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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Matthew 11:20-30

I. The Deepest Mysteries of our Faith

- A. Christianity a Mysterious Religion
- B. So Simple a Child Can Enter
- C. So Complex No Human Can Fathom It
- D. Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Mystery
- E. BUT We Can and Should Go as Far as Scripture Goes

II. Overview: Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

- A. Christ Denounces Unrepentant Cities (vs. 20-24)
- B. Christ Praises God for Sovereignty (vs. 25-27)
- C. Christ Invites All Burdened Sinners to Come to Him (vs. 28-30)

Start and finish of this text: human responsibility

Center of this text: Divine sovereignty

Perfect blending together in text... no controversy, no confusion, no cacophany

D. Human Responsibility

1. Korazin and Bethsaida responsible for their unrepentance

- a. Matthew tells us Jesus denounced them for unrepentance (vs. 20)
- b. Jesus pronounces “woe!!”... the strongest word of condemnation

c. Jesus says their judgment is greater because of the miracles they saw and yet did not repent

2. Jesus appeals to all sinners to come

a. the appeal is genuine, so is the invitation

b. sinful humans called upon to repent, to turn

c. appeal is gentle and loving... sinners being enticed

E. Divine Sovereignty

1. Divine Power: Christ's Miracles

Matthew 11:20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

2. Divine Perception: Supernatural Knowledge of Gentile Cities

vs. 21 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.

vs. 23 If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

3. Divine Prerogative: NOT to Do Miracles There

Christ was in Tyre and Sidon, and chose not to do those same miracles there. This was His choice, His prerogative, and He exercised it.

4. Divine Praise: Christ Praises Father for Sovereignty

vs. 25 "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

5. Divine Position: Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth

vs. 25 "Father, Lord of heaven and earth..."

6. Divine Preference: Concealing to Some, Revealing to Others

vs. 25 "I praise you... because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."

7. Divine Pleasure: All Things Done According to God's Pleasure

vs. 26 *“Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”*

8. Divine Presentation: Father Commits the Universe to the Son

vs. 27 *“All things have been committed to me by my Father.”*

9. Divine Privacy: No One Knows the Father or the Son

vs. 27 *“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son...”*

10. Divine Privilege: The Son Chooses to Reveal the Father to Some

vs. 27 *“...no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*

III. Woe to Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (vs. 20-24)

vs. 20-24 *Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”*

A. Word of Judgment: WOE!!!

1. “Denounce” = strong word of rejection
2. Woe = word of condemnation... the direst warning God can give
3. Clearly speaks of judgment coming on all these cities, including Tyre, Sidon

Says that Capernaum will be thrown down to hell!!

4. Grace from God: to tell sinners when judgment is coming
 - God doesn’t owe sinners anything
 - God doesn’t owe sinners a warning... certainly not many and specific warnings!
 - God is gracious, drawing sinners to repentance
5. What cities? Korazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum

- a. Jewish cities, north of the Sea of Galilee
- b. they were all about 2-3 miles from each other, clustered together
- c. constituted Jesus' **home base**... he did **more miracles** there than anywhere else
- d. Bethsaida: the home of Philip, Andrew, and Peter
 - here Jesus healed many people, including a blind man by spitting on his eyes
 - near here he walked on the water
 - near here he fed the 5000
- e. Chorazin: almost nothing is known about it... a tiny Jewish village which would have sunk back into the dust and been forgotten long ago were it not for this reference
- f. Capernaum:
 - Jesus' home town in the years of His ministry (Matthew 4:13)
 - performed more **miracles**, preached more **sermons** there
 - healed demon-possessed man in synagogue (Mark 1:21)
 - healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8)
 - healed huge crowds of people that thronged to him (Matthew 8)
 - healed centurion's servant (Matthew 8)
 - healed a Royal official's son (John 4)
 - healed paralyzed man who had been let down through the roof; linked it specifically to the forgiveness of sins

With all these healings, Jesus preached powerfully His central message:

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

With the last healing I mentioned, He clearly proclaimed that He had the authority to forgive sins:

***Matthew 9:6-8 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...."
Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." 7 And the man got up and***

went home. 8 When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

The preaching, combined with the clear demonstration of power, left Capernaum no room for doubt... there was nothing left to do but repent in droves, in large numbers... to fall down weeping before God and confess their sins, renouncing them, and living for the glory of God

There was nothing left to do but embrace Christ as Savior, and follow Him as Lord

But what did they do??? NOTHING... NOTHING AT ALL!!!

B. Cause of Judgment: Failure to Repent... INDIFFERENCE

vs. 20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

1. Root cause: sin... opportunities to repent not taken
2. Resultant sin: indifference to Jesus
3. No record of strong opposition to Jesus in these cities
4. People just marveled, talked about it, shrugged and went about their business

Matthew 22:1-5 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' 5 "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business.

Luke 14:16-20 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' 18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' 20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

Indifference!!! The world's most common reaction to Christ

Not hostility, not persecution, not indignation, not wrath and rebellion

Simple indifference. "I'm too busy to do anything about all that right now... I just started a new business" or "I'm into my classes at school" or "The big game's coming up" or "I just met the most wonderful girl!" or "My wife just gave birth to our first child" or "I'm too stressed out right now to think about all that"

Indifference. The world gives scant attention... Jesus gets His ten minutes of fame, then its back to business as usual

Indifference is the scourge of the gospel... it will condemn more people than any other response to the message... it will continue to the end of the world

Matthew 24:37-39 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

People will be living their lives as normal right up until the moment the judgment sweeps them away

C. Increase of Judgment: Failure to Repent in Face of Miracles

1. The Judgment on Bethsaida, Korazim, and Capernaum is greater because of greater revelation
2. Vital Principle: the greater revelation of God you have received, the greater your responsibility
3. Jewish cities: had all the privilege of Jews everywhere
 - written word of God: the Law, the Prophets, and the writings
 - heritage and history of God's powerful dealings
 - Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
 - Great kings: David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah
 - One prophet after another, culminating in John the Baptist
4. More than that: specific revelation of miraculous power such as never had been seen before or since... a river of miracles

Clearly, Jesus links miracles to repentance

Miracles were given to display Kingdom power and to reveal forgiveness of sins

Miracles intended to produce 1) repentance 2) personal faith in Christ

John 4:48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."

John 3:2 [Nicodemus] came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

John 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

To reject this astonishing evidence was the greatest possible sin.

5. More than that: greatest preaching ever heard in history

John 7:46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

Yet, for all of that, they were indifferent! They couldn't care less!! They **did not repent!!!** Their sins were dearer to them than the Kingdom of Heaven

D. Comparison of Judgment: Gentile Cities

21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! 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. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

1. Amazing!! They were WORSE than the WORST Gentile Cities

- a. If Tyre and Sidon had had these miracles, they would have repented

In Old Testament, Tyre a by-word and symbol of Gentile wickedness... Tyre a merchant city with a great seaport... a symbol of Gentile prosperity and commerce

Early on, in the reigns of David and Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre a friend to Israel...sending cedar logs to build the temple with

BUT when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Tyre exulted and celebrated... the prophet Ezekiel picks up this theme in Ezekiel 26; in Ezekiel 27, the wicked prosperity of Tyre is described, but by Ezekiel 28, the "King of Tyre" is actually Satan Himself... the guardian cherub, radiant in Eden with glorious beauty, until wickedness was found in him

AMAZING!! Jesus is saying that even this prosperous, demonic, pagan city would have repented long ago in sack cloth and ashes!

- b. If even wicked, perverted Sodom had seen these miracles, they would have remained until that day!!!

Sodom was the by-word in Israel for a wicked, pagan city

Sodom the place of homosexual perversion such as the world has never seen since

Not even ten righteous people could be found in that great city

The wrath of God poured down fire and brimstone on that wicked city

BUT: if Jesus had come and performed those miracles in Sodom... it would still be here!!

2. Vital Principle: the greater revelation of God you have received, the greater your responsibility

Luke 12:47-48 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

- a. not everyone will receive the same punishment on Judgment Day!
- b. "more tolerable on the day of judgment" shows this

Illus. Dante's *Inferno*: "Circles of hell"

- c. punishment directly proportional to the amount of revelation God gave
- d. YET don't misunderstand... no "innocent pagans"

Tyre and Sidon would have **REPENTED** long ago IN SACK CLOTH AND ASHES

Clearly they had committed grave sins, and deserved great wrath and judgment

BUT STILL... their punishment will be less than that of Israel

3. What About INDIFFERENT and sinful America??
 - a. more Bibles than any other nation in history
 - b. more faithful preachers of the word
 - c. more resources of God's truth
 - d. more revivals, more missionaries
 - e. more radio and TV broadcasts
 - f. more publishers, Christian book stores, seminaries
 - g. more evangelists

How much has God lavished on this nation?

How great will our judgment be if we don't repent

IV. Why Didn't Christ Save Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom?

Disturbing Question: Why Didn't Christ Do These Miracles in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom?

A. Divine Perception: Supernatural Knowledge of "What Might Have Been"

1. Amazing!! Only God Can Know This!

Illus. "Alternate history"... authors constantly writing what would have happened if Hitler had done this or not done that... we may wonder "Suppose I hadn't made that wrong turn?"

Suppose Hitler had never invaded Russia... suppose he had fully funded the atomic bomb research project his scientists were working on...

Illus. "It's a Wonderful Life"... what the world would have been like without George Bailey

For us, this is all speculation...we don't know for sure

BUT Christ does!!

- a. Gentile cities, filled with totally different worldview
- b. Christ knows their hearts completely

B. Doctrine: Exhaustive Knowledge of God

1. Knows all the past: what actually was

Amazing: Sodom was destroyed 2000 years and more before Christ... but He knows their hearts completely

- 2. Knows all the present: what is actually taking place today
- 3. Knows all the future: what actually will happen

God's omniscience searches out all the secret things in the universe: the thoughts and dreams of people, the darting of tiny fish in a tropical sea, the precise number of stars in our galaxy, the number of steps you walk in a day, week, month, year. Nothing is hidden from God!

4. BUT also knows all the possibilities: what would have happened if

Christ says, "If I had traveled the thirty-five miles up the road to Tyre, and done these same miracles there I did in you, O Korzin and Bethsaida, they would have repented spectacularly. They would have repented even more dramatically than Nineveh did when Jonah preached to them."

B. BUT Christ Chose NOT TO Do Those Miracles. WHY??

C. Eliminating Reasons

1. Not because it was too far to go

It was only thirty-five miles from Capernaum to Tyre, and the road was well-traveled

Christ went there!!! Matthew 15

2. Not because it would not have succeeded

We already covered that! Christ says the gospel would have succeeded there spectacularly

3. Not because Christ lacked power to do miracles in a Gentile country

In Matthew 15, Christ healed a Gentile woman's demon-possessed daughter with a mere word

4. Not because He has no concern for Tyre and Sidon

God's plan and concern extended to the ends of the earth, and definitely includes the Gentiles

Isaiah 49:6 "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

After Pentecost, the gospel was preached in Tyre and Sidon and churches were planted there

D. Why Christ Did Not Do These Miracles There

1. His Sovereign Will

2. His Sovereign Plan: "To the Jew FIRST, then to the Gentile"

Matthew 15:21-28 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

E. Implications

Common view of God: God loves everyone on earth the exact same way, and gives to everyone the same opportunities for heaven

God does everything He can to save every single individual sinner

BUT: This text shows very clearly there was something Christ COULD HAVE DONE to save sinners in Tyre and Sidon, but He didn't

- God dispenses Gospel miracles and proclamation as He sees fit, and is willing to allow Sodom, Tyre, Sidon to sink into judgment
- God does not do everything He can to save every single sinner and bring them into the Kingdom... Christ held back from doing miracles He could have done
- He does some things for some sinners that He does not do for others... Christ did some miracles in Korazin

God is sovereign over salvation

He doesn't owe it to Sodom... He doesn't owe it to Tyre... He doesn't owe it to Sidon... He doesn't owe it to Korazin, Bethsaida or Capernaum

He certainly doesn't owe it to America

If anyone gets saved, its by the mere pleasure and sovereign grace of God!!

We'll talk more about God's sovereignty next week, God willing

V. Applications

A. Embrace and Delight in God's Sovereign Rule

B. Thank God for Your Salvation

1. If you are saved today, it's because of the sovereign grace of God
2. Nothing you or I did could ever merit it

C. Pray and Lament for Wealthy America

1. The more we know the more we're accountable for
2. Pray for our saturated country

D. Be Careful Not to Presume on God

"If God doesn't destroy America soon, He'll owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology!"

Blasphemy!! God will never owe Sodom and Gomorrah anything. It's true that if Christ had showed up in their streets with the same miracle-working power He displayed in Capernaum, they would still be here... many who sank into hell that day would have repented and would be in heaven now

God didn't owe it to them, and he doesn't owe it to us!

E. Repent While There is Time

God also doesn't owe us one more day to repent...

"If today you hear His voice, don't harden your heart"

Are you coldly indifferent to the things of God?

1. Sackcloth and ashes: symbols of genuine repentance from sin
2. Do you have sin in your life?

F. Come to Christ

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."