

Negative Responses to Jesus, Part 3: Indifference

Matthew 11:20-30

Halifax: 10 July 2005

Introduction

In the Gospel of Matthew,

- Matthew presents the Lord Jesus Christ to us as the promised Messiah.
 - He seems to be presenting Him especially to the Jews who were God's covenant people by birth.
 - Being in the covenant does not mean that you are saved,
 - It means that you are among those God has set apart from the world to be exposed to the means of grace by which people are saved...
 - You are able to hear the word, to be the special object of prayer, to be under the discipline of the church, and to be given the sacraments...
 - It means that you are one of the people who professes Christ and who has all the privileges that go with such a profession.
- But we have seen that all the way through the gospel of Matthew,
 - Matthew challenges the covenant people to never be satisfied with a mere outward communion with God and profession that they belong to the Lord.
 - Don't think you are okay simply because you go to church and say your prayers and receive the sacraments.
 - These are essential things for those who have a relationship with God, but unless you have living faith, they are useless.
 - The whole purpose of the preaching of God's word, the fellowship of the church, the prayers, and the sacraments is to teach you to rest in Christ...
 - to lead you to see that you are a sinner who cannot save yourself...
 - and to set forth Christ as the One who alone can save you so that you will go to Him and rely on Him alone for salvation.

In Matthew 11-12, Matthew is showing us all sorts of wrong responses covenant people have toward Jesus—responses that in many cases are not in agreement with saving faith.

- And today in Matthew 11:20-30, I want to show you the negative response that has probably kept more of God's covenant people from heaven than any other!
 - Indifference!

I. Indifference to God's revelation of Jesus Christ is a deadly response!

A. Jesus roundly rebukes those cities where most of His mighty works were done because they did not repent.

1. Repent is what they should have done!

a. By all the miracles He wrought among them, they should have concluded that God had truly visited them!

- That God was in their midst to bless them and establish His kingdom.
- As you know, the words that Jesus did were accompanied by the announcement that the Kingdom of God was at hand!

b. Repentance is the proper response when God is near!

- We are so full of sin—
 - all those selfish raunchy attitudes we have,
 - all the whining and complaining we do,
 - all the ways we neglect doing good to our neighbour,
 - all the things we say that we should have left unsaid,
 - all the lustful thoughts and envious thoughts and bitter thoughts...
 - We are full of such things...
- And as soon as we see that God has come near, we ought to be ashamed of all these things!
 - You remember what Peter did when saw the miracle Jesus did with giving him the huge catch of fish...
 - He fell down at His feet and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.”
 - This is the way all men ought to respond when God comes near!
 - Abraham fell on his face when God spoke to him...
 - The people at Sinai begged that God would not speak to them directly any more, lest they die in their sin.
 - Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me, for I am undone, a man of unclean lips,” when He saw His glory in the temple.”
 - Daniel was overwhelmed,
 - The apostle John was like a dead man.

2. But it seems that Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum went on with life as usual!

a. The Son of God was in their town working wonders...

- They were happy to bring their sick to Him for healing,
 - to bring their blind and their lame,
 - even to listen to His sermons...

- b. But these things seem to have no affect on them!
 - They did not say, “The Lord of Glory is in our midst! Let us humble ourselves before Him!”
 - They were very casual about it all...
 - It made very little difference to them that God was in their midst except that now they had someone to go to when they had problems.
- c. Oh brothers and sisters, that sounds too much like the church today!
 - 1) We have the complete revelation of Jesus Christ and we are told that He is with us in the church...
 - He is preached and we hear His voice.
 - 2) And we are glad to have someone to help us when we have problems...
 - But other than that we go on as if He were not here!
 - What I mean is, we don’t repent!

B. Indifference is a deadly sin because it doesn’t look so bad...but it is bad

1. It has a nice, clean cut appearance about it...
 - a. Indifference can speak well of Christ, be kind to Him, and even go to Him for certain things like healing.
 - It can even be zealous for ceremonies or good morals—active in speaking against profanity and lying...
 - You see, it is not indifferent about everything...
 - It is only indifferent about the fact that the Son of God is around.
 - b. Indifference can even approach Christ in a warm and friendly way...
 - It does not come with confusion and wrinkled brow like doubt,
 - nor does it have anything negative to say like criticism.
 - It certainly does not try to drive Jesus out of town the way the citizens of Nazareth did when Jesus went there...
 - c. Indifference can be quite pleasant to have around.
 - I am quite sure that Capernaum or Bethsaida would have been a very nice, moral kind of place to live...
 - On the Sabbath everyone would go to worship, children would play happily, and marriage would have been held in honour...

- nothing like Tyre and Sidon, port cities where the streets were lined with prostitutes and drunkenness abounded!
 - A place where idols were worshipped and where everyone profaned the Sabbath...
 - Where cursing could be heard from the houses and thieves were all about.
2. Yet Jesus says that Chorazin and Bethsaida are worse than Tyre and Sidon;
- And that Capernaum is worse than Sodom!
- a. He says that if any of these immoral cities had seen all the miracles that were done in Galilee,
- They would have known that God was among them!
 - They would have repented long ago!
 - And Sodom, instead of being a monument to God's justice would still be standing as a monument to God's mercy and grace!
- b. But perhaps you would say,
- "But this is not fair!
 - How could the Lord reveal Himself so fully in Galilee when His word would have done more good in these other places?"
 - Indeed it would—Jesus says that the very same revelation would have brought these cities (in general) to repentance!
- But you cannot charge God with wrong in this!
 - You must understand that mercy really is mercy!
 - No one deserves to be saved!
 - If God brings His word of salvation to one place and not another, that is His business.
 - He was patient with those cities and gave them more warning than they deserved.
 - You must understand that there is not a person on earth that deserves to hear the gospel...
 - even it would make them repent to hear it!
 - God is under no obligation to offer His mercy to even one person, and the fact that He does ought to be the thing that causes us to marvel!
 - And not just to one, but to many!

3. Jesus goes on to say that it will be worse on the day of judgement for Chorazin and Bethsaida than for Tyre and Sidon,
 - and for Capernaum than for Sodom!
- a. These immoral cities will have a lot to answer for,
 - They will indeed suffer in hell fire forever....
 - but they will not have to answer for rejecting the full revelation of Christ that the cities of Galilee were given!
 - There are degrees of suffering in Hell,
 - and it will be far worse for covenant people who have been indifferent to Christ than for those who never heard,
 - no matter how immoral they may have been.
- b. How shocking these words must have been to the fine citizens of these happy Jewish cities!
 - How shocking to the little old lady who goes to church each Sunday and says her prayers, and even speaks of Jesus but knows Him not as Saviour!
 - How shocking to the man is busy fighting abortion and homosexuality in the political arena and who has not repented of His own sin...
 - How shocking to the minister who knows all the right doctrine but has never turned from his sin to Jesus Christ...
 - How shocking to the social activist who has stood up for the rights of the poor and defended battered women, but has never confessed the dark depravity and bitterness in her own heart.

TRANS> What terrible words the Lord Jesus has for you if you are indifferent to Jesus!

- If you have heard God's word and have learned of Jesus, but have not repented!

II. But how could it be possible that anyone should receive such a glorious revelation of Christ and not repent?

A. Think of how absurd this is!

1. To stand there and see Jesus working miracle after miracle, day after day...
 - to hear Him declaring that the Kingdom of God is at hand
 - to hear Him expound the Law in the same manner that He did in the Sermon on the Mount—
 - demanding a righteousness that far exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees—a righteousness that reaches to the very thoughts of the heart!

- and to hear Him announcing that He has the authority to forgive sin on earth!
 - Who could stand before such miracles and such preaching and not repent?
 - Here is the Son of God, showing the power of God and the holiness of God and presenting Himself as Saviour,
 - and someone can be indifferent to Him?
 - Surely, even Sodom would have repented if they had seen these things!
 - A person would have to an absolute fool to be indifferent to all this!
2. Even right here in this discourse,
- a. Who in Galilee could hear Jesus speak these awful words of judgement and not repent!
 - No doubt, Jesus was saying all this to stir them up to repentance!
 - He wants to make them jealous by telling them how Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen these things!
 - b. In a moment, we will look at how He goes on to plead with them—
 - Showing them that He has everything they need for salvation and pleading with them to come and take His yoke...
 - We will look at His gracious appeal in a moment,
 - but first, let us consider what He says about how it could be that the people in these cities could see what they had seen and not repent!

B. Jesus answers this question for us in verse 25...

- It is a terrifying statement He makes and it might be more comfortable for me to simply ignore it and pass right over it.
 - But it is there for the glory of God and the good of His people and I dare not pass over it or twist it to say what it does not say.
1. Jesus, addressing the Father in our hearing—for our sake, declared:
 - v. 25-26: “I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”
 - a. First, let me point out that this is a kind of confession.
 - The Greek word translated “thank” is the word:
 - *exomologew ex-om-ol-og-eh’-o*

- This word is ordinarily translated “confess,” and it carries that idea of confessing something glorious and praiseworthy about God.
 - It is very similar to the Hebrew word “yada” we have seen in the psalms that also means confess, but is often translated “thank” or “praise” when it is speaking about confessing who God is—
 - because to confess who God is always involves praising Him and thanking Him.
- b. Jesus is confessing something about God here...
- 1) He begins by addressing Him as His Father...
 - 2) Then He calls Him Lord of Heaven and earth—in other words, He is the Lord of all and we have no right to question Him.
 - He is the judge, we are not.
- c. But the content of Jesus’ confession is the terrifying part...
- He says,
 - “I confess to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes.”
 - And then He adds that the Father has done this because it seemed good in His sight:
 - “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.”
2. This is the only explanation of how the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum could see what they saw and not be moved to repentance!
- a. God the Father has blinded them!
 - There is no question about it, Jesus says that God hid the obvious from the wise and prudent!
 - John explains this in John 12:37-40:
 - John 12:37-40: But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with *their* eyes, Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.”
 - b. There is no other explanation for how intelligent, religious human beings could see Jesus revealed day after day in their streets and not repent...
 - God has blinded them as an expression of His holy justice and judgement!

- c. We need to think about this because we need to see how absurd unbelief is—even though the unbeliever is a wise, respectable sort of person!
- 1) For example, take a whole room full of PhD's—top scientists who have devoted their minds to astronomy...
 - and these men actually believe the universe was created by a big bang!
 - and they can actually take themselves seriously when they speak about it and nobody laughs!
 - It is absolutely absurd!
 - The only way they could ever come to such a conclusion is because God has blinded them.
 - It would be impossible for them to believe this unless they had been blinded.
 - But we need to see that it is absolutely absurd because
 - “what may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...”
 - You do not need to be intimidated by them!
 - Yes, they are very intelligent men, but what they believe is absolutely absurd!
 - A miracle is required for them to be so blind!
 - Just as God miraculously hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he kept refusing to let Israel go even when it was so clear that the whole nation was going to be destroyed.
 - God made the man blind to humble him.
 - 2) And now let us take another group of people—
 - a) That huge company of persons who has been exposed to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and who do not believe!
 - Any human being who is in his right mind knows that he is a sinner who is under God's judgement.

- And as soon as he hears about Jesus Christ and how He died for sinners, He immediately knows:
 - “That is the answer to my problem! Surely this is the way of forgiveness!
- b) The gospel is patently obvious to anyone who is in his right mind.
 - We need to see this because with so many people around us rejecting it, it can make us think the gospel is not so clear.
 - But it really is!
 - The cloudiness comes because the god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine to them.
 - The god of this world, as it is used in that verse, is Satan, but he is God’s agent of judgement let loose upon the sinner...
 - For as we saw in John 12, it is God who sends blindness to sinners as a judgement.
- 3. But how can Jesus say that hiding the truth from the wise and prudent was something that seemed good in God’s sight?
 - a. How can He praise the Father for doing this?
 - He can praise Him because this is an expression of God’s just judgement against us sinners!
 - In all justice, He blinded the human race when we fell so that now the natural man (man left to himself post fall) does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to Him, neither can he know them.
 - b. If God chooses to judge many members of the human race even after Christ has come into the world so that they cannot see Christ,
 - that is His prerogative.
 - He is Lord of heaven and earth and is under no obligation to save any rebellious sinner.
 - He can leave them in their darkness, and even make that darkness deeper so that they are caused to believe a lie.
 - c. Now my friends, you all need to see that there is no injustice with God in blinding sinners.
 - You need to see that so that you can realise the mercy that has been shown to you if God has opened your eyes to believe!

- 1) After Jesus says, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent,”
 - He adds,
 - “and have revealed them to babes!”

- 2) If you are able to see the truth when so many others don’t see it...
 - so many that are more intelligent than you are and more prudent than you are...
 - don’t let that bother you!
 - You can see what they cannot see because God has revealed it to you!
 - He has opened your eyes to see the truth!

- 3) Those wise and prudent people have a way of making their foolishness seem credible and respectable...
 - but if you think about it, you know that it is totally absurd!
 - And it is!
 - Don’t let a blind man spoil your confidence that there really is a beautiful Saviour to look upon!
 - Just because he can’t see the morning sun rising on the horizon does not mean the Sun is not there!
 - He can argue and try to sound important, and be full of confidence,
 - but when you have seen the truth, he looks rather silly.
 - God has blinded him or he would be able to see.
 - How thankful you ought to be if God has opened your eyes!
 - It is not because you were wiser or more prudent, but it is because of God’s free mercy to you!

III. Now let me ask you—have you seen who Christ is?

- **Have you been gripped by the fact that in Christ, God is among us for salvation?**

A. I tell you, if you have, you cannot be indifferent to Him!

1. In verse 27, Christ explains in plain words who He is as our Mediator...
 - a. He says, “All things have been delivered to Me by my Father.”

- As the Son of God who came from heaven and took on human flesh, Jesus has been given all authority from heaven.
 - He fully represents God on the earth to us sinners!
 - This is why when Philip said, show us the Father,
 - John 14:9: Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"
 - Clearly, Jesus deity is something that ought to have been obvious to all who met Him and to all who learn of Him today...
- b. But Jesus goes on in v. 27 to explain that only the Father knows who He is—
- We don't see what ought to be plainly obvious because we are blinded...
- 1) But we have just seen in verse 25 that although God hides these things from the wise and prudent, He reveals them to babes...
- It is not because of superior intelligence, but because God opens their eyes that they are able to see Jesus.
 - The point is not that no one who is wise and prudent sees, but that God is able to hide what is plainly obvious even from the,
 - and often does hide from them what He reveals to others.
- 2) So if any one does see who Jesus is, it is because the Father has revealed it to them—
- You can say of them what Jesus said to Peter when He began to realise who Jesus really was:
 - "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven."
- c. In the remainder of vs. 27, Jesus goes on to show that He is the One who reveals the Father to us...
- The Father reveals Christ to us, and then when we see Christ we see the Father...
 - No one but Jesus is able to bring sinful human beings into contact with the Father.
 - He alone knows the Father and He alone reveals the Father to whomever He wishes.

TRANS> So what this means is that as soon as the Galileans saw Jesus,

- they ought to have immediately seen that God was among them.
- But they could not because sin had blinded them.

- Nevertheless, they are culpable for this blindness and Jesus rebukes them for it...
 - They should have repented when Jesus was manifested among them!
 - He brings you face to face with God.
 - And so it is for you...
 - You should not be indifferent when you hear of Jesus through the word—from the Bible...
2. You are a sinner and as soon as a sinner comes face to face with God,
 - there is only one thing He can do!
 - Repent!
 3. You become weary and heavy laden because you see your wretchedness!
 - a. You see that you are unclean and have no resources to save yourself.
 - You see that you are totally unfit for Him and deserve only His wrath and judgement.
 - You are gripped by the fact that apart from God’s mercy, you cannot be saved.
 - b. These words, “weary and heavy laden” refer specifically to sin.
 - There are many who turn this around because they do not see Christ...
 - Rather than seeing themselves as sinners who need to be saved, they see themselves as victims of injustice who need to be saved!
 - In other words, they are weary and heavy laden because life has been so hard and so unfair to them...
 - And they come to Christ to set things right!
 - They come to Him with an attitude that God needs to repent for handling them so roughly.
 - That is the attitude that so many of Jesus hearers in Galilee had.
 - They did not look at themselves as the problem,
 - it was all the difficulties of life that made them weary and heavy laden.
 - c. But that is what Jesus is chiding them about!
 - Rather than repenting when they encountered Him...
 - Rather than pleading for mercy when they saw that the Son of God was among them...

- They only came to Him with their complaints...
 - Their own sin was not the great problem...
 - It was the sins of others against them and the difficulties of life.
4. But I assure you that when God has opened your eyes, it is not how you have been treated that concerns you...
- It is what you are before God.
 - You become weary and heavy laden because you realise that you are a wretched sinner, condemned by God's holy justice!
 - The word **weary** or **labour** in v. 28 speaks of "labour to the point of exhaustion"—
 - Of one who has come to end and can do no more...
 - You realise you have no resources in yourself.
 - The words **heavy laden** speak of the load of guilt that one carries when he sees something of His guilt before God.
 - You are desperately weighed down,
 - crushed under the burden of the condemning sentence of God that has pronounced against you:
 - "The sinful soul, it shall die!"

Jesus brought His rebuke to the cities of Galilee in order that at least some among them might become weary and heavy laden!

- He knows that there are some that are.
 - He knows that there are some who are not indifferent, but have been brought to repentance!
 - He knows that there are some whose eyes God has opened to see the truth about themselves and the truth about Him.
 - Perhaps you are among them.
 - I hope you are!
 - I hope you are because for you Jesus has some special words!
- B. He says: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
1. There are no better words than these!
 - a. All things have been delivered to Him!

- He has everything a sinner needs for salvation!
 - And freely He invites you,
 - “Come to Me”
- b. “Come to Me with your sin and your guilt and I will give you rest!”
- “I have the resources in myself to pay the penalty of your sin!”
 - “You do not need to toil under the weight of it any longer!”
 - “Do you have a sentence of eternal condemnation?”
 - “Give Me the bill and I will pay it in full.”
- c. And of course now, He has paid it in full.
- He has brought us into His rest.
 - He has paid the penalty of sin by His death on the cross...
 - God the Father has accepted His offering and raised Him from the dead...
 - Now He is at rest—all has been accomplished—the awful work has been completed...
 - And so He says,
 - “Come to me, you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
 - Come and rest in my completed work for you!
2. “Come” does not mean “Stand at a distance”...
- a. He says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me.”
- He calls you to a deliberate, forthright, public discipleship.
 - He calls you enter into His covenant before witnesses, to confess with your mouth that He is Lord.
- b. A yoke was something worn around the neck of an animal to pull a plough or a threshing sledge.
- By taking Jesus’ yoke, you put yourself under His service to do His work.
 - He calls you to learn of Him—
 - You are to enter His school, and the subject is Him...
 - The Church has been given the task of making disciples, and we do that by teaching them to observe all things that Christ has commanded.
 - And we do that by preaching Christ Himself so that you might learn of Him.

- And, as we saw, to learn of Him is to learn of the Father.

c. You do not need to be uneasy about Christ's yoke...

- He promises you that you will find Him gentle and lowly in heart, His yoke easy, and His burden light.
- Yes, you may even be called to give your life for Him,
 - but whatever you are called to do, you will always find His grace sufficient.
 - He will give you the wisdom that you need if you seek Him with all your heart...
 - He will give you the strength you need to do His will...
 - He will provide the cleansing you need for all your sins.

3. See how tenderly He pleads with you!

- "Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest..."
- "Have my words of rebuke struck you?"
 - Have they caused you to toil and be weighed down?
 - Then come to Me, and I will give you rest!
- I say, how could any human being possibly resist such a moving, such a convicting, such a gracious appeal?
 - It is the highest insanity to be indifferent about this!
 - It will do you no good to be content with merely hearing and liking the gospel...
 - You must go further...
 - You must repent and be converted.
 - You must come to Him and take His yoke.