

Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

Theme: Are you listening carefully?

It is quite amazing that people accept as fact that the Earth is 93 million miles from the sun, but put up a sign saying 'Wet paint' and people have to touch it to see if it is right! People often ignore warning signs or warnings given. At Toddbrook Reservoir near Whaley Bridge serious warnings have been given of the possible collapse of the dam wall and its 300-million-gallons of water taking out Whaley Bridge. Police have warned the town's 1,500 residents to evacuate, taking pets and medication with them, but according to police still a handful of residents had refused to leave their homes. The risk of collapse remains at a "*critical level*" and there is a yellow weather warning for the area today (4/8/19). Would you heed the warnings from the police and authorities and get out?

We would be very foolish to ignore warnings, to ignore danger signals e.g. smoke detector or a fire alarm going off. We would be very foolish indeed, if we then saw the smoke or the fire and out of curiosity proceeded to enter or even to stay in the room or building! This would be doubly so if people warned us, told us not to do so or if the police or the fire brigade warned us of a possible explosion or a dam bursting as in Whaley Bridge!

In the verses we read in Matthew 11:20ff, Jesus begins by sounding a **solemn warning** - for the local cities and for all of us (v20-24); He goes on to **great rejoicing** in v25-27 and then He makes an **amazing invitation** in v28-30. Warning, Rejoicing and Inviting - 3 nice headings which I hoped to

cover this morning. Yet as I prepared, I realised we need to take things more slowly and look in more detail at each section, especially this solemn area of Warning that Jesus made in v20-24. As we do so, we are to realise it is in the context and in connection with the other 2 sections. Charles Spurgeon says *“The wonderful portion of Scripture which makes up the rest of this chapter (i.e. v20-30) deals with 3 things about which there has been great disputing: namely the responsibility of man, the sovereign election of God and the free invitations of the gospel. They are all here in happy combination.”*

We need to keep these 3 things in view and mind as we will look at them in the next few morning sermons. Today we will look at the warnings or woes given in v20-24. I have split this heading into 3 parts and I will use the letters of the word WOE take my headings from:

1. Warnings Given.

The Lord Jesus denounces certain cities and He sounds these woes, these warnings which are designed to warn them of the consequences of their course of action. Jesus warns they will go to judgement. That is a solemn enough warning as we remember these words come from the lips of the Lord Jesus who came to save us from the judgement of our sins. This means we also need to listen to what He said, for He is no hard, harsh character, but the one who would lay down His life to make it possible for these people and for us to be saved and to be spared the judgement of God. Each and every person deserves judgement from God, but Jesus does not just warn of that, but says something more.

He warns of a more intolerable, a worse judgement upon these cities. The Judgement Day will be intolerable, unbearable for all, but on the cities Jesus mentions, their judgement would be more intolerable, be worse, more severe, be more terrible. He warned Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum of this. He warns Capernaum that they would go down to the depths i.e. the depths of hell! Here the Lord Jesus indicates that although hell is an awful place, for some it would be worse, be more unbearable for them. Some theologians speak of degrees of torment in hell. Hell will be intolerable, unbearable for all who are there, but for some it will be more unbearable, more awful and agonising. These warnings sounded by Jesus are serious and solemn. Why were the cities warned in this way? We move on and see:

2. Ones Warned.

These 3 cities are warned - Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. They were all local to one another. Was Jesus coming down on a geographical locality? No. We are to remember He had been in this area for some time. Indeed, Capernaum had been His base of ministry for the past year to 18 months or so. Here we begin to tease out the reason for such warnings given. These 3 places had been favoured to have had among them the Lord Jesus Christ. He had been teaching and had performed miracles amongst them. They actually had the Son of God living and walking among them; telling them of God and His ways. All He said and did were backed up by His mighty miracles.

No one in Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum could have failed to have heard of Jesus and what He had done. Yet, with all their privileges, with all these great honours, with all the miracles, very few were affected by Jesus, His ministry and miracles.

Jesus warned these cities because most of His miracles had been performed in them and those miracles had, on the whole, affected just a few of them. Most continued to live lives with little serious thought of God, no belief in the Saviour, no repentance or using the privileges they had to turn back to God, but most of them carried on in total apathy and indifference to God!

They failed to realise that their privileges would be used as evidence against them to condemn them to hell; they failed to see that to whom much was given, much would be expected. They did not consider that in the judgement they would not have the excuse of being able to say '*We never knew or heard*' for their own consciences would say '*O yes you did!*' This would mean that in hell they would not only suffer the torments of hell, but would also realise they were there despite all the privileges they had; despite having seen, heard and even touched the Lord Jesus in person. They would realise they could have had so much and yet they blew it! In hell they would constantly realise and see quite clearly that they had the responsibility laid on them to believe and trust in the Lord Jesus. Yet with all their opportunities and privileges, they did not and would realise they shut the door of hell on themselves; shot themselves in the foot, blew their own chances and this

will add to, aggravate their torment and make hell more unbearable *'I could have, but I didn't!'*

These ones with all the great privileges are the ones given such solemn warnings. It was not some far distant people who'd never seen or heard of Jesus, but people who'd seen and heard Him, who were called to repent and believe and yet they did not. These ones and all like them, are warned, but they are further warned by Jesus by Him using other places. So, we see:

3. Examples Given.

Jesus says that these Jewish cities, where people acknowledged God and looked for the Messiah, had great privileges given them and yet had not repented. They deserved such punishment, for if the things they had heard and seen had been done in ungodly, foreign and even evil cities, then those cities would have repented, turned to God and believed on the Lord Jesus.

Jesus uses the example of Tyre and Sidon. These were prosperous seaports to the north of Israel. They were immoral, ungodly places and had such a bad history. Much evil was done in and by them, but if these pagan, Gentile, immoral places had been favoured as had Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, then they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes - outward signs of great mourning and sorrow. They would have been dramatically affected, sought God and expressed their grief and sorrow in open and public ways.

Jesus then speaks of Sodom and tells those of Capernaum that even Sodom, an evil and vile city, would have repented. Sodom was destroyed because of its vile practices and immorality, but even they, who had ignored angels, would have been affected by Jesus' works and miracles and they too would have repented and been spared their destruction!

Jesus puts the case against Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum in a forceful way. Those evil, ungodly, immoral places would have repented and sought God's forgiveness at the miracles of Jesus. Jesus says that Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were of harder hearts and were more stubborn in their sins than these pagan places! Yet they had every opportunity, every expectation to believe and trust in God; they had the privilege of an upbringing that taught them of God, that gave them God's word and ways. They had even had the Son of God walking among them and working among them in might and power, yet they were unaffected, did not believe, indeed some of them were becoming more and more antagonistic to towards Jesus.

Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum deserved their punishment and deserved it without any warning and yet it is amazing, wonderful that the Lord Jesus tenderly warns and pleads with them so that they could consider their course of action, their headlong rush to destruction and that they would repent, would be spared such. The question is would they, did they?

A most important question for us this morning is '*Will we consider, repent and believe?*' Realise the warnings said to

those ones so long ago, are said to us this morning. Recognise there is both a Judgement Day and there is a hell. While we have life, there is the opportunity to turn to God in through the Lord Jesus and we will be saved from hell - the just, but awful judgement for our wrong words, thoughts, actions, desires and indifference to God.

You may mock and say '*Well, I am hell bound, so what!*' You may say as others have done '*That we will be with our friends and we will party day and night!*' Yet people do not realise that hell is a place of no friends at all! Your dearest family member, your dearest friend, in hell will be as your worst enemy. Love, family love, friendship are blessings of God and in hell every blessing of God will be removed. You have to realise that if **you here** go to hell, you will find it more unbearable than someone who has never heard of Jesus Christ. For there you will clearly remember that in Doncaster Evangelical Church, on at least one occasion, probably on even more occasions, you heard these warning, you heard of the Saviour and yet you chose to ignore, neglect or reject what you heard.

You may go out from here and never ever hear a gospel message again, but this message (*at least*) will pierce you through countless times in your eternal agony in hell and you will wish '*If only, oh, if only!*' I urge you not to make light of the gospel. You too have been given great privileges, great honour in hearing and learning of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He can be your Saviour. Do not turn your greatest blessing into your worst regret and greatest curse! Do not let it be your complaint '*If only, oh, if only!*' One day everything you

learned about the Lord Jesus will be clearly remembered in every detail and that will aggravate and make more intolerable the suffering of hell for you. That is why I call on you to seek the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and not to give yourself any rest until He grants you the salvation you seek Him for.

Call on Him to show you your need, to show you the remedy, to make Himself known to you as your Saviour. If you feel your need of Jesus as your Saviour, then listen to His words of invitation in v28-30 *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* I’m looking forward to preaching on those words, but until I can, I would urge you to go to Jesus, do not delay. Have a talk with friends, speak to me, make your peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not let these gracious, kind and timely warnings be sounded in vain by Jesus to you, but turn to Christ - repent and accept Him as your Saviour. In place of all the woes will be joy unspeakable, instead of unbearable agony will be amazing joy, peace and comfort. All is prepared. Come to the Saviour for He calls on us all to go freely to Him and amazingly He will take ones such as us as His and we will have Him as ours and He will never let us go or ever let us down.