

Matthew 11:20-30

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading will come from Matthew chapter 11, verses 20 to 30. And as you turn there, children ages 3 to 5 who are in green line, you are dismissed to walk quietly to the back to meet your teachers for class.

And parents, there's a nursery available for children ages 0 to 3. All other kids, if you could take out your KitKanX and your Bibles so you can follow along with us today. Again, that's Matthew 11, 20 to 30.

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. 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. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

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.

[1 : 09] But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, good morning.

It's always a privilege to open up the Bible. It's always encouraging to see people want to hear the Bible. Well, let me pray for us as we get started.

[2 : 31] Father, we thank you for your word, that it serves a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, that in it we find the words of the living God.

And here we are, a people who are weary in need of rest, weak in need of strength, lost, needed to be found.

And so would you find us this morning? We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. The hope of summer vacation.

There you are, reclining on the beach chair, the sun's rays warming up your skin, the light breeze that is just enough to keep you cool, cold beverage resting next to you, sunglasses in place, background track, ocean waves crashing in the background, rolling in and out.

I know for some of you, perhaps, there is a cigar close by. It's the vacation life, where all the worries have temporarily subsided, where all anxieties have been paused.

[3 : 57] It's a moment we all long for. It's a moment many of us anticipate, a moment of rest.

In that moment, the children aren't bickering. In that moment, the demands of the bills are not looming. In that moment, the deadlines and rigors of study or work are not bearing down.

The anxiety related to the future is absent. In that moment, the fracturing of your marriage or the demise of a loved one's life is not at the forefront in your mind.

In that moment, you're at peace. In that moment, you're free from all that makes you ever so weary, burdened.

In that moment, you're in heaven. In that moment, you're at rest. This is why we look forward to summer vacation.

[5 : 02] And for some, we experience it and taste it. But the truth of the matter is it's temporal. Vacation days run out, if you have some.

Our responsibilities and duties summon us back into reality, into the grind of life. But this seems to be the longing of all of life.

To experience some form of respite from the onslaught of the world. To find refuge in our wanderings. Rest in our weariness.

It seems like we've been internally wired. To push for this. To find perpetual rest. To experience this heavenly rest.

This settled state of joy, bliss, stress-free, pain-free, sin-free. We want it.

[6 : 01] We crave it. We need it. The Bible offers it. The Christian faith has it.

And Jesus gives it. It is one of the greatest promises in our Bibles. It is one of the grandest exertions ever made by a human.

It is one of the most paramount pronouncements found in literature. And it is there in verse 28.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It's applicable to every listener. Every reader. Every person. Burden, laboring, and heavy laden. It is for one laden with sorrow.

Laden with anxiety. Laden with remorse. Laden with despair. Laden with shame. Sin. And it's marvelous to consider.

[7 : 02] Yet this morning, I marvel at the fact that many will decline it.

Many will decline it. Some will snicker. Some will mock. Some reject. Some doubt. Some despise. Some denounce it.

And you see it. Last week, Jesus' predecessor is demonic. Jesus himself, according to chapter 11, verse 19, is slighted and called a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

At the end of chapter 13, you'll find Jesus is thoroughly rejected, not only by his hometown, but by his very household. No one wants it.

Matthew wants us to know that this is not, Jesus will not be universally accepted. The gospel, we call it, or good news, is very good news, but it is not good news to all.

[8 : 12] Christ died for our sins to reconcile us to God is wonderful news, but it's not welcome news to all. How can someone refuse this offer?

Who can pass this up? Who wins the lottery and declines the payout? Well, this morning, I want to take the remainder of our time and give us a glimpse of the heart that rejects the divine invitation. What compels an individual to refuse the promise of eternal rest? I've tagged our time, the heart that hates heaven.

The heart that hates heaven. The sermon is a giant warning sign. I went to college in the promised land, not Israel, but California, on the coast of Santa Barbara, California.

And if you wander the cliffs, it's right next to the Pacific. It's on the Pacific. If you wander the cliffs long enough, you encounter danger signs.

[9 : 28] Warning, steep cliff, jagged rocks. And this morning, I want to give us three warning signs to assess our hearts, to assess your heart.

And these are the warnings. The warning is dangers ahead. Beware of an unrepentant heart.

Secondly, beware of a proud heart, a prideful heart.

And lastly, beware of an unwilling heart. An unwilling heart. Beware, firstly, of an unrepentant heart.

Jesus had been denounced and denied by the generation. You see it in verse 16 of chapter 11.

Amidst his miracles and message, he was being called a friend of tax collectors and sinners. It's a statement of denigration, an insult. Jesus befriends them because he's like them.

[10 : 33] It was a generation that could not be pleased, according to verse 16. In the language of the Bible, it was a stubborn and a rebellious generation. An evil and an adulterous generation.

When the music played, their hearts had no song. The generation's rejection would lead Jesus to denounce in verse 20.

To denunciation in verse 20. Woes are now pronounced on Jewish cities. Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum. A woe is simply a solemn warning mixed with pity.

And it's often used in these judgment oracles in the Old Testament. All these cities had experienced the powerful displays of Jesus' might. Demons were cast out.

Blind received sight. Even paralytics were restored. And sins were forgiven. This is where Jesus showcased his power, served the people, and staged his divine work.

[11 : 33] And despite being where Jesus did his mighty works, the cities remained unchanged. Tyre, Sidon, Sodom are all cities mentioned in our Bibles.

Judgment was pronounced on all of them. Pride, false worship, injustice. Ezekiel writes of the city of Sodom. I think you and I might know the story quite well.

But Ezekiel writes this, Sodom, she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned. They did not help the poor and needy. They were wicked and wayward cities.

The reputations of these cities were all negative in the Bible. They were all judged, overtaken by enemies, even destroyed. And as Jesus denounces them, he foretells a day of judgment where the fate of the evil cities will actually be preferred over the fate of the cities where Jesus demonstrated his power.

As one commentator helpfully states, Jesus exercises this contingent knowledge. He knows what would have happened to Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom if he showed up.

[12 : 51] It would have been like Nineveh. They would have repented. The outcome of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom on the future day of judgment will actually be better and more bearable than it will be for you.

It's astounding to the reader. Pagan cities where Jesus never visited would fare better than the towns where Jesus, the Son of God, was manifest.

Well, why? The writer tells us, Matthew tells us, the key word is repent. You see it in verse 20 and again in verse 21. That's the explanation.

That's the explanation. Jesus showed up. He showed off. And the people didn't change. Jesus' message was recorded earlier in the book. From that time, Jesus began to preach.

His message was about this. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, Matthew 4, 17. The kingdom of heaven brought by Jesus had touched down, but the people still wanted earth.

[13 : 54] When Jesus, a new king, arrives, whenever a new king arrives, a new allegiance must be required. When a new empire is established, we are to renounce the former power.

We were once enslaved to our sin, worshipers of ourselves, obedient to the devil. But when Jesus shows up, he's calling us to a new kingdom.

The passage is so shocking because it indicts the people who have experienced Jesus. Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were all judged and condemned.

And lest the religious audience think that they were all spared because of their status, they are now confronted and rebuked for their failure to repent. Well, what is repentance?

I know we have kids in our congregation this summer. This is repentance. Have you ever been in the car when your mom and dad went the wrong way?

[14 : 53] Yeah? Did they keep driving? Yes. Yeah, possibly. Hopefully, they corrected and made the turn and altered their course.

This is what repentance looks like. You're driving, driving, driving. You're aware. You're made aware. Whether Siri tells you or whatever tells you or your child tells you that you are going the wrong way.

Make the turn. This is repentance. It's saying, God, I'm sorry. I've gone the wrong way because I wanted to do things my own way.

I want to now turn and go your way and follow you. And this sequence of verses applies to us because it tells us this.

Being close to Jesus does not spare you from judgment. There is no, I went to Christ Church Chicago.

[16 : 05] I am exempt. This doesn't apply to me, Claus. For those who have tasted God's work, experienced his might, enjoyed his blessings, the blessings of the church, and presume somehow I'll be okay, this passage undermines, undercuts all of our thinking.

Well, I don't need to repent. I saw Jesus do stuff. I know this person, maybe mom or dad, and Jesus changed his life.

I'm good, right? Oh, no. We are not spared because we're close to someone who's close to Jesus. Because he does some mighty, miraculous work in your life, it does not automatically rescue you.

No, your repentance is required. And in this regard, being born in this country can be a bountiful blessing or a catastrophic curse.

It's bountiful. Why? Because we're filled with theological resources, churches upon churches, shows, books, media, institutions that hold out Jesus to us.

[17 : 24] And the opportunities to seek him are abundant. abundant. But it's a catastrophic curse. Because this warning is true. Because we think somehow we're born into a country established with Christian values, that somehow we are just Christian.

Because God is mentioned in our historical documents, printed on our currency, mentioned in our politics. We dangerously presume that all of our citizens are Christian.

Yes, it's becoming less so, I know. But for the strand that wants to fuse together country and kingdom, this is the outcome.

One writer puts it this way, 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.

That's the message of the text. Sodom will have a better day in court than Capernaum. Beware of the heart that doesn't repent, the unrepentant heart.

[18 : 45] It's the heart that says, I won't change. I will not change. spurning all his works around you, scoffing at his very word held out before you, scorning the good news that is calling to you.

If you do so and hold that unrepentant heart, you may find that it will be better for Pol Pot's Cambodia than for you.

It will be better for Hitler's Germany than for you. It will be better for Mao's China than for you on Judgment Day. That's the text.

Beware an unrepentant heart. Secondly, beware of a proud heart. We're now taken into a prayer in verse 25 where Jesus gives us a peek behind the scenes.

He is the Supreme Son given all things by his Father. All things encapsulates all power, all authority, all glory, and we're taken behind the curtain into the mind of God and given the answer to the question, well, how come people receive Christ?

[20 : 12] And how come others reject Christ? well, the answer is right there. God in his sovereign will conceals himself from some and reveals himself to others.

He's hidden from some and shown to others. He has mercy on whom he has mercy. His election is his divine prerogative. God is entirely free from my judgments, your judgments, my assessments, your assessments.

He does not owe you and I a particular explanation. The verse is true. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. And his mighty works are shown, were accompanied by mighty words spoken. And not all come to believe and receive. That's the reality. I think it's safe to say that all 5,000 who were fed on that hill did not become faithful followers.

They saw the mighty work. They ingested the mighty work. They rejected the mighty words. Ten lepers were healed.

[21 : 25] One leper returned in thanksgiving and faith. Twelve disciples were called. Eleven finished faithfully.

To some, Jesus is priceless, I understand. To others, Jesus is meaningless. The same sun hardens both clay and softens wax.

The same heat solidifies bread, yet softens butter. And what it means is this. The principle is that visible even in nature.

It's operative in our spiritual lives. I don't get why when Jesus shows up and we all hear the word that some repent and others won't.

We can philosophically wrestle with this reality. We can theologically discuss divine sovereignty and human free will, but I don't want to spend more time than this.

[22 : 31] Rather, I want to spend our time to focus upon the comparison of the heart between the one who receives and the one who rejects.

Because Jesus makes an observation that is very helpful for us to note. He notes this. Christ is concealed to the wise and the understanding.

From the wise and the understanding. Christ is revealed to little children. Now, if we read this literally, we ought not to read it literally because you may begin to think, oh man, that means smart and thoughtful people are kept from Christ.

No, that's not what it's saying. It's not also saying that only little kids are in the kingdom. It would be a bad reading of the passage. So what does it mean?

It means this, the language of wise and understanding carries this idea of really wise and learned in their own minds, this self-proclaimed I am wise, brilliant, smarter than the other.

[23 : 39] It carries this idea of superiority over confidence in natural reasoning. We are the learned and those are the uneducated. In our modern day, it is this pride, this confidence in the humanist endeavor.

You can think of it in the realm of science. That science will allow us to throw off the need of any faith. It is human pride. It is our self-sufficiency. It is our tower of Babel.

I don't need heaven to come down. I can build my way up. Jesus is saying that those to whom the message is often concealed think that way, the proud.

Instead, the gospel is revealed to children, children who are marked by humility and dependency.

Children tend to be humble because they know of their inability. Routinely, my children will come to me for some menial tasks that frustrate me, but they know that dad is the source of help.

From their lips is the request, mom, can you help me because I can't. From our lips, father, can you help me because I can't. This is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit.

[25 : 08] For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in a high and holy place, and also with him who is of contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

This is the principle that is operative. Christ is revealed somehow to the humble. Christ is concealed to the proud.

Therefore, the warning sign reads, beware of your proud heart. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Therefore, humble yourself before the Lord that he may lift you up. If the unrepentant heart says, I won't change, the proud heart says, I don't need.

I am self-sustaining. I am self-determining. I am self-promoting. I am self-worshiping.

[26 : 24] The proud heart looks down on Jesus, stands over his work, critiques it, discards it, foolishly says, I can do better than, I can do better myself.

The proud heart is so naive, so naive, and you would be deceived to think that Christ offers nothing for you.

Beware the proud heart. You will find that God is opposed to you, possibly in this life, certainly in the next, and oh, the horror it would be.

Beware of an unrepentant heart. Beware of a proud heart, and thirdly, finally, beware of an unwilling heart. Unwilling heart.

I hear your objection. Yeah, bang, according to the text, some will not believe. Even more accurately, some cannot believe.

[27 : 33] It's fatalistic. It's deterministic. What can I possibly do? If God is sovereign, then I'm just going to throw my hands in the air and okay, so-ra, so-ra.

Whatever will be, will be. Okay, unless you become apathetic and unconcerned, I want to read to you verse 28.

Come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. There is no more universal call to Jesus than this. There is no call that holds greater promise than this.

There is no invitation so wide to all the world than this. There is no summons more marvelous, than this one. And you ask me, well, what do you do with that doctrine of election?

I do whatever Jesus did. And what did he do? I invite everyone. It's staggering, right?

[28 : 34] Jesus tells you, hey, you need to know a few things. I'm going to denounce these towns for their unrepentant hearts. I'm going to reject, these people will reject because of their pride.

know that. That election is at work. And the next verse, verse 28, Jesus says, knowing all that, I'm going to invite the whole world.

Jesus, that's, why would you invite the whole world? You already said, some won't see. but he goes ahead and does it.

Jesus had told us, some will resist, some will oppose, some will reject. And we are to accept the fact that there will probably never be such a thing as a completely inoffensive witness to Christ.

And look what Jesus does. He opens his arms, flings heaven's gates wide open, and welcomes everyone. The grand invitation is given, the banquet hall is open.

[29 : 41] And the story from Luke 14 goes this way, doesn't it? There is a banquet host, and he throws a party. It's been set, the invitations have been sent, and today is the big day.

And instead of RSVPs, the host of the banquet is receiving regrets. I have to tend to business. please excuse me.

I have to tend to my property. Please excuse me. I have to tend to my marriage. Please excuse me. And in the host's anger, what gets me is the host doesn't just shut the doors. Instead, he sends his servants, and he says, go quickly.

Go to the streets, the lanes of the city, to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. Take anybody. There's still room, the servants tell him.

[30 : 43] Well, then, you go to the highways, the far places, you go to the hedges, go to the bushes, and go find people, and compel them to come.

Compel them to come. And this is the heart of God. That though your heart may be unwilling, God's heart is so large that he draws you, he woos you.

Such is the heart of God. My concern, our concern, is not who should come or who will come. Our charge is you do everything in your might to compel them to come in.

The text implies that there are some who are simply unwilling. Yeah, the unrepentant say, I won't change. The proud say, I don't need him. The unwilling say, I don't want him. And in my final moments, allow me to compel you to come to Jesus.

The call is to come. The summons is to come. The announcement is to come. The divine invitation is to come. The shout and the plea from the heart of Jesus is to come to Jesus.

[32 : 02] And I know there are some of us who are not willing, unwilling to come because we think God is like Zeus in the heavens holding a lightning bolt. I guess that's what he holds.

He's hurling them on earth, sending suffering indiscriminately. He's merciless in his dealings. He will crush me in my own sins, won't he?

He will scorn me in my shame, won't he? He will put me through the gauntlet of my guilt, won't he? No. No, no, no.

He's not that way. I am gentle and lowly in heart. There is no condition of yours that is so low that his love isn't lower to pick you up and move you upward.

heart. It is a tender and a compassionate heart. It is a loving heart. It is a heart moved by human suffering. It is a heart that is near the broken heart and saves the crushed in spirit.

[33 : 10] No, no. You may be unwilling because you grew up in a setting where this book was used as a weapon setting upon you laws that were oppressive, burdensome, demanding, rules and regulations that crushed you, that said you cannot, you ought not, you should not.

The legal code was weaponized and you are wounded. And the good news to you, the good news at least the one that you heard was you just obey and you'll be accepted.

well, I'm here to tell you, no, no, no. That's not the gospel. It's an easy yoke, a light yoke, according to verse 30.

It rests upon your shoulders and it does not promise an easy life, a light on affliction, but it does offer rest for your soul.

You may be unwilling because you think you could achieve what Jesus provides. I could secure that rest. I'm going on a nice summer vacation.

[34 : 32] I can earn this much, save this much, retire this early, and enjoy life. I will buy the beach. I will have the reclining chair, the vacation spot, eat the delicious food, drink the fine drink, enjoy this world and all its pleasures.

I can do that myself. And I tell you, you might, and maybe you can, and you might find rest for your body, but your soul will be agony.

We vacation to rest our bodies. We go to Jesus to rest our souls. you will never find.

It's my last paragraph, and I like it. You will never find an individual, never, who dares to bear the weight of the world upon themselves.

God's no one would ever extend an invitation to all the world's burdens.

[35 : 56] No one would incur all the world's debt upon themselves. No one would welcome all of humanity with all her ailments and anguish.

Yet, Christ does. He may be gentle and lowly in heart, but he is supreme and mighty in power.

He may be meek and mild, but he is his majesty and highly exalted. and he invites the world with all its brokenness.

Why? Because he has the resources to heal and he is the remedy to save.

thank you. Thank you.