

Christ is Risen – So What?  
Matthew 11:20-30

The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Because Jesus walked out of His tomb on the third day, we can be sure that He is Who He says He is – the promised Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God. This is not a matter of opinion, but of historical fact.

But Jesus' identity should have been obvious to everyone, even before His resurrection. For example, at the beginning of this chapter, messengers from John the Baptist came to make sure that Jesus really was the Messiah, that John hadn't made a terrible mistake. In response, Jesus pointed to His miracles of healing: "Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." By not only displaying obviously divine power, but by doing the works that the ancient prophets had foretold of the coming Messiah, Jesus left no room for doubt about Who He is.

So, how did the Galileans who saw those miracles react to Jesus? Oh, we know the religious leaders had already rejected Him – back in chapter 9, the Pharisees went so far as to insist that He was using the power of Satan to cast out demons. But what did the common people think of Him, the great multitudes who crowded around Him, filled with awe and wonder, hanging on His every word and seeking His healing touch?

Well, up to this point in His ministry, Jesus had made the city of Capernaum, which was located on the Sea of Galilee, His home base. That was the place where, for example, He had healed a paralytic simply by telling him to stand up and walk. But the end of chapter 9 goes on to say that Jesus went about in other cities and villages, which doubtless included such neighboring towns as Chorazin and Bethsaida.

So, we know the people of these towns had seen Jesus' undeniable power, the clear proof that He was the promised Messiah. Just like those of us standing on this side of the cross, they had the best of reasons to embrace His identity and to acknowledge His authority. But instead of saying that they would be blessed because of the things they had seen, Jesus said they would receive woe. In fact, Jesus said they would receive an even harsher judgment on the day of His return than the unbelieving cities of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom – and remember that, in the days of Abraham, Sodom was destroyed by fire from Heaven.

Why would Jesus say something so harsh? What had these people done that was so bad? Simply this: although they had the clearest evidence, the greatest reasons to believe in Jesus' identity, they refused to submit to His authority and obey His teachings. As verse 20 summarizes, "They repented not."

So, why not? Well, perhaps the cities to which Jesus compares them give us a clue. After all, Tyre and Sidon were the greatest trading cities of the ancient world, with their fleets of ships carrying goods all over the Mediterranean Sea. The prophets repeatedly condemned them for preferring wealth and wickedness to holiness and righteousness.

So, what about Sodom? Well, that ancient town was prosperous because of its agricultural wealth – Genesis chapter 13 tells us that the Jordan River valley where it was located was as well-watered as the land of Egypt in those days. But by Genesis chapter 19, all the men of Sodom had become so wicked and depraved that they demanded that Abraham's nephew Lot allow them to rape the two men who were his houseguests. The men of Sodom were thus just as devoted to fulfilling their sexual lusts as the

men of Tyre and Sidon were focused on making money. Like the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, none of them were willing to repent, to turn away from themselves and turn to the Lord.

But maybe there's another reason the people of Capernaum didn't want to repent. After all, in verse 23, Jesus mentions their expectation of being exalted to heaven. Perhaps, since Jesus had made His home there, they expected Him to shower royal favors on His friends once He ascended David's throne in Jerusalem. Maybe they were trusting in their familiarity with Jesus, even while they refused to obey His teachings or submit to His authority.

Okay, so what about us? Remember, we know even more about Jesus than did the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum, those who saw His miracles with their own eyes and heard His teachings with their own ears. For we know Jesus is not just a miracle-working prophet, and not just the royal Son of David. No, because He has walked out of His tomb, we know that He is the Lord, the Son of God. That means we also know that His teaching carries all the authority of the voice of God, and we know that He is coming again to judge everyone, the living and the dead, according to the standards of His absolute, unchanging truth.

But are we any more interested in true repentance than were the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, or Capernaum? Oh, sure, we crave Jesus' healing power and His generous providence the way they did. We might even be just as interested as they were in listening to what He has to say – but do we really want to obey Him? Do we really want every aspect of our lives to be governed by His Word?

Worse yet, do we ever catch ourselves relying on our proximity to Jesus – our knowledge about Him or our familiarity with His teaching? In other words, do we ever take pride in the fact that we are members of the Church, or that we attend worship regularly, or even that we have all our theological ducks in a row? Do we imagine that we are in good with God just because we've known Who Jesus is for years, ever since we were little kids going to Sunday School Easter egg hunts?

For remember, none of those things did Chorazin or Bethsaida or Capernaum any good. Just because they saw Jesus, just because they knew lots of things about Jesus, and just because they experienced many of His blessings didn't mean they were in a right relationship with Him. For there's just no way around it: neither greed nor lust nor pride are compatible in any way with Christian discipleship.

That's why, as Jesus invites us to come to Him, He specifically mentions taking His yoke upon ourselves. Now, in those days people used yokes to hitch oxen to carts or plows. But students also used the term to describe their relationship with their rabbis – taking on a rabbi's yoke meant coming under his authority and accepting his direction for both their studies and their way of life.

So, if we are to take the yoke of Christ on ourselves, if we are going to let Him be in complete control of our lives, we can't very well go on living for the pursuit of money or pleasure, like the men of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, right? And there's no room for the pride of the people of Capernaum if we're just pulling the wagon and Jesus is deciding what we're hauling and where we're taking it. No, true repentance, turning away from ourselves and completely submitting ourselves to the power and authority of Christ, requires nothing short of true obedience and humility.

This is why, in verse 25, Jesus says that true knowledge of Him comes, not to those who are puffed up with self-importance, not to those who think they are wise and have everything figured out, but to babes, to those who know how ignorant and helpless they really are. For as long as we're relying on our traditions or our reason or our experience to determine the will of God, as long as we're trying to figure out the direction of our lives on our own, we're never going to understand Jesus, let alone have Him guide our lives in the way they should go.

For, as He makes clear in verse 27, the only people who truly know God are those who truly know Jesus. And the only ones who really know Jesus are those to whom Jesus has chosen to reveal the Father. That means that Jesus is completely in charge, not only of the blessings that come our way, and not only the daily direction of our lives, but of our eternal salvation too.

So, how do you feel about that? How do you feel about Jesus having such complete control of your life? Well, how do you feel about anyone who is in charge of anything that is important to you? How do you feel about having a boss at work or a coach on the playing field? For that matter, how comfortable are you with opening your heart to a special someone – someone who could take advantage of you or hurt you just as easily as help you and make you happy?

Well, doesn't the answer to that question depend on who it is that's in charge? After all, players rarely object to their coaches as long as they're winning games, right? And bosses that are fair and reasonable in their expectations don't usually have to worry about their workers going on strike. And if you really love someone and want to spend the rest of your life with him or her, well, you'll give your spouse the benefit of the doubt, even if you don't immediately understand everything he or she says or does.

And Jesus invites us to come to Him, He invites us to trust Him for the same reason – simply because of Who He is. Far from being a bully or a blowhard, Jesus reminds us in verse 29 that He is gentle and humble in heart. That means we don't have to be afraid of Him trying to take advantage of us, piling on a greater load than we can bear or pointing us in a direction that will be harmful for us to go. No, because of Who He is, we can be sure that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

And we know this, not just because Jesus said so, and not just because He walked out of His tomb on Easter morning, but because of the reason he was laid in that tomb on Good Friday. We know He is gentle and humble in heart because He laid down His life for us, shedding His blood so that we might be forgiven, giving up everything He is and everything He has because He loves sinners like us. Because Jesus humbled Himself before God and man on the cross, we can safely humble ourselves before Him, taking His yoke upon ourselves without fear that He will hurt us or take advantage of us.

And that's also why we can be certain of the rest He promises to all those who are weary, all those who are trying to save ourselves through our own efforts, all those who are burdened with guilt or fear, with grief or disappointment. Because Jesus has paid the penalty that all our sins deserve, because He has opened a way into the very presence of God through His perfect sacrifice, we can rest in the love of God, confident in His welcome. And because He has filled all who trust in Him with His Holy Spirit, we can rest in the certainty that He is with us, no matter how difficult or scary our path may be. If His yoke is upon us, we know we're going where He wants us to go and doing what He wants us to do – and we know that He is leading and guiding us every step that we take.

So, let's not just listen to the words of Christ and then go off on our own way. No, let's heed His call and believe His promise: "Come to Me, all you are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."