

Matthew 11:20-30*NIV Harmony 81; Loyal 97-98***Introduction**

1. If you have been to the Grand Canyon, you probably know that one of the attractions offered is a ride by donkey down into the canyon. Well, one of those donkeys was more contrary than your average donkey. In fact, he was so obstinate that no one could train him. Eventually, his owner asked a kind and gentle pastor to work with this difficult donkey. After a long period, the pastor had some limited success, but the donkey would only follow one of two specific commands. When his rider said, "Praise God!," he would start walking, and when his rider said, "Woe," he would stop. Since those were the only two commands that the donkey would follow, his handler would carefully instruct each rider. One day, an absent-minded fellow was assigned to ride this troublesome donkey. Unfortunately, he did not pay close attention to the handler's instructions. He got on the donkey and the handler got him moving by using the proper command, but as the donkey neared the edge of the canyon, the man became quite concerned at the rapidity of their approach. So, he cried out to the donkey, "Stop!" and "Halt!" to no avail. As they quickly neared the rim of the canyon, the man finally remembered the right word, "Woe!" Immediately, the donkey stopped just before they would have plunged to their deaths. With great relief and thankfulness, the man cried out, "Praise God!" And the rest of their ride went rather quickly.
2. In this lesson, Jesus started with the word "Woe" and stopped with praise to God.
3. **Read Mt 11:20-30.**

A. Woe! – Jesus Confronted Unrepentance (20-24)

1. Jesus confronted the unrepentance of the Jews.
 - a. In our last lesson, Jesus had confronted the unrepentance of the scribes and Pharisees exhibited by their rejection of both John the Baptist and Himself.
 - b. Now, Jesus broadened His confrontation of unrepentance to the inhabitants of three Jewish towns where He had preached and performed miracles.
 - c. Matthew recorded, "Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed because they did not repent" (20).
 - d. The word "denounce" (Gk., *oneidizein*) means "to reproach, revile, upbraid; to view someone/something as culpably guilty and therefore deserving punishment."
2. Jesus first rebuked the towns of Korazin (also spelled Chorazin) and Bethsaida.
 - a. The exact location of Korazin and Jesus' ministry there is unknown in the gospels.
 - 1) The Lord traveled to many places during His ministry.
 - 2) In his gospel, John recorded, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:30-31).
 - b. Bethsaida was a small town in Galilee and the birthplace of Jesus' disciples Phillip, Peter, and Andrew (John 1:44-45; 12:21).
 - 1) Bethsaida was the setting for the restoration of sight to a blind man (cf., Mk 8:22-26).
 - 2) It is also likely that the feeding of the 5,000 took place near Bethsaida (cf., Lk 9:10-17), and it may have been near there that Jesus walked on water (cf., Mk 6:45-52).
 - c. Even though Jesus had performed miracles (Gk., *dunameis*) in these towns, they failed to repent and believe in Him.
3. So Jesus denounced them by saying, "Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For 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." (21)
 - a. The word "Woe" (Gk., *Ouai*) was used to express grief, regret, misfortune, or distress over a seemingly inescapable affliction or problem.
 - b. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "He was not pronouncing a judgment which He would inflict capriciously; He was announcing the result which they had deliberately chosen, and from which there could be no escape" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 117).

- c. Jesus contrasted these two Jewish towns with two Gentile towns, Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia.
 - 1) Jesus stated that the inhabitants of these Gentile cities would have repented (Gk. *metanoesian* – “change of mind/heart”) had He performed His miracles there.
 - 2) They would have shown their repentance by putting on sackcloth and smearing ashes on themselves as signs of repentance.
 - 3) Remember Jonah’s message to the inhabitants of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and their response. “... ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (Jon 3:4-5).
- d. Jesus pronounced judgment upon their unrepentance and failure to believe in Him. “But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.” (23)
- e. They have failed to respond to His message and His confirming miracles and so they would face the consequences of their poor decisions.
- 3. Jesus even rebuked His Galilean homebase of Capernaum, the village where His disciples Peter, Andrew, James, and John lived.
 - a. Jesus said, “And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.” (23)
 - b. In contrast to Capernaum, Jesus pointed to an infamous Gentile city of Sodom.
 - 1) Sodom was one of the four wicked cities on the plain around the Dead Sea in Genesis 19.
 - 2) Not even ten righteous persons could be found in the city, but God spared Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family by bringing them out of the city before He destroyed it.
 - 3) God’s judgment fell on Sodom and the other wicked cities on the plain with burning sulfur which resulted in their complete destruction.
 - c. Jesus said, “But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment (Gk., *kriseos*) than for you.” (24)
 - d. Again, the people of Capernaum had failed to repent and believe in Jesus despite His teachings and miracles. They too would face the consequences of their poor decisions.
 - e. Warren Wiersbe summarizes, “How unusual to find the word *woe* on the lips of Jesus! This word means judgment, but it also includes pity and sorrow. How tragic that these cities should treat lightly their opportunities to see and hear the Christ of God, and be saved! The Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, and the godless cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have repented had they seen the miracles that Jesus and His disciples performed. Capernaum had been ‘exalted to heaven’ by being privileged to have the Messiah live there. Yet her greater privileges only brought greater responsibilities and greater judgment. Five of the ten miracles recorded in Matthew 8-9 were performed in Capernaum” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 97).

B. Praise God! – Jesus Calls the Weary and Burdened to Rest (25-30)

- 1. Jesus shifted from words of woe/judgment to praise of His Father.
 - a. “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 is what you were pleased to do” (25-26).
 - 1) God’s plan is simple and can be simply understood if we will only hear it and believe.
 - 2) Paul stated it this way, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate’” (1 Cor 1:18-19).
 - b. The Pharisees, scribes, and unbelieving Jews thought that they were wise in rejecting Jesus, but Jesus showed that their actions were not only foolish but led to their destruction.
 - c. In contrast to the “wise” are the “little children” of whom Jesus spoke. They are those who repented and believed in Jesus.
 - d. Jesus praised His Father for those who have responded to Him with repentance and faith.
- 2. Jesus knows the Father’s plan, and only those who come to Jesus can find the Father.
 - a. Jesus said, “All things have been committed (Gk., *paredothe* – “given over; entrusted”) to me by my Father....” (27a)
 - b. He also said, “...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” (27b)

- c. Jesus still reveals the Father to those who will come to Him in faith with repentance.
 - d. Wiersbe writes, “There is a vast difference between the spoiled children of the parable (Matt. 11:16-19) and the submissive children of this statement of praise. The Father reveals Himself to the Son, and the Son reveals Himself and the Father to those who are willing to come to the Son in faith. These verses indicated both the sovereignty of the Father and the responsibility of the sinner” (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 97).
3. The blessing of coming to Jesus in faith and repentance is found in rest both for this life and for eternity.
- a. Jesus gave three commands to those who are burdened and in need of rest.
 - 1) First, “Come (Gk., *Duete*) to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest” (28).
 - a) Jesus called to those who are “weary” (Gk., *kopiontes* – “exhausted, spent”) and “burdened” (Gk. *pephortismenoi*, - Pf. tense indicates ones who have been carrying a load for a long time).
 - b) Jesus commanded us in our exhaustion and overload to come to Him for “rest” (Gk., *anapauso*).
 - c) Wiersbe states, “...true salvation is found only in a person, Jesus Christ. To come to Him means to trust Him. This invitation is open to those who are exhausted and burdened down. That is exactly how the people felt under the yoke of pharisaical legalism (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10)” (Wiersbe, 97).
 - 2) Second, “Take (Gk., *arate*) my yoke upon you...” (29a)
 - a) As we come to Christ, we must take (Gk., *arate*) what He gives, which Jesus describes as a “yoke” (Gk. *zugon*).
 - b) In Jesus’ day this meant one was willing to become His disciple or follower.
 - c) We must not see this yoke as another burden but as acceptance of who Jesus is by placing our faith in Him.
 - d) Wiersbe writes, “This is a deeper experience. When we come to Christ by faith, *He gives us rest... ‘peace with God’* (Rom. 5:1).”
 - 3) Third, “...and learn (Gk., *mathete* – “be disciplined”) from me...” (29b)
 - a) We enter a lifelong relationship as a follower of Jesus.
 - b) Wiersbe states, “When we take His yoke and learn, we find rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience... ‘the peace of God’ (Phil. 4:6-8)... The first two commands represent a crisis as we come and yield to Christ, but this step is a process. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. Life is simplified and unified around the person of Christ” (Wiersbe, 97-98).
 - b. Why should we be yoked to Jesus? Jesus gives four reasons.
 - 1) “...for I am gentle (Gk., *praus* – “strength under control”)...” (29c)
 - 2) “...and humble (Gk., *tapeinos*) in heart,...” (29c)
 - 3) “...and you will find rest (Gk., *anapausin* – v. 28) for your souls (Gk., *psuchais*)”. (29c)
 - 4) “For my yoke is easy (Gk., *chestos* – “well fitting; tailor-made for our lives and needs) and my burden (Gk., *phortion*) is light (Gk., *elaphron*).” (30) - The burden of doing Jesus’ will is not a heavy one (1 John 5:3) but a joyous one.
 - c. Jesus’ words are reminiscent of Jer 6:16 which says, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”
 - d. The Jews and each of us stand at the crossroads considering which way we will take. Let us come to Jesus in faith and repentance and take up our walk of daily discipleship with Him.

C. Reflections

- 1. You are accountable for your knowledge of God and His plan in Jesus. Have you repented and come to Jesus?
- 2. Are you weary and burdened? Have you come to Jesus for help? Have you given your load to Him or are you picking it up again?
- 3. Where there is greater light, there is greater responsibility. We are responsible for how we respond to Jesus. May we never hear a word of woe from Jesus but only words of praise to the Father that we are His “little ones.”