

**God's Judgment and Justice**  
**Matthew 11:16—24**

In the last lesson we looked at the connection between John the Baptist and Elijah. Jesus said that John was Elijah...if they would accept John as him (Matthew 11:14). If Israel had accepted John as Elijah they would be accepting Jesus as Messiah since Elijah is to come before the Messiah and restore all things (Matthew 17:11). Jesus was confronting Israel with the decision to choose or reject Him as their Messiah.

First Coming	Second Coming
John the Baptist Malachi 3:1	Elijah Malachi 4:5
Jesus	Messiah

**Condemnation of the people** (verses 16—19)

The people of Israel rejected the testimony of John the Baptist and of Jesus. When John came, he did not come eating, drinking and rejoicing and he was reviled for doing so. Jesus, on the other hand, came eating and drinking and was condemned for doing that. Jesus explains that his disciples were eating and drinking because the bridegroom (Christ) was in their midst (Matthew 9:14—15). The important thing to take away from this is that when Israel rejected John and allowed him to be put to death that they were in effect rejecting Elijah. By doing this they were rejecting Jesus as their Messiah then demonstrated that rejection by eventually putting Him to death (Matthew 17:9—13).

Those in Israel who received Jesus as Messiah were called wise when Christ said that wisdom is justified of her children. The words spoken by Jesus came from God and were words of wisdom. Those who accept these words of truth are wise while those who don't are foolish. Those who do believe them are declaring these words of wisdom as true. It is only through the fear of the Lord that a man can become wise.

**Proverbs 9:10** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

**The fear of the Lord**

What is the fear of the Lord and does this term apply to the Church, the Body of Christ? I believe there are two senses in how this term is applied. The first is a fear of God stemming from what He will do to those who disobey His commands (2 Chronicles 19:8—10; Proverbs 1:22—33).

The second is a fear of God emanating from an understanding of the gulf between God's holiness, might and power and the frailties of man. This fear of God can be demonstrated by John's response to seeing the glorified Jesus Christ in heaven in Revelation 1. John was completely overtaken by the person of Jesus Christ in His majesty and awe. The same idea, on a lesser scale, can be imagined if you were to have an audience with the President of the United States. Your fear would not of one of condemnation or persecution but that of being overwhelmed to the point of being weak-kneed.

**Revelation 1:17** And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.

Our fear of the Lord comes out of our understanding of who He is and who we are. When we see God as John saw Him we too should see ourselves as prostrate before Him as dead men. We also realize that we will be judged for our works and God will be our Judge (2 Corinthians 5:9—15). Knowing all of our works will be reviewed should cause us to fear the Lord. This passage also has the idea of serving Him because of our reverent fear of Him.

An important point to remember is that we don't fear anything that does not pertain to us. Living in a northern climate I have no fear of going outside and stepping on a scorpion. I never even think about that happening. The same idea can be applied to how people think (or don't think) of God. If God is the furthest

thing from a person's mind then there will be no fear of God. How can they fear something that, from their standpoint, isn't even there? Only people who know God through Jesus Christ can have a fear of God.

Only those who fear God can have wisdom. The wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world are mutually exclusive (1 Corinthians 1:20—25; 3:18—19). So the believer is wise while the unbeliever is foolish even though the world will tell you otherwise. Going back to Matthew 11:19, wisdom belongs to the Righteous Remnant of Israel who have accepted the message of John the Baptist and have therefore accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

### **Denunciation of the rejecters (verses 20—24)**

We now get some insight into how God metes out justice and how He will judge men in the future. We also can see how far God's knowledge extends. The main reason for this section is as a condemnation for the cities that rejected Jesus as Messiah.

He first denounces Chorazin and Bethsaida, cities just north of the Sea of Galilee. He demonstrated His mighty power through miracles and wonders but yet the people rejected His testimony. It was hard for them to look past the fact the Jesus grew up as the son of Joseph and now they were to accept Him as their Messiah (Matthew 13:54—58). These mighty works were so powerful and convincing that if Tyre and Sidon had seen the same miracles they would have repented. This is a real slap in the face to Israel because Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities northwest of the Sea of Galilee on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in the land of the Philistines. The Jews hated Gentiles receiving any type of godly blessing (Luke 4:24—30). The same is said of the Jewish town of Capernaum and the evil Gentile city of Sodom.

### **Degrees of punishment**

Verse 22 is a demonstration of how God will judge the nations. Those cities that rejected the light given to them will be judged much more harshly than the pagan Gentile nations from whom the light was withheld. The cities that heard the gospel and rejected it will be held more accountable than the Gentile cities that have not heard.

We see this principle throughout Scripture. The Mosaic Law says an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth... (Exodus 21:23) meaning the punishment should fit the crime. Luke 12:47—48 say that the slave who knew his master's will but willfully ignored it will be given many lashes while the one who broke his command out of ignorance will be given few lashes (this is in line with the Mosaic Law as described in Leviticus 4). Israel was forgiven and given another chance when she put her Messiah to death (Luke 23:34). Other passages of Scripture that show degrees of punishment are John 9:35—41; 15:22—24; Revelation 20:12—13.

### **God's omniscience**

We can also see from this passage that God not only knows everything but that He knows what someone would do if circumstances had changed. In this case He knew that Tyre and Sidon would have repented and that Sodom would not have been destroyed if they had seen God's mighty works of power.

So why didn't Jesus go to Tyre and Sidon and do some works that would have caused them to believe? If you absolutely knew that your neighbor would put their faith in Jesus Christ if you would only knock on their door and share your faith with them would you do it? I'm guessing most would say yes. But yet Jesus withheld the Gospel from them and in so doing, some would say, condemned them to hell.

This is, however, consistent with His ministry. Israel needed to believe first and through Israel the Gentiles would be reached with the Gospel. This is made clear in Matthew 10 where Jesus limits the Disciples to bring the gospel only to Israel. Once Israel believes they will have the task of reaching the world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8).

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