

JESUS URGES THEM TO REPENT

Matthew 11:20-30

Key Verse: 11:24

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

We are studying Jesus' Galilean ministry. As we studied, Jesus preached the gospel and healed the sick. He also chose his disciples and raised them through common life together with him. Jesus' ministry was indeed intensive. He had done gospel ministry from one village to another. Actually Jesus might have visited all the villages of the Galilean district. But even though he worked so hard, the fruit of people who believed the kingdom of God was very few in number. So today Jesus laments over the people of Korazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, who had seen Jesus miracles, heard the good news of the kingdom of God, and seen Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons in many people. Jesus gave them a demonstration that he is the Son of God. Jesus gave them miracles and intensively preached the kingdom of God so that they might have eternal life through Jesus Christ and not perish. But they were very unrepentant. They came to Jesus, saw Jesus preaching and were amazed and moved. But when they went back to their daily lives, they were just the same ungodly people. In this passage Jesus laments over their unbelief and indifference and ignorance, and at the same time he urges them to repent. Today we also see how Jesus comforted himself when people did not repent as he wanted. Finally, instead of punishing them, Jesus gave them the way of true rest. May God give us the spirit of repentance and help us learn the way of true rest through this passage.

First, Jesus laments over unrepentant people. As we studied, Jesus began his messianic ministry in the Galilean district. But after a long time Jesus denounced the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. Jesus cursed them. Look at verses 21-22. Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

Here we see that they had seen enough of what Jesus was doing. It was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God by performing miracles and healing the sick so that they might repent and believe in the kingdom of God.

Wherever Jesus was, a crowd of people followed him to hear the good news of the kingdom of God and also to see his miraculous signs. They said many vows. Some seemed to believe. For example, in John's Gospel chapter 6, five thousand people followed Jesus because they ate bread and fish made out of five loaves and two fish by the miracle of Jesus (Jn 6:1-15). But when Jesus talked about heavenly bread, they insisted on having free earthly bread. Jesus talked to them again and again about heavenly bread. They were discouraged and ran away one by one until only the disciples were left. Their purpose of following Jesus was to get some bread. Some followed Jesus to entertain themselves by

seeing Jesus miraculous signs performed on the lepers and the blind and the paralytics. But when they went home, their lifestyle did not change at all. In order to live in this world forever, they did everything by all means. So Jesus said to them, Woe to you Korazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! 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.

Jesus laments that his chosen people never received the long-awaited Messiah's divine words. Rather, some Gentile people responded. So Jesus said, Your punishment on judgment day will be unbearable.

Look at verse 23. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. Here Jesus rebukes the people of Capernaum. At that time Capernaum was one of the important cities in Galilee. It was the headquarters of Jesus' messianic ministry. It was a most prosperous business center. In addition, a Roman regiment was stationed there. And the tax collector Levi's office was there. Later this tax collector was called to be a disciple of Jesus. His name was changed to Matthew, the greatest teacher of humanity in history. Because Capernaum was a prosperous city, people were rich for themselves and very poor toward God. Even though the Messiah came and worked centering in Capernaum, people's responses were very indifferent; they thought Jesus was only a little bit more than an ordinary man. So Jesus lamented, saying, And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. According to Jesus' lament, the people of Capernaum were not better than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Finally Jesus told them that those who reject the good news about the kingdom of God will go to hell, and their punishment will be worse than that of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Usually we think that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah received the most terrible punishment by fire. But the people of Capernaum would be even hotter than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God. But they did not accept. They were busy. They wanted to be great and wealthy and they wanted to live in this world forever. They were indeed ignorant and ungodly people. They were like pigs before the butchers. They were like cattle before the huge slaughterhouse. They had a premonition that something was going to happen, but they did not know they were going into the slaughterhouse. But Jesus knew and he urged them to repent.

Second, the meaning of repentance. When we consider our human life, it seems that we are born of a woman and are going to a graveyard. During the time in between, we work hard to succeed, to make money, and to become a small and great man. In order to survive in the world, each person unintentionally becomes selfish and self-centered. They do not think about the invisible spiritual world or the kingdom of God. So even if many attend churches, they do not know the true meaning of repentance. They think that if they go to church, they will go to the kingdom of God by the grace of God. The grace of God is given to us

through the message of the kingdom of God. Mark 1:15 says, The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news! We must know that believing in Jesus and going to the kingdom of God is everything. Suppose a person works hard and gains honor and wealth. He cannot keep it forever. Therefore, believing the good news of the kingdom of God should be the entire plan of our lives. And believing the kingdom of God should be the entire purpose and meaning of life. And preaching the kingdom of God should be one's life mission. But these days, by the Biblical conception, there are too many old wineskin kind of people. They think that believing is nothing more than one of their activities for survival in this hard world. We must seriously think about why Jesus preached the kingdom of God as a matter of first importance.

Jesus also urged repentance to all people. What is repentance? Repentance is turning one's worldly lifestyle to the lifestyle God wants us to have. For example, to one who lived for his pig or cow business as his life purpose, repentance means to change his lifestyle to live for the glory of God. Repentance is turning around from the world to God. Repentance is changing one's value system from the world to the kingdom of God. Repentance is changing one's desire from enjoying the things of the world, like wine or women, to enjoying God in one's heart. Repentance is to see that the present life is temporal and the kingdom of God is everlasting. When we repent, we can obtain the kingdom of God. Repentance is to become great and wealthy. For example, Abraham was a 75-year-old man who was a very fatalistic person with no son. So he had no grandsons to enjoy. But God promised him, You will be great and you will be a blessing (Ge 12:2). When Abraham changed his way of thinking from fatalism to faith in God, he finally became the greatest man in the world. Even in the former Soviet Union so many are named after Abraham. Our greatest president's name was Abraham Lincoln. As God promised, he made Abraham a very great and wealthy man. Abraham didn't have to cry like Reptavia in Fiddler on the Roof, singing, If I were a rich man... God blessed him abundantly. Now his descendants are like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. His name is so great that all Christians and even most non-Christians know that he is the ancestor of faith and the greatest man together with David and after Jesus. This is the reason Jesus delivered the message of repentance. But the people of Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum did not repent. So Jesus had to curse them. Actually, it was not really a curse, but an expression of Jesus' deep sorrow and lamenting over the people.

Third, Jesus comforts himself (25-27). Look at verses 25-26. At that time Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. One young man wanted to be a Ph.D. and an honorable person. But after 16 years had elapsed he still could not get a Ph.D. So he shot his advisor and he also shot himself in the head. The real problem was his discouragement. He had wanted to marry after getting a Ph.D. His age was already 40. But he could not marry. He could not get a Ph.D. So he killed himself. Jesus discouragement was even more than this. Yet Jesus saw that the good news of the kingdom of God was not accepted by the wise and learned but was revealed to little children. Here, little children means those who are pure in heart. Their number

was very few. Maybe Jesus made one hundred thousand telephone calls and had ten thousand rejections and engaged in mass evangelism and visiting from village to village. But the result was that only several people were left. Here we learn that we don't have to be discouraged because of the hardship to fish sheep and raise them as disciples. Jesus experienced the same thing. But Jesus was overjoyed by God's wisdom. Jesus said, Because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children (25). It was the exact expression that only a few sheep were left.

Jesus also comforted himself. Look at verse 27. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. This verse is a little longer, but it is the same as John 15:1, which says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Jesus' relationship with God was absolutely inseparable. It was like a vine and branch. Jesus was greatly comforted and rejoiced even if heaven fell and the earth cracked. It didn't matter to Jesus, if only he had a personal relationship with God.

Fourth, Take my yoke (28-30). People of the world pretend to be great and wealthy. They only enjoy their lives. In fact, there are many people who enjoy their lives more than enough. They count the long weekend holidays and make a perfect schedule to enjoy their lives. They seek pleasure in going around to 120 kinds of restaurants and go to the restroom a lot. Still, they go around to all the restaurants of 170 nations which are in the Chicago and Los Angeles areas. But actually they are very restless. After having a decent party, husbands and wives shout and fight. One housewife was beaten up several years by her husband. One night she thought if she had to be beaten up like this, she wanted to die fighting with her husband. So she made a fist tightly and began to fight with her husband. By one punch her husband was thrown to the wall. Then she got the confidence to lift him up and throw him to the other wall. They are a renowned university professor couple. The more the people of the world have fun, the more they feel empty and meaningless. The people of the world enjoy immoral lives. Most men think they can enjoy many women because they are most handsome. Actually, most of them look like Cambodian refugees.

True rest comes from Jesus. True rest comes when we carry out God's mission assigned to us. So Jesus said, Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (29). Can you find some other way to truly rest? No. Jesus' word is the only way to have true rest. Therefore, let's take his yoke upon us and learn from our Lord Jesus Christ.