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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 9, 2014  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 3:22-23; Passion: Upper Room  
Hymns: 390; 141; 367; 50:2; (245:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mathew 11:20-24

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our glorious Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Offended by Jesus.

This was one of the temptations that the disciples had to face, a temptation that overwhelmed them all. They had struggled with the

core truth of Jesus' mission; that He had to go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of His enemies and be turned over to the Gentiles and be crucified. Even though Jesus had clearly taught this truth, along with the marvelous truth that on the third day He would rise again, they still could not understand, or would not understand the necessity of His death. They still thought it was necessary for Jesus to live and NOT die.

So it was that others also had their “hang-ups” with Jesus. Most of the people of the Jews were looking for a different kind of Savior. Some wanted a Savior who was more glorious, who had a more distinguished family background, not the son of a carpenter. Others wanted a Savior who would free them from the tyranny of Rome, not the tyranny of sin. Still others wanted a Savior who would not only restore glory to the nation of Israel, but make life easy, and free of problems, providing them bread the way Moses had in the wilderness. Worldly notions and temporal considerations were allowed by the people to get in the way of –

### **THEME: Acknowledging God's Grace in Christ.**

What Jesus makes abundantly clear is--

#### **I. The Disaster of Rejecting Christ.**

**Matthew 11:20** “He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.”

Jesus singled out Capernaum and the cities near Capernaum, saying:

**Matthew 11: 21** “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!”

Great judgment would befall these cities because they had rejected Jesus as Lord and Savior. These were the cities that knew Jesus the best, had heard Him the most, had witnessed many miracles, many more than those recorded in the gospels. And yet they wanted nothing to do with Jesus beyond making this life easier, beyond healing their sick.

It is hard for us to imagine this, isn't it? I mean wouldn't you have loved to hear Jesus preach? Wouldn't it be wonderful not only to read about His miracles, but to actually have witnessed how He had raised the dead, how He had healed the sick, how He had fed the 5000, or stilled the storm. These people had witnessed many of these signs and wonders, which gave them ample evidence to know and believe that this Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God who had come into the world to be all that He told them He was, the one who brought to them the kingdom of God. He was the one that preached repentance and the announced to them the forgiveness of sins that was to be found in Him. But they rejected Him, and so Jesus warned them of the tragedy this would bring in the judgment to come.

Jesus emphasized this point by calling into remembrance the evil cities of the heathen, cities that suffered judgment because of their great wickedness. We all know how Sodom and Gomorrah had been destroyed by fire and brimstone, in spite of Abraham's intercession for them, because not even ten righteous could be found in these wicked cities. He went on to pronounce that Tyre and Sidon, two wicked and spiritually arrogant cities of Phoenicia upon whom the prophets had declared the judgment of God, would have repented if they had seen what the people of Bethsaida and Chorazin had seen. Directing attention to these wicked, heathen cities, Jesus proclaims that it will be better for them on the Day of Judgment than it will be for Capernaum, or Bethsaida and Chorazin.

We need to be careful that we don't try to turn the Lord's lesson upside down. God had granted grace to Tyre and Sidon, Jesus Himself preached in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. So also grace was revealed to the ancient wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. One should recall that Sodom and Gomorrah had the testimony of Abraham who had rescued them from their enemies, as well as the living testimony of Lot and his family who had moved there and lived among them. Tyre and Sidon had also received the message of the Lord through the prophets, and had seen how their neighbors had been blessed by the one true God. These cities had been dealt with graciously. These ancient cities had not however had the special measure of grace that Capernaum and Bethsaida and

Chorazin had experienced with the very presence of the Lord of Glory, the Savior of the world being right in their midst.

Those heathen cities had not witnessed the miracles which the Lord had done the way the citizens of these Galilean towns had. This was indeed a special gift of grace that Jesus had spent so much time among them, and had taught them in their synagogues, and had healed so many of their sick. And still in the end they rejected Jesus. They did not want to look to Him for righteousness and life. They brought a disaster upon themselves that far surpassed any destruction by the hands of man, or even the fire and brimstone of God. These cities are nothing more than ruins in modern Israel, but the greatest disaster is yet to be seen, as they will stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment and hear the worst words of all, **“Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity”** (Luke 13:27). They will be sent away to the eternal prison house where **“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”** (Luke 13:28). This will befall them, not because this was the Lord’s will for them. **“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). No, this shall befall them because they turned away from the Lord and the grace which He revealed to them.

Now let us take a step back again to that wistful notion of how great it would have been if only, ... if only ... we could have been there, if only we could have heard and seen what they had heard and seen! Boy, did they ever have it good! They did have it good, but we have it even better! The Lord has given us every advantage, EVERY ADVANTAGE! We live in the time of fulfillment. It is easy for us to look back at the Lord’s passion and see how it fulfilled all that the Lord had foretold by the prophets. It is easy for us to open the Scriptures and read time and again the sermons of our Lord Jesus, and review time and again the miracles of the Lord and the lessons we are to learn from them. We have the divinely inspired record of the complete Word of God!

Every home is able to procure a Bible. It is no great cost! They are readily available. We have so many copies of the Bible in our home I don’t even know the number! This is a gift of grace. If we take the Word lightly, and neglect this great salvation which has been revealed to us, how shall it be for us on the Day of Judgment?

And that is a real danger because we are so caught up in things temporal; and social, and material. We want our ease every bit as much as the people of Galilee. And we are sorely tempted to tamper with the teaching of Holy Scripture as if they were the ideas and teachings of man. We are also tempted to modernize the Word, and bring the values of the Lord into step with the times. We are so sorely tempted that sadly many have fallen into temptation and have twisted the truth into something else that serves their social or political agenda.

Thank God that by His grace we have not been taken in by the spiritual delusions that have misled so many others. And yet even those who have fallen into sin and despair, it is not God's will that they should perish. It is still God's will that the sinner would see the error of His ways and turn away from his sin, and repent, and be saved (Jeremiah 26:3).

Repentance or impenitence; which shall the Lord find among our fellow countrymen? Which shall be found among us? During this Lenten season we pray for the Spirit's blessing upon us as we meditate upon Jesus' Passion that we might appreciate --

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## **II. The Blessing of the Grace Revealed to Us in Christ.**

This Lenten season we shall review all those marvelous events that reveal the wonder of Jesus' love. Our passion reading this morning took us back into the upper room, and we recalled how Jesus came to serve, washing the disciples feet, reminding us all how we need to be washed by the Savior, that we might have our sins washed away. In our next reading we will review how Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, a blessing we celebrate every month and more in our worship. And what a blessing of grace this is that came to us in the hours before Jesus capture and death. We will go to Gethsemane and hear His prayer, and how the Father's will for our salvation directed Jesus to go and meet His enemies, and how He willingly turned Himself over to them. In doing this Jesus not only looked out for the welfare of His disciples, but even reached out in mercy and healed the wound of His enemy caused by Peter's sword. Jesus was abused and reviled, and yet He did not revile in return (1 Peter 2:23). He heard the many false accusations leveled against Him, even as the Father placed the load of our sin upon

Jesus. He was scourged, and He was crucified, and He was forsaken by His Father in heaven. We know all this because it has been revealed to us by God in Holy Scripture, and the Holy Spirit has opened our hearts to believe.

And so what does all this mean to you? Is it of little importance in the busy-ness of daily life? If it isn't of little importance, does it appear that way to any who might be observing our lives? What does it all mean to us? It means that the grace of God in Christ has been visited upon us. It reveals the measure of the greatness of Christ's love for you and me, a love we do not deserve, that we could not deserve. It means that when we fall into sin and even shameful vice, the Lord is ready to hear our prayer, hear our confession, and grant us in His grace, full and free remission for all our sins. May we live to the praise and honor of this gracious Lord who is powerful to save.

**CONCLUSION: TLH 140:4-5**

“Grant that I Thy Passion view With repentant grieving,  
Nor Thee crucify anew By unholy living.  
How could I refuse to shun Every sinful pleasure,  
Since for Me God's only Son Suffered without measure?”

“If my sins give me alarm And my conscience grieve me  
Let Thy cross my fear disarm; Peace of conscience give me.  
Grant that I may trust in Thee And Thy holy Passion.  
If His Son so loveth me, God must have compassion.”

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.