

Matthew 20-06-21b

Let's resume our study now in Matthew chapter 11 and we're looking at Jesus talking about the results of the ministry of John, the results of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and by extension the disciples that he has just sent out into the towns and villages of Israel, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. If it's a lost sheep, it belongs to you. He's not going out and gathering wild sheep.

He's not looking for goats to bring in and domesticate. If they are lost sheep, they used to be in the fold and they got out and got away. They got distracted.

They chased something. They wandered off and, you know, the ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold, one got lost and the shepherd goes out to find it. Jesus says, I'm here to look for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

So when this ministry comes to Israel, when the good news of the kingdom and the potential for judgment is there, John is the judgment side. Jesus is the benefit side. There is the mourning dirge and there is the celebratory excitement, piping and dancing.

What is the response? Not interested. I'm going to find fault with the messenger. Notice when people reject the message, the first thing they do is shoot the messenger.

So when John comes neither eating bread nor drinking wine, which of course is interesting in itself, the combination of bread and wine occurs in scripture going all the way back to Melchizedek. But when you see the response, what happens? John came neither eating nor drinking. You get the bread and wine in Luke, by the way.

They say he has a demon. They don't say, you know, his message is mistimed. It's not the time or it doesn't pertain or it doesn't apply or what do they do? He, John is demon possessed.

There's something wrong with John. His good message is actually motivated by an evil force. We are told in the epistles not to let our good be spoken of as evil, but can you really help it? If you're doing what you're supposed to do and you are ill treated as a result, Paul says, guess what? We're sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Jesus has already said, if they've hated me, they're going to hate you. So there's only a limited extent to which we can control. You know, don't let it be your fault that your good is spoken of as evil is about as good as you can do because John did it right.

John fulfilled his mission faithfully and obediently, and they're calling him a crazy man. He's under the control of Satan. He's demon possessed.

If you can't address the argument, go ad hominem, shoot the guy that's talking. I remember in John nine, when the blind man is healed and the authorities hail him up, get

his parents to talk and talk to the guy. And he says, well, why do you keep asking me these questions? I've already told you.

I mean, he's obviously from God. Who else could, could cure congenital blindness? And they end up saying, well, you were altogether born in sin. Are you going to instruct us? And they run him off.

You were born in sin. I'm not going to address your argument, that well, he's curing blindness. Who, but someone from God could do this.

They can't answer the argument. So they attack the man. Just be prepared in your Christian faith and witness as you live your life.

There are people who are going to say, you're crazy. You're adhering to a bunch of old Hebrew myths and legends. Goat herds made this stuff up beside the campfire.

And you're actually trying to live your life by it. It's going to happen. And if you are ready to give an answer to those who observe your hope and are curious about it, and you have, you know, your scripture, you know, whom you have believed, and you are firmly persuaded why and how he's going to keep what you've committed to him against that day.

Then those who are receptive, those who are seeking, God can use us to help them find the rest. It's pretty much hopeless. And if they don't listen to the Lord, Jesus Christ, if they don't listen to the none greater in the old Testament than John, if who can do it better, who can witness better than John the Baptist, Jesus says, nobody Carly Simon saying nobody does it better.

Well, Jesus said, John, the Baptist, nobody does it better in the entire old Testament age. He's there's none greater than John, Jesus himself, perfect communication, perfect understanding, perfect witness of the father, fullness of deity and bodily form. It's not your fault that people do not receive that people do not accept that people do not not calm.

They do not meta. No, they do not change their mind, shift their attitude, think differently, adopt a new policy, a new approach, a new way, shift their direction, be faithful, be consistent, tend to our relationship with God first and foremost. And the message is going to, Jesus said, it's a sword and it's going to divide even households.

And it's the message doing that. It's not your eloquence. It's not your inadequacy.

You don't have to worry like Moses. I'm slow of speech and have a slow tongue. And if I'd only said I, after I got, you know, how you always think of a wonderful rejoinder or a wonderful answer or a good scripture after the conversation is over.

And, oh, if I'd only thought of that, I had an opportunity and I missed it. No, you didn't do the best you can rely on the Holy spirit and what comes out of your mouth is what God wants that person to hear. And if you didn't think of a real zinger, they didn't need to hear that zinger or God would have brought it to your mind.

This is assuming you've done your homework and you're keeping short accounts and doing what you do prayerfully as under the Lord. It's the message that counts, not the messenger. People who don't want the message are going to make an issue out of the messenger.

And they killed both of these messengers because of their message. So, woe to you, Corazon, woe to you, Bethsaida. If the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have metanoeo.

They would have changed their mind long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Now, what question does this immediately raise? If the mighty works that Corazon and Bethsaida saw had been done a little north and west in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in dust and ashes. These mighty works were not done up there.

They have not repented in dust and ashes. So, why didn't he go do them? If they're ready to repent, why didn't Jesus make a run? You know, later on, he is going to go to Sidon. He's going to go to the region later.

And Jesus says, if the mighty works had been done up there, they would have repented in dust and ashes. Well, why don't you? And if you don't, and if they don't repent in dust and ashes, are they lost? This is why we spend our time looking at nakam, which is the root that Jesus would have used in speaking Aramaic. It's cognate in Aramaic and metanoeo in Greek.

Because did God need to be saved when he looked down and saw the wickedness of man? Was his repentance a salvific repentance? Did Lamech have a salvific change of mind about work and the curse on the earth when he saw baby Noah? You can change your mind about a lot of things. Think about Jonah and Nineveh. You almost can't help but think of it.

Was the population of Nineveh saved? Like I was taught in Sunday school, Jonah went there and they all got saved. No. What did they repent in sackcloth and ashes about? Their wicked deeds.

Jonah didn't say, you know, the God of Israel offers righteousness and eternal life. And if you fail to respond, he has no choice but to judge you for all eternity. What did Jonah say? 40 days, Nineveh is going to be wiped out.

That's all he said. Judgment is coming in 40 days. People looked around and said, well, why would our city be destroyed? Probably because we are such incurable, wicked guys.

Look at the moral degeneracy in this town. Let's demonstrate a change of mind about that. Let's put on some clothes and say, we're not going to do that kind of stuff anymore.

We're going to lay off being centers of slavery and oppression and brutality and criminality. We're going to reform. We're going to have some social justice.

We're going to have some better treatment. We're going to be more fair. We're going to be more balanced.

We're going to take care of this criminal behavior. And from the King down to the animals, they said, we know we're bad. And because they relented, because they changed their policy and their attitude about their works, God changed his policy and his attitude.

When he saw that, don't have time to turn there, but if you go to first Kings and look at King Ahab, under the preaching of Elijah, and he is told that the dogs that licked up Jezebel's blood are going to lick his as well. And Ahab, there is no King more wicked than Ahab, married to Jezebel. It says he not calmed when he was given this message that in this prophecy that the dogs were going to lick up his blood.

And of course it later comes true, but God tells the prophet, I have seen that Ahab has humbled himself before me in the same breath that it says he was one of the most wicked Kings and sponsored it and indulged in it and promoted it. He's a wicked, wicked, man. But he humbled himself.

When he heard the words of the prophet, he put on sackcloth. Ahab put on sackcloth. Why? It wasn't reform.

He didn't rebuild anything. He didn't sponsor worship. He didn't get back to the Bible.

He just humbled himself. And God said, because Ahab, Ahab has not calmed and has humbled himself. I will not bring about the destruction of the Northern kingdom in his days.

He won't see it. I'll spare him that much simply because at the word of the prophet, he has humbled himself. Ahab is more responsive than the people in Chorazin and Capernaum and Bethsaida hearing and seeing the word of the Lord, the power of the Lord to have a change of attitude, a change of mind to say, God is at work here.

God is speaking. I need to change in some way, but it can be in multiple different areas. So if the mighty works, which were done and you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, now you can, you can talk about the Tyre and Sidon of Jesus day, but this is primarily going back to the old Testament and in Isaiah and in Ezekiel, there are woe songs spoken against Tyre.

You remember Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. Uh, and, and we understand that, that this is a description of how the art fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning, the five I wills, who is that spoken to formally who's being addressed. It's to the King of Tyre, right? The King of Tyre is put for, he's the metaphorical representation, just like you've got the dragon in revelation.

You've got the King of Tyre and God says, you are the, you are the guardian cherub who covers you were, you were in the garden of God. You walked among the stones of fire, your pipes and your timbrels, you know, your starts and your stops your, he was evidently the, the security, the final angel to pass, to come into the presence of God. And he determined who could come into the throne room and who couldn't that, that, you know, your, the workmanship of your pipes and your is, is you were the highest ranking angel who determined who and who could not come into the presence of God.

And he had a function, not unlike what Absalom started doing when David led him back into the kingdom after his murder of Amnon and David relented, Joab appealed to him and he finally let Absalom come back. What did Absalom do? He stood at the gate and people who were coming in to see David for justice, Absalom would stop him and say, well, look, I can sort this for you. I can do what the king does.

I can be like the most high. I can raise my throne above you all and dispense justice. And I can do it as well or better than my father.

This is what Satan did. And he was short stopping traffic into the throne room of God in his pride. In my understanding, when you look at it in Hebrew and so on, it's basically, he was the one who was stopping and allowing things to pass.

That's why they compare it to musical instruments that allow air or stop. But the Tyre and Sidon that Jesus is speaking of here are like Sodom and Gomorrah in their symbolic value. Everybody knew from their synagogue reading of Isaiah and Ezekiel that these were symbolic towns rife with evil and they're like Nineveh.

In fact, there's a very famous poem by Richard Kipling called Recessional. And he says, all of our pomp and he's talking about the British empire, but our pomp and something that rhymes with empire had become one with Nineveh and Tyre, formerly great, but notable for evil and ultimately destroyed. Nineveh is ultimately going to be destroyed for their evil, their change of mind because it wasn't spiritual, it was temporary.

And they soon went back to the ways that they practiced. Jonah merely went there and at his preaching, they repented. And that was a sign to Israel.

The pagans know enough to do something different when they hear the word of the Lord. You, my own people don't. This is the exact same thing.

If Jesus mighty works have been done in the Tyre and Sidon of the old Testament, they

would have done what Nineveh did. They would have said, well, let's see if we can make a change and forestall this and keep it from happening. But that's not the mission.

And it's not talking about salvation in the same way that that same word Nakam is used of Pharaoh changing his mind about letting the people go. Pharaoh Nakam about letting the people go. He's not changing his mind about the God of Israel.

After seeing these mighty works, he's changing his mind about letting the people go. He's repenting about saying that he would release them. So what are you repenting about? But Nakam in the old Testament, Metanoia and Metanoia in the New Testament are talking about the process.

Are you willing to make the change? God's attitude toward man, God was willing to change his policy and his goals and objectives for man when he sees how wicked they have become. He says, well, I'm not going to keep sponsoring them and growing the population. I'm going to clean them out and start fresh with these eight.

And in the same way, Tyre and Sidon, Nineveh, Sodom, he's going to say down here, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment. Verse 22 of Matthew 11, more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. Here's another thing.

Notice that Jesus is rebuking the cities. Everything is corporate. He doesn't say you people.

He doesn't say you Herod. He says you cities. And at the judgment, the city is spoken of as being judged in the day of judgment.

Cities are going to be judged is the implication. When you see what Jesus is saying here, it will be more tolerable for the city of Tyre or the city of Sidon than it will be for the city of Chorazin or the city of Bethsaida. Why would Jesus do this? Why wouldn't he say it will be more tolerable for the people of instead of just the city? You say, well, it's the metonymy of the adjunct or the whole for the part or whatever else.

And it's just symbolic. And it really means all the people. And of course it does because cities are not the brick and mortar that make them up.

They are the population. But why speak of them in these terms? Why not individualize it? Why not personalize it to what's going on in the individual soul? Because when people reject the truth in general and the gospel in particular and the word of God and the truth of God, they will unite in their opposition and it becomes groupthink. And these birds of an evil feather will flock together and will vindicate and justify each other and will talk each other up and will assemble their arguments.

And there will be a kind of reverse enthusiasm that comes in opposition to God. So it's

not someone carefully considering and saying, based on the balance of the evidence, and you know, I'm kind of the judge in the courtroom here and I've heard the prosecution and the defense, and this becomes a movement. It becomes a trend.

It trends and it feeds on itself and people reinforce each other. They gather in the dark because they love darkness rather than light and their deeds are evil, but they find this. It's the opposite of fellowship.

It's negative fellowship. It's negative encouragement. It's negative.

And the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts. And Jesus says, you all, Jesus comes and does these mighty works. People witness the miracles at firsthand.

After he leaves and goes to the next town, people get together and say, well, how did he do that? And they start talking and they start explaining. Yeah. Yeah.

What he said, that's what it is. He has a demon. He's casting out demons by the principles.

That's what it is. And it feeds on itself. And this is why Paul will say later, bad company corrupts good morals.

If you hang out with people who are constantly using this corrosive sort of rationale, if you tolerate and begin to listen to and begin to agree with this kind of thinking and this way of explaining, oh yeah, well, science would say, and I don't want to be dumb or thought of as dumb. So if science has an explanation, then it probably wasn't a miracle to begin with. And it's this corporate responsibility for fostering and encouraging and spreading this attitude that Jesus is addressing here.

And it is a reminder that our fellowship in the opposite sense is something to treasure and value and preserve because groups affect the individuals in them. So where do you spend your time? It's trickier now with social media, because with a couple of clicks, you can be in one group or you can be in another. Somebody gets a wild thought.

I was apprised of one yesterday and my class at Annapolis was the last all-male class to go through. It set us apart. You know, how are you going to distinguish yourself from previous and subsequent classes? Well, we're the last class before they go co-ed.

So the class motto, I never did really like it, but they said, omnes veri, it's Latin for all men. Okay. You're the period at the end of the sentence.

After this, it's going to be a different thing. There's a change in policy. There's a change in attitude.

There's a change. Well, now in the current environment, unfortunately for a member of the class of 1980, the class behind me, a retired captain was watching the news and

watching events unfold that you've seen in the past weeks in terms of unrest and protests turning into rioting and looting and violence. He's sitting in his living room with his wife and let this be a warning to you.

He had his phone in his pocket and unbeknownst to himself, he joined Facebook live and his phone started transmitting out of his pocket to a Facebook group. So the comments he is making in the privacy of his living room to his wife watching the news for 33 minutes and some seconds went out publicly. He made allusions and used language and launched ideas in frustration at what happens when races are at odds with each other that have ended him.

He has resigned. He was on the board of the alumni association. He was this, he was that.

He might as well just hang himself in the front yard. He's done. And his class, of course, has risen up in repudiation, rightfully so.

The sad thing is it's thought police. Let's say your ideas are bigoted and wrong. In this country, we used to say, well, even though you are wrong and heinously so, it's a free country.

You can think what you want. You can say what you want. We will shout you down, but we're not going to stop you from having your say and expressing your viewpoint.

We used to let skinheads and Nazis have a parade and march down the streets because we fought for freedom. We've fought for, look, you know, I can't think of anybody that's more wrong than you, but you have a right to your view and you have a right to express it. We will neutralize it.

We will counter it. We will explain why you are full of old tennis shoes, but you can say it. Well, that is rapidly changing.

And even if you inadvertently, something escapes the confines of your home. So, you know, you're carrying your phone around, and anybody that knows how can turn that microphone on, whether you think it's on or not. You can have it in the same way that you, you know, the colloquial term for accidentally dialing someone when it's in your hip pocket.

Well, you can accidentally, and this is an argument to me for consistency in our Christian walk. The father who sees in secret is going to judge and either rebuke or reward openly. What is spoken in the corner is going to be shouted from the housetops.

Remember that? Well, live accordingly. A transparent life of faith, obedience, looking to God's righteousness isn't ever going to have to worry about an open mic or an inadvertent phone connection because we're consistent. We're consistent when we're by

ourselves.

We're consistent when we're just thinking to ourselves. We're consistent in our prayer life. We're consistent in our fellowship.

We're consistent in what we believe and what we say, and it should reflect biblical values. Now, if I get in trouble for expressing a biblical truth and a scriptural value, so be it. They hated Christ, they can hate me.

But if we are inconsistent and if we are hypocritical and put on a face in public where we don't use, we don't say what we think, and we don't use the kind of language we use in private, that's hypocrisy. That's something that the Holy Spirit needs to convict and cleanse and work with the scripture to purge out of us. But these are days in which literally, I heard this on the news last night, there are actually children turning in their parents, just as is described in scripture, for thought crimes, for saying something in private.

Children are ashamed of their parents and are outing them in social media, and they are similarly vilified and hung in effigy or worse. So here, Jesus says it will be more tolerable for the unbelievers who, when rebuked for immorality, recognize that it's wrong and make a change, than for you who have had the Son of God in your midst, doing the works of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, and you've had no shift in attitude. You've had no change of policy.

You don't find that you need to do anything different. If we go to church and have fellowship and instruction in the Word of God and the opportunity to have the ministry of God's Holy Spirit through music and through the various expressions of our worship, if we don't come away regularly with a sense of the need to be better, to change, to be more fully conformed, we need to change churches, we need to change worship, we need to change something. Paul the apostle said, I do not consider myself to have arrived.

Do you remember in Philippians? I am still. He's the apostle, and he's toward the close of his ministry. He says, I'm being poured out like a drink offering, and I don't know if I'm still going to be here, but I press, Paul says, toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

I do not consider myself to have already attained. If you haven't attained, Paul is looking at himself and says, you know, there's places where I need to change. There are ways I can improve.

This is the man that's been exposed to what's up in heaven and can't even talk about it. This is the man who was personally instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Many believe when he went in the direction of Sinai, and there's a period of his life that's unaccounted

for.

You get the idea that in the same way Jesus personally trained the eleven disciples that he personally trained Paul, and Paul says, I've gotten some of this from the Lord, and some of it I've learned later, but Paul still recognized that there were places where he needed to change his mind, shift his attitude, do better. Jesus says, you've been confronted. The son of God himself has walked their streets and has performed sign miracles in their presence, and they haven't changed their minds, and judgment is coming.

It will be more tolerable. Look at the end of this. You Capernaum, this is Jesus' headquarters.

Back in chapter four, verse 12, you Capernaum, you think you're exalted to heaven. This actually, and I don't know what the text note says, but yeah, I think they're right here. That text note in your New King James, will you be exalted to heaven? It's actually put in the form of a question.

There's a construction there that makes it in the mood of potential. You Capernaum, do you think you'll be exalted to heaven? The answer is no. You will be brought down to Hades if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom.

What a shocking rebuke. Ask yourself this question. If you're reading along in the Bible and suddenly a messenger of God, an angel appears and says, you know, if somebody living in Sodom had learned the things that you've learned in church, had come to know the things that you've come to know across time in your spiritual walk, if somebody that knew those things was living in, was confronted with those things in Sodom, he would have changed his mind in ways that you have not.

That would be a stinging rebuke, and that's pretty much what's happening here. We need to look at ourselves with the objective light of God's word shining in the inward parts of our soul, dividing us under the soul and the spirit, the joints and the marrow, critic of the thoughts and intents of our hearts, and ask ourselves the hard questions. Am I exposed to the power of God and it's not changing me? Am I listening to the word of God and giving myself a pass and an approval and thinking I'm going to be exalted to heaven and I'm going to have the unwelcome and infinitely sad surprise at the judgment of finding out that I'm basically my reward, my opportunity, my future, my ability to reflect the glory of God in the future kingdom of the son and ultimately kingdom of the father is all gone to Hades because I was unwilling to, I couldn't even do what Ahab did.

Ahab heard the word of the prophet and humbled himself. God resists the proud, that blind spot that Satan's got is shared by all the people who follow his example. God resists the proud, but God gives grace to the humble.

I remind myself of the promise where Jesus says, ask and it shall be given. One of the things we can ask for is David's prayer. Lord, show me my hidden faults.

Try me and see if there is any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Entire cities are spoken of here for our benefit. They're in scripture as an example for us. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit like they did not have.

We have the power of God's word at hand. How many Bibles are in our house? How many resources, how many wonderful insights are available to us? Never in the history of mankind has there been a greater witness of scripture to believers than there is to us as I stand here speaking. Never greater.

And from those to whom much is given, much is expected. Capernaum, Jesus' headquarters. If anybody ought to be paying attention, it's where he spends most of his time.

Chorazin and Bethsaida, just down the road, representing the villages. Both of them are very close at hand, and they've seen a lot of what Jesus does, but it didn't change them. It didn't give them a fresh motivation.

It didn't establish a new direction. And when Jesus says, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you. That's something to cycle through the gristmill and say, have I got any Sodom in my land, the land of my heart, the landscape of my thinking? Are there things that I'm giving myself a pass for, or I'm explaining away? And sometimes I might attach myself to a group that thinks the same way and affirms that, well, yeah, that's really not important.

Or, you know, there's plenty of us that do the same or act the same or think the same, expose ourselves to the same or whatever it might be. That group ethos is part of the deception. He doesn't talk to individuals.

He talks to cities. There's a groupthink here that fools us. We've got to break out of the groupthink and get with the faithful believer groupthink.

What do faithful believers, what does healthy fellowship spark and sponsor and encourage in us? That's what we want to look for. So the Lord Jesus gives us this warning and we're still here. We still have time.

We've got this afternoon. We've got this evening. We've got tomorrow and however much more time God gives to us to look at this warning from the Lord Jesus and say, you know what? I'm not going to be Capernaum.

I'm not going to be Corazon or Bethsaida. I am going to pray the David prayer. I'm going

to get in there and let God shine the light into the cracks and crevices.

And I want to change my mind. I want to be conformed to the image of his dear son. And it's going to be a lifetime task, but it's like chipping away.

Did you ever do a project and you keep returning to it and just a little bit more here, a little bit more there. I can, I can take another, it reminds me of a sculptor that gets a pretty good shape going, but then the more he looks at it, he says, you know, that cheeks a little bit fat. And so he files a little bit of a way.

And, uh, you know, that, that fold could be a little bit more natural and he just keeps coming back to refine it and make it better and better. God wants to refine us, but we have to be humble enough to allow that process to take place. Change of mind is a process and it is sparked by what we see.

When God looks and sees, sometimes he changes his mind, changes his policy, changes his attitude. When he looks at what we do, your iniquities have separated between you and your God, your sins have hit his face from you so that he will not hear. You have the opposite thing at the dedication of the temple with Solomon.

When my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and seek my face, then will I hear from heaven and heal their land. God looks and God not comes. God has a shift.

That's what we need to do. So we'll pick up next time in Matthew chapter 11, verse 25 with this wonderful prayer. It's a great thing to have prayers recorded.

And I think spoken prayer is a biblical model and it's underappreciated. I'm a big fan of silent prayer. I like to pray.

Nobody knows I'm praying. It's just in my head and I'm sure that God knows my inward thoughts. But when you look at scripture, Psalm 55, 17, evening and morning and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud and he will hear my voice.

Daniel got in trouble because people could hear him praying from his window. Jesus and Paul, the apostle share the content of their prayers with us. And it's a, it's a wonderful encouragement.

I'm so glad that these spoken prayers here, John 17, other places are preserved for us. And there is a power in spoken prayer. I've tried this when I'm all by myself, I'm in the truck or whatever.

I'm so accustomed to praying silently, but I've been trying to train myself to pray out loud. There is a difference. Jesus is going to pray out loud here and we're going to see what he says next time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for its convicting power. Thank you for the presence and influence of your Holy spirit to make it pertinent and personal and show us its application.

We pray that as we reflect on these things, that we can in fact, be those who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and become worthy of him. Even if it involves suffering, even if it sets us back in the eyes of the world, we want to be pleasing in your sight. And we know that this momentary light affliction is working for us an eternal weight of glory.

And that is our goal. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray these things in his name.

Amen.