

Reading: Matthew 11:20-30

Theme: God's marvellous plan.

In the verses we read we have 3 amazing things that Jesus speaks of:

1. The solemn warning (v20-24)
2. The great rejoicing (v25-27)
3. The amazing invitation (v28-30)

These underline 3 great truths that are in balance and harmony, and yet may appear to counteract each other. We have the responsibility as people to believe the gospel - the 3 cities are warned of the consequences of not believing. We have the sovereignty of God in salvation - that no one can believe unless God reveals their need of salvation to them and we have the free invitation of the gospel to be made to all so hear and are to believe.

Last time we looked at the warning of Jesus to 3 cities in v20-24. Today we move on and look at the rejoicing of Jesus about the Father's marvellous plan in v25-27. These verses are not to be isolated from their context otherwise we will lose the harmony of their setting - like jewels in the crown, the truths we will see are precious, exceedingly precious on their own, but their beauty and worth are best seen in the setting of the crown in all its design and glory.

The context, the setting here is on the one side are the warnings given. People must flee from the more intolerable judgement Jesus warns of. Yet on the other side we note people are graciously invited to go to Jesus. How can they find the way? How are they going to be moved from indifference, unbelief, hatred to God and even dead towards God? How are they going to be aware of their need? How will they go to the One who can meet that need or ever realise there is Someone who can meet that need?

This is a practical section, as it affects much of our view of Christian things. If being a Christian was simply a matter of right education -

we could have great publicity and educational programs. If it meant we only had to have some emotional experience, then we could engineer many things in meetings. If it was just an intellectual thing, then we could list arguments and evidence to get people to decide, to make just an intellectual decision for Jesus.

These verses clearly tell us that to become a Christian involves a work by God. Without God and His working no one would ever become a Christian. This means that congregation and preacher alike are dependent on God to work through the means He has appointed - preaching, witnessing, praying. We do not try to make people decide, or pressurise people or try to manipulate their emotions, but we try to clearly and relevantly present God's word and His claims on their lives. Should we find we are being challenged, stirred, made to feel uncomfortable, then realise God is at work in us and we are not to think of excuses, but are to use such times to seek Jesus as our Saviour.

Yes, it will involve our minds, but does not mean we need to be a genius, neither does it exclude us if we are! It may touch our emotions and move us, stir us, even upset or challenge us! We have the responsibility to believe on the Lord Jesus, to make sure He is our Saviour and we use the invitations in the gospel to go to Him. Yet all these are outward consequences, under God, of His unseen, secret, sovereign and yet vital work in us. I'll use 2 headings to see what Jesus says in v25-27 and try to apply such to our lives.

1. The Father's Concealing and Revealing (v25 & 26)

Here we read "*At that time Jesus said...*" What time? Yes, it was after speaking the woes, the warnings, Dr Luke tells us it was after the disciples returned and told Jesus of all they had seen and accomplished (Luke 10v21ff). Jesus does not rejoice in the warnings given, but even in spite of those favoured cities not believing and repenting, there were those who had believed, repented and were

telling the glorious good news. Maybe to the society around, it appeared these disciples were no great army or great intellects, were mostly uneducated, working-class men and yet they'd come to trust the Lord Jesus and were serving Him in spreading the good news.

Jesus began by praising and thanking God. In these verses He calls God "*Father*" five times, not "*our Father*" or "*my Father*" but "*Father*". We may think "*So what?*" We are to realise that on another occasion when He said this, the Jews accused Him of blasphemy as He was making Himself equal with God - saying He was God! This is exactly what Jesus means here - He is God, equal, co-equal and coexistent with God and yet He, in the plan of salvation, had become the Messiah, the Promised One - wholly man and wholly God.

This One is Lord of heaven and earth, the Ruler, the Sovereign Lord. He can do exactly as He wants because of who is. No one has the right or authority to question Him, for He is Lord of all. Many years ago, Prince Charles, in his army training, was on Dartmoor and was ordered to dig in, set up a tent - the sergeant questioned by if he had a problem with that; to which he replied "*No problem. I assume you have the permission of the Duchy of Cornwall to dig on his land?*" He was referring to himself! In other words, the sergeant had no real authority, but he did!

Surely, we understand that the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth can do as He wills. Here we see 2 amazing things in this verse - He hides the things of salvation from the wise and learned and reveals them to little children! As the sovereign Lord chooses to do so, He deliberately reveal the things of the gospel to some people so that they understand that which they never bothered with or understood before, but others are not shown these things, indeed these things remain hidden to their view and understanding and appear to be foolishness. People may have the same privileges, experiences,

background etc., one may have revealed these things and the others not so. It is the good pleasure of God the Father to do this (v26). God deliberately chooses to do this, reveal the truth to one, but leave others in their ignorant darkness.

Does this mean God is fickle; has a list of people He likes or dislikes? Does He favour one group of people more than others because they are nicer, sweeter, less sinful or more religious than others? Not at all. His divine pleasure to reveal these things are not based on anything in any person, nor on any foreknown response by or in them. We are to realise that no one deserves any favour from God. Each and every one of us are sinners and deserve only God's punishment. Theologians and scholars speak of mankind's total depravity - not that we are all as bad as we could be, but that every part of our being is affected, infected by sin - our bodies, desires, minds, wills, hearts i.e. the true us. No matter who we are, what we do or our standing in society, this affects us all and is shown in various ways. It may be shown in wicked living, open wrongdoing against people and God. It may be shown in an indifference to God or by trying to earn heaven and salvation as we think we are ok, are good enough and do enough to be accepted by God.

All of us are in such a position and none of us deserve to have anything good from God, but receive eternal punishment from Him. In His kindness and love, He chooses to reveal the need of all mankind to individuals here and there. He does not have to, there is nothing in them to deserve it, but He chooses to do so, has pleasure in doing so, it is His will. In doing so, He rescues them, makes known their need and shows them the way of salvation.

The Bible says God decided to do this before He created anything. As God He chose who would know His way of salvation, know His love and forgiveness. Because He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, we are cannot understand this and we dare not argue with

His method, calling Him unfair. He would be fair and just to leave us all go to hell and it is incredible He should ever choose to love anyone of us. It is amazing grace, love, kindness and mercy that He should ever consider such, let alone do such!

It is not based on intellect, wealth, or lack of such things. In v25 it may seem like it is, but wisdom, intellect are gifts from God and God frowns on ignorance and encourages us to be wise, to use and rightly develop our minds. The “*little children*”, or “*babes*” (AV) are those dependent upon someone else. They realise they cannot do anything to save themselves. The “*wise and learned*” are those who are so conceited that they feel they can do things their own way, save themselves, for they are good and able. Such ones remain hard-hearted, indifferent to the things of God. Yes, they may have had many opportunities to believe, had much evidence, but instead of calling to God to help them, even to understand these things correctly, they feel “*I do not need that, for I am fine really and I will do things my own way!*”

Little children, babes, feel no self-sufficiency and realise their help is in the Lord and they must trust Him. Realise no one saves themselves! We need to be brought to realise our need by God and as that happens, we must not carry on rebelling, neglecting or rejecting the gospel, for to be saved we are to cling to God like a child to its father in a time of need or fear.

For some here, you may be completely unaware, indifferent of your need to be right with God. Others of you may have begun to see your need and it is becoming so important for you to be right with God. Here is the work of the Father and Son revealing the need of salvation to such ones.

2. The Father’s Channel. (v27)

In v26 we read all things are of the Father's good pleasure and now in v27 we have the channel, the means by which God is pleased to be known, salvation and heaven gained - the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the commissioned One, the One sent by God and all things are committed into His hands. No one else can bring us salvation - no angel, no Pope, no saints, no priest, no minister - the final authority for giving salvation rests in Jesus only. He alone is the only means of salvation and through Him and Him alone comes the grace of God to people like us. He has the authority to make peace between God and man, to give salvation, indeed He had the authority to purchase salvation for all He would give it to. This should encourage us to go to Jesus, to realise He has the authority and power to save us, to give us the new life He truly offers - we are to see the great invitation in **v28-30** in this context and not view this invitation with suspicion as from a someone who is false.

The Son, the Lord Jesus, is known only to the Father and the Father to the Son. This gives us a glimpse into the relationship within the godhead - the Father and Son knowing, delighting, sharing and loving in perfect, holy harmony. No one else but God the Father and Holy Spirit know the Son. The greatness and glory of the Son of God is far beyond the grasp and understanding of the highest angel. Yet incredibly, the Father and Holy Spirit delight to reveal the Son to ones like us. Here in v27 the emphasis is on the Son revealing the Father to those He chooses to do so. The ones who will have the Father revealed to them are the same ones the Father chose before time began; as both the Father and Son work in harmony and the Son knows the Father's good pleasure and will fulfil such as He delights to do such.

Jesus is the channel, the means by which we know God, or rather have God the Father revealed to us. When Jesus invites all people in v28-30, it is a royal invitation, a royal command even. Only someone incredibly foolish would ignore such an invitation from the One who

is Divine, is making known the Father and is the means through which salvation comes. Our salvation is dependent on God revealing, making Himself known to us in His good pleasure - both Father and Son. Salvation is solely and wholly from the Lord.

If you are not confused at my explanation, you may be thinking *“Well, what is the point of me bothering? How do I know if I am chosen by God? Couldn't I be wasting my time? Because God's choosing of His people is secret and unknown!”* I will let you into how you can know if God has chosen you! You will come to see your need of the Saviour, you will take notice, want to act on the warnings He gave, you will fear hell and long for heaven, you will see in Jesus the only answer to your need and see that Jesus' promises include you - that whoever believes on Him will never perish, but will be saved. God's chosen ones are *“whosoever believes”*. God causes, will cause you to see your need of this Saviour and you will realise that the only thing you can do is go to Him for the salvation God freely offers.

It is not ours to probe and question the mysteries of God's counsel or God's eternal purposes. It is ours to listen to and to be warned by God's warnings, commands and promises, to then go to the Saviour and believe on Him as our own Saviour. We will not understand all things clearly, but in v20-30 we have a true and wonderful invitation - God's sovereignty and the free invitation of the gospel are in harmony. We may not understand God's sovereignty, but see our responsibility and the invitation *“to come”* leaves us without excuse. As we see our need, we are to realise that God is working in us and He, Himself, is drawing us to Himself.

For those who are believers here, God's sovereignty is a source of comfort in our salvation. It means He deliberately worked in us and saved us – it was not an accident! He will never let us go and does all these things on purpose. If it were a question of us doing this or

that, we could wonder if we've done enough or received Him correctly. Yet if He has received us, saved us, we can be sure He has made no mistake or done half a job. He will never let us go and we can keep on going to the end, knowing He will keep us and present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy, as we know our salvation does not depend on us one little bit, nor is it affected by our ups or downs, understanding or intellect, but it is of God's sovereign and undeserved love – this love will not disappoint us, nor is it a self-serving love that will allow Him to take advantage of us, but He will love us totally and do all things for our ultimate, eternal good.

This should spur us on to serve Him and praise Him - our Father who has lavished such love on us and it should cause us to take notice of and rejoice in the genuine invitation to all people in v28-30, which is an invitation, a command, a love letter from the sovereign Lord to people such as us.