

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, December 17, 1972

Willo Bible Chapel, Willoughby, OH (44:17)

I'd like to return with you to the Gospel of Matthew, and one of its prominent chapters, the 11th chapter. I wish we had time to read the whole chapter, but I'll allude to the first part a little bit later. Starting to read from the 20th verse, this is in the midst of the Lord's ministry here upon earth, when he has preached in a great many of the cities, and attested the ministry, the word that he spoke, by works of power. We call them miracles, but in the text this morning the word miracles is changed to mighty works, works that only God could do.

The 20th verse then says that "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe to thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, (or as some texts have it, "thou Capernaum, dost thou think thou art exalted to heaven?" thou shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I think this portion of scripture divides into four parts. You have first the declaration of woe against the city. The second is the prayer of the Lord to his father, showing that even here on earth he was a dependent man. The third is the declaration of his Deity, which puts him so far above us, and upon the rest of men, that if the chapter ended there it would look as if there was no hope. But it is immediately followed in the fourth section, in the fourth part of this end of the chapter with the most gracious invitation that escaped, or that left the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ while here upon earth.

I only think of one other that copes with it, that equals it, and that's the one in the gospel of John where the Lord says that "He that believeth to me shall never hunger," or "he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" [John 6:35].

What led up to the beginning of this chapter in which the Lord pronounces woes upon three cities? And that itself is remarkable because these three cities came to nothing. They don't exist today. It is only a guess where these cities now are. If they are in the same place, the cities today do not have the same name. But I believe it was not the cities so much as the people in them, that the Lord was denouncing. Here he had done his wonderful works of attestation, that he was what he claimed he was, the Son of God, and yet the people in these cities, that is the majority, because in Bethsaida we know there were three disciples there who were three of the twelve disciples, so that they were not included.

But the Lord is speaking in general terms here of these cities, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum.

Capernaum was the second home of the Lord Jesus Christ while he was here upon earth. He was born in Bethlehem, but brought up in Nazareth, and that's where he was the carpenter, where he framed the yokes of which he speaks here in the spiritual sense, "take my yoke upon you, and learn of me." But before the woes that he pronounces on these cities and the people in them, he has had a remarkable happening.

The first part of the chapter that I alluded to previously gives us the doubts, the period of doubts that assailed the mind of John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whose business it was to point, and he did point, to the one who was to come. He said that he wasn't worthy to tie the shoelaces of this person, the shoe latches of this person that was to come. Yet when he was in prison, and probably unconscious of his coming death, the beheading by Herod, he has periods of doubts, as all of us no doubt have had at times. That's one of the things that Satan uses as a weapon against us. It's to get us into a frame of mind, take our eyes off the Lord, just as Peter did when he was on the water, and he saw the waves, he saw himself sinking, getting a little below the waves, he took his eyes off the Lord, and he began to sink and had to call for the Lord to save him. And so I believe we too have periods of doubt, of uncertainty. We think that the Lord is letting us down whereas he's just testing us. He's just wanting to see how much we've learned of him, as our text gives us. It's not only to come to him, but learn of him. Learn about him, learn how wonderfully he keeps us. Not only what he has done for us, but what he is doing. Daily, daily exercise of our faith; that's what God tests at times.

We see that all through the Old Testament; Elijah was one of those. Here for three and a half years, he was public enemy number one. He was a traitor to his race; he was hated, and hunted, and yet he remained firm. But in the hour of his greatest victory, when he was responsible for the destruction of 400 prophets, yet it took only the threat of his murder by the reigning Queen to send him off in haste, and he had to be told that the Lord had 7000 others like himself, who were faithful to God but that were not open. They were secret, they were secret believers in the Lord, and how many there must be of such today.

We all have missed opportunities to spread the name of Christ, haven't we. And that will be to our disgrace and to our shame and to our sorrow in the day to come, in the day of reward, when we see some others, who were probably unknown, receive a greater reward than we do. At least that is the subject of the woes of the present chapter.

Well John sent to the Lord, through his disciples, for he couldn't come himself, he asked the simple question, very direct, "Are you he that should come, or should we look for another?" The impact that the Lord was making, upon the nation, was so little, that John was beginning to doubt whether this really was the Messiah. See, I think he had the same idea in the back of his mind that the disciples had. When the Lord came, he would immediately route the Romans, and establish his kingdom, bring Israel back into the land, and establish power and great glory. But John, I'm afraid missed the whole purpose. While he called the nation to repentance, he was not telling to believe on him who should come after him. And John was establishing disciples, when his business was to just be the forerunner of Christ, point, be the pointing finger to the one who was to come.

Well, we can blame John, we can see where he made a mistake, and we can deplore his doubting, but the Lord gave a gracious answer. He said, "go back to John and tell him that you have seen my

works. The lame are healed, the blind receive sight, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised from the dead, the dead are raised up to life again.” But better than all of that, than all of that together, for that is just temporary, but “the poor have the gospel preached to them.” That was the great ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; the poor of the flock, the ones that he said were babes, not that they were babes in stature or like the little one in the back of the room, no these were the unlearned. These were ones who could not be classed with the wise and prudent. There the Lord uses the wise and prudent in the same sense that he spoke elsewhere of the righteous. “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” [Luke 5:32]. Well, the whole trend of scripture is that none of us are righteous. There is none righteous, no not one. In the sight of God we have no righteousness. The Christian depends upon Christ for his righteousness. And so John is dismissed with that wonderful ending statement, “Blessed is he who is not offended in me.”

Well they go away, and take that message to John, and I’m sure it reassured him. But of course he met a terrible fate, but an instant fate compared with his Lord. We were speaking this morning of the sorrows of the Lord Jesus Christ, what he suffered on the cross, those were six hours of unutterable agony, first the agony of physical suffering. Just think what nails in the hands and feet, and then to be suspended, to be dragging on them, to be resting all your weight on them, and then to be naked before his enemies. And then to have the crowd pass by in silence or in scorn. The priests, the high priests and the chief priests saying He saved others, himself he cannot save. What a terrible death, compared to any other. And those three last hours of the six were concerned with the judgment of God upon him, something that was done for us that we might escape the eternal judgment that awaits everyone that does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior.

This was no doubt why the Lord denounced these cities, for the great majority, in fact all of them, Jerusalem most of all, where the Lord was crucified, where he taught in the temple daily, they had seen his works. And as far as the works are concerned, I’ve only mentioned a few of them, but multitudes were saved. It must have been thousands upon thousands that were temporarily given back life, given back health, but they’ve all passed on, and unless they turn to the Lord in repentance, and faith, for not only is repentance the first prerequisite, but faith is the second. And that repentance must be genuine. You see, the infidel would say, the unbeliever might say, if Tyre and Sidon, 350 BC, were destroyed, because they repented not, and yet the Lord says that they would have repented, if the same message, if the same works that had been done in Chorazin and Bethsaida were done there, they would have repented. But the Lord, you see, speaking as an eternal being, knowing the end from the beginning, knowing everything that was to happen, that did happen, that will happen, and has told us so. It is said of him that he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of him, for he knew what was in man. For he had made man, and he had seen him go further and further and further away, and the only way to retrieve man, to bring him back to God, was to make a sacrifice for sin, that would satisfy God’s holiness, and make it possible for God, righteously, to forgive us.

And so, after John’s messengers leave with the wonderful message, “blessed is he who is not offended in me,” the Lord tells his disciples that there wasn’t a greater man born of woman, than John the Baptist. And he gives them a wonderful writeup, a wonderful message. You see this would not been good for John to hear, but for us, it shows that the Lord balances things perfectly. If we receive suffering at one time, it will be matched by glory and by rejoicing again. He never treats us unfairly. God is no respecter of persons: he treats everyone fairly. He knows what’s best for us, and he’s working from

an eternal purpose; we can only see the present.

Well, the second city that is denounced, woes are pronounced upon the people of it, and the city itself fell, Capernaum, is no more, it's lost. All the wonderful works that were done by the Lord there were wasted, apparently, because they had not repented. The Lord said that if the terrible sinners of Sodom, and that word has become a part of our language, sodomy, if the terrible deeds that those men did, most of them becoming blind as a result of their immorality, if the message, if the word spoken, if the deeds done to attest that message had been done in Sodom, almost 2000 years before the Lord appeared here on earth, and spoke these words, they would have repented.

Well, the Lord knew that their repentance would have been like that of Jonah, I believe, not of Jonah, but of Ninevah. Jonah was sent to Ninevah to preach against it, to pronounce woe, and to say that within 40 days, that city would be no more. Well, wonder of wonders, they believed him, but it was a repentance for a time. They went to sackcloth and ashes, which was a way of showing outwardly the inward state of their mind, that they were repenting, and were pleading with God not to destroy the city. But they went back to their old ways, they went back to sin, the very sins that they had repented of; you see it was false repentance.

And I believe the same thing would have happened in these places, Tyre and Sidon, and Sodom. They would have repented for a time, but it wouldn't have been a genuine thing. John the Baptist called men to repentance and he said "Do works worthy of repentance. Prove that repentance by a changed life." which is what repentance means. Not only a change in direction, a change in the direction of God, but a change from your old ways. A renewed heart was what they needed, and that would only come by believing on Christ, committing themselves to him, coming to him as we have it in the text this morning, coming to him in order to receive something that only God can give. Men want rest, and they want peace but I think that the rest and peace that they want today is the kind that is just cessation of war. They'd like a little peace, and that seems to be the prevalent thought, but God has something far better than that. For peace, even here on earth, the peace that will come, the most wonderful time in the world's history is coming, a thousand years of peace, but that'll end too.

The peace that the Lord is speaking of here, the rest, the rest for the heart and the conscience, that is a rest that's eternal. And God gives things that are eternal, but he does give us things that are temporary, the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal. And that's His business; He wants us to enjoy them.

Well, we go on to the prayer, now, of the Lord The Lord has received this terrible disappointment in the doubting of John the Baptist. He goes on to tell these cities, the woe that is coming. And then in communion with his Father, he turns to his Father as the dependent man, as I said before, and utters this beautiful prayer: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to babes." He's not speaking there of the cities that he's denounced, but he's speaking of the poor of the flock, the great majority of the people that heard him, and the same thing applies today. The Gospel has been preached for 1900 years, yet apparently it seems that few have availed themselves of it. Few have repented, few have changed their ways, few have come to the Lord Jesus Christ and received forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and all the things that he's promised in the gospels, all that he came to give man as a result of his work on Calvary.

The poor, and the babes, as I've already said, they've revealed them to babes and given them the Spirit of God to help them in that. The revelation, a divine revelation would be worthless as far as you or I are concerned because the natural man receives not the things of God. He needs a divine person, a Holy Spirit, the one that the Lord said he would send after he went back to his Father. And this Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Lord rose from the dead, and He has been in the world ever since.

And He is the preserving element in the world; if the Holy Spirit were not in the world today, it would be in chaos. And we know that from the book of Revelation, that when the Spirit of God leaves this earth with His people, to take them back to heaven, that then the Satanic power is let loose, and men then find out what blessings have been theirs for the past 1900 years. And that is taken away.

Well the Lord said, even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. You see, when the Lord is here upon earth, everything is referred to his Father. In fact, the Lord said on eight occasions, in eight different places in the Gospel of John, that the very words he spoke were not his own words. They were his words, he spoke them, they came from his lips, but they were dictated to him by his Father. The last one of those expressions is in his prayer in the 17th of John. He says, "I have given them thy words." It is his word too, but it shows the dependence of the Lord here as a man, he is the example for us. If we all want to do anything for the Lord, we have to have his help. And he has to do it through us. He wants to do it through us. He will do it through us if we depend upon him.

Now comes this wonderful declaration, the declaration of the Father and the Son, of the relationship between them, so wonderful. All things are delivered unto me of my Father. Now there he's speaking in a prophetic sense, because it was only after the resurrection that God approved his work and set him at His own right hand, in the place of power. All things are delivered to me of my father. And the Lord said in the fifth of John in this respect, on another occasion, that all things were committed to him, all judgment is committed to the son, that is the son of God, that all men should honor the Son, even as they honored the Father. That's something that was not done when the Lord was here upon earth. Who honored him? Who treated him as the Son of God? Even his disciples were hazy on that point. It was probably the greatest tribute to him, when Mary of Bethany anointed his head and his feet, with this wonderful ointment, this spiknard that filled the house with the odor. She realized that he was going to die. He had evidently told her that, and she believed it, and she honored him. She paid him the highest tribute she could. None of the others did that, although what the Lord is speaking of here is prophetic. What he is to receive in the future, his glory on earth, his being pronounced the king of kings and lord of lords, and everyone knowing him, as the prophet said that all men shall know him, as the waters cover the sea, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters now cover the sea. Well that time hasn't arrived yet, has it. And yet the Lord is looking forward to that; he says "all things are delivered to me of my Father, and no man knows the Son, but the Father." Now if the chapter would end there, how far we would be in a hopeless case. And then he says, "and neither knoweth any man the Father save the son, except the son, and that person to whom the Lord will reveal Him."

So you see, the Lord is retreating here into his Deity, He's saying that he was from the beginning, he ever lived, had no beginning, which is a thought that is just beyond the human mind. Everything with us has a beginning, with us too things have an ending, a continuance, but he is an eternal person who speaks as no man ever spoke. No wonder the men that were sent to take him, to capture him, in the

eighth of John, I believe it is, said, no man ever spake as this man speaks. And that's the terrible question that comes to mind. Why don't men who honor the Lord in his birth, and honor him at Easter time for his death and resurrection, why don't they take these words that attest to his deity, that proclaim what he is, and to claim his works prove it. What are they doing with that? That's all glanced over, and nothing made of who he is and the claim he has made upon each one of us. No man knoweth the Son but the Father, ?? neither the Father but the Son.

Remember when Moses asked to see the Lord, to see the person he was speaking with, God said no man can see me and live. There was this distance, the infinite against the finite, that we have little conception of. The greatness, we were singing How Great Thou Art, why we haven't the slightest conception of how great God is. Just think of the stars, and the planets, and the earth, and the moon. We've seen a little bit of that, been reminded of a little of that today, in the last few days, but, the infinity of space, and the world is supposed to be going on further and further into space, so there must be an unlimitable space, beyond.

Well this person has that ability, to come down so low, that he can reach the unlearned, those who are not the mighty, not the rich, not the great others, for the Lord didn't come to them. He offered himself to all, but he specifically came to those who were the needy, the poor and the needy. Poor in spirit, not spiritually poor, but poor in spirit, those who like the ones in the end of the Gospel of the Old Testament, the book of Isaiah, are said to be the poor and the contrite, the humble, those who tremble, those who pay attention to my words, to those he comes and dwells. And he to whomsoever the son will reveal him: that's a part of this wonderful declaration of deity. The Lord comes down to those who are repentant, those who realize that he is speaking the truth. Many men attested that, when they accosted him, especially on the one occasion you remember, they brought a question, should we give tribute to Caesar or not? But he perceived their duplicity. He knew they were trying to trick him. He said, "show me a coin." He didn't have one. He didn't need one. And then, "whose superscription is this," he asked them. They said "Caesars." "Well render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. and to God the things that are God's. [Luke 20:25]

You see, he put things in reverse there. but he paid his tribute to Caesar in putting him first, before God. They couldn't find any fault with that. You know when the believers, afterwards were questioned and asked whether they believed in Jesus being their King, they were in a bad place, because that made them traitors to Caesar. But the Lord provided the tribute to Caesar.

Remember when Peter was asked, "Does your master give tribute or not?" The Lord said, "lest we offend them." "Lest we break their law," He might have said. "Go to the sea, and cast your hook, and the first fish you take out, open its mouth and take out the coin." And the remarkable thing of it is, it doesn't give it in our text, in the translation that we have, but the remarkable thing of it was that the fish that delivered that coin, gave Peter that coin, was a coin of double value. They were supposed to give the penny, or the denarius, but when that coin was taken out, in the real translation, it was a stater, which was two denaria, and that provided the tax for both Peter and the Lord.

So the Lord comes to reveal himself to those who are the neediest, those who are willing to receive him. those who have repented, those who have put themselves at the mercy of God, for that's what we need to do. It's a remarkable thing in the Old Testament, I was noticing it the other day, that every time you come across the word lovingkindness, and that's an expression that's only in the Old Testament, it's

not in the new, but that word translated lovingkindness is really mercy. It's the mercy of God, it's the mercy of God that we're here at all. If we were judged on strict justice, every one would have been banished immediately, for God's holiness is so great, not one of us could meet it. Not one of us could stand in its place.

And then comes this wonderful invitation: "Come unto me." Though as Deity, I am so far from you, the Lord seems to indicate, you have a responsibility. I've come here, down to earth, at my father's orders, and I've come of my own volition; I want to do a work that will save your souls. But you have a responsibility too; that is to answer. You know if I offer anyone a gift, and they are not interested, that's no gift, is it. They're not interested and they wouldn't receive it. Or even if they get it, it's sent to them, and they don't use it or don't accept it, don't thank for it, that's not really a gift, is it.

And so that's the way God offers His salvation. He offers it as a free gift. "The free gift of God is eternal life" the apostle says in Romans 5, or Romans 6. "The gift of God is eternal life." The gift, not a gift, but the gift. The supreme gift is eternal life, and you know what that eternal life is? That's the Lord himself. That's God's Son, the one who's speaking here. Come to me; he speaks to those who are in particular need of him. Of course, this original passage was first addressed to the Israelites, who was under the law, and who had borne its many burdens. You know how Peter the apostle in the book of Acts, being reprimanded for having gone to Gentiles and eaten with them, he turns around and says why don't you know that the Law, the Law that we've been living with all our lives has been a yoke, a yoke that none of us has been able to bear.

Just think of it; the Israelite was under the compulsion, he was under the need of providing a righteousness to God that he could never furnish. That was what the Law was for. And Paul, in the book of Galatians, tell us that if Christ died, and couldn't give us a righteousness above the Law, then Christ died in vain. Or that if we could provide a righteousness, under the Law, that would satisfy God, then Christ died for nothing. It was all useless. The Law was only to bring men to Christ, bring them to a sense of their need of him. And thank God so many, after the Lord went back to Heaven and sent the Spirit of God down, that so many did believe.

But we never find this repeated, a condemnation of three cities. Although there were, the Gentile world especially received the message as one that lifted them from their burden, from their idolatry, from all the vain living that they were doing, the misery, the oppression. This gave them a new life, a new hope, a wonderful destiny. But not only with the responsibility, we've heard a little bit of the sovereignty of God, how he's sovereign. He reveals the father to whom he will. But our responsibility is to come, and no man has ever been saved but what has come. We may think that we are saved against our wills, but it is the coming to Christ. And how do we come? I've already quoted that beautiful verse, the other side of the invitation, "he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." [John 6:35]. We must put our trust on him. It's not just believing in him. I may believe all the things about the Lord that are historical, and there's a great many. The Apostle John says that if all the things that Jesus did were written down one by one, the world couldn't contain the books that were written. Now that of course may include everything that was done from the moment time began, through the eternal ages, but the world couldn't contain them.

So the responsibility of the sinner is to come, to commit himself, to turn from his ways, realize that they don't satisfy God, that only judgment he can look for in the world to come, unless he is saved,

unless he is saved from those sins for which Christ died. But then the other side is the responsibility side, is not only to come, but to take. And these two verses might be separated in this fashion. Come unto me and I will give you rest: that's a one time thing. You can never get that again. Once is enough. The divine work that is done for your soul, and you can rest in that for eternity.

But then, after that, what about the rest of our life here? And this is the verse for that: "Take my yoke upon you." In other words, live in company with me. "Take my yoke." I've already alluded to the fact that the Lord made these yokes. These were yokes that covered the oxen, enabled them to work in harmony, in peace, and to get work accomplished. So when the Lord says take my yoke upon you and learn of me, he's giving us a lifelong work. He's giving us a lifelong responsibility, Take my yoke. But he tells us it will be an easy yoke.

In another place he tells us that if you keep my love, you keep my commandments, and my commandments are not grievous. Ye shall find rest for your soul. You see the first one was the given rest, that's what we get when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ as sinners, who deserve nothing, but are anxious to get everything, because when we receive Christ, and that's another thing to do, is not only to come to him, believe on him, but to receive him, receive him into my heart, into my life, and then to follow him. That's what it is here, take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.

Now this is a remarkable expression; this is the only description the Lord gives of himself. We might say that when he says no man knows the Son but the Father, that's describing himself as very far away, impossible to know. But here when he says I am meek and lowly, that's a person you can make friends with, isn't it. That's a person who will get down to your level. He's not going to treat you, as some people say, treat you as dirt. No, he treats you as one of his own, treats you as himself. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Shall we pray. Gracious God and Father, we thank Thee for the lessons that thy word gives us, and none more important than the one we've been looking at. We thank Thee for the fact that repentance is the first step toward getting to know Thee. We thank Thee that Thou has sent Thy son so that we might get to know Thee. We remember words of the Apostle "who died," speaking of Jesus, "who died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" And so every one of us that has believed has been brought into Thy presence as children and sons. And now we ask that the blessing of learning of Christ of being in company with him, doing everything to seek to please him, may be our goal in life, so that when we get to that wondrous place that he is preparing for us, we shall not be ashamed at his coming. We ask thy blessing, especially for the....[End of Tape]