

## Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the joy of knowing You; for the pleasure of finding You in others and the happiness we can find by living our lives according to Your will. Remind us of this when we feel low, and that even though our own love falters, Yours does not, and we are loved for eternity. We praise You for this great assurance, and pray that we may never lose sight of it or forget it through ignorance. Thank You Lord Jesus; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Internet Church

*Pray today for the internet itself and its development. As more and more people use it for every kind of activity both good and evil, ask the Lord to help His people to use it for good.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for important elections around the world, notably in the USA*
- *Pray about the growing divisions between countries in our world*
- *Give thanks for friendship*

## Meditation

Simplicity is;

The love of God which has made the world;  
The passion of Christ for people everywhere;  
The work of the Spirit in the believer's heart;  
The Gospel commission to save the world;  
The example of Jesus to heed the poor;  
The Word of God correcting all error;  
The life of the Church which testifies to Faith;  
The beauty of worship which lifts up the soul;  
The joy of a life lived for God and for others;  
The defeat of Satan before Christ on the Cross;  
And the promise of eternal life with our Lord in Glory!

God's truth is simplicity itself.

## Bible Study - Matthew 11:20-24

<sup>20</sup> Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his works of power had been done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> 'Shame on you, Chorazin! Shame on you, Bethsaida! If the works of power done in you had been in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long since, in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> However, I tell you it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the Day of Judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will not you be lifted up to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades! For if the works of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. <sup>24</sup> And now I tell you it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for you.'

## Review

Something was happening in Jesus' ministry. He was about to move on from the first phase of His work and intended to travel further on. Up to this point in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had moved around the small area of northern Galilean towns, drawing astonished crowds (9:8) and gathering a name for Himself as a preacher and healer (7:28,29; 9:8 etc.). The Pharisees had begun to object to His teaching (9:34), but the people of the region seemed fascinated. So what was the problem that made Jesus speak about these towns in a very different way, turning on them and speaking about the inadequacy of their response to the Gospel! Jesus could have moved on in His ministry by simply going away and taking the disciples with Him, but He chose not to do this before He explained that He had been rejected. In a small way, Jesus' feelings about rejection in His own home territory mirrors what we will hear from Him later in the Gospel when He becomes heartbroken at the rejection He receives from God's people as a whole (see Matt 23 etc.)

Jesus had made the northern Galilean town of Capernaum his home and the base for the initial phase of His ministry. His first preaching was done there (4:12-17). Bethsaida was three miles from Capernaum, and Chorazin was thought to be two miles away (although this is a little uncertain, and the location of the town is something of a mystery). So why did Jesus speak about them as He did? He denounced Bethsaida and Chorazin because their response to the Gospel was less than adequate. Strangely, He then compared them with what He might have expected from two wealthy cities, Tyre and Sidon, frequently chastised in the Old Testament for their prosperity and arrogance (see Jer. 47:4; Joel 3:4 etc); there seems little point in the comparison except that it served to slight the cities of Galilee! Jesus then chastised Capernaum, using a quote from Isaiah 14:4f. which refers to the King of Babylon. This passage of scripture was used in Jesus' day to identify Babylon as Satan, the Prince of Evil! Jesus said that His home town would fare worse at the last judgement than Sodom, the Old Testament epitome of sexual sin and rebellion (Genesis 19)!

This was an extraordinary outburst. Up to now we have had no idea that Jesus was dissatisfied with His reception in these places. It may be, however, that although the crowds followed Jesus and were amazed at his teaching, his deeds of healing and deliverance had changed individuals but not had any substantial effect on the community life of the towns themselves. Moreover, Jesus had certainly preached repentance, and this had been heard, taught and discussed; but there was little evidence of substantial social change. Society as a whole had not responded to Jesus' preaching or His works, and so He pointed this out in this direct and challenging way.

Jesus when He felt it necessary to cut through the pleasantries of home and hospitality to speak directly about truth of the situation. The people of these towns listened to Jesus and accepted His ministry of healing; but without responding to the Messiah's call, they needed to know that the time available to them to make up their minds about what they were witnessing was limited. God's judgement was not far away.

Even today, we ask the question; 'Why do people hear what is said and accept it, but do nothing to respond to it or let it change their lives?' When we have heard a great preacher or a listened to a compelling sermon which has explained the truth of the Gospel, we will sometimes respond ourselves but be genuinely confused about why so few other people respond to the message. There are times when I have heard a message inspired by the Spirit, which clearly calls on God's people to respond; and yet people who are otherwise known as godly folk within a community simply remain where they are and do nothing when the appeal is made to take up God's call. It is as if people have decided beforehand that they will allow nothing to change their minds or move them to do anything other than what they know. IN this case, we are like the cities of Galilee; we have seen and heard the

Messiah, and we have brought or sick to Him for healing and we love to hear Him speak, but we will not let Him change our lives utterly, become His disciples or enter the Kingdom.

I am not the only person to feel like this, especially in the West; where people appear to have the ability to carry on with life as if the sharp questions of faith can be dealt with whenever people think they have time. However, Jesus' message is that God's judgement is soon coming on us all, and we need to burst out of our shells and respond in faith to God's Spirit, and follow Jesus wherever He will lead us! Will we 'stay in the towns of Galilee' or will we move on with Jesus? This passage of scripture may be startling, but Jesus has made it very clear where the real future lies for the real disciple!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Why are people generally unwilling to make specific responses to the Gospel call when it is made in a sermon?
2. What are the equivalent of the 'cities of Galilee' today, and where does Jesus call us to go?
3. Share in your group those instances in your life when you have responded to a specific call to follow Jesus in some way.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This passage of scripture is rather dour, and yet the challenge it presents us with cuts to the heart of the way the Gospel is received and heard in our own times. There needs to be a change of heart within many churches, a change of 'spirit', to which we respond in faith. God needs people who will respond to His call unreservedly so that His will may be done.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Take the opportunity to find out as much as you can about the cities of the Galilean region in Jesus' day. You can find information in Bible dictionaries or the internet. This will help you understand more about the background to this story.*
- *Find someone who is a preacher and discuss with them the problem of challenging people to make a specific response to the Gospel.*

## Final Prayer

I love You, Lord; for Your love is the power of the Universe and it shines as fiercely as the sun. May it shine on me as well; and even when I am uncertain or troubled, when I feel ill or in distress, and when I have been hurt by someone else, Your love helps make sense of my world. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN