

Wil Owens

The Way of Repentance; Matthew 11:20-30

GPBC

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Introduction – As we studied last week, while Jesus was defending the faith of John the Baptist, He began to call out the current generation for their lack of faith. They were responding to John, the final prophet, the Elijah who was to come, and to Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, like selfish children. Rather than being quick to confess their sin, they were quick to condemn John and Jesus. Rather than being quick to repent, they were quick to reject. Rather than following Scripture, they followed self.

Now in our text today, Jesus moves from exposing their willful, hardened rejection of truth to declaring the consequence of their willful, hardened rejection of truth. John's message was a message of repentance. He called people to recognize their sin before God, to confess that sin, to turn from that sin, to be baptized as signaling their open admission of guilt and reliance on the Lord. And that was just too much to ask. The last thing they wanted to admit; the last thing anyone wants to admit is guilt. They absolutely refused to repent and rather sought to justify themselves by finding fault with John and Jesus.

The first step towards salvation is understanding our need of salvation. If we do not see ourselves first of all as guilty before God, under the judgement of our own sin, and helpless to rid ourselves of our guilt, we will never repent. We will never cry out for salvation. We will never long for Christ and rejoice in the salvation of Christ if we never understand and admit we need saving.

- I. Repentance is Not Merely an Intellectual Pursuit (vv20-24)
  - a. Jesus compares the cities where He had performed most of His miracles to the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. Tyre and Sidon were pagan cities, widely known for their cruelty and lack of any morality. Sodom was destroyed by fire in the days of Abraham because its immorality was so widely known and defiant and perverse. Their conduct of sexual immorality had risen to such a degree of debauchery that Sodom became the chief biblical example of what happens to a people who turn completely from God.

- i. Jesus is here declaring that the sin of these cities in the land of Israel are actually in a worse condition.
- b. The reason why their sin and their rejection and their lack of repentance is even far greater is because they had been given greater light. They had been given greater exposure to the truth. They had been given greater insight. They were given more than the glory of creation pointing to a Creator, more than the witness of a righteous neighbor, more than the promises of the OT. And rather than repent, they had grown even more defiant. Therefore, their judgment will be greater.
- c. The lesson is this: the more light we are given, the more truth we are given, the more gospel we are given – the more responsible we are before God – the more accountable we are before God. The more we are exposed to the things of God, the more we are accountable to them.
- d. Now that should give us great pause this morning because everyone of us have a Bible and everyone of us have heard the gospel. If we are unrepentant, we are in the same condition as the cities in our text that Jesus addresses.
  - i. I've heard some compare America to Sodom in regard to our increasing godlessness and depravity. We're not like Sodom with little light and great depravity. We're like Capernaum – we not only have great depravity; we have been given great light.
  - ii. "If God doesn't judge America, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah." My friends, God will never need to apologize to anyone. His ways are always just! If America is to be judged, it won't be to the degree of Sodom – it will be to the degree of Capernaum.
- e. Now why didn't they repent? They had the biblical evidence before them. Jesus has taken them to Isaiah and to Malachi. They had the hard experiential evidence before them. Jesus has performed various incredible, undeniable miracles that prove His authority over every realm of life. Why didn't they repent?
- f. Listen carefully: The miracles can only point to Jesus as the true Messiah. But evidence and miracles and reasoning, while they prove who Jesus is, they, in and of themselves, cannot change the heart.

The heart should change. With so much evidence pointing to Jesus as Messiah, the heart should change; but the heart won't change. The dead, hardened, sin-soaked heart will not change; it will only grow colder and harder, and therefore, even more responsible.

- II. Repentance Flows from Gracious, Special Revelation (vv25-27)
  - a. First of all we see that the work of salvation, beginning with repentance, is a work of God and not of man.
    - i. If salvation was the work of man, surely the wise and the understanding would be first among those of faith. The wise of the world, those who claim to know the ways of the world and secrets of the universe and have great understanding would lead the way into truth. Yet, the very ones who reference their mighty intellect and awareness are the very ones who turn from truth and turn others from truth. Pride has kept many from salvation.
    - ii. God is glorified in that those who are thought least likely to enter heaven, those who are least expected to know the truth, those who have no credential, those who have the humility of a child – they are the ones who repent – they are the ones who are saved.
    - iii. Matthew 9:12,13
  - b. Repentance flows from gracious, special revelation.
    - i. It begins with grace. Acts 11:18 – And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”
      - 1. Repentance does not begin with man – it begins with God.
    - ii. It is a secret work of special revelation. The Father reveals the Son.
      - 1. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and opens the eyes and opens the heart to see the Son.
    - iii. The Son reveals the Father.
      - 1. John 14:8-11
  - c. Here we have the bringing together of our responsibility before God to repent and believe and God's sovereign, gracious will in our salvation. We should repent. We should believe. We have the Word

of God. We have the miracles of Christ. The evidence abounds. The light is all around us. We should repent. We should believe.

- d. But we won't believe. We won't repent. Unless God moves in grace and does a work of special revelation.
- e. All that simply means this: If you have repented of sin, if you have believed in Christ as Savior and Lord, if you know the Father and know the Son – then give God glory and thanks and praise for your salvation!

### III. Repentance Follows Gracious, Special Invitation (vv28-30)

- a. This invitation is for those who have yet to repent and yet to believe. Jesus invites you to come. We not only have His Word. We not only have His works. We have His gentle, loving, extended, promised-filled invitation.
- b. “labor and heavy laden” Are you trying to work your way to heaven? Are you trying to get on God's good side by attending church? By not committing any horrible sins or at least not getting caught? Are you laboring to fit God into your own understanding? Are you weighed down? Do you feel the weight of your sin before God? Your guilt? Your shame? Are you carrying your burden of sin around with you? Are you trying to make your self right? Are you attempting to earn favor with God by being moral? Are you bent over with your load of guilt as Christian in Pilgrim's Progress? Has the world and sin and suffering become too heavy to bear?
- c. Jesus says, “Come to Me, and I will give you rest!”
- d. Take my yoke upon you – take up the cross of Christ
- e. Learn from me – follow Christ on the path of life
- f. Yes it's true the Christian life is not an easy path. Yes it's true if you go against the world, you will be persecuted. Yes it's true if you go with Christ you will still endure the hardships and sufferings of this life.
  - i. But it is also gloriously true that the benefits and blessings of knowing Christ and having Christ far outweigh the costs.
- g. Rejection leads to judgement; repentance and faith lead to life!

Conclusion – You may conclude, “Then there is nothing we can do!” You can call on the Lord! For whoever calls on the Lord will be saved!