

Matthew 11:20-24: Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

Intro: We've seen John the Baptist struggle with doubts & questions about the true identity of Jesus. We've seen Jesus report evidence to John's disciples showing **Who He is**, the Messiah, the very LORD & God that John prepared the way for. **Who is Jesus?** Is the most important question we could ever ask & answer. The evidence Jesus gave to John's disciples was many of the mighty works He had been doing. Many don't believe but reject! Today, Jesus gives stern warnings to people who have seen His many mighty works & yet still do not believe.

1. Jesus Denounces

Matthew 11:20: Then he began to denounce

Jesus pronounces woes! Woe to you! Cursed be you! This is the opposite of blessing! This is God's condemnation!
V. 23: You will be brought down to Hades. This is a strong word of judgment, anger, & indignation to people!

Ligon Duncan: That's exactly what He's going to say to Capernaum. 'You're headed to hell.' You don't hear that kind of criticism in many pulpits these days. You don't hear those kinds of reproaches & criticisms & denunciations in today's pulpits. When I first came to First Presbyterian Church, I had some wonderful opportunities with saints who have been in this congregation a long time, & they shared with me experiences from their childhood & all the way up to the more recent days. And many of them told me that they remembered Dr. Hutton leaning over the pulpit at the corner of Yazoo and North State, and saying on occasions, "You're going to hell." You don't hear that very often today from pulpits. Even in evangelical pulpits you don't hear denunciations & rebukes that are that clear. Perhaps, perhaps that is because the inhabitants lack the Spirit of Jesus. Perhaps it is because they care more about what their congregation can do for them, than they care about the eternal well being of their congregation. The Lord Jesus does not use these hard words to be mean. He doesn't use these words to tear people down. He is trying to shake them out of their indifference because He loves them so much. He loves them so much He doesn't care whether they get angry with him. And we need folks who will care about us more than they care about what we think about them. We need those folks who will administer to us the wounds of a friend.

2. Jesus Denounces Cities Where He Had Done Many Mighty Works

Matthew 11:20: Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done

a. Capernaum: This was the town Jesus' went to live in for His base of operations during His earthly ministry – His adopted hometown. He taught in the synagogue there; delivered a man from an unclean spirit there; healed Peter's mother-in-law and healed many others there as well; a paralyzed man was let down through a roof to be healed there; Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead there; Dyer and Hatteberg note that more of Christ's recorded miracles were performed in Capernaum than in any other city!

b. Chorazin was about two miles from Capernaum

c. Bethsaida was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John

3. Jesus Denounces Cities Where He Had Done Many Mighty Works Because They Did Not Repent

Matthew 11:20: Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

Jesus came preaching repentance. **WLC 76: What is repentance unto life?** A: Repentance unto life is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.

- **Acts 11:18:** they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."
- **2 Timothy 2:25:** God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth

4. Jesus Denounces Chorazin and Bethsaida

Matthew 11:21-22: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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.²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

a. Woe to you: Cursed be you! Doom and destruction be to you! Pity be on you! It's a serious warning!

b. Tyre and Sidon: Gentile cities; unclean and pagan; port cities known for sin and rebellion against God.

Hendriksen: Isa. 23 & Ezek. 26-28 [give] the definite impression that the commercial seafarers & colonizers who inhabited these cities were proud, money-mad, & cruel. Amos denounced [people in Tyre] for selling Israelites into slavery to the Edomites (Amos 1:9). The Phoenicians also sold "the children of Judah & the children of Jerusalem" to the Greeks (Joel 3:6). In the description of pleasure-mad, arrogant, presumptuous "Babylon" of Rev. 17-19, there is much that brings back to mind the heathen center of wickedness & seduction, Tyre.

c. Jesus knows everything, even what would happen in every possible circumstance or situation that hadn't even happened yet: Jesus knows what would have happened in Tyre and Sidon if He had done His mighty works there! They would have repented! He knows every contingency and every possibility! He is God! He reigns!

d. They would have repented in sackcloth and ashes: D. A. Carson: "Sackcloth" is a rough fabric made from the short hairs of camels and usually worn next to the skin to express grief or sorrow. Ashes were added in case of deep emotion, whether one put them on the head, sat in them, or even rolled in them.

- **Joel 1:8:** Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.

- **Jeremiah 6:26:** O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.

e. God doesn't owe mighty works (special revelation) to anyone: God is under no obligation to save anyone! If these cities had seen Jesus' mighty works, they would have repented, but Jesus didn't go there and do those works! God is not obligated to save anyone! He would be good, righteous, and holy to send everyone to hell!

f. There are different degrees of punishment on the day of judgment based on how much truth about Christ has been revealed to you: D. A. Carson: punishment on the day of judgment takes into account opportunity. There are degrees of [happiness/joy] in paradise and degrees of torment in hell, a point Paul well understood. The implications for Western, English-speaking Christendom today are sobering.

Bruner: Christian countries are in special trouble on judgment day, not because Jesus has not really been in their communities but because he has. Jesus' presence, without change, can lead to a damnation deeper than Sodom's.

Remember you can't fast in the presence of Jesus; you can't die in the presence of Jesus; you can't be sick in the presence of Jesus. And you also can't escape a greater judgment if you hear about Him & don't repent & believe in Jesus! He is that great! Greater judgment revolves around Him, is centered on Him, & is conditional on Him!

g. There will be a day of judgment: God knows everything and always does what is right: He will judge one day! Are you ready? Judgment Hymn – Sister Mavis: **GOSPEL!**

5. Jesus Denounces Capernaum

Matthew 11:23-24: And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

a. Jesus' warns Capernaum: You will not be exalted to heaven, you will be brought down to Hades! Jesus' words are very similar to the words of Isa. 14:13-15 that speak of judgment against Babylon. Very offensive to compare!

Hades is usually another name for hell: D. A. Carson: Gehenna and Hades are often thought to refer, respectively, to eternal hell and the abode of the dead in the intermediate state. But the distinction can be maintained in few passages. More commonly, the two terms are synonymous and mean "hell."

b. God sovereignly gives certain people more opportunities to be saved than others: Jesus did many mighty works in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that He did not do in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom!

Ligon Duncan: They had more opportunities in these cities where Jesus was preaching to hear the gospel than did these people to hear the prophets of the Old Testament. "That's not fair," somebody says. Jesus said it. I didn't say it. I didn't write it. Calvin didn't write it. Jesus said it. That's the way it is. They had more opportunities. Listen to what Matthew Henry says, "Some places enjoy the means of grace in greater plenty, power, and purity than others." That is just the way it is.

c. God sovereignly did not send Jesus to do mighty works in places where if He did go and do them, they would have repented: V. 21: if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes; **V. 23:** if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Ligon Duncan: notice that Jesus indicates that some would have repented if they had more light.

d. Beware of increasing your condemnation: Thomas Brook's book, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*: One last thing, don't read this book. Know that it is not the knowing nor the talking nor the reading but the doing man that will at last be found the happy man. Reader, if it be not strong upon your heart to practice what you read, don't read this book. For to read it would be to increase your condemnation.

e. If Tyre/Sidon/Sodom can repent, anyone can repent: God saves! God changes hearts! God grants repentance!

Capernaum did repent later! Daniel Doriani: Capernaum was a center for Christianity by 50-55 A. D.

6. The Bible Teaches There Are Degrees Of Bad And Worse Sin

Charles Quarles: The sinners in these cities who have seen Jesus' mighty works and still refuse to repent are more wicked than the most notorious sinners of Old Testament times.

France/Jeremias: Arrogance and immorality will be punished, but not so severely as the rejection of God's direct appeal. "Only the rejection of forgiveness is unforgivable."

Remember you can't fast in the presence of Jesus; you can't die in the presence of Jesus; you can't be sick in Jesus' presence. You also can escape a greater judgment if you hear about Jesus and don't repent and believe in Him! He's that great! Greater judgment revolves around Him, is centered on Him, is conditional on Him!

What about Matthew 5:27-28?: You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus doesn't teach actual physical adultery & lust are exactly equal degrees of sin. What do these verses teach?

1. The outward action and the inner desire are both sinful in God's sight.
2. The outward action and the inner desire both deserve the punishment of God in hell. God will judge both our outward behavior and our inner thoughts, feelings, desires, and motives.
3. The inner desire is the beginning or seed of the outward action.
4. The inner desire (lust) is a kind of adultery of the heart.
5. All sin, both our outward behavior and our inner thoughts, feelings, desires, and motives from which our outward behavior flows, are very serious to God. Repent and turn from all sin.
6. The Pharisees were very focused on mere outward behavior while their hearts were far from God. Jesus is teaching here that God looks at the heart and judges the heart as well as the outward behavior.

20 Points On Degrees Of Sin In The Bible

1. God makes a distinction between unintentional sins and high handed sins in the Old Testament
2. God assigned more or less severe punishments depending on the sin committed in the Old Testament
3. God told Ezekiel that he would see greater abominable sin than he was already seeing
4. Jesus said people who sin with more knowledge will receive a more severe punishment than those who sin with less knowledge: **Luke 12:47-48:** And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.
5. Jesus said certain people will suffer more than others on the day of judgment
6. Jesus said some sins are greater than others: **John 19:11:** You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.
7. There is an unpardonable sin in the Bible, showing this sin is worse than other sins
8. There is a sin leading to death in the Bible, showing this sin is worse than other sins
9. There is a sin God calls unthinkable to Him – parents offering their children to false gods – abortion
10. Sexual sin is spoken of as a sin that is worse than other sins because it is a sin against your own body
1 Corinthians 6:18-20: Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
11. God says that deliberately sinning after you have the knowledge of the truth is particularly evil
12. God says that those who reject the revelation found in Christ will receive a worse punishment than those who sinned under the old covenant
13. God lists sins that He particularly hates: **Proverbs 6:16-19:** There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.
14. God speaks of a sin that is so bad that it is not even tolerated among godless, pagan people (1 Cor. 5)
15. Turning away from God after receiving many evangelical blessings is particularly evil in God's sight
16. Causing children to stumble is particularly evil in God's sight
17. You can sin in such a way that you are twice as much a son of hell when compared with others
18. Paul called himself one of the greatest and worst of sinners
19. The unbiblical notion that all sin and sinners are equally evil in God's sight steals the joy of those who know they have been forgiven much
20. This is what the historic, Reformed catechisms teach. The Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches this biblical truth in Question 83: Q. Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous? A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

7. Jesus Saves From All Bad And All Worse Sins – He Saves From All Manner Of Sins!

This is why the King of kings came to Jerusalem, meek and lowly, riding on a donkey! He came to die & save! This is what we are celebrating this week & everyday!: Holy week. The death of Christ & the resurrection of Christ to save us from all degrees of judgment forever! He underwent the worst judgment of all to save us!

On the cross: Woe to Christ! Woe to Christ! He was brought down to hell, in a sense, suffering God's wrath! And Jesus suffered a worse wrath and worse judgment than anyone else – even worse than all the damned in hell!

Jesus fully quenched the wrath of God in those six hours on the cross! It takes the damned forever to do it!

John Flavel: First, None of the damned were ever so near & dear to God as Christ was: they were estranged from the womb, but Christ lay in his bosom. When he smote Christ, he smote "the man that was his fellow," Zech. 13:7. But in smiting them, he smites his enemies. When he had to do, in a way of satisfaction, with Christ, he is said not to spare his own son, Rom. 8:32. Never was the fury of God poured out upon such a person before.

- Secondly, None of the damned had ever so large a capacity to take in a full sense of the wrath of God as Christ had. The larger any one's capacity is to understand & weigh his troubles fully, the more grievous and heavy is his burden. If a man cast vessels of greater & lesser quantity into the sea, though all will be full, yet the greater the vessel is, the more water it contains. Now Christ had a capacity beyond all mere creatures to take in the wrath of his Father; & what deep & large apprehensions he had of it may be judged by his bloody sweat in the garden, which was the effect of his mere apprehensions of the wrath of God. Christ was a large vessel indeed; as he is capable of more glory, so of more sense & misery than any other person in the world.

- Thirdly, The damned suffer not so innocently as Christ suffered; they suffer the just demerit & recompense of their sin: They have deserved all that wrath of God which they feel, & must feel forever: It is but that recompense which was meet; but Christ was altogether innocent: He had done no iniquity, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him. When Christ suffered, he suffered not for what he had done; but his sufferings were the sufferings of a surety, paying the debts of others. "The Messiah was cut off, but not for himself,". Thus you see what his external sufferings in his body, & his internal sufferings in his soul were."

City Alight: See Him in Jerusalem; Walking where the crowds are; Once these streets had sung to Him; Now they cry for murder!

- Such a frail and lonely man; Holding up the heavy cross; See Him walking in Jerusalem; On the road to save us!
- See him there upon the hill; Hear the scorn and laughter; Silent as a lamb he waits; Praying to the father
- See the king who made the sun; And the moon and shining stars; Let the soldiers hold and nail him down; So that he could save them!
- See him there upon the cross; Now no longer breathing; Dust that formed the watching crowds; Takes the blood of Jesus!
- Feel the earth is shaking now; See the veil is split in two; And he stood before the wrath of God; Shielding sinners with his blood!
- See the empty tomb today; Death could not contain him; Once the servant of the world; Now in victory reigning!
- Lift your voices to the one; Who is seated on the throne; See him in the new Jerusalem; Praise the one who saved us!

Christ Jesus Sets The Judgment Tone
He Is The Best Of All That's Known
Did Mighty Works, God's Power Shown
Healed The Blind And Those That Groan
Raised The Dead, All Death Dethrone
For He Would Die, Bear Wrath Unknown
For Every Sin He Did Atoned
Then Rise Again, God Moved That Stone
We're Justified By Faith Alone

Repent, Believe, And Don't Postpone
For Without Christ Your Judgment's Grown
Greater Still Because You've Blown
The Greatest Moment Ever Known
To Trust The Savior Who Has Sown
The Gospel News, He's God's Capstone
So Trust Him Now, Be Made His Own
He Satisfies And He Alone!