

Foolish objections

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Date: 07 July 2019

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[0:00] A warm welcome to anyone who is visiting us this evening. You're very welcome here and I trust that you will be blessed by God's word. It's our normal practice here at Calvary, ordinarily to go through the Bible systematically. So you'll be coming in at the beginning of a series this evening.

But before I start to preach, can we bow our heads in prayer? Our Father, we come before you and we give you our praises. We exalt you because you are our great and blessed God.

Father, we're so aware of our need. We are a dependent people, Lord. And tonight we are so dependent on your Holy Spirit to be among us. Oh Lord, I pray that as I preach your word, your Holy Spirit, so to speak, would take these words and press them upon people's hearts.

And that it would be Christ speaking through me, I pray. Lord, as we approach the scriptures, help us to remember that all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training, for inrighteousness.

That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. Oh Lord, open the eyes of our hearts, open the eyes of our minds. That we may behold your law and see wondrous things, we pray.

[1:38] In Jesus' name, Amen. Okay, so keep your Bibles open at Matthew 11, verses 6 to 24.

People of God, some parts of the Bible are hard. They're hard for us to understand. They're hard for us to read and apply to our lives.

And apply to the world around us. But sometimes the word's hard because we don't understand what God is saying to us. Some parts of the scripture are obscure.

Hard to understand. Whereas other times we find the scriptures hard because God's word goes against all the cultural norms and values that even we as Christians have taken on ourselves.

Political correctness. The emphasis of values such as individuality. Freedom of self-expression. What's okay for me is okay for me.

[2:46] What's okay for you is okay for you. Everyone's ideas and views are equal. No matter what their moral preferences are.

No matter what their religious persuasions are. Nowadays people need safe spaces in universities to protect them from views that might cause an offence.

There's no absolute truth. There's no absolute authority or rule for our lives. Well the Bible does not hold to this politically correct view of the world that we live in.

sometimes God's word is uncomfortable for us it's uncomfortable because it searches us we see plainly God's verdict about human nature about sin and about judgment now certainly these passages before us fall into this category I think they're relatively plain to understand they're not obscure but they're very very hard words to hear and they're hard words to preach Jesus has been speaking about the ministry of John the Baptist if you recall we learned that John's expectation about the coming Messiah and the kingdom of God were not matched by his reality his lived reality Chris was preaching last week John is in prison and he has what Chris called a momentary wobble he'd hoped that the messianic king would usher in his end time rule straight away his end time reign immediately upon his coming but there seems to be some delay and John's uncertain he's uncertain about what's going on he sends a message

Jesus sends a message to John stating that he is the one prophesied he is the Messiah in fulfilment of prophecies such as Isaiah 35 he says the blind they receive their sight the lame walk lepers are cleansed the deaf hear and the dead are raised and the poor have good news preached to them he

then speaks of John in exalted terms he says that John there's none greater than John among those who are born of women John is the forerunner he's paving the way for the coming Messiah he's the Elijah to come now Jesus now he's shifting his focus he's been speaking about John and now he's shifting his focus to speak about this generation those who witnessed the ministry of John and now witness Christ in his ministry I want us to consider our passages this evening under three headings this generation is a generation that is firstly impossible to please secondly unwilling to repent and thirdly under the judgment of God so my first point a generation who is impossible to please if you see in verses 16 to 19 so Jesus begins this section by addressing this generation which is made up of both the religious leaders and the Jewish people now I'm inclined to think that he means primarily the religious leaders but not exclusively he's addressing those who were among the crowds they went out to see John in the wilderness and then they witnessed Christ's teaching they witnessed his signs they witnessed his miracles they witnessed his healings in surrounding towns and what Jesus is doing here he's saying what is absurd enough or ridiculous enough for me to compare to this generation and then he speaks to us about this metaphor this metaphor of a children's game to describe the utter unreasonableness and childishness of their unbelief now if you look in the text there's a kind of irony isn't there there's a sarcasm in his tone because the religious leaders they would have seen themselves as those of great wisdom they would have seen themselves as those of great maturity great knowledge the great purveyors of spiritual reality the guides yet Jesus is saying they're impossible to please he's saying that they're childish he's saying they're hard hearted they're obstinate so if we look at this metaphor it's quite self explanatory we have the image of children playing in the marketplace sitting down you've got a group of children in one end of the market sitting down and they would play a cheerful joyful tune on the flute with the expectations that their mates on the other side their playmates would respond and show joy but they didn't dance they didn't respond then they would sing a sombre solemn funeral song and still their playmates didn't mourn whatever they did it just wasn't good enough it wouldn't please their teammates the picture is one of a child who's discontented who's petulant who's difficult who's obstinate impossible to please

[8:29] Jesus and John don't conform to their expectations and they don't do what that generation want them to do and you see how this corresponds to the ministries of John and Jesus John the Baptist he came speaking words of judgment and seriousness he said things like you brood of vipers who warned you to flee the wrath to come the axe is at the root of the tree he was an ascetic he was living in the wilderness people came to hear John he didn't go to them he was set apart it says in the text that he was neither eating or drinking it doesn't mean he literally didn't eat or drink it means that he was living a life of temperance he was moderate he was living on locusts and honey this was a man of strictness he didn't drink alcohol he wasn't sociable he wasn't attending the events and the soirees of the day this was a serious minded ascetic man living a secluded life and preaching a message of judgment and repentance he came in fulfilment of the scriptures and was called the greatest by Christ yet they mocked him they mocked him saying that he has a demon so here they are attributing the demonic to the last great prophet of the old testament this was the greatest man that ever lived according to Christ the last great prophet and they're attributing to him the demonic they levelled an attack against him saying in a sense they're saying he's nuts they're saying he's weird he's crazy they rejected him because they found him too severe now Jesus on the other hand he was different to John he was seen at weddings he was among the outcasts he would go out to the people he'd go to the sick and the poor he'd go to the tax collectors he went to people's houses he had a ministry that was more socially focused much of his ministry was around meals and everyday life he was among the people but they still levelled an accusation against him stating that he was a drunkard stating that he was a a glutton a kind of hedonistic licentious type a kind of worldly figure spending all his time with sinners there was a celebratory note to

Jesus' ministry he pronounced the kingdom has come and the gospel of good news was here there was festivity in his ministry although he was the man of sorrows there was much joy in Christ's ministry who was preaching good news but they still didn't like it we see here how this generation in its unbelief and blindness levelled unreasonable accusations against John and Christ what they're doing they're refusing to attribute to them the true worth and goodness of their ministries they're calling what is good evil and then in their darkened and depraved sinful minds they're saying what is right is wrong people of God this is the effect of sin do we not see this in our own lives do we not see this in the lives of people around us they're just impossible to please their hearts are totally depraved they're darkened they shut up in their unbelief now as I was preparing this I was trying to consider some personal examples and there were many but a few came to mind when I was first saved many years ago

I worked in substance misuse services and I worked in an open planned office and I shared the office space with nurses and medical doctors I was full of the zeal of having newly been saved I was wanting to talk to anyone about it I didn't know anything I had no kind of theological knowledge but I did know one thing I was so overjoyed at the free grace of Jesus Christ in my life I knew I had been a terrible sinner and now I knew free salvation and I remember talking to one of the medical doctors a trainee medical doctor there and full of this joy speaking to him about the gospel and he was a really nice guy very intelligent man he turned around and said to me I find your message offensive you see he wanted to smuggle in some kind of works he wanted a religion that recognised his worth he wanted a religion that recognised his intelligence and his ability he didn't like the freedom he didn't like the joy he didn't like the simplicity of the gospel message it was too free for him another colleague in the same office a woman

I was talking to her about the gospel and she said to me I don't like all that hell and sin stuff I hadn't even mentioned anything to do with that but immediately she said that she was a feminist and she said I don't like the resurrection because it's male in its emphasis you see she thought it was too harsh too masculine she needed a feminine soft more emotionally sensitive religion colleague about a year ago a Jewish lady in my office I thought she's Jewish I thought there may be some point of contact here I thought we could have a conversation about the Hebrew scriptures had a conversation about Exodus the redemption of Israel from Egypt and she looked at me as if I was absolutely mad and she said something along the lines do you really believe all that stuff do you actually believe it yeah she said do you believe the miracles as well I said yeah and she couldn't believe that in this modern scientific age someone would believe that she thought

I was intellectually in the dark ages she needed something more sophisticated she needed something more intellectually modern something more scientific a belief that's rooted in observable facts no no doubt she thought my religion was backward it lacked sophistication probably saw me as some kind of mad fundamentalist people will use excuses to rationalize their unbelief they will see us as nuts backwards and intellectually in the dark ages that's just the way it is don't expect so-called sophisticated educated postmoderns to always welcome your commitment to biblical truth or supernaturalism and we see this I think we see this closer to home in the church as well let's bring this to the church people can bemoan that there's just too much law in the church there's too much duty there's not enough grace

[16:01] I've heard that said so many times I've heard it said here not by anyone that's here or is among us at the moment but some time ago charges of legalism can be levelled against people that really take seriously sanctification really take seriously holiness but they're legalists they're seen as stiff rigid on the other hand I've heard a kind of suspicion of joyful expressions of worship oh they're too happy they want to express their joy in worship they're happy clappy their faith is too emotive their conversion oh it's a bit frivolous it's a bit temporary maybe there's a sense where people can be impossible to please because they have the same spirit this generation now this doesn't mean that one shouldn't carefully assess ministries it doesn't mean that if a ministry is off balance or promulgating false teaching we don't need to call that out or assess it or be mindful or wary of that it doesn't mean that we don't exercise discernment and it doesn't mean if people are seeking and they're among us they want to ask legitimate constructive questions they've got genuine questions it doesn't mean that people can't level

constructive criticisms against us we welcome that it doesn't mean we can't ask honest questions and even share our doubts this is something else

I think this helps us to remember that as a church if we preach the gospel faithfully and live a life of holy obedience we will face rejection we will face criticism and accusations at the level of our ministry at the level of our preaching and possibly even personally the son of god the greatest prophet john the baptist in the scriptures they faced rejection accusations and unbelief among the people who heard them we learn here as well that although the gospel is very very good news there are times that it can come to us as bad news to awaken us of our need it sometimes comes to us as a dirge as a funeral song with severity other times the gospel will come to us with a sweetness and a joy the law shows us our need and the gospel provides the way of salvation we need to hear the goodness and mercy of god but we also need to hear the severity and the wrath of god you can't have one and not the other you need both this is our god the commentator

Matthew Paul comments on verses 18 and 19 stating that god has used all means to win people to the gospel excuse me i'm just gonna have a drink we come to this rather enigmatic saying it's 19 verse 19 at the end yet wisdom is justified by her deeds now i think there's different ways of taking this and time doesn't permit to kind of go into all that but i think the most natural way of reading this is that the righteous fruit of john and jesus's life and ministry are vindicated in the life of the true followers those who have saving faith true believers they'll demonstrate god's wisdom in lives of holiness and uprightness wisdom's children will vindicate god's message of salvation regardless of the form it comes in whether it comes in a more austere or strict way or whether it comes in a more joyful way wisdom's children will see the message with spiritual eyes and they will vindicate it the problem here it's not with the message or even the messenger it's with the hearers it's with their hard and unbelieving hearts and their unwillingness to hear my second point is this generation is unwilling to repent verse 20 the next section is a whole unit however I want us to focus on verse 20 where he denounces the cities where most of his mighty works have been done because they did not repent often in churches when there's a huge emphasis on the miraculous the supernatural often that's associated with a desire for something theatrical something effective an effect rarely do we hear an emphasis on repentance as well now throughout the scriptures there's a regular not exclusively but there's a regular connection between

God's mighty miraculous works and the need for repentance think of Acts 2 after the effusion of the spirit and power on the church on the day of Pentecost Peter he preaches his sermon they've all been filled with the spirit they're speaking in different languages different dialects and Peter he preaches his sermon and when the crowd asks what shall we do he says repent repent and be baptised in the next chapter in Acts chapter 3 there's this amazing healing Peter and John they heal a lame beggar who's been sitting outside the temple and Peter he speaks again in Solomon's portico amongst the people and again he says repent therefore and turn again that your sins may be blotted out repentance is a crucial part of the Christian experience and we do well to consider this tonight we need to ask are we a repenting people in Matthew 11 it's probable that Jesus is alluding to a kind of ongoing obstinate unbelief and it's easy for us as believers to think well we've done the repentance bit we're done with that and see it as a one off thing but we need to be defined as Christians as a repenting people are we repenting of specific sins

I think it's easy to speak about sin in general terms isn't it but are we repenting of specific sins are we living lives of true repentance now this will set us apart from people in the world people will be sorry of the consequences in their lives and I work in an office full of incredibly decent and moral people but what will set us apart is our we are repenting people now what's meant by repentance the word literally means to change one's mind and purpose it's a turning from sin it's a putting to death it's a putting off it's a renouncing I once heard a sermon where a gardening metaphor was used and I found this very helpful it's like pulling up weeds it's like a killing and putting to death the Puritan Thomas Watson says there are six ingredients to repentance sight of sin sorrow for sin confession of sin shame for sin hatred of sin and a turning from sin okay but it's not just that repentance it's a it's a turning to

[24:17] God it's a putting on it's a planting there's a positive act in repentance John Murray in his excellent book Redemption Accomplish and Applied speaks of the close relationship between repentance and faith they go hand in hand I've heard it said that they're like two sides to

one coin although they're distinct they're inseparable he goes on to say quote such hatred of sin involves repentance which essentially consists in turning from sin unto God so there's a sense that repentance isn't just a mortifying it's not just a putting to death or doing away with there is a turning to God now in their pride they were unable to see their sin for what it was they're unable to see Jesus for who he is do you see here that they were the most privileged of people very privileged people they had the greatest of preachers the world had ever known they saw the most miraculous signs and wonders yet they would not repent

I thought of Luke 16 31 where Jesus says that neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead we sometimes speak of great preachers and great saints in the past with such deference and respect don't we and we almost wish we were there well can you imagine being under the ministry of Christ people I've heard people in other church settings they're often pining after the miraculous they want to go back to the early church days where all the miracles and signs were happening they saw Christ's miracles first hand are we not a privileged people we have faithful teaching week in week out what do we do with this does it make us better are we a repenting people my third point is this was a generation that were under the judgment of God verses 20 to 24 this section speaks of judgment and the pronouncement of woes against the cities of Chorazin Bethsaida and Capernaum now this is a hard text and the doctrine of judgment is extremely uncomfortable we!

I think we recoil from it for a number of reasons and complex reasons they may be very personal reasons I think one of those reasons is somehow we struggle to see the fairness of it there's something in us in our fallen state somehow thinks it's unfair well one of the things I found very helpful and I think we should feel uncomfortable with judgment it's not a doctrine that we should be comfortable with but I think something I found helpful is when we think of judgment we need to consider the character and attributes of God God is a spirit infinite eternal unchangeable in his being his wisdom his power his holiness his justice his goodness and truth God cares about what we do and what we believe justice is an essential property of God he's infinitely just he's superlatively just he's just in all that he does he's not only just but he's justice itself he doesn't just do justice he hasn't got a bit of justice in him that he parcels out he is justice now if we ponder and meditate on that that goes some way to help us

I think God doesn't incrementally gather information like a human judge and he doesn't have any prior knowledge and he sifts it and he weighs it he looks at the evidence he needs to go out the back to deliberate and then he makes a judgment like a sinful finite judge he knows our hearts he knows our motives way before we do so if we're worried about fairness there's no greater fairness without God there's no such thing as fairness these passages they speak of the day day of judgment and in a sense the unbeliever is already under the wrath of God the scriptures say already under the just condemnation of God in verse 21 we see

[29:23] Christ begin to pronounce these woes and I think here you might think I'm pushing it a bit far but I think we implicitly see the identity of Christ deity in that he denounces the cities because they did not acknowledge his works and repent these pronouncements of woe they mean warning grief denunciation and regret Chorazin and Bethsaida these were cities where most of Jesus' miracles were performed now their witness of Christ in the flesh and his miracles placed them in a position of great privilege like I said they had opportunity they had responsibility now this comparison is drawn to Tyre and Sidon and these were Gentile cities and if you recall Phil if those of you were here this morning Phil was telling us a bit about Tyre Tyre and Sidon they're mentioned in a variety of contexts in the Old Testament they're mostly condemned by the prophets such as Isaiah if you read Isaiah 23 when Isaiah brings this indictment to the nations

Tyre's within that and also in Ezekiel 26 and they were they had this indictment for their arrogance their pride their materialism like Phil was saying they were a trading nation and their pagan worship now the message here is quite clear isn't it that the greater the opportunity the greater the privilege means the more responsible we are the more culpable we are and the more severe the judgement

is that's what we see here this comparison shows the utter hardness of the occupants of Chorazin and Bethsaida doesn't it and I think there's a message for us people of God we mustn't squander our spiritual opportunities Capernaum was a place where Christ spent much of his time he lived there for a period they were exceptionally privileged it looks like that they may have thought themselves more exalted and in a sense they were exalted because they had Christ among them they were very privileged yet they're condemned to a place of death and punishment due to their contempt and abuse of Christ's teaching and the mighty works that he showed we see a comparison to Sodom and I don't think

I need to go into detail about Sodom I think Sodom is has a renown doesn't it even among those outside of church Christ is shockingly saying that it will be more tolerable more tolerable for the sexually perverse for the violent and inhabitants of a place renowned for utter ruin and death and judgement than it will be for Capernaum they did not see the gravity of their sin they didn't see the majesty of Jesus now there's a there's a common view among evangelicals some of you may have come across this I've come across this a number of times and it sounds very very spiritual and there's a real truth in it there is a truth in it all sin is the same you may have heard that there's no difference in sin sin's all the same now there is a truth in that because all sin is deserving of God's just condemnation and wrath that is true but there are differences those of us who are exposed to much teaching those of us who have more knowledge if we willfully go on in sin it's of a greater consequence than those who have not been exposed to the gospel those outside the walls of the church if they haven't heard the gospel they will be judged accordingly but for us there's a difference there's a greater responsibility there are degrees of punishment we see here how pagan idolaters and the sexually immoral are to be treated more favourably than the quiet the respectable contempt and unbelief of the regular church goer who's around the church or the person exposed to the gospel who's not willing not willing to place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ we think about that it's utterly shocking isn't it outward civil religion is not enough we see in the scriptures how obstinate unbelief it rarely unless God intervenes it rarely just stays as it is there's something of a development that goes on it often grows into an outright hatred and a desire to kill

Christ if you look at Matthew 12 verses 9 to 14 just glance down on the page or over to the next page I won't go into it in too much detail but Christ heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath wonderful healing such compassion such mercy what do the religious elites want to do if you glance at the end but the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him in John 15 Christ says if I had not done among them the works that no one else did they would not be guilty of sin but now they have seen and hated both me and my father you see if you're denying Christ you're denying God they hated him and his father but the word is written in their law must be fulfilled that they hated me without a cause in John 11 there's this wonderful miracle where Lazarus is raised from the dead he's raised from the dead what a miracle it's not likely we'll ever see anything like that the religious leaders they're worried they're worried that if they let

Christ continue doing these wonderful compassionate acts of mercy that everyone will believe in him and the Romans will therefore take away their place and position and their nation so they plan to put him to death so we see how this obstinate unbelief this unreasonableness develops largely into something it can do well as we come to an end Jesus' words have been hard even harsh for us to hear tonight yet I do want to say there is still very very good news the gospel is still able to break open the heart and hearts and God's command to repent and continues to this day if you recall earlier I mentioned Acts two verses from Acts he was preaching years later to that generation the Jewish people and the offer the command to repent was still going out to them now my question to you tonight if you don't know

[37:04] Jesus will you repent will you put your faith and trust in this Jesus and know eternal peace will you respond to his voice now my sermon is coming to an end now I've been assigned this section but actually Jesus' discourse it continues now at the beginning we were talking about this generation being a childish generation they were compared to children but we're to be compared to children as well we're to be compared to little children there's a difference we're to be like children who are dependent needy they were a petulant unbelieving childish nature we're to be dependent and needy now Aaron's going to unpack this next week we've heard some of the most harsh and hard words

you'll ever hear but actually if we glance down to verses 28 to 30
I think they're some of the most comforting words that you will ever hear come come to me all who
labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest will you come will you come to this Jesus yes
there is a severe there's a hard message but there's such sweetness there's such joy there's
eternal heavenly joy in Christ do come amen amen amen amen■ amen!
amen! amen! amen! amen! amen! any! any!■ any!■ any!■