

## Matt. 11:20-24 - The Danger of Being Unrepentant

Written by Tim Black  
Sunday, 02 August 2009 13:00 -

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1.

### Introduction

1.

At its heart repentance is a turn. A change of heart and a change of ways. By God's grace some will repent. Because of their obstinacy others will not. Repentance is an act of man, but also a gift of God's sovereign grace. As such it is a saving grace which only God can give. ( Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Cor. 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:25; WSC 87; WLC 75, 76

) Esau "

found no room for repentance, though he sought it with tears.

" (

#### Heb. 12:17

) Do you have this grace of repentance? Esau may have sought repentance, but he did not have it, because though he grieved he sought to comfort himself by killing his brother! "

Godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

" (

#### 2 Cor. 7:10

) Do you have this grace of repentance? It is the mark of a believer—you have a soft heart, a heart that will grieve over sin, and turn from it. Repentance is the mark of a person who truly knows and receives God's kindness. "

God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.

" (

#### Rom. 2:4

) Christ showed the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum the kind works of His kingdom, and in this passage He tells you

His is a kingdom characterized by repentance

. And He warns you of

the danger of being unrepentant

.

2.

**Outline.** Matthew summarizes this danger in v. 20, then Christ shows the true evil and terrible consequences of being unrepentant in vv. 21-24, first addressing Chorazin and Bethsaida in vv. 21-22, then addressing Capernaum in vv. 23-24.

1.

### Summary of the Danger v. 20

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2.

### Chorazin and Bethsaida vv. 21-22

3.

### Capernaum vv. 23-24

4.

### Body

1.

**Summary of the Danger v. 20.** Christ summarizes the danger of being unrepentant in v. 20.

1.

### Text

1.

20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

2.

**Danger: Christ denounced the cities.** First Christ denounced the cities. He upbraided

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them. He said "Shame on you!" It is a shameful thing not to repent.

3.

**Reason to repent: Because His mighty works had been done among them.** Second we learn why Christ denounced these cities rather than others. These cities were the ones "where most of his mighty works had been done." Christ's mighty works were His miracles which demonstrated God's kindness, which is meant to lead you to repentance. The reason to repent is because you have seen God's mighty works of kindness. Of mercy. Have you seen them?

4.

Reason for denunciation: Obligation: They should, but did not, repent. All men are obligated to repent of their sin because sin is a transgression of God's law. But men who know God's mercy in the gospel are twice as obligated to repent. Not only are they guilty of sin, but they have the way of salvation from sin laid out plainly before them, revealed in the most brilliant light. For that reason they are not only twice as obligated to repent, but twice as guilty if they do not repent. God told His people, "Samaria has not committed half your sins."

" (  
**Ezek. 16:51**  
)

5.

**Chorazin & Bethsaida vv. 21-22.** Following this introduction Christ tells us the true evil and terrible consequences of being unrepentant.

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**Woes.** Christ pronounces woes upon two cities and their residents.

1.

**Text**

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-  
21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!

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The word "woe" in Hebrew and in Greek is obviously a word of pain: "yAh," "yAa," "ouv ai,"

It is onomatopoeia; it means what it sounds like. It is the sound someone makes when they hurt.

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"Woe to you" means grief, sorrow, misery, terrible calamity will come upon you if you do not repent. This is not the final judgment; there is still a delay, there is still time to repent. But if you do not repent, the greatest of curses will fall upon you. You can know this for certain because Jesus Christ, who will be the final Judge, has said so.

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**The reason for the woe is the lack of repentance. Tyre & Sidon would have repented.**  
The reason for the woe is the lack of repentance

1.

**Text**

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For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

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Chorazin was on the east, Bethsaida the west, of the Sea of Galilee. Both were fishing towns in which Christ had performed miracles. These people knew boats, and trade. Christ parallels and contrasts them with Tyre and Sidon, two maritime cities known for their wisdom, merchants, wealth, power, pride, greed, theft, and idolatry. They were outside the nation of Israel, so Jesus' point to His Jewish hearers was the sins of God's people were worse than those of the most wicked unbelievers. The residents of Chorazin and Bethsaida had received a greater revelation of God's saving mercy than those in Tyre and Sidon, but were more obstinate in their rebellion.

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Interestingly, Christ indicates some sinners are more easily converted. As ours ought to be, Tyre and Sidon's repentance would have been speedy and deep; "long ago in sackcloth and ashes." God also said this to Ezekiel.

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### Ezekiel 3:5-7

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5 You are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel- 6 not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. 7 But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me. Because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart.

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This can raise difficult questions about God's decrees.

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Does Jesus mean God foresees what we might possibly do, then orders events so we make the choices He wants us to make, with the result that He is not sovereign over our free will? This is exactly what Arminianism teaches.

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Calvin rightly explains Christ's words this way: "he reasons, not of what God foresaw would be done either by the one or by the other, but of what both parties would have done, so far as could be judged from the facts....Christ speaks after the manner of men." Christ speaks about what is plainly observable to men: Tyre and Sidon were ignorant of Christ's miracles; Chorazin and Bethsaida were not. Yet the sins of God's people were equal to, and even greater, than the sins of the pagans! " Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

" ( **Heb. 3:12** ) Now not only the Hebrews, but you Gentiles too, have heard the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and so must repent of your sins. " 30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent , 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

" ( **Acts 17:30-31** )

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You might ask a further question about the idea that Tyre and Sidon would have repented: Is God unjust to not save some who would be more easily saved?

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The answer is no! God is not unjust! Those who reject Him remain guilty for their sin. "Whoever does not believe is condemned already." (**John 3:18**)

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**The nature of the woe is a more unbearable condemnation. But it will be more bearable for Tyre & Sidon on the day of judgment.** In v. 22 Christ says the nature of the woe that will come

on the unrepentant is a more unbearable condemnation

1.

### Text

22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

We see here that the purpose of Christ's miracles was to drive home His gospel message, which was the gospel of faith and repentance. To bring about repentance, and salvation. But if you reject the gospel there is no other way for you to be saved. Christ's point is not that Tyre and Sidon will receive mercy, but that those who will not repent after hearing the gospel will receive a greater punishment. You could have been saved, but you would not turn and live! "Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live. " (**Ezek. 18:30-32**)

**Capernaum vv. 23-24.** Christ addresses Capernaum with the same message, in the same structure, but with minor variations.

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### Capernaum

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### Text

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23 And you, Capernaum,

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Christ addressed Capernaum with emphasis, calling its residents to attention with the word "you," calling them to remember they heard Christ's teaching personally and saw His miracles from day to day while He kept His residence among them for a time. Have you seen God's grace personally? God's mercies are new every morning, and He displays His mercies abundantly in Christ's body, the church. " Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

" (

#### Is. 55:6-7

) Because Christ's early ministry was based there, Capernaum was like Shiloh, of which God said in

#### Jeremiah 7:12-14

, "  
12 Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

"

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**Not exalted but brought down.** Christ doesn't use the word "woe," but presents its content. The residents of Capernaum were honored with Christ's presence for a time, but that will

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mean nothing to the final Judge because it meant nothing to them! Christ said,

1.

### Text

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will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades.

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All the time you spend in "The temple of the Lord" (**Jer. 7:4**) will not save you, but only faith in the Lamb who was slain on its altar, and repentance from your sin. But the more of God's grace you reject, the more of God's wrath you will receive. A true Christian is not proud of his membership in the church, and does not boast of his seat at Christ's table, but cries "Lord, why was I a guest?" "

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

" (

### Ps. 51:17

) Do you think you don't need the miracles of Christ to heal you, His mercies to save you, daily time with Him in His word to feed your soul and in prayer to commune with your Savior who gave His life so that you might live? Pray for "

a broken and contrite heart

" before the awesome holiness and saving grace of God.

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**Sodom would have remained.** Like Tyre and Sidon, Sodom "would have remained until this day," because by implication, it would have repented.

1.

### Text

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For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

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"Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord." (**Gen. 13:13**) Sodom's sin was great, but Capernaum's sin was greater than the sin of Sodom. Tyre and Sidon had begun to recover, but Sodom had not. Sodom's sin was sexual immorality, homosexuality (Gen. 19:5; Jude 7), arrogance and abuse of the poor (Ezek. 16:49, 40), and inhospitality (Gen. 19:8). Sodom was malicious; the height of wickedness.

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**But it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of Judgment.** Yet in v. 24 Christ says,

1.

**Text**

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

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Today we are advantaged more than Capernaum, because we have the full revelation of the gospel recorded for us in the pages of the New Testament. We have the gospel preached to us, the gospel ordinances administered to us, and live in the age of the Spirit. Unlike Capernaum we have seen Christ risen from the dead, His ascension into glory, His acts by His Spirit in His church saving men through 20 centuries and to the ends of the earth. We who stand in the full light of day will be greater debtors than Capernaum in the final

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judgment whether we go to Heaven or Hell—greater debtors to God's mercy in Heaven, or greater debtors to God's justice in Hell.

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If you do not believe this, you need to recognize God has done it once before, and He will do it again. The sin of God's people in the OT was greater than that of Sodom, therefore its punishment was greater than that of Sodom as well.

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**Ezekiel 16:46-51** tells us Israel's sin was greater than Sodom's.

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46 Your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. 47 Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. 48 As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. 49 Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. 51 Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed.

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**Lamentations 4:6** says "The chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom."

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**Amos 4:11-13** tells us the Exile's foretaste of the final judgment did not bring hard-hearted Israel to repentance, and that is why Christ would come once for salvation, and a second time for judgment.

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11 "I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me," declares the LORD. 12 "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" 13 For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought, who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth- the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!

-

Because you have tasted of the heavenly gift of salvation, you will be a greater debtor to God's mercy in Heaven, or His justice in Hell, than even the most wicked men of Sodom. God has done this once before, and he will do it again. **2 Peter 2:6-9** tells us,

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6 if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;

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7 and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked...

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9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

-

Because Christ's kingdom comes with a better covenant founded on better promises, with a greater Prophet, greater revelation, greater power, greater mercy and greater condemnation, it is a kingdom of a greater repentance. He commands all people to repent, but also graciously gives what He commands—abundant repentance by the power of His Spirit. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is

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patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

" (

**2 Pet. 3:9**

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### Conclusion

1.

Have you hardened your heart against the Lord this past week? Remember the greatness of God's justice and mercy which you above those in all former ages have learned, and repent. " The day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it? 12 'Yet even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.' Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

" (

**Joel 2:11-13**

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Commentaries, 27, 30;.