

MATTHEW: THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

LESSON 30 – JESUS WARNS THE APATHETIC— MATTHEW 11: 16-24

“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. 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.”

1. What did people expect the revelation of a prophet would look like?
2. How was the appearance of John the Baptist contrary to these expectations?

Opposition to Jesus began to grow as he moved closer to the cross. In Matthew 11:16-24, “this generation” was spoken to the crowds that are around him but there is also foreshadowing to all people whose ears are closed to the unfolding of the gospel. Jesus fiercely denounces those who refuse to repent.

3. Vv. 16-19 have been interpreted in three different kinds of ways. 1) “this generation” refers to the children being addressed in v. 17. They are called to play at the wedding, but they do not want to dance. They are called to play at the funeral, but they do not want to grieve. 2) “this generation” is referring to the children called out to the other children to play. John and Jesus represent the children called to play but they don’t play games for show to the crowd. 3) “this generation” is all the children, some want to play at a wedding, others a funeral, and they cannot agree what time it is. If they don’t agree then they don’t play.
 - a. Matthew 11:16-19 refers to the petulant children, 11:18-19 provides parallelism which helps us understand the references in vv. 16-17. The people saying in both sections are likely the same people.

- i. What are these children doing in the public square?
- ii. Who are the playmates to whom the children in the marketplace are crying out?
- iii. Why do the playmates not respond?

Some ways these verses have been interpreted in history can be found in the hymn, “Lord of the Dance”

Grace is dancing.
 I want to play the flute; dance, all of you! Amen.
 I want to sing a song of mourning; grieve, all of you! Amen.
 ...
 The twelfth number is dancing above. Amen.
 The dancer belongs to the universe. Amen.
 Whoever does not dance does not understand what is happening.
 And:
 “I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
 but they would not dance and they would not follow me.
 I danced for the fishermen, for James and John,
 and they came with me and the dance went on.
 ...
 I am the Lord of the dance,” said he.¹¹

- b. “Yet Wisdom is justified by her deeds.” Wisdom in the OT is someone greater, a personal substance of God. With the revelation of Jesus, we find the NT providing interpretation of Wisdom as the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the agent of creation. True knowledge of God and his ways comes to people through the voice of Wisdom. How do the following passages show the voice of wisdom as the revelation of God.
 - i. 1 Cor. 2:6-7
 - ii. Colossians 2:2-3
 - iii. Luke 2:40

¹¹ “Lord of the Dance,” in *Hymns for Now* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967).

iv. Luke 11:49

4. Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus denounces the cities. Capernaum was Jesus “own city” and Chorazin and Bethsaida were highly favored. What happened in the cities that should have brought the people to repentance (Romans 2:4)?
5. The opportunity for salvation that arrives with the reign of God becomes the occasion for damnation. Jesus’ “woe to you” statements, vv. 21-24, express judgment, rather than sorrow. On what basis will people be judged?
6. 11:23 Jesus uses language similar to what Isaiah the prophet used to denounce the godless king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:13,15). How do you think the people of Israel would react to being referred to in similar terms to the king of Babylon?

Tyre and Sidon were Israel’s pagan enemies in the Old Testament. Sodom was legendary for its evil ways and its destruction by God. Jesus does not propose that these cities will escape judgment but rather that they would have believed.

7. Why is judgment against sinners a difficult topic when sharing the good news in this world today?
8. Jesus promises a harsher judgment for Capernaum than for Sodom, because Sodom would have believed if Jesus had performed his miracles there. Our human nature, corrupted by sin, does not desire to repent. We would rather rejoice in some other terms than the ones that Jesus offers. What terms would bring “joy” to a person corrupted by sin and unable to see the grace of Jesus?
9. Jesus offers unconditional grace that strips us from us all of our claims to our own righteousness. We find ourselves regularly acknowledging our sin, living in repentance, and rejoicing in the graciousness of the love of Jesus. Why is there judgment for people who reject the grace of God in Jesus?