

Prayers

To God

Bless the Lord in silence. Then, if you have a 'tongue', use it; if not, praise the Lord for His greatness in words or in song

For myself

Offer to the Lord your concerns about those who cause you hurt. Do your best to forgive, knowing that forgiveness does not always change other people, but it can open up the pathway to your own healing.

For others

Father God, You have created this world and You love everything You have created. Forgive us for making a mess of this planet, and forgive us for our frequent failure to use our gifts of knowledge and intelligence in looking after it properly. Reveal the works of the enemy in our midst, so that we deal with the evils that threaten life as we know it, and all our future hopes. Give us courage to place our trust in You, and in Your plans for our future. AMEN

Meditation

When you are hard pressed by adversity,
Look to the hills, and see Your Lord
Coming from the horizons of eternity
To help and save and bless and heal.

When you are stuck in the quagmires of life,
Look to the Word, and discover within
The liberating work of Almighty God
Who works for good throughout the ages.

When you are worried by the mystery of relationships,
Look to the Cross, and be humbled
By the love which passes understanding
And breaks down all human barriers.

When you are disturbed by sins of the Church,
Look to the Spirit of Christ within you
For His presence will guide His people
To repent, and pursue all righteousness.

Then, when Satan's wiles have danced awhile,
Look to the path of faith you have trod
And know that for sure, for now, forever
That in Christ, you are eternally secure.

Bible Passage

Luke 10:13-16

¹³ ***"Listen, Chorazin and Bethsaida; how awful for you! For if the works of power done for you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, and showing this by wearing sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ Yet at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ As for you, Capernaum, will you be raised up as high as heaven? No, you will fall down to Hades.***

- ¹⁶ ***"Whoever listens to you listens to me,***
- ***whoever rejects you rejects me,***
- ***and whoever rejects me rejects the One who sent me."***

Review

The passage for reading today is relatively short. I have divided the studies like this because by having a short passage today, the rest of Luke 10 breaks down into understandable and logical sections. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for us to dwell on this short and telling speech of Jesus. At the close of yesterday's passage, we read about how Jesus told His disciples to turn away from towns that had rejected the Gospel message, and *'wipe off the dust that clings to (your) feet'* (10:11). He wanted His disciples to make this harsh but necessary judgement, and it would have eternal consequences (10:12).

To begin with, this part of scripture is remarkable because Jesus speaks of towns rather than people as judged for their response to the Gospel. We might protest that Jesus surely wanted to save individuals and surely, people should not fall from grace merely because of the towns in which they live? Certainly, God loves individuals, and Abraham's attempt to barter with God over the saving of individuals in Sodom (Genesis 18), demonstrates the point. However both this Old Testament passage and our reading today warn us that people can often react according to their natural groups, or common identity. We can see evidence of this today when we reflect on how the Gospel is received either well or badly within different cultures or even different regions of a state or city. The Lord wants our individual response, but too often, all we offer Him is a response conditioned by the life we already lead, based on our 'race', our town, our nationality, our age, or any one of the social markers by which we identify ourselves.

As we have discovered in recent studies, Jesus was turning His back on the Galilean ministry he had so far performed, and setting His face to go to Jerusalem. In the emotion of this, Luke reports that Jesus was shocked because the *'works of power'* (10:13) He had done in the two towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida had not resulted in repentance. Jesus did not perform miracles to draw crowds; He did them to lead people to repentance so they might be drawn into God's Kingdom. But in these places, people saw and heard but did not respond.

How little we know of Jesus' Galilean ministry! From the Gospel records we know about Jesus' life in Capernaum, but we know nothing about the work He did in Chorazin and Bethsaida! Still, this is not the only place where the Gospels report that Jesus was astonished at the resistance of the Jews to the Gospel. He had done so much for them,

including healing the sick and showing them God's love in remarkable ways. Yet He thought that the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon would have fared better in God's judgement (10:14)! These cities were centres of trade on the coast to the north of Israel, and they were known as places of loose morals, wickedness and evil. The prophets of old had called down judgement on these places (Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26-28), but perhaps Jesus' work would have been received there?

We know more about what happened in Capernaum. Jesus had made His home there (Matt 4:13), and attended its synagogue (Mark 1:21). It was where a centurion came seeking the healing of his son (Matt 8:5), where people of faith brought a paralysed man to Him (Mark 2:1f.), and so much more (Mark 4:31f.). Yet Jesus had spotted a terrible weakness. The citizens were proud of their city, or as Jesus reports here, they '*raised (it) up as high as heaven*' (10:15), and this pride was their downfall. Their self-centeredness and self sufficiency was a barrier to God's love, so they had chosen a tragic end. To this day, the city is deserted.

Turning His back on these cities, Jesus identified with His disciples, for they would be the future of His mission. They would take the work of God beyond the borders of Israel to the whole world, a theme that will emerge more and more from Luke's great writing. Here, we find it in the powerful saying found in verse 16, given as Jesus turns to those with Him and identifies with His disciples. This is not the only place in scripture where Jesus speaks of the close connections He has with the disciples (Matthew 10:40, John 13:20).

Jesus states adamantly that His disciples speak for Him; he says, '*whoever listens to you listens to me*'. They must accept that what they do on mission they do with Christ's powerful authority, and this is the only way that they will gain the response God wants, which is people's repentance. This is only the first part of the saying, however, and Jesus continues in a similar way but speaking about rejection. Jesus said, '*whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the One who sent me*' (10:16). Now from Jesus' perspective, He was still commissioning the disciples. But from the perspective of the disciples, this saying means that if their work is rejected then Jesus and God are rejected! Their task is of immense importance for the world!

So Jesus' disciples are called to great obedience, and they also bear great authority and responsibility. There will be no opportunity for anyone to repent if the Gospel is not preached by the disciples, or if they do not heal the sick or set captives free! To this day, the work of Jesus' disciples continues, though I sometimes wonder whether some who attend church on Sundays do so to feed their own spiritual needs rather than for the sake of engaging with God's will and His desire to save the world. Unless the Gospel mission is taken seriously we end up promoting the rejection of God.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V13 '*Listen, Chorazin and Bethsaida; how awful for you!*'

Other translations:

'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!' (NIV)

'How terrible it will be for you, Chorazin! How terrible it will be for you Bethsaida!' (CEB)

The Greek says exactly what the NIV says, but the reason why I, together with a number of other translators, offer a different translation is this. The Greek

here is undoubtedly colloquial, and people do not speak in this way today. There are many places in the Bible where we have to translate colloquial phrases differently, and I believe this is one of them. My translation captures the sense of the ancient word 'woe', which is a not prophetic word of doom but an expression of heartfelt regret at coming tragedy.

V13 'and shown this by wearing sackcloth and ashes'

Other translations:

'sitting in sackcloth and ashes' (NIV)

'they would have sat around in funeral clothes and ashes' (NRSV)

Again, some of the Greek language here refers to practices of mourning that are unknown today. We do not 'sit in sackcloth and ashes' today or even understand what this meant for those who once did it. The translator has the job of trying to make this sensible to people today, and I have chosen to do this by expanding the meaning of the particle that connects this with the previous sentence. The phrase *'and shown this by ...'* confirms to the reader that this strange action of wearing sackcloth and ashes is the result of true repentance.

Further Comments

Jesus' judgement on Galilee (10:14)

As Jesus began to think about the end of His life in Jerusalem, themes of judgement became more prominent in His teaching and ministry. That was natural. For Jesus, the things of heaven were very close and he could see the consequences of everything He was involved in. How hard it must have been for Him to leave the towns and cities of Galilee, which were a major population centre in those days containing probably the largest concentration of Jews outside of Jerusalem and Judea. This was Jesus' home area, but He had to leave it to pursue God's call. He did so believing that His mission had not had the impact hoped for, He had been rejected in the major towns and cities, and the people there had by and large, not turned to God, even if they had appreciated the healing and deliverance ministry He performed amongst them.

Nevertheless, by commissioning the disciples, Jesus was planning ahead beyond His death in Jerusalem, and while he remained with them He trained them and taught them. There is some evidence that the Galilee region was one of the first regions outside Jerusalem to be evangelised by some of the disciples after the resurrection. Indeed, Matthew reports that Jesus instructed the disciples to go there when He rose.

Jesus' heartbreak at Galilee when He went to Jerusalem did not reflect God's final word on the region.

Gentiles responding to the message of God

In this passage, Jesus says that it was more likely the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon would repent than the Jewish towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida. This sounds like a tough judgement. But Jesus was justified in His assessment. The Bible is full of stories in which God speaks not just to His own people, but to other nations and cities, and sometimes, they respond. In Old Testament times, the prophet Jonah was shocked to discover that God wanted him to preach to the Gentile city of Nineveh, and ran away (Jonah 1,2). When he was brought to his senses, he did what God required and to his utter disgust, the citizens of Nineveh repented and turned to God (Jonah 3f.). Jonah was beside himself with upset, for at the time, the people of Israel were embroiled in the evils of their rebellious kings (2 Kings 14:23-29).

The New Testament Gospel starts with the Jews but is ultimately for all people, and it calls for the same response of repentance from all who hear it. The apostle Peter was first led to take the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10), and he was followed quickly by the apostle Paul, who eventually made it his life's work to 'take the Gospel to the Gentiles, with much success (Acts 18,19).

Discipleship

Application

Let us be careful we give the Lord our personal response, not a conditioned one

This passage gives a warning that people of whole towns face judgement because they have not responded to God's Word, and this can happen today. We should therefore make sure we respond to our Lord outside the 'box' of our culture, our locality or our homes.

If we have heard about the faith from our parents or from the people we socialise with or because our families go to church, then while giving supreme thanks for these things, they cannot be the props of faith. Neither should we imagine that cultural issues in our worship of God, such as music, the use of speech, art and much more are anything more than that; faith cannot be allowed to depend on them or our opinion of them. If our response to God is conditioned by such things together with any other likes and dislikes, cultural niceties or family norms, then we are in danger of wandering from the narrow pathway. The Lord God wants to know how we respond to Him and to His love, and everything else is secondary. Once this is clear, our relationship with God can be built as He intends, not as our culture intends, as our feelings dictate, as our church or social group expects, or as our friends prefer. There is nothing wrong with culture, church, family, friends and feelings, but ultimately, they do not contribute to the heart of our relationship with God, and we had better grasp that fact firmly. We are saved by the pure grace of God, and our faith is in this alone.

Works of power are for repentance and not for show

Some reckon that the reason Jesus did miracles was to draw attention to Himself as the Messiah. However, Jesus specifically rejected this idea during the temptations in the wilderness, when He told the devil, '*do not put the Lord your God to the test*' (Matthew 4:7f.). As is plain from this passage, Jesus believed He did miracles and works of power so that people might repent, that is, that they might change their ways and turn to God. He also did miracles in order to show the love and compassion of God.

We must therefore make this our objective when seeking to do works of power. For example, a healing miracle is of course a wonderful sign, to be sought not just because it brings physical health, but because it gives the healed person a chance to change, to repent, to turn to God in thanks for the grace He has shown, and to move on.

Now we cannot prejudge the opinions and expectations of those who come for healing when they barely know about God's power to heal through Jesus. However in the light of this teaching, when Christians in church queue up for healing ministry, they should perhaps be as much ready to repent as to be healed. Of course, a miraculous healing is completed when a physical problem is dealt with and the individual is made well again, and able therefore to turn again and do God's perfect will.

Accepting Jesus' authority, the authority to speak for Him

Many would prefer if we did not have authority to speak for Christ. But I find nowhere in Scripture that suggests there may be some Christians who do not have an important role in the proclamation of the Gospel. Nearly every person speaks or communicates, almost

everyone drives a car out of necessity, and nearly all people access the internet nowadays if they want to take part in the world of today. All of us do many things not because we want to but because, put simply, everyone does and everyone benefits.

Why then do we allow people the luxury of saying something like this; 'I am not good with words, so God does not use me to proclaim the Gospel, and my role is to just make cakes and clean rooms; that's where I know I can make an effective contribution.' In truth, being church is not about making contributions according to our preferences. Church is about all God's people doing His will, whatever He requires in any time and place. Moreover, He has given us the authority to do this effectively, so let us not stand back from it with false humility.

Ideas for what to do

- Where do you live? In a town or village or city? To what extent is your own identity caught up with home region or area? Has this affected your faith in any way? If you find it hard to imagine that this is the case, then use the internet to explore how people of different parts of the world organise their churches and practice worship.
- Ask who is preaching the Gospel to the people of your part of the world and how? Is this done inside church or outside of it? Who is doing this with serious integrity? Do your best to explore as the Lord leads

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you know of places where the Gospel cannot be preached because it is unwelcome? Why is this the case? Why is the Gospel effective in some places and not in others?
2. Do you feel that you represent God at any time in your Christian life and ministry? If not, why not?
3. When Jesus says these words '*whoever listens to you listens to me*', what does this make you feel?

Final Prayer

Jesus, You have asked us to do great things, and we feel unworthy. Bless us with the courage, the determination, the steadfastness and the endurance to preach the Gospel effectively in our own lands we pray, and may the message of Your love and grace come to the whole world, soon. **AMEN**
