

Woe to You

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles this afternoon to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 11. And forceful men lay hold of it.

There's a violent advance. There's work to be done in advancing the kingdom. And it won't all be easy. And I told you eventually we would come to the end of chapter 11 and see Jesus' words about rest.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light. We aren't going to get to those verses today. I hope perhaps in May to get to those verses. But there's some very important verses in between. We want to consider today Jesus' words to the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum. And these are not words that you ever want to hear from Jesus.

Directed to you. Sometimes when Jesus taught, He was gentle in His teaching. Other times, the circumstances warranted something different.

[1:24] Something stronger. A warning. And that is what we have here in Matthew chapter 11, beginning in verse 20. And we would do well to heed these words of our Savior.

Directed to these cities, but if they are directed to you as well, take them to heart. And hear what our Savior has to say to us. We'll notice Matthew chapter 11, verses 20 through 24.

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. Woe to you, Chorazin!

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.

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.

[2:32] But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you. Jesus upbraids them.

He reproaches them. He denounces them. Strong words from our Savior. Why these strong words? Well, these cities in which Jesus had performed these remarkable miracles had not repented.

Some of them were impressed. They liked the show. And so they came out to be healed or to have their friends healed or to see other people healed. And they came out to be fed. They liked it when Jesus gave them lots of food and fed their needs.

But their very shallow belief in the power of this Savior was not accompanied by repentance. They did not repent. And so Jesus comes to them with these humbling, powerful, frightening words.

And go back for a moment to verse 4. And it puts this in a bit of a context for us. John had sent some of his disciples saying, Are you the one who was to come?

[3:43] Are you the one who was to be sent? The Messiah? Or should we expect someone else? And Jesus says in verse 4, Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight.

The lame walk. Those who have leprosy are cured. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me. Jesus says, I am the one who was to come. And the way that you can tell is by all of these things that I have done. All of these miracles that should lead you to repentance. They should lead you to be faithful disciples of mine.

And so blessed is the one who does not fall away because of me. But now he's got some words for those who are falling away because of him. Woe to you if you do not follow me.

Woe to you because you have not repented. And so for us this afternoon, which is your response to the miracles of Jesus? And we'll see that we've seen miracles even right here in Bremen.

[4:48] In addition to the ones that are recorded for us in the pages of Scripture. What is your response to them? Do you reject them? Do you reject this glorious, marvelous, powerful Savior?

Or do you come to him in repentance and faith? Because if you don't have repentance, then it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for you.

If you don't come in repentance and faith. And so we want to consider these miracles for a few moments this afternoon. And then consider the response to them. Sometimes we might pass over the miracles.

Yet Jesus mentions them here. If the miracles that were performed in you have been performed in Tyre and Sainte. Well, what miracles were performed in Chorazin and Bethsaida? What miracles were performed in Capernaum?

Let's get a little bit of a feel for what Jesus is talking about here. And feel the weight of some of these things. And what ought to be amazement on our part. Now, we're so familiar with them.

[5:48] Again, we find this so often in Scripture. We get so familiar with it that it doesn't amaze us. Jesus healed a blind man. He healed the leper. He raised Lazarus from the dead. He did what?

Stop like you're reading it for the first time. Like you were standing there watching it. And here's a man who's been blind his whole life. Doctors can't help him. Nothing can help him. And Jesus spits in his eyes.

And he starts to see. He sees men walking around like trees. A little fuzzy still. Like me without my contacts in. And then Jesus touches his eyes.

And the man can see. As clearly as if he had seen his whole life. That's amazing. You know where that happened? Happened in Bethsaida. Jesus did that there.

He did remarkable things in these places. It's in Bethsaida, Luke tells us, that Jesus took five loaves and two fish. And he fed a crowd of 5,000 people.

[6:51] Now, what would you all have done if you had gone back for fellowship lunch today? And all that the ladies had put out on the table were five loaves of bread and two fish. You'd look around at each other and say, where's the rest of the food?

Is that any obstacle for the Savior? And we're not nearly 5,000 today. I'm not very good at estimating crowd sizes, but I know we're a lot less than that. And yet Jesus takes just these five loaves and two fish and multiplies them and multiplies them and multiplies them and multiplies them and multiplies them.

And we could go on and on 5,000 times until all have eaten and are filled. And then he picks up more than he started with as leftovers. The people of Bethsaida had seen that with their own eyes. Unbelievable. Remarkable. John 1 tells us Philip, like Andrew and Peter, were from the town, or was from the town of Bethsaida.

Well, where's the miracle there? Fishers of fish becoming fishers of men. That's a radical change.

[8:10] Surely the town of Bethsaida was abuzz that these three men had left their livelihood, left what gave them income, and made them money in the world to follow this radical teacher, whoever he was.

That's radical. That's a miracle that God can take a heart and change it like that. You see maybe why you say we've seen miracles here in Bremen. God's taken hardened hearts of sinners and changed them and made them His own.

No miracles that are specifically recorded as having taken place in Chorazin. These two cities are on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. If you're looking at your map of Palestine, you know there's the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River runs down to the Dead Sea.

So we're up in the northern part and these two towns are right on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. And certainly what was done in Bethsaida was known in Chorazin and apparently miracles were done there because that's what Jesus says.

If the miracles that were performed in you. Okay, there were some performed there. We don't know which ones they were or if they're even recorded for us at all. But they had seen remarkable things. In Capernaum too. This town was something of a headquarters for Jesus during His earthly ministry.

[9:19] And that was also on the north side of the Sea of Galilee there. And it was there that a centurion came to Jesus and said that My servant is sick unto death, but I don't even need you to

come to My house.

You just speak the Word and He'll be made well. And Jesus speaks the Word, marveling at the man's faith. And He's made well. That happened in Capernaum.

As Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mark 1, He cast out a demon from a man, amazing the people, and the news about him spread throughout the region. And then when they left the synagogue in Capernaum, they came to the home of Simon and Andrew.

So they probably actually went back to Bethsaida here. But at their home, He heals Simon's mother-in-law from her fever. And then people come from all around bringing their sick and demon-possessed.

And Jesus spends the evening healing various diseases, sicknesses of various kinds, casting out demons. Imagine that you're there in the crowd seeing these people that you know are sick, that have had no recourse, and are without any hope in this world.

[10:29] And Jesus touches them, or speaks a word, and makes them well. Says a word, and the demon is gone. Remarkable things these people had seen. And then Jesus gets up early the next morning to go pray.

I would have slept in after a night like that. Not our Lord. He's up early the next morning to go pray. It was in Capernaum that four men carried a man on a stretcher to them and they couldn't get in the house.

It was so crowded. So they had to dig a hole in the roof and let him down to the roof. And Jesus forgave his sins. And then was challenged by the teachers of the law.

Well, who does He think He is? Only God can forgive sins. And Jesus says, So that you may know, I've lost my place.

So that you may know, the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. And He heals them. And the man gets up and he carries his stretcher out of there under his arm. And Jesus is showing that He is the Messiah.

[11:29] You're going to question my authority to forgive sins. Here's the evidence. And so when you reject Jesus' miracles, you're rejecting all sorts of things. You're rejecting His claim that He's God. You're rejecting the Messiah.

You're rejecting the Savior, the One that can help you. It's more than just rejecting His miracles. It's rejecting Him. It's rejecting who He is. It was in Capernaum that there was a royal official whose son was sick.

And Jesus has some strong words for him, but He heals His son with a word. There had been much done in these three towns. You just try to picture being there. Imagine that it happened here in Bremen.

Imagine that Jesus comes to our town and He goes to the hospital and He heals all the sick. And they walk out of there. One by one.

Healthy. Like they had never been sick a day in their lives. And He gathers us all for... People here, He's going to be giving a message. And so we all gather down at the football field because that's where you can seat the most people.

[12:29] And after He teaches, He feeds the whole crowd with just a few items from the concession stand there. A couple of pretzels and some pizza maybe.

The whole crowd with just a few pieces. You would be amazed. You would be inclined to follow after this one. To listen to what He had to say. And if He said something, you would believe Him because of His remarkable power.

And yet, people didn't believe Him. The response now. There's some of the miracles. And we could go on and look at other miracles that were maybe done in other towns or ones that aren't specified as to which town they occurred in.

There's just a few that occurred in these cities. You should be amazed. Eagerly running after this one with such great power who claims to be the Son of God. He must be because we've never seen anything like this before.

But what is the actual response? What do these cities do? There's no repentance. They did bring themselves out to hear Him teach and to be healed by Him and to be fed by Him.

[13:31] But no lasting fruit. No real repentance. He had proved that He was the Son of God. The Messiah. And His message was a simple one. Repent and believe.

For the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe. That's it. Very simple message. And yet, they would not. Here's the one that could save them and they reject them.

And so what will the outcome be for these who liked the show? They were impressed by the fireworks and all of the healing. They enjoyed it and being fed.

But had no stomach for the hard road of discipleship. For the forceful advance of the Kingdom. Not ready for that kind of hard work. What does Jesus have to say to them? What does Jesus have to say to you today who have rejected Him to this point?

And said, I'm not really all that impressed by what you say Jesus does. And though I may be impressed a little bit, it sounds like too much work to me and I'm having too much fun now.

[14 : 37] What of you? Says Jesus. Woe to them. Woe to them. And how horrible it will be for them it will be an intolerable day of judgment.

We often skip right to the result of the judgment itself. Thinking about hell itself. And that's right. And that's here in this text. But notice that it's the day of judgment that's unbearable for them.

You know that the day of judgment for those who are not in Christ will be unbearable. Standing in the presence of a holy, wrathful God. They called to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

For the day of their wrath has come. The great day of their wrath has come. And who can stand? That's a fearful sinner on judgment day that doesn't have Christ cloaking Him with His righteousness.

That's a fearful thing. And to know that you've rejected, you've had such great truth, such great life, and you've rejected that makes that day all the more fearful for you.

[15 : 43] Because the judgment will be all the worse. Of Capernaum, it said, they'll descend down to Hades. And usually in the New Testament, that's hell. That's what's coming for those who repent.

Hell. And it will be a hot hell. Hotter for you than for others. Not only is the day of judgment worse, the judgment that is pronounced and that is carried out is more severe for these that have seen these great miracles and have rejected them.

How bad is it? Well, Tyre and Sidon and Sodom. Let's talk about those places for a little bit. Jesus says, it won't be as bad for them as it will be for you.

Well, Jesus must be mistaken. He must have got His cities mixed up. It will be better for Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida. There's good, upstanding, righteous Jews in those towns.

And Tyre and Sidon, well, those are pagan cities. And they're known for their wickedness. They were considered to be abominable places by the Jews. You can read Isaiah 23 or Ezekiel 26-28 to hear prophecies against Tyre and Sidon.

[16 : 55] Pagans there. Surely you've got it wrong, Jesus. You're not thinking clearly. Or maybe you just misspoke. Sometimes we misspeak and we flip two words around or something. And surely that's what Jesus is doing.

He meant to say woe to Tyre and Sidon. And Sodom? Well, do we even need to talk about how wicked Sodom was? They were consumed by fire and brimstone. They're so wicked that they're still known today for the sin that was so prevalent there.

It's even named after Sodom. Sodomy. That's how wicked they are. Surely, Lord, you don't mean that us good law-keeping Jews are going to have it worse in the day of judgment than Sodom.

Or Tyre and Sidon. Where all those pagans live. I'm pretty sure that you meant to say it the other way, Jesus. And Jesus says, no.

Will you be lifted up to heaven, Capernaum? No. Instead, you'll go down to hell. I've got it right. It's you that has it wrong.

[18 : 02] You see, if the people in these places, in Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, had been privileged to experience and see what you've experienced and seen, they would have repented long ago. And here you remain unrepentant.

And this is borne out in the New Testament with Tyre and Sidon. They do get glimpses of Christ there.

There's the woman that comes to Jesus and longs for her daughter to be freed from the demon. And Jesus puts her off. And she refuses to be put off. And she comes back. Even the dogs eat from the crumbs under the table.

And Jesus heals her daughter. She was from Tyre and Sidon. She was from those two cities. A glimmer. She saw the power of Jesus and believed. And later we see in the book of Acts that there are Christians there.

Paul stops there on several of his trips in each of those cities and finds friends there. Finds Christians there who take him in and help him. Just a glimmer. They didn't get to see the miracles of Jesus.

[19:09] But even then, there were some signs of hope from them. And so surely, had they seen the miracles of Jesus, he says, they would have repented long ago. And even Sodom. It would still be around today if they had seen my miracles.

And so, for these, for Sodom and Tyre and Sidon, the day of judgment will still be a horrifying day. They will face the wrath of an angry God.

Even without the light of miracles in Jesus' teaching, they sin against a holy God who has revealed Himself in the world around them. And they will be held accountable for their sin and for their abominations.

Their judgment will be severe. The duration of it is the same as these other cities here in the land of Palestine. The duration is the same. It's for eternity. But the severity of that eternity will not be as great for Tyre and Sodom and Sodom.

Because they had an excuse, so to speak. They didn't see the works of Jesus. Now, it's not an excuse that excuses them completely.

[20:16] But it relieves some of the pain of the agony that they will face. Although, any agony in hell will be unspeakable. Make no mistake about that. But not so much for Tyre and Sidon.

A different level than for these others. They didn't sin against the great light and privilege that Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum had.

They had great light and they sinned in the face of it. They rejected this Jesus whom they had seen so clearly before their eyes. And with great privilege comes great responsibility.

And so, what of us here today? Any miracles here today? Well, you have in your hands the Word of God that records for us the miracles of Jesus.

You know about the miracles that He did in all of those places. You hear them preached. You've read them. You've heard them in your homes in Sunday school classes. You know about the miracles of Jesus.

[21:16] Your light is actually even greater than that of the people living in Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida. You can look back and see the whole picture. You can see the whole life of Christ and see that He did come and accomplish the Father's will.

That He did die to save men from their sins. And that since that time, a church has grown and blossomed and is now all over the world trusting in this one Savior.

You have greater light than they did. And you have seen miracles here. The fact that there's a church standing here today is nothing short of the hand of God working.

Apart from His hand, there would not be a church here today. There would not be individuals in that church whose lives have been radically transformed by the work of Christ.

You have seen lost sinners come to Christ and go through the waters of baptism and added to this church. That is a miracle when God takes a sinner's hardened, stony heart and gives them a new heart.

[22:15] A heart of flesh that longs to follow after Him. And so maybe you're sitting next to a sibling today or a friend that you've seen that radical work done in. And you're saying, no big deal.

I don't need that. You've seen remarkable things here. And with that great privilege, and that's a privilege. It's a privilege to hold in your hands the Word of God and to have recorded for you what Christ has done.

It's a privilege to be a part of a church, to be in a church where you see God working and preserving His people and keeping them and saving them and drawing others to Himself. It's a privilege.

And with that privilege comes responsibility. With all that you've seen, your responsibility is great.

I'm certainly not a prophet, but wonder with me for a moment. I wonder if the truth that you've heard your whole life here, some of you have been here for your whole life, I wonder if the truth that you've heard your whole life were made known to some lost tribe in the jungles of South America who are living in wretched sin, perhaps even sacrificing their own children.

[23:28] I wonder if the truth that you've heard had been made known to them if they wouldn't have repented long ago. I wonder if some of the worst sinners of our day, the ones that we think of as the worst sinners, drug abusers and homosexuals and drunks and prostitutes and murderers and rapists, I wonder if some of them who have never heard the truth were to hear the truth and see it demonstrated in power like you've heard and seen in this place if they wouldn't come to repentance.

You understand, you're not just sinning in ignorance. You can't say, I didn't know. I didn't know that these things were wrong. I didn't know that there was a Savior to be trusted in. And so that's my excuse.

Sodom could claim that. Tyre and Sidon could claim that. I didn't know. They're still responsible, but they say, I didn't know about the Savior. You know about the Savior.

You can't say, I didn't know, and so it's not my fault. There's no excuse. You're sinning against great light. And that lost tribe in South America, those heinous sinners that you think of, they'll be held accountable.

They'll be punished eternally for their sins. But it will be worse for good kids from Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen. It will be worse in the day of judgment for good kids from this church than it will be for that serial killer on death row who never heard the Gospel.

[24:59] It will be worse for good, upstanding citizens who've never committed a crime in their life, who have attended this church for years, but never repented, than it will be for that native in South America that sacrificed his own son.

Worse for you than for what you think of as the worst of sinners. Do you believe that? That's what Jesus says.

There's no escaping the weight of His words. You have great light. Great privilege here. What are you doing with it? It'll be better for them than for you.

Your punishment will be more severe. And so will you continue in your sin? Will you continue to sin against great light? Will you continue to say, I don't want any part of repentance because I know, I've been here, I've been well taught, I know that repentance means turning from your sin and following Christ.

and I don't want to turn from my sin. Will you continue in your sin? For a few little pleasures the world has to offer, and so, make it all the worse for yourself in the day of judgment.

[26:12] J.C. Ryle says, surely these words ought to make the ears of everyone tingle who hears the Gospel regularly. That's you. You hear it regularly. These words ought to make the ears of everyone who hears the Gospel regularly tingle, and yet remains unconverted.

How great is the guilt of such a man before God? How great is the danger in which he daily stands? Know that you're in great danger every day if you don't come to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Every day. Great danger. So come to Jesus. Do that which was lacking in these cities. Repent. Be done with your sin. Cast yourself on the Savior, and He will receive you.

And we'll see, Lord willing, eventually, down at the end, verse 29, 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.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You come to Jesus today. And then you'll find that instead of facing an intolerable judgment, you'll find refuge in the Jesus who took that judgment in your place.

[27:20] And so when the day of judgment comes, you won't have to dread because you have the joy and peace of sins forgiving, resting at ease from the dread of judgment.

So the day of judgment can be something that is not to be dreaded because you know of your standing in Christ. Or it's something to be horrified about.

Terrified of. Because it will be worse for you even than for Sodom. Or for the most wicked person you can think of that's never heard the truth.

Worse for you than for them. Come to Jesus and it will be far better for you. It will be the best for you. You will ascend to heaven instead of going down to the grave.

And for all of us, perhaps we should not be so quick to cast our judgment on what we view to be wretched sinners. We're very quick to be appalled at sodomites and rapists and murderers.

[28:24] And rightly so. But are we so appalled at unbelief and a lack of repentance? Are we just as quick to reach out to such appalling sinners with the truth that can set them free as we are quick to sit in our living rooms and condemn them for what they do?

Maybe if they just heard the truth, they would come to repentance. That's what would have happened for Sodom and Tyre and Sidon. Maybe we need to be about the business of making sure as many people as we know hear the truth so that they have the opportunity to come in repentance and faith to Christ.

So that they will be without excuse. So that they can know the truth. Let's not make the Pharisees' mistake of thinking we're better than anyone else. I thank Thee that I'm not like that tax collector over there.

And that's sort of our attitude sometimes. I thank You that I'm not like those really bad sinners. Except for the grace of God, there go I. And so let us not look down our noses at such, but be thankful for the grace of God in our lives who's made us to differ.

He's the only reason that we aren't with them. And so if God has set you on the path that leads to life, that does go upward to Heaven, that doesn't have to fear the day of judgment because you're in Christ, then thank and praise Him today.

[29 : 48] Don't use it as an occasion to look down your nose at everyone else. Oh, praise Him for the privilege that He's given you and that He's given you the right response to it. We are a privileged people. We are a blessed people.

And so we thank and praise our God. And if you haven't come to God in repentance and faith, come today. Come today so that it will be far better for you in the day of judgment than for those around you that have heard and yet remained hard-hearted.

Our Father, we thank You for the words of Jesus that are recorded for us in the Scriptures. We thank You for His miracles that are recorded for us. We thank You that He is still working today changing hardened hearts, saving sinners.

We pray that He would come and work in our midst today. Do a work of salvation. Turn those who are headed down towards hell and set them on the path to heaven and to glory this day.

Give them that gift of faith and repentance that would have them turn from their sin and run to Christ. We pray that You would keep any here who have been exposed to such great light, such great privilege from continuing to reject it all the way down to hell.

[31 : 03] We pray that You would save them and turn them so that it will be good for them in the day of judgment rather than intolerable for all of eternity. So come and do a good work in our midst this day, we pray.

Give us grace to go from here living for Christ, bringing honor and glory to His name even as we seek to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We thank You that it is You who wills and works in us to do the work.

And we pray that You would strengthen us for what You have called us to. Bless us and keep us. Cause Your face to shine upon us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.