

Rev. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church  
**Matthew 11:16-24 | The Price of Unrepentance**  
Sunday November 26, 2023

**WELCOME:**

- Please turn your Bibles to Matthew 11.
- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- Sermon notes in the foyer.

**REVIEW:**

Last Sunday, Jesus taught us about the most underrated man in all of Scripture—John the Baptizer. (Immerser/Baptist/Denominational)

What made John so special— is that he had the divine privilege of actually pointing people to the Christ—The Messiah! The Son of God! God in the flesh!

Obviously, none of the other prophets did that.

And because John did—Jesus said— that he was the greatest man who ever lived.

Now, Jesus asked the crowd a crucial question last Sunday—we know it was important because He asked it three times in a row.

Jesus asked, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see?”

And then, as I closed my sermon, I asked you a crucial question as well—“Why are you here?”

Two vertical reasons and two horizontal reasons.

1. Worship the Lord—and want to be. (Not out of guilt, habit or tradition).
2. Preparing to die (meet Jesus face to face) by experiencing God verse by verse.
3. Serve others

4. To be trained and disciplined—to fulfill the Great Commission) and to Share Jesus day by day.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Today, Jesus turns from John's doubt to the crowd's indifference.

John the Baptizer preached repentance. (Matt 3:2)

Jesus also preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Matt 4:17)

And to prove that God's Kingdom was on the Earth, Jesus taught in such a way that was so powerful, that the crowds were "astonished" (Matt 7:28).

Jesus also provided miracles to prove that his preaching and teaching were true—it also revealed to the crowd that Jesus is the Christ / the Messiah / God incarnate.

Jesus didn't step down off his throne in Heaven where angels constantly sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy"...

Jesus wasn't born of a virgin to bypass human sin, live a perfect life, and die a substitutionary death to impress or entertain people.

The second person of the Trinity (Jesus Christ) did these things for one reason—so that people would repent from their sins and embrace Him as their Savior.

A fundamental teaching of Scripture is that God demands a response when the Gospel is presented.

It's one thing to have a legitimate concern or an honest doubt about Jesus—John taught us that.

But when our attitudes turn critical, and our hearts become indifferent to the Gospel — that is sin in the form of unbelief.

And it's that unbelief that Jesus addresses today.

**DISCLAIMER:**

Today and next Sunday are tough messages to hear and receive.

Jesus teaches on judgment and hell.

Jesus has never preached an easy-beliefism—

- *All you have to do to be saved is come as you are.*
- *Everybody close their eyes and say a silent sincere prayer.*
- *Simply walk the isle.*
- *Sign the card.*
- *Raise your hand.*
- *Pray the sinners prayer*

None are in Scripture

Jesus has never told anyone ever to simply believe and all their problems will go away.

No, Jesus turns away “would-be” disciples.

Jesus says if you want to be His disciples, you have to pick up your cross and die.  
(Matt 10:38)

You want to be a disciple of Jesus; Jesus says, “Eat my flesh and drink my blood.”  
(John 6:54).

How's that for a Gospel presentation?

Jesus ended with this last Sunday—



**Matthew 11:14/15**—And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come. Let anyone who has ears listen.

John

“Can you hear me now?”

For those who had ears—they understood that since Jesus said John was the Elijah—that meant that Jesus Himself is God.

And today, it is God Himself who explains with crystal clarity what it means to reject Him as Lord and Savior when the Gospel is presented.

What's that mean for you? Everything! Eternal life or eternal death.

*\*Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.\**

### **SCRIPTURE:**

**Matthew 11:16**—“To what should I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:

**Matthew 11:17**—We played the flute for you,  
but you didn't dance;  
we sang a lament,  
but you didn't mourn!

**Matthew 11:18**—For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!'

**Matthew 11:19**—The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

**Matthew 11:20**—Then he proceeded to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent:

**Matthew 11:21**—“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago.

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

**Matthew 11:23**— And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to Heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today.

**Matthew 11:24**— But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

*These are the very words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word of Almighty God.*

**PRAY:**

*If a person does not repent,  
God will sharpen his sword;  
he will bend and string his bow.  
He will prepare his deadly weapons  
and shoot his flaming arrows. (Psalm 7:12/13).*

**EXEGESIS:**

**Matthew 11:13**—For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

**Matthew 11:14**— And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come.

**Matthew 11:15**— Let anyone who has ears listen.

And it's like Jesus pauses and looks around at the crowd.

What's He see?

People yawning.

People thinking about lunch.

People falling asleep.

People who are indifferent!

People who are consumed with themselves.

And then Jesus asks another question.

**Matthew 11:16(a)**—“To what should I compare this generation?”

This type of question was a common teaching expression in the first century—Jesus is setting the crowd up for an illustration or a parable.

This Generation— Jesus borrows terminology from the OT.

It’s miraculous in itself to see how the OT and NT are like hand in glove.

**Deuteronomy 32:5**—<sup>God's</sup> His people have acted corruptly toward <sup>God</sup> (him); this is their defect—they are not his children but a devious and crooked generation.

**Deuteronomy 32:20**—<sup>God</sup> He said, “I will hide my face from them; <sup>God's people</sup> I will see what will become of them, for they are a perverse generation—unfaithful children.”

Jesus borrows that OT language.

**Matthew 11:16(b)**—It’s like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:

Don’t miss this—Jesus doesn’t mince words.

He calls the crowd—a group of children.

The sense here is not of good little boys and girls but spoiled little brats. There is a difference between being childlike and being childish.

To come to faith as an adult means that we lay down our pride and become childlike in our faith because it is only by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone, that anyone is saved.

But the crowd is not childlike—they are childish.

Jesus points out the fact that they are acting like children because all they do is complain—nothing makes them happy.

Back to...

**Matthew 11:16(b)**—It's like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to other children:

The *marketplace* was where adults went to do business and socialize.

So, the children would play games while they waited.

Two popular games at that time were called “Wedding” and “Funeral.”

Weddings and funerals were two major social events, so children would mimic what they saw.

Weddings involved music and dancing—and when children played the wedding game, they expected everyone to dance when the kids played their imaginary flutes.

When they played the funeral game—they expected the other kids to cry when the imaginary funeral songs were played.

It's like an ancient version of the game, “Simon says.”

So with that background...

**+** **Matthew 11:17(a)**—*We played the flute for you,  
but you didn't dance;*

So we changed the game...

**+** **Matthew 11:17(b)**—*we sang a lament, (funeral song)  
but you didn't mourn!*

Like unhappy children, “this generation” found it easier to whine, moan and complain — than to play the game.

In other words, “All you do is to bark orders and criticize what others are actually doing.”

It was happening in Moses' day and in Jesus' day.

Aren't you glad it's not happening today?!

(The more things change...the more they stay the same!)

These childish adults that Jesus speaks to are like people today who find fault in every church.

They hop around from church to church complaining about this and that — never serving —but always giving unsolicited advice.

People complain about the sermons— it's too short, it's too long, he's too serious, he doesn't tell enough jokes, he's too political, he's not political enough, he doesn't know how to connect, etc.

*five of the best*  
Please know that preachers have an audience of One.—The Lord Jesus Christ.



People complain about the music—there's too much music, there's not enough music, it's too loud, it's not loud enough--

When people complain about the music in church, they need to volunteer at the hospital, nursing home, or hospice.

If people complain about the temperature—bring a jacket.

*And as soon as the complaints go.*

The one thing all these people have in common are that they think church is about them.

Church is never about us it's always about God!

These people are armchair quarterbacks who never get into the Gospel game.

So Jesus is pointing out how unhappy, disgruntled, sulky, quarrelsome, inconsistent, irresponsible, and fickle they are.

As no game can please a moody child, so nothing pleases Jesus' generation.

**Matthew 11:18**— *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!'*

People went out to see John the Baptizer because he was the first prophet Israel had in over 400 years.

At first, they enjoyed the excitement of his preaching.

And then they tolerated him.

But John would not let them be neutral bystanders—he called for them to make a choice.

When they saw they had to choose, the majority of people—especially the Scribes and Pharisees chose not to believe—and John rebuked them for it.

Nobody likes to be rebuked or reprimanded.

So what do people do when all eyes are on them, and someone points out their sin?

**Answer:** They deflect.

*Oh, John... you're crazy—you must have a demon!*

The crowds respected John, so **“he has a demon”** should not be taken literally.

It may mean *He is out of his mind* or *He is a religious fanatic* (Mark 3:21).

### **KEYPOINT 1:**

*Instead of accepting John's rebuke of their wickedness, the crowd rebuked John's righteousness.*

John grated against their immoral and unspiritual nerves— so they lashed out at him.

*John, it's okay...can you preach on anything else besides repentance and hell...this is getting old!*

John's message of repentance pointed to this type of “funeral mode” that Jesus is referring to.

**Matthew 11:19(a)**— *The Son of Man (Jesus) came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*

Just as John lived in ‘funeral mode,’ Jesus lived in ‘wedding mode.’

Jesus ate and drank just like any normal person.

Jesus lived an everyday Jewish life— Attending parties and dinners.

In other words, Jesus did the things John was criticized for not doing.

And then people accused Jesus of being a glutton and a drunk because He did the very things that John didn't do.

So which one is it? *Make up your mind - you can't have it both ways.*

Jesus points out their hypocrisy...and then He says...

**Matthew 11:19(b)**— *Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

The statement on wisdom refers to the Godly lives and righteous activities of both John and Jesus.

The world's wisdom produces worldly wisdom.

Godly wisdom is a gift that comes from outside this world— Godly wisdom comes from the Creator.

That's why Jesus had to step down from Heaven to solve our sin problem.

What does Jesus mean?

**Matthew 11:19(b) NLT**— *But wisdom is shown to be right by its results.*

If someone makes a decision, the consequences demonstrate whether that decision was wise or unwise.

Your translation may say "children."

**Matthew 11:19(b) NKJV**— *But wisdom is justified by her children.*

In other words, wise decisions yield positive “children,” or results.

Jesus was saying that the fruit that would come from both His ministry and John’s ministry would demonstrate that they were godly men in the end.

Now, notice that the subject is wisdom.

Jesus also identifies himself as Wisdom.

It’s a theological hint—it’s through Him (Jesus) that the Father provides wisdom.

In Proverbs 8, Wisdom is personalized as God.

+ **Proverbs 8:32**—*And now, sons, listen to me;  
those who keep my ways (God’s ways) are happy.*

+ **Proverbs 8:33**—*Listen to instruction and be wise;  
don’t ignore it. → worst thing we can do is ignore God*

+ **Proverbs 8:34**—*Anyone who listens to me is happy,  
watching at my doors every day,  
waiting by the posts of my doorway.*

+ **Proverbs 8:35**—*For the one who finds me finds life  
and obtains favor from the Lord,*

+ **Proverbs 8:36**—*but the one who misses me harms himself;  
all who hate me love death.”*

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So Jesus has warmed up the crowd—and now gives them a dose of truth with a capital “T.”

**Matthew 11:20**— Then he proceeded to denounce (harshly criticize) the towns where most of his miracles were done, because they did not repent:

**Matthew 11:21**— “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago.”

For the most part, the cities mentioned here did not overly oppose Jesus. What they did do, however, is ignore Him.

While Jesus preached, taught, and performed miracles, they kept doing what they’d always done.

From a <sup>Your</sup> human perspective, their indifference <sup>to God</sup> is foolish— but is it terribly sinful?

In other words, is it really that big of deal to ignore God?

*It doesn't matter what our opinion is — it only matters what God says.*

From God’s perspective—indifference about Him and His saving Gospel message — is one of the most wicked forms of unbelief someone can have.

Jesus taught on this indifference with a parable...

**Matthew 22:2 NLT**—The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son.

**Matthew 22:3 NLT**— When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!

**Matthew 22:4 NLT**— “So he sent other servants to tell them, ‘The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!’”

**Matthew 22:5 NLT**— *But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way,*

**Matthew 22:7 NLT**— *“The king was furious, and he sent out his army to... burn their town.*

**Matthew 22:14 NLT**— *“For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

And because Jesus is calling the many, and they refuse to come...

Now the rebukes become more explicit in verse 21—

**Matthew 11:21**— *“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!*

Jesus uses the familiar Old Testament form of a woe.

### **DEFINITION**

*A woe is doom mixed with pity and sorrow.*

“Woe” suggests both anger and weeping.

*Jesus is prophesying doom on these cities.*

*→ Jesus also feels pity, compassion & sorrow for these people.*

Until this point, Jesus has been giving warnings, but today — woes are pronounced.

God’s patience, grace, and mercy are not infinite with an unrepentant mankind.

There is a deadline.

God’s patience has an expiration date.

We don’t get to choose when to come to Him any time we want.

Our decision to receive God’s grace isn’t based on convenience.

There are lots of ‘woe’ judgments in the OT.

+ **Isaiah 3:11**—Woe to the wicked—it will go badly for them, for what they have done will be done to them.

+ **Jeremiah 22:13**—Woe for the one who builds his palace through unrighteousness,

+ **Ezekiel 13:3**—Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing.

+ **Micah 2:1**—Woe to those who dream up wickedness and prepare evil plans on their beds!

+ **Habakkuk 2:9**—Woe to him who dishonestly makes wealth for his house...

+ **Zecheriah 11:17**—Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock!

But oracles of woe are not just an Old Testament feature.

*We see it in the Gospels, but also*

In the book of Revelation, John witnessed an angel crying,

+ **Revelation 8:13**—"Woe! | Woe! | Woe to those who live on the earth,

As terrifying as it is to hear Jesus call out a 'woe' judgment—

Please know that by His grace, the woe implies that there is still time to repent.

The end is almost, but not quite, here.

Jesus still offers a shred of hope for those who will repent.

**+** **Matthew 11:21(b)**— *For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago.*

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

Jesus performed many miracles in the vicinity of these cities.

- Capernaum was Jesus' ministry headquarters.
- Chorazin was 2 miles from Capernaum.
- Bethsaida was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.
- Tyre and Sidon were wicked Gentile cities where Jesus performed miracles—think Las Vegas.

Jesus is saying that God's judgment against sin is more tolerable/not as strict for people who don't know the Gospel.

On the other hand, people who have heard the Gospel now have a greater responsibility to repent—and if they don't, they will experience a greater judgment for their unbelief.

In other words, they don't have an excuse.

**+** **KEYPOINT 2:**

*The more we know about the Gospel and God's Word, the greater our responsibility and the greater God's judgment.*

Now, when we hear the word judgment—something visceral tends to happen.

We tend to shut down and stop listening.

Our hearts harden, our necks stiffen, our blood pressure rises, and our ears become deaf.



And yet, at the same time, God has built a sense of justice in our hearts.

Let's talk about justice.

Gentlemen, if someone knocks over your bride and steals her purse—will you be okay with that? = Justice

If someone starts threatening your kids or grandkids—are you going to be okay with that? = Justice

We want criminals to be punished under the law of the land.

**ILLUSTRATION:**

Videos on “Instant Justice.”

If someone commits a heinous crime by walking into a school and starts shooting people, we want the judge and jury to give a ‘guilty’ verdict.  
demand

That person must pay for their crime.

They have a debt that they owe to society.

Pause: How much more, then, does God want sin punished—for our moral crimes against Him?

We don't get to live this life any way we want, and for it to not have consequences.

There are consequences to breaking laws.

We can't steal from our employer and expect to remain employed.

We can't drive like idiots and not expect to get a ticket or worse.

So if we understand earthly justice...how much more for the moral laws of God?

So what Jesus is saying, is that when people hear the Gospel proclaimed and reject Him—

And reject His offer of their sins being forgiven through Christ Jesus the Lord—  
their guilt is then intensified and their judgment increases.

**+** **Hebrews 10:26 NLT**— Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins.

*The only sacrifice that covers our sin is Christ's blood? His empty space.*

**+** **Hebrews 10:27 NLT**— There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies.

In other words, there is no 'Plan B.'

We either accept God's plan—which is the grace that comes through Jesus, or we don't.

When we come before the judgment seat of God, we will face the bar of perfect justice.

*perfect justice equals perfection.*

We will be convicted for every single sin we have committed in our lifetimes—  
AND we will be judged according to the revelation of God's truth that we have received.

**+** **KEYPOINT 3:**

The greatest mistake a person will ever make is thinking he will escape God's judgment.

**+** **Romans 2:4**—Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

**Romans 2:5**— Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed.

The longer you wait, the worse the judgment is going to be.

**Romans 2:6**— He will repay each one according to his works:

Now, Believers are justified by faith.

But our deeds will still be judged. *Matt 7:2,*

*we will have to give an account of every word we speak — Matt 12:36*

In other words, God may have chosen you and called you—to which you responded to the call.

You have received God's grace and the forgiveness that Christ offered through His blood—

**However,** you can still be a real jerk.

You can still treat people poorly.

You can still be a self-centered hypocrite.

You can still steal God's grace and never extend that same grace to others.

You can still squander God's forgiveness on yourself and never apologize to people you've hurt and offended.

So, yes our deeds will be evaluated and judged on judgment day.

**Matthew 11:23**— *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to Heaven? No, you will go down to Hades/Hell. For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today.*

Evidently, Jesus saved his most powerful illustration for last.

Capernaum was a beautiful, wealthy fishing village.

Jesus performed more miracles and preached more sermons in and around Capernaum than anywhere else.

It was there that He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead.

It was Capernaum, where He healed a Roman soldier's servant.

It was Capernaum where Jesus:

- cast out demons,
- healed Peter's mother-in-law,
- healed the woman with the hemorrhage,
- healed two blind men,
- healed the paralyzed man when his friends dug a hole in a roof.

And after all that, the people of Capernaum...yawned.

So, Jesus tells them flat out...

 **Matthew 11:23**— *And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to Heaven?*

**No,** you will go down to Hades.

Capernaum has incurred the most guilt and will receive the harshest judgment *-why?*  
because they heard the Gospel and saw the most miracles.

Hades is hell.

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Jesus isn't turning all fire and brimstone.

He's telling them exactly what will happen if they don't repent and accept His grace offered through the Gospel.

**Matthew 11:23(b)**— For if the miracles that were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until today.

→ City of Sodom

The miracles that Jesus performed in Capernaum were so amazing that, had they occurred in Sodom, Sodom would still be around!

Sodom is the most wicked city in all of Scripture.

It's famous for its wickedness.

As far as we know, Capernaum wasn't blatant with their sexual sin like Sodom.

The citizens of Capernaum were upright, law-abiding, and decent.

The people of Capernaum never persecuted Jesus—and fewer even criticized Him.

They never mocked Jesus, ridiculed Him, ran Him out of town, or threatened His life.

But—and this is a big BUT!

Because they ignored Jesus, their fate on the day of judgment will be worse than that of Sodom.

What happened to Sodom?

**Genesis 19:24 NLT**—Then the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Genesis 19:25 NLT**—He utterly destroyed them, along with the other cities and villages of the plain, wiping out all the people and every bit of vegetation.

Some archaeologists believe that Sodom will never be found because it's now covered by the Dead Sea.

If you go to Israel, you can go to the sites of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin.

These cities, once beautiful wealthy cities, are now nothing but archaeological digs.

By human logic, these cities should be thriving today.

Their locations— beautiful.

Their climate— primo.

But these cities were judged and destroyed shortly after Jesus made this statement.

And they were never rebuilt.

It would be like San Diego being whipped out and never rebuilt.

People would ask, "Why not? —God wouldn't let them be rebuilt. .

*The people of that city were judged w/ perfect justice.*

Their sin of ignoring God was too great.



**PREACH:**

**Question:** What do you think Jesus would say about our little city of Cottonwood?

Would He give us a 'woe' judgment?

What about those of you in Clarkdale, Cornville, Camp Verde, Sedona, and Rimrock?

What kind of revelation have you had—and yet, you've simply dismissed it and ignored it?

Something to think about this week.

I want to close with three truths about God's judgment:

### **+** 1. **There will be a judgment.**

We don't like to think about judgment because we don't want to admit there is one.

We tend to think that if there is a judgment, we will come out all right since we are nice people—good people.

### **+** 2. **There are degrees of punishment.**

**Example:** The person who doesn't repent of his repeated adultery will be judged more harshly than the person who didn't repent of his lust.

### **+** 3. **Indifference to God is the greatest of sins.**

We do not think this way.

That's a supernatural revelation.

Indifference is the greatest of sins because when you peel back the layers, what's the root cause of indifference and unbelief?

Answer: Pride.

Pride says I don't need God — I am completely self-sufficient.

There is a price to our unrepentance—please ponder that price today.

**PRAYER**

## **BENEDICTION**

*He who is the faithful witness to all these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon!” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s holy people. (Revelation 22:20/21)*

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**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Tyre-in-the-Bible.html>

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