

October 30, 2016

THEY DID NOT REPENT

Matthew 11:20-24

Missed opportunities. What can you do?

People are missing out on inspirational blessings all the time. Some, every Sunday they miss worship. There are several reasons people miss out. Some just never really knew the opportunities were offered. Some may not have taken the offerings seriously. And some just passed them by... because they just didn't care. It's one thing if it's a matter of taking advantage of the chance to talk to, or, ask out the pretty girl you like. But it's quite another when you fail to take advantage of the steps necessary to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!

Back in Chapter Ten, Jesus sent His Disciples out to preach and heal. They were to preach the Kingdom and draw people in... the way a harvest is brought in. *"If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I tell you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town!"* (10:14-15) Jesus is echoing this sentiment here, in today's reading, only now, He is picturing Tyre and Sidon – pagan cities popular for their decadence at the time of Christ.

But the issue is that the people He is talking about didn't take advantage of His presence when they had the chance. Jesus is *"Upbraiding the cities where most of His mighty deeds had been done."* (Matthew 11:20) Why? *"Because they did not repent."* (v. 20b) Jesus mentions three cities in particular: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum,. Chorazin was a little farm town north of Capernaum. Bethsaida was a fishing village east of Capernaum. And Capernaum is a large fishing village at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. We don't know what particular *"mighty works"* were done in Chorazin, but Jesus, as He began His ministry, traveled to the towns and cities of Galilee preaching and healing (Matthew 4:23-25) In Bethsaida, Jesus healed a blind man (Mark 8:22-25) and he fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, nearby. (Luke 9:10-17) But Capernaum..., Jesus made Capernaum His home town. (Mark 2:1) He lived there after He left Nazareth. In Capernaum, Jesus healed the Centurion's servant. (Matthew 8:5-13) In Capernaum, He healed Peter's mother-in-law. (Matthew 8:14-15) *"And that evening they brought to Him many who were possessed with demons and He cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick!"* (Matthew 8:16) It was also in Capernaum that Jesus healed a paralytic man that some friends lowered through the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching. (Mark 2:2-5)

People saw those "mighty works," but it didn't change them. It didn't inspire them to realize who Jesus is. And so Jesus pronounces a fearsome woe upon them. The idea of condemnation seems awfully harsh. But it's real. To threaten condemnation unless you repent seems unloving. It is coercion. It's blackmail. But the challenge still remains: Repentance is necessary!

If, however, time and time again, the call to repentance is refused... If, time and time again, the invitation to follow is not accepted... If, time and time again, the grace of God is passed by... Well, here's what Jesus has said: *"Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges Me before others, I also will acknowledge before My Father in heaven; but whoever denies Me before others, I also will deny before My Father in heaven."* (Matthew 10:32-33) Is that harsh? But it's the grace of God! How can we take God's grace for granted?

Let's back up a second. Warnings have a purpose. They're for our own good. Reading between the lines in this passage of Scripture is the message: Don't let every opportunity pass you by...there will eventually be eternal consequences. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are gone. All that is left of them is archeological ruins. Get the message?

Jesus is upbraiding these cities because they did not repent!

Why is repentance so important?

Well, you don't really have faith (at least not the Christian faith), until you have chosen to follow Christ. To follow Christ is more than just believing something about Him – that's the beginning. To walk in faith is to turn from sin and let Christ (who died for our sin) rule in your life. Part of what has to happen in this process is dealing with sin – repentance. Remember, the Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* – *meta* = change, *nous* = mind. We need to change the way we think until Christ thinks through us. That is what it is to truly have faith. *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!"* (Galatians 2:20)

The Holy Spirit makes it happen in your life, but we have to let It do so. We have to surrender Self, and the Spirit will help us do so. And when we do, God will change our hearts and our minds. Then, when the Day of Judgment comes, we won't be condemned!

Another word about warnings: Ezekiel 3:16-21 – *At the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, I have made you a sentinel for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give them no warning, or speak to warn the wicked from their wicked way, in order to save their life, those wicked persons shall die for their iniquity; but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness, or from their wicked way, they shall die for their iniquity; but you will have saved your life. Again, if the righteous turn from their righteousness and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before them, they shall die; because you have not warned them, they shall die for their sin, and their righteous deeds that they have done shall not be remembered; but their blood I will require at your hand. If, however, you warn the righteous not to sin, and they do not sin, they shall surely live, because they took warning; and you will have saved your life.*

Part of the prophetic role of those who lead the faithful is that of giving a warning. No one likes warnings, because they sound condemning. But... the warning is meant to help us change directions. If the warning pictures a consequence that is negative, we should want to do whatever we can to avoid that consequence. When we do, the warning was successful. When we fail to heed the warnings, there will be consequences. That's another reason repentance is so important!

A final word from the New Testament from 1 Peter 5:8-9 – *"Be watchful and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..."*