

This Generation

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[0 : 00] On Jesus offered a blessing to the people of God. The least member of the kingdom of God, he said, He holds a greater position than even the kings of this world.

! He changes gears and far from a blessing, he says to those who do not heed him, Woe to you on the day of judgment.

That's not easy to hear, but we must hear it. Last week when Jesus ended verse 15 with the words, He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Well friends, if you will come with me and look hard at this passage, I pray that likewise he will give you eyes to see. Eyes to see that this passage will explain so much of the world around us.

And eyes to see that this explains so much of your own heart. And eyes to see that this message, it is a message of judgment.

[1 : 23] But it is also in fact a warning, and that the warning is merciful. So let us hear his words.

Matthew 11 verse 16. But, to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, And calling to their playmates, We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came, neither eating nor drinking, And they say he has a demon. The son of man came, eating and drinking, And they say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, A friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. 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.

[2 : 31] 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. But I tell you, that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment For the land of Sodom than for you.

Let us pray for ears to hear and eyes to see. O Lord our God, As we come to this hard word to hear, Will you give us ears to hear?

And apply this message to our own lives And eyes to see, Lord, That you are good. And that even in the midst of a passage like this, You are gracious and merciful.

And so, Lord, will you prompt us to a greater love For Jesus Christ, our King. Amen. Today's passage comes in two sections.

[3 : 49] Verses 16 through 19 gives us a parable. And then verses 20 to 24, Aural warning. First, the parable. But to what shall I compare this generation?

It is like children sitting in the marketplace And calling to their playmates, We played the flute for you and did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn. There are two ways to take this parable.

He could be saying that this generation is calling out And not getting a response that they want. Or, and I think this is probably the way we are supposed to take it, That he and John the Baptist, The people that he's been talking about in chapter 11, Have been calling out to this generation And they've ignored the Savior.

Now, either way that we take it, It's quite clear that this generation, And by extension, every generation, Is not on the same page as Jesus. I think we are intended to take the ones calling out to be John and Jesus.

First of all, because it's the context. John's ministry and Jesus' ministry all the way through chapter 11 here. And also in verses 18 through 19, Jesus is saying, John called in one way, I called in

another, And you've rejected us both.

[5 : 08] I think the idea in Jesus' story here, Is he's giving us a scene where children are trying to play.

But their playmates won't respond. And the point is, Not just that they won't respond to this game, But they won't respond to any game. Playing the flute is a happy thing.

A dirge is a song of mourning. Some people think that this is actually children playing an adult version, Or a child's version of a wedding, Or a funeral. Those are like, you know, Two ends of a spectrum.

And Jesus is saying, John came, Preaching one way, Stirringly. I came, Preaching, With a little bit more life.

And you've rejected us both. We've preached the same kingdom. And it's not the message, The messengers, That are at fault here. Because we've come in one way, We've come in another way, And you have still ignored us.

[6 : 11] And still, You've refused to play along. The masses are like the children. And oftentimes in scripture, When Jesus is talking about children, The children love him.

They come to him. He speaks positively. He wants us to be like children. But he doesn't want us to be childish. I think that's what we see here. Parents know the difference between, Right?

Those of you who are parents here, You know the difference between Your child's beautiful trust in you, And dependent on you, And their childish refusal to be happy, In any circumstance.

Would you like this or this? No. I want neither. Well, you need to eat. So, Which is going to be, No, I want neither. Right? So, Jesus is saying, John and I came preaching the same message, In two different tones.

I came preaching the blessings of the kingdom to draw you in, And John came preaching how serious it is to reject it. That's the dirge. But you won't listen to either of us.

[7 : 19] John is the dirge. Jesus is the flute. Both men came, Both in their lifestyle, And in their preaching. Right? John, In his lifestyle, We saw him back in chapter 3, He's kind of an austere man.

He is wearing camel's hair. He's eating a very restricted diet. He is what is called an ascetic. It's a spiritual practice, Where you choose not to have the creature comforts. That's not very widely practiced in the United States, But it is still around the world today, And was certainly very prominent in his day.

And his preaching was likewise austere, Pointing at the kingdom in a severe and in a stern way. You know, He said, He came, Repent, For the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And when he saw the Pharisees and the Sadducees coming to baptism, He said to them, You brood of vipers, Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now, The axe is laid to the root of the trees.

[8 : 28] Every tree, therefore, That does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And so he came preaching With a severity and a sternness That is appropriate of this, Of the, The importance of the gospel.

In contrast, Jesus also appropriately Came ministering with joy, The flute. His lifestyle, Very much different than John's.

His first recorded miracle Is turning water into wine at a wedding celebration. He is found eating and drinking with sinners At their celebrations, At their parties.

And his preaching, Likewise, Though it is also stern, It is not, It doesn't let us off the hook, But it also comes with great joy. For instance, The Sermon on the Mount Begins with a long series, Not of judgments, But of blessings To those who are found in the kingdom of God.

And for this, They said, Oh, You're too lighthearted. We're not going to take you seriously either. John's too stern. I don't really want to hang out with him. Jesus, He's too lighthearted.

[9 : 41] He can't really be serious. They've both preached the kingdom of heaven. They're the ones calling out, Come and play with us. With a different tone. And here is the point. It does not matter Whether the message came with joy, Like the flute, Or of the mourning of a dirge.

If Jesus said, Blessed are those in the kingdom, To draw them in. Or John said, Repent, Or you will be excluded from the kingdom. To warn them away from their destruction. They simply weren't

having it.

And for every parent, They know what it is to deal with a child Who simply won't be satisfied. It reminds me too Of my first assignment in the Coast Guard.

I was a brand new ensign. The most senior petty officer In my division Was a leadership challenge. We'll say. He had been at the unit for years.

And he had a lot more influence Than I did. And no matter what I said. It didn't even have to be about Coast Guards.

[10:47] It just had, No matter what I said, His opinion was exactly the opposite. And it wasn't just me. It was a lot of the junior officers That he did this to. No matter what we said, There he was to say the exact opposite.

To contradict us. And sometimes he had to take Really odd stances on things Just to be a contrarian. Why did he do it? What did it get him?

Now I can't be certain of his heart. But here's my guess. It gave him a measure of power. When you criticize someone, You are setting yourself up as a judge.

It's a power play. If you can discredit the messenger, You don't have to listen to their message. At least that's what you tell yourself. And so if these people felt they could, Discredit John.

Call him, Oh, you've got a demon. I'm a crazy man. Or Jesus. Oh, wow. You know. You're a drunkard. We don't have to listen to you. If they call them names, They can dismiss them.

[11:51] Children do that. Politicians do that. We do that under our breath. Don't we? You and I, Everyone we meet, No one is unbiased.

At the end of the day, We will believe what we want to believe. And we'll make sure that happens in all sorts of ways.

When a story we don't like comes on the news, We'll change the channel. When a study is done that doesn't conform to our presuppositions, We'll say, Oh, it must be flawed.

But the one that does confirm our presuppositions about an issue, We don't even look at it critically.

We say, Yeah, see? See? It's right. We create an echo chamber for ourselves on social media, Only looking, you know, Following the people who agree with us.

We write off the messenger and convince ourselves that we don't need to hear the message.

Friends, it's not an information problem. They were standing there right in front of Jesus, the king.

[13:07] We have free access to his scriptures. It's a heart issue. We decide what we want to hear and what we don't want to hear. What we want to believe, what we don't want to believe. The choice is at a heart level.

And so, we don't want to hear repent. We say, That's too stern. So we're not, you know, That's, You've got a judgmental religion. Well, it might still be true. You can't dismiss it at that.

Or, you know, Oh, this grace stuff, you know, Oh, that would excuse notorious sinners. Just for saying, I believe in Jesus and I repent. I don't like that either.

Well, that might be true. We can't dismiss Christ. Just because we don't like what he has to say. My friends, if we're sitting here today and you're a Christian, You don't recoil at the message of Jesus.

Remember, it's not because you're awesome. It's not because I'm awesome. It's because Jesus has done something in our hearts to change us. We're not better than the people around us or the people, The crowds that Jesus preached to.

[14:10] It's because God does a work in our hearts. I remember having a conversation a few years ago about the resurrection.

This person was not a Christian. Actually, it was two people. Neither were Christians. They were asking me about the empty tomb. And I explained to them why I believe the tomb is empty.

Why I believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the grave. If you'd like to hear more about that, what I did, I spent an hour explaining what I did probably in five minutes in the sermon at the beginning of Matthew chapter 10.

So if you want to go back on the Shoreline website, you can hear more about that. But I gave a more extensive explanation of what we saw there. By the end of the argument, it was a girl and a woman and a man.

The woman was convinced. The man, not so much. She was actually saying, no, like, she turned to him and said, no, like, you got to listen to this. Like, this is why. And she was defeating his arguments based on, she was so convinced that she was arguing for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 31] So, naturally, she repented and believed and heeded the words of Jesus Christ, the Jesus that she believed was alive, right? Nope.

The issue is not our heads. It is our hearts. She believed that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive. So much so that she was arguing for it.

That didn't mean she wanted any part of him. She wasn't interested in Jesus. She just found these facts interesting.

The issue is our interests, our inclinations, our desires. We will believe what we want to believe.

The issue is our hearts.

We need the information about Jesus, yes, of course. And we also need to respond to Jesus. Not just do we understand the truth about Jesus, but will we receive that truth about Jesus with gladness?

[16 : 43] Will we submit to the truth? Will we repent? Will we worship him? Those are heart issues. And apart from the work of God in our hearts, we will reject his lordship because we don't want a lord who wants to be ruled, who wants to be called, as the New Testament calls us, slaves of Christ.

It is only when he does a work in your heart that you find that to be a beautiful thing. Or like the crowds, we want the miracles of the kingdom, but not the reign of the king of that kingdom.

Our natural position, Romans chapter 5, is as God's enemies. We reject his rule and his reign, not necessarily because we are convinced that there isn't a God, but because we don't want him to be God.

That's why we won't receive his words. That's what's going on in the multitudes in verses 16 through 18. And that is what goes on in the world around us every day.

When Tim Keller preached this passage, he shared something of a humorous anecdote that's quite true. It's a parable of sorts as well. He calls it the dead man walking illustration.

[18 : 06] What if you had a friend who was convinced that he was dead? Lots of conversations, but we're talking, you're breathing, but no, no, I'm dead.

Really, I'm dead. Okay, you go to the library, you get a bunch of medical textbooks and say, okay, look, look, all of these say dead men cannot bleed.

You want to try it out? Sure, go ahead. I'm dead. It doesn't matter. You cut him and he starts bleeding. And now you say, are you amazed?

And he says, yes, I am amazed. Do you see what this proves, you say? And he says, yes, I see what this proves. And you ask him, what does it prove? And he says, this proves that medical science is wrong.

Dead men do bleed. And Keller says, do you see, unbelief starts with the assumption and refuses to even consider the possibility that you are not competent to run your life, that you are not competent to be the ultimate arbiter of what is wise and what is right and what is wrong.

[19 : 20] Unbelief says, that's where I start. And then you're going to interpret everything from there. Jesus says, no matter what I tell you, you're not ever going to see the truth and the implication is because you don't want to.

I want to point out that this actually takes a lot of pressure off you as a Christian in your task of evangelism. Now this might seem like it heaps up a whole lot of extra impediments to it.

How do I break through all this? How do I get into somebody's heart and change them? The answer is you can't. The answer is you're not called to. We're just simply instructed to tell people the news about Jesus and call them to repent and believe.

That's it. We cannot change someone else's heart. That's God's job. We share the news of Jesus. The rest is up to God. And thanks be to God that he does act. The fact that there are Christians sitting in this room worshiping God today is the evidence of that.

[20 : 38] And that's exactly his point. At the end of verse 19, he says, yet, in the face of unbelief, wisdom is justified by her deeds. the fact that he does change our hearts.

That's his work. Not only does he change our hearts, but he has been. Working many miracles. Chapters 8 and 9 are just him showing the signs of the kingdom, healing the blind and the lame and the sick raising the dead.

And he says that the wisdom of his words, the truth of his teaching is proved by these works. That's verses 20 to 24. He began to announce 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 would be more bearable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

[21 : 49] 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.

But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on that day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. A few details that I'd like to point out before we get to the central thrust.

First, there will be a day of judgment. Everyone who has repented and believed in Jesus will be the beneficiary of his cross and empty tomb.

The judgment will have fallen on him instead of us. We will be brought into glory with him. Not on the basis of the judgment of our own works, but on his. And for everyone who has not repented of their sins and trusted in Christ's cross for the forgiveness of their sins, the Lord will justly condemn them to hell.

It also shows, another detail here, that there are degrees of punishment. This is very similar to the degrees of blessing we saw at the end of chapter 10. We saw that on top of salvation, on top of being united to Christ forever, the Lord will also give us rewards for our faithfulness on that day.

[23 : 19] Now, these words are not things that we have earned, they are gifts of grace. And so we are to be faithful to God also among the many reasons for our increased joy.

likewise, this passage shows us that among the damned there appears to be levels of punishment. Now, just as with the rewards, Jesus does not elaborate.

He does not explain what they are. I don't think it profits us very much to speculate. but we should bear in mind especially what Jesus says about who will receive the greater punishment here.

Who is it? Is it Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Mao Zedong, Joseph Stalin? No. It's respectable people.

The cities he names here, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum. These are cities within Israel.

[24 : 24] They're upstanding citizens. These are religious people who still reject him, but they're going through the motions religiously. They will have a worse time, he says, than notoriously sinful cities.

Tyre and Sidon are, think of Vegas today, Sin City, and especially Sodom, probably needs no explanation.

It's probably the greatest symbol of an evil city in their minds in that day, even to this day, in our minds. And he says, you, for having rejected the Christ that is standing right in front of you, will be punished more severely than those who have had less opportunity to repent and believe.

And having said that, let us return to that central idea in verses 20 to 24. He's expanding on the idea of verse 19, that the wisdom of his words are proved out by his works.

This means that he's calling us back to chapters 8 and 9, where he did all of these miracles, those miracles, healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, making lame men walk, raising the dead.

[25 : 49] He did not do those things just so that their situation would be a little bit better. The miracles were not for their own sake. They were there to point to something bigger, namely, his teaching.

He preached to the Sermon on the Mount, called everyone to repentance and belief in the King himself. And he proved that he is the King with all of these miracles.

And that's exactly why when John asked him at the beginning of chapter 11, he said, are you the one? He can then point to the works and say, look at what I have done.

Yes, I am the coming King. And so, as one preacher put it, the miracle is never the thing.

They're not self-contained. They point somewhere else. They point to someone else, namely Jesus. He doesn't want us seeking after the sign.

[26 : 58] The sign is meant to make us seek him. That's actually what he says in John chapter 6. They found him on the other side of the sea and they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here?

They were so excited that he was coming, they wanted him to do more miracles for them. And Jesus answered them, truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

He had made a lot of bread. And he's like basically saying, are you seeking me or are you just seeking more stuff from me? In fact, in John's gospel, the miracles are almost exclusively called signs because they point somewhere.

They aren't the end result. They point to the end result. And that end result is Christ and his message. And Christ wants us to see here that the signs are meant to do what? Bring us to repentance. repentance. That's exactly what happened with Peter. In Luke chapter 5, when Jesus calls Peter, he does it in an interesting way.

[28 : 10] He does a miracle in front of him. He brings an incredible amount of fish into his boat. Now, what does Peter do? Does he give Jesus a big high five? He says, can you do that again?

He didn't ask for more fish. No, he said, but when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

His miracles are meant to bring us to repentance. What is that? What is repentance? He describes it. He says, repentance in sackcloth and ashes.

It's the language of mourning over a tragedy. Let me ask you, when you see Jesus, does the sight of him lead you to mourn over your sin?

Does your sin look grievous and terrible against a wonderful and holy God to whom you owe your complete allegiance?

[29 : 29] Repentance is a godly grief over your sins. And friends, God aims to change our hearts. The miracles were not an end in themselves.

They were designed to bring repentance and that repentance brings us into reconciliation with God and an ongoing life with him. Many of us are probably praying for some sort of miracle in our lives. And I want to ask you, are you praying for it for its own sake? perhaps you're asking God to remove a thorn which he intends to use to spur you on into more fellowship with him.

Consider it. I promised you at the beginning that we would see how this stern message reveals a loving heart.

And this is where we will find our last point. This is not just a judgment. It is a warning.

[30 : 47] And warning, I'll go back to parents again. I'm warning you, right? What are you doing when you warn your children? You're keeping them from harm. Right?

It is an act of love. Now it could be like, don't touch that hot stove. I'm warning you, don't touch that hot stove. It'll be terrible. Or, I'm warning you, stop misbehaving or it will go poorly for you. Right? There are a number of ways, but that's actually gracious.

It's actually merciful. Jesus is not here destroying the people in front of him. He's warning them. He's saying, I am here for you.

I love you. I care for you. Will you please stop your course? Will you be saved from destruction? this passage is about judgment.

Yet what Jesus is doing in proclaiming judgment is extending mercy. mercy. There is still time to avoid destruction.

[31 : 56] You can still repent. And friends, if that's you, if you've not turned from self and sin to Jesus Christ, will you do it now?

One scholar looked at that phrase, woe to you, in verse 21, and the language there, he said, it is not a grim call for vengeance, but an expression of regret.

And in fact, many translations render it as alas, or how terrible it will be. It combines a warning and compassion.

Jesus is sad about the fate of the city that it has brought down upon itself, and he calls them away from destruction. And he calls you today as well.

Now, friends, this is not just for the world outside those who have not received Christ yet. It also resides still in our hearts because we have not been made fully holy yet.

[33 : 23] Do we do these same things too? Yes, we're found in Christ, and yes, our works are not what save us.

we still have remaining sin in us, and our hearts sometimes, oftentimes, still return to these same patterns.

we ignore the parts of the Bible we don't like, especially when it's hard obedience, to kill sin that we like, or to engage with the church when that's hard to do, or to be generous to the poor, or to evangelize when we find that uncomfortable.

And Jesus' response to you is the same. verse 19, his wisdom is proved out, verses 20 to 24, by his works.

Sometimes we are also unwilling to be pleased, just like the masses around him, just like the children in his parable. He offers us joy in himself, and we want to be pleased in some other way.

[34 : 46] I know I do sometimes. What about you? They were name callers, verses 18 and 19. Jesus, you're a drunk.

John, you're a crazy man, you've got a demon. Check your own soul. Do you find yourself criticizing people a lot, using names and labels that are demeaning and derogatory?

Maybe not out loud, but maybe silently in your heart. Or maybe if people in your life tell you that you are really too frequently critical of others, that you have a critical spirit, friends, if this describes you, you are in a dangerous place.

Repent. Run to the cross for forgiveness and for the grace to change. There's another person we call names and that person is God.

Every time we choose sin, we call God a name. It changes from sin to sin.

[36 : 03] For instance, if the sin makes us feel happy, we're calling God a buzzkill when we choose it.

If the sin makes us feel free when we choose it, we're calling God a slave driver. If the sin makes us feel enriched, we are calling him stingy.

Friends, every time we choose sin, we say that God is not right, that he is not wise, that he is not good.

And we're saying that something else is satisfying and he is not. Friends, don't go there. The last point of application to Christian hearts us.

Remember back to the dead man? The guy was convinced he was a dead man and Keller said that that person refused to consider the possibility that we are not best at running our lives, that we have assumptions about how things should be and we just work from those assumptions.

[37 : 26] And we say, oh, medical science must be wrong, dead men do bleed. right? I'll give us one example of our unredeemed assumptions and how they kill us and I hope that it will find application broadly in your life.

This attitude strikes in our marriages. I'll speak to husbands. Husbands, what is your instruction in marriage? church? There are plenty of them that will go to Ephesians 5 and say that our instruction is to love our wives sacrificially as Jesus did the church.

But that's not our natural assumption, is it? That's not how we wake up every day. Our natural assumption is, you know, when we go into marriage is, I like this girl.

I want to be with her. I'm going to marry her. Now, I hope that's true, right? I hope that's true. But there are two ways that we can extend that. There are two ways we can extend that idea.

One serves me, and one honors the Lord. If we follow our natural inclinations, it goes like this.

[38 : 52] I like this girl. I want to be with her. I'm going to marry her so I can stay happy. There's the other way it could go.

I like this girl. I want to be with her. I'm going to marry her so I can serve her. Those are very different. Those are very, very different.

And one is the outpouring of our natural inclinations. and we wake up feeling that way every day.

And if we wake up every day and don't crush that assumption that my marriage is for my happiness mostly, certainly I hope your marriage does make you happy, but if it is about my happiness, we will never serve our spouse.

Not truly. We might even serve them in some ways in the hopes that we'll get what we want out of it, that it will go well for us, that they'll respond favorably or to keep the peace, but that's for my benefit, not for my spouse's.

Friends, assumptions like this reside in our hearts across the board, not just in our marriages, but in every situation in our lives. And if we do not submit every thought to the word of God, we will continue walking in these paths that Jesus commands us and begs us to repent of.

[40 : 30] And he warns us lovingly. What is the best marriage? Is it the one where I go into it looking to extract happiness from my spouse?

No. And so when he gives us good commands, they are actually good. The most beautiful marriage is the one where we both come to serve.

I hope that the Lord will apply that idea to your hearts across the board in every way. Let's pray.

Amen. Lord, thank you that you came to rescue us.

Lord, thank you that for those of us who are in Christ today, you have overcome the hardness of our heart, our unwillingness to be pleased, Christ, and found our joy in Christ.

Lord, I ask that you would break the resistance. Anyone here who does not yet know and love you, Lord, you do that work in their heart too.

[41 : 53] Lord, I ask that you would free us to be evangelists, knowing that you do the real work, the work in the heart. And, Father, I ask that you would help us to strike down our natural assumptions so that we aren't people who say, dead men do bleed, but rather so that God and his ways are where life is found.

We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ who preaches this message to us. Amen.