

**Words of Condemnation and Comfort**  
**Matthew 11:20-30, Luke 10:13-22**

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.”

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”  
(English Standard Version – ESV)

**Background:**

- Judgment oracles against nations were standard in the OT prophets (Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel). The teaching that those with more light were judged more strictly is in Amos 3:2 and Jonah 4:11.
- Jewish people thought of Tyre and Sidon as purely pagan cities (1 Kings 16:31), but some of their inhabitants who were exposed to the truth had been known to repent (1 Kings 17:9-24). Dressing in “sackcloth and ashes” was characteristic of mourning, including that of repentance. Chorazin was a short walk, less than two miles, from Capernaum.
- According to some Jewish stories about the time of the end (often called “Day of Judgment”), the righteous among the pagan nations would testify against the rest of their people, making it clear that no one had any excuse for rejecting the truth about God.
- Judgment was often described in the terms Jesus uses (see Isaiah 5:14), especially against a ruler who exalted himself as a deity (see Isaiah 14:14-15 regarding the Babylonian king’s death).
- In Jewish wisdom tradition, it was not those who were wise in their own eyes and leaned to their own understanding who wisest (Job 12:24-25; Proverbs 3:5-7; 12:15; 16:2; 21:2; 26:12), but the simple, who began with the fear of God (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).
- Matthew 11:27 may attribute the power of predestination (assigned only to God in Jewish sources) to Jesus. As the revealer of God, Jesus assumes a position often assumed by divine Wisdom in Jewish tradition.

- Offering rest to the weary is something God does (see Isaiah 40:28-31), but would not be the promise an ordinary teacher would make, as Jesus does in Matthew 11:28-30.

- When a man carried a yoke he would carry it on his shoulders (Jeremiah 27:2); Judaism applied this image of subjection to obedience. Jewish people spoke of carrying the yoke of God's Law and the yoke of his Kingdom, which one accepted by acknowledging that God was one and by keeping his commandments. Matthew intends Jesus' words about rest as a contrast to Pharisaic Sabbath rules in the following passage (12:1-14). The promise of "rest for your souls" comes from Jeremiah 6:16, where God promises to stay his wrath if the people turn to him instead of to the words of the false religious leaders (6:13-14, 20).

- Greek literature praised meekness in the sense of gentleness and leniency, but not in the sense of self-abasement. Aristocrats disdained humility as a virtue, except for the lowly. However, Jesus, identifies with those of low social status, a value more prominent in Jewish piety.

### **Questions:**

- + Why did the cities where Jesus preached and performed miracles refuse to repent of their sins? What modern city is least likely to repent, and why? Which is most likely to repent, and why? What is the Day of Judgment, and when will it come? Do you fear that day? Why or why not? What sin is the most persistent in your life, and why? What will it take for you to repent of it?
- + Who are "the wise and understanding" and "the little children" mentioned in verses 25-26? On what basis or by what criteria does Jesus reveal the Father to some, but not to others? What is "the rest" that Jesus offers to all who labor and are heavy laden with burdens? What burden in life is too heavy for you to bear right now? What will you do with it?