

The Cost of Following Jesus

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Preacher: Simon Attwood

[0 : 0 0] This evening's reading is taken from Matthew chapter 11, verse 16 to 24, and it's on page 976 of the Church Bibles.

Page 976. Matthew chapter 11, from verse 16. To what can I compare this generation?

They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others. We played the pipe 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, here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

But wisdom is proved right by her deeds. Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

[1 : 0 2] Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But I tell you, it would be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.

Amen. Thanks, Bethany. And let me add my welcome to Jamie's. My name is Simon. I'm a trainee minister here at St. Silas.

There's an outline on the notice sheet you received on the way in if you want to follow through our passage in Matthew tonight. There was a journalist named Malcolm Muggeridge, a Christian apologist who lived in the 20th century.

[2 : 0 2] And he, in a lecture series on Christianity in the media, said these words. If Christ had been put on television to preach the Sermon on the Mount, viewers would have either switched to another channel or contented themselves remarking that the speaker had an interesting face.

Christ might have become a television personality, but there would have been no Christianity. So I wonder what you make of that. What do you think of the idea that if Jesus had been more public, more well-known, that there wouldn't have been a Christian faith?

I wonder what a 21st century version of this might look like if Jesus had social media, if Jesus was on TikTok, how many followers would he have? What would he post? What would the reaction be?

Because I think one of the criticisms often leveled at Christianity goes something like this. Well, if God really wanted us to follow him, why wouldn't he make himself more obvious?

If he turned up in the flesh and did a miracle in front of me, then of course I'd believe, but he's not going to, is he? I think a lot of people believe that.

[3 : 15] I think a lot of people would say that. And many of us, maybe in our own hearts, would think maybe there's something right about that. But is it right? Would people believe if that evidence was put in front of them?

Well, in our passage today, we get Jesus' verdict on the people of his day and the evidence that they received. And through that, we're going to understand what it would mean to follow Jesus in light of the evidence of our own age.

So let me pray as we begin to dig into this passage this evening for God's help. Father God, thank you so much that you speak to us through your word. We pray that as we learn more of the Lord Jesus this evening, you would help us to understand and by your spirit teach us that we may hear you, that we may respond to you, and that we may follow you.

Amen. Well, we return to Matthew's gospel into Jesus' ministry in Galilee. We're in the middle of a section concerning John the Baptist. John had sent some of his followers to see if Jesus was indeed the Messiah promised.

And Jesus sent back confirmation that all the signs the prophets of the Old Testament had said would be on display are on display in Jesus' own ministry. There are so many compelling reasons to believe in Jesus, the miracles themselves, and the prophecies of Scripture.

[4 : 42] The kingdom of God has come near, and Jesus really is the promised Messiah who the Old Testament said would restore everything and bring about the kingdom of God. Jesus then said John himself was proof of this.

If you look at verse 10, this is the one about whom it is written, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you. Jesus in those verses was quoting from the prophet Malachi, and he's identifying John as the one who would be God's promised messenger, heralding the coming king and his kingdom.

And John did come. And if you met him, you would see someone who looked like an Old Testament prophet, dressed in camel hair clothing, living a life of fasting, on honey and locusts in the wilderness.

Jesus has been demonstrating with his words to Israel that on the basis of their own Scriptures and on who John is, that the Messiah really has come and the kingdom of God is open to them.

There's all this compelling evidence for believing in Jesus. They have everything they need to follow the best possible chance, Jesus appearing right in front of them. This news should be received with joy that the Messiah of Israel's history is finally here.

[6 : 05] And yet, as we've walked through Matthew's Gospel, we see many of those who witnessed Jesus' miracles directly rejecting Jesus.

And not only that, the religious teachers of Israel are rejecting Jesus too. The ones who know those Scriptures best are the ones who are turning around and saying, we will not follow this man. And what we'll see in tonight's section of Matthew that Bethany read for us is that Israel's rejection of their Savior is in fact foolish and the consequences are terrible.

So our first point on the sheets, foolish reasons for rejecting Jesus. Now, I'm sure we've all seen, and you may well currently be a person who is parenting, a child throwing a tantrum.

We've all seen tantrums big and small. Not all tantrums are made equal. The very worst sometimes are the I don't care what the options are. Every option is wrong tantrum.

When a mother asks the child, do you want to stay in and play? And the child shouts, no! And then the mother says, we'd like to go outside and play. The child shouts, no! They can't be pleased.

[7 : 21] Every option is the wrong option. They don't even know what they want. They just know whatever's on offer is not for them. And yet, Jesus' first verdict on the people's rejection of him focuses on the foolishness of their reasons for rejection by drawing a comparison between that generation and petulant children.

Look at verse 16. To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others, we played the pipe for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.

Children who aren't getting their way. That's what this generation of Israel are like, says Jesus. But what does he mean in those verses?

Well, he goes on to expand in verses 18 and 19. This is about the different ways that they've rejected both John and Jesus. So first, John.

As previously said, John came fasting, wearing camel's hair. He doesn't feast, he doesn't party, but he's living the ascetic life of a prophet. Were you to go back and read Matthew chapter 3, you would see that John was sent with a message of repentance for Israel and its leaders before the coming day of judgment.

[8 : 45] And Jesus tells us in verse 18 that assumedly due to the intensity of John's message, some are saying that he is in fact demon-possessed. If you were to go and read about John in the Gospels, you would find a man that many were listening to, but few were truly hearing.

By comparison to John's ministry, Jesus' ministry has been marked by joy. He uses the Son of Man title for himself in verse 19, a title that comes straight out of the Old Testament scriptures.

And he has been building on John's message of repentance with a message of forgiveness, of restoration, of peace, and of grace. The kingdom opening to people who were previously rejected and welcoming them.

They are flooding in and eating with him and he is with the tax collectors and with the sinners. And yet, the response of the people of Israel is to accuse him of gluttony, of drunkenness, and to denounce him because of the company he keeps.

It's as if they're turning to John and accusing John of being too religious and yet turning to Jesus and saying he's not religious enough. John, too dour, too serious, too much.

[10 : 00] We can't listen to that guy. Jesus, too sloppy, too liberal, too loose. We can't, you should see who he spends his time with. We're not listening to him. Why listen to John and Jesus?

Because all the evidence points to them being God and his appointed messenger. That's why you should listen to Jesus. But Israel, just turn around and say it's not what we wanted.

Look at the statement at the end of verse 19. Wisdom is proved right by her deeds. Now, we might find that a little odd, the kind of personification of wisdom in female form.

But all that is is something that Jesus is again picking up from Old Testament scriptures. Something that people of Israel should know. Wisdom, or real wisdom, would be to respond to the evidence of John and Jesus and their ministries.

A wise response would be to put down their own expectations of what they assumed God would be and what he would do and actually follow God when he turns up. But instead, like foolish and petulant children, Israel reject both the promised king and his messenger.

[11 : 22] how often do we find ourselves, though, rejecting God because he doesn't conform to our own expectations?

It happens out in the world so much, doesn't it? The kind of, well, I assume that if there was a God, he would be like this. And Jesus isn't like that, so actually, I'm not going to follow Jesus. But actually, in our own hearts, we know that we have a view of what we assume God would be like and yet it's constantly challenged by what the Bible actually reveals him to be.

God doesn't fit in with our preconceptions and clinging on to our assumptions about God well, isn't going to get us anywhere near the truth. How many people in our age and history will say something along the lines of, well, God didn't give me what I wanted, so why should I worship him?

Israel, in Jesus' day, wanted a revolutionary king who would come and smash the Romans and take back the empire for themselves. They didn't want to listen to Jesus' message.

They didn't want to be part of his kingdom. And Jesus' verdict on that generation is that they are foolish and childish. And the same could be said of us when we reject based on the evidence that we are given because it's not how we assumed that God would be.

[12 : 53] When I say in my heart I don't want Jesus, he's not what I assumed him to be, well, how foolish to miss what's right in front of me for the sake of something else that I wanted. Even if you're a person here today who would call yourself a Christian, we know that actually that constant reformation of our view of Jesus has to just keep going.

We have to keep putting down our basic assumptions and taking up the truth revealed in Scripture. Jesus simply doesn't conform to our expectations and if you wanted proof of that, then how easy do you find it to accept what's written in Matthew's gospel here?

When Bethany read it, how did you find your heart responding? Because so often we don't like what Jesus says and yet wisdom is to listen to Jesus and believe in him because of the evidence that we've been given.

But secondly, rejecting the evidence from Jesus is foolish but critically, the consequences of that rejection are terrible. So our second point, the terrible consequences of rejecting Jesus.

And Matthew makes it completely clear why Jesus' denunciations in the next paragraph are so intense if you follow verse 20. Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed because they did not repent.

[14 : 20] Which is very clearly told the reason. It's not some other reason at all. It's because of a lack of repentance. There's not some sort of especially aggressive rejection of Jesus as we read through the gospel in the towns that he mentions.

They may have even been quite interested in Jesus' miracles. There are whole crowds flocking to him. But it hasn't provoked the right response. And to pronounce a woe as Jesus does in the following verses is to proclaim something that is deeply grievous.

a sorrowful judgment on these people and on these towns. Woe to you Chorazin, Bethsaida. Two Jewish towns where most of Jesus' miracles healings exorcisms have been performed.

These two places have been given the most astounding evidence of Jesus' identity and his deity and yet it hasn't led to them listening to him and repenting. And see who he compares them to.

Now if you were here at the services this morning you would have heard about Tyre in the book of Ezekiel. A place full of wealth and worldly wisdom that thought that it was the pride of the world but eventually fell under God's judgment.

[15 : 39] And another set of comparisons Jesus says here that if the miracles that he had performed in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been performed in Tyre and Sidon then the judgment would not have come to them because they would have repented.

And in 22 Jesus says I tell you it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. Imagine hearing that as an Israelite.

Our enemies. Our enemies. How could it ever be worse for us than our enemies? It doesn't matter that Chorazin and Bethsaida have seen Jesus' miracles or that they've heard Jesus preach or that they're ethnically Israelite.

In fact all of those things will eventually become reasons for their culpability in the judgment that comes. Their judgment will be worse than any of their pagan neighbors because they were given more opportunities and evidence to believe.

And if that weren't enough Jesus then intensifies this with a judgment on Capernaum. Capernaum was the hometown of Peter and Andrew and James and John four Jesus' disciples even in Matthew chapter 9 verse 1 described as Jesus' own town.

[16 : 59] And of them Jesus says and you Capernaum verse 23 will you be lifted to the heavens? No you will go down to Hades. Capernaum will not be lifted up in its pride and its rejection it will go down to hell in judgment because of rejecting Jesus because of refusing to repent when God's messenger and his son turn up.

And as if that wasn't enough the comparison goes deeper still when Jesus says for if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom it would have remained to this day.

Sodom was a city in the book of Genesis known for grievous evil. A city of violence and of rape so evil that God had to destroy it outright burning the whole thing down in his judgment.

And Jesus says that had he turned up in that city they would have repented and followed him. Yet the people of Capernaum because of their rejection of him will be subject to even worse judgment than Sodom.

It is a harrowing confrontation of the hearts of these people as Jesus says this. On the day of judgment both Sodom and Capernaum will be judged but Capernaum will come off worse even than Sodom for having rejected Jesus when he came in the flesh.

[18 : 31] It's hard I think to understand just how shocking what Jesus says here is for his first readers. It's shocking enough for us but it completely subverts the human idea of judgment.

Generally I think we just assume that God is against the really bad people the Hitlers and the Stalins of history they're the bad ones but generally for people who are you know kind of nice and good to their neighbors and don't do that much wrong well God probably wouldn't judge those people but if we're listening to Jesus here the most important factor in God's judgment isn't about how good or bad a person is but what they've done with the truth about his son how they have responded or not to the gospel whether they have repented of their sins and followed Jesus yes God will punish evil deeds but he will punish everyone who rejects Jesus as the Messiah and that is how he will judge and if that's true that has to shape how we see everyone we ever meet we may not like the judgment of God we may even think it unfair we may think that if we were

God we would have done it differently but if we have those thoughts we're just proving that we're just like the generation that Jesus is speaking to making up what we assume that God would be and rejecting how God actually is whenever we think of Jesus judgment here the biggest question it poses to any single one of us is how are you individually responding to Jesus because even by just sitting here and hearing about him the judgment that we will face on that final day will include what we have heard and how we responded to it but importantly Jesus doesn't in any way hide the right response the whole point of these woes is to spur the people listening to repentance to respond to Jesus to say sorry to God for their sins and to follow his son and so that's Matthew's message for his readers rejecting Jesus is foolish and has terrible consequence but in our final point believing in

Jesus has wonderful consequences the warning that Jesus gives here in Matthew is stark for sure but Jesus loves us enough to tell us plainly the consequences of rejecting him and warning us but if we look onto the next paragraph we'll see the alternative that Jesus calls us to the wonderful consequence of believing in him now for any of you who are around for our tri-church service at the start of the month we had a whole sermon on this upcoming paragraph so I'm not going to dig into it in loads of detail but I just want to focus on a couple of things first when Jesus says in verse 25 these things are hidden from the wise and learned and revealed to little children as we've seen in today's passage the truth isn't found in human wisdom finding its own way to God through assumptions it isn't found by those who assert their ideas to others they will not find the truth but for those who come to believe in

Jesus well even a little child can do that even a small child can accept the truth about Jesus these things are hidden from those who think that they are wise and learned in this world but revealed to anyone who comes to Jesus like a child receiving from him and what do these people receive when they come to Jesus we'll look at verse 28 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 Jesus offers to take the wearying burden of the world off our shoulders and to give us true rest true rest it's being forgiven by God at peace with him welcomed into his kingdom forever that's what Jesus offers something that is only found in believing in him that offer is open to absolutely everyone who believes in him the evidence is laid out through the ministries of

[23 : 05] Jesus and John rejecting is foolish and has terrible consequences but believing leads to everlasting life and so finally I wonder what you think Jesus' verdict on our generation would be what would his proclamation be with what would he compare 21st century Glasgow do you think he would consider us wise or foolish as I said at the start I think many of us wander around thinking if Jesus had just been a bit more obvious if he turned up now then well of course people would follow but Matthew is saying it's just not the case we've been given the evidence we need and think about our culture here in 21st century Scotland a strong Christian heritage church buildings lining the streets of almost every city in Scotland and yet the average person on the street would struggle to hear the good news about Jesus the Bible is at our fingertips on our phones and everyone can download it we have unparalleled access to scripture that people in years gone by could only dream of yet so little spiritual life can you imagine

Jesus saying woe to you Glasgow how would we respond to him saying that I think Matthew's made clear that the response that we need is repentance and faith not to be a person who merely hears Jesus words and then wanders off blindly but one who responds rightly rejecting Jesus no matter how passively leads to judgment and yet coming to him in repentance no matter who you are and what you have done is the path to life and to blessing and to rest with God forevermore so what are you doing with what you've heard about Jesus have you taken the time to listen and respond to him have you taken seriously that if you do not repent you will face the judgment of God don't let your preconceptions about what you assume God to be stop you from coming to find Jesus and finding rest for your souls and him and if you're someone here who would call yourself a Christian maybe you've been Christian for many years the question will always come back to us what are we doing with that news are we using that opportunity that we have to tell people in this age about him are we using the evidence that we've been given to tell others that there is a God who loves them and would welcome them into his kingdom and that without him they will face judgment if that is real then we must tell people

Jesus has given us everything we need to follow him so let's listen to his words and make every effort to tell those who don't yet know him about the truth of the gospel so they can escape judgment and find rest for their souls let's pray father god thank you that you tell us so plainly and so clearly through Jesus that those who turn away from you face judgment but those who turn to you in Christ will be welcomed into your kingdom father help us to repent help us to respond rightly to your words to us and help us to tell other people the good news about our lord and savior amen amazing