God only to REJECT it by treating it with INDIFFERENCE will find their punishment WORSE than Tyre, Sidon and even Sodom.

Today is the day of salvation, NOW is the appointed time... TODAY, if you hear the Spirit's voice, don't HARDEN YOUR HEART!

QUESTIONS:

1. What brings you great joy? What makes you feel fulfilled? What satisfies you? I have heard parents say “I just wish that when I give my kids (insert some great gift) that they would appreciate it more than 5 minutes before they complain again or ask for more” — how can we be like that with God? How can we change our “wanting” heart?
2. Would you consider yourself one who criticizes often? Why or why not? Why is it easy for some people (us?) to see the situation from a “less than” perspective versus an “opportunity to grow” perspective? When you are criticized, how do you handle it? When you criticize others, how do you justify that?
3. What signs in our culture would indicate that many people are indifferent to Christianity and/or having a relationship with Christ? What evidence might they cite for their position that there is not a need for Christ? Do you have friends/family/acquaintances who fit this description? How do you respond to these people? What role do we, as Christians, play in their indifference?
4. Are you indifferent to some parts of your Christian faith? Which parts? What do you think breeds this kind of indifference? What turns our hearts to stone and keeps us from being moved? Is it the weight of a broken world? Is it the knowledge that we are saved? What is it?