

Jesus Is the Coming Judge (11:20-24)

Chapter 11 verse 2-19 has developed in this fashion:

John's Question to Jesus (11:2–6)

Jesus' Estimate of John (11:7–15)

The People's Assessment of Both John and Jesus (11:16–19)

Now we come to Jesus response to the unbelief of those who were most benefited by his miraculous works. Having rebuked the crowds and the religious leaders for not responding to his ministry and that of John, Jesus speaks words of judgment on those who do not repent (11:20–24).¹

“... he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31, ESV)

Matthew 11:20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

“Interestingly, we have no record of his preaching judgment to pagans.”² His messages of judgment were reserved for those who claimed membership in the community of faith.

Then he began... “Then he began’ joins this episode with the preceding: the mock judgment of the children’s game is now played out in all seriousness.”³

to denounce⁴.... Because they denounced him and John, Jesus now denounces them, Matthew 11:18-19.

most.... Jesus had performed “most” of his “miracles” in these cities proving that the age of salvation had begun.

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 420.

² Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 521.

³ John Nolland (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (466). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁴ *denounce* *ὀνειδίζω* “...to reproach someone, with the implication of that individual being evidently to blame—‘to reprimand, to reproach.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (436). New York: United Bible Societies.

mighty works⁵.... Jesus' ministry of healing were his mighty works.

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” (Matthew 4:23, ESV)

“That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.” (Matthew 8:16, ESV)

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.” (Matthew 9:35, ESV)

they did not repent⁶.... But both John and Jesus had called them to repent.

“He does not say, because they *believed* not (for some kind of faith many of them had) that Christ was a *Teacher come from God*; but because *they repented not*: their faith did not prevail to the transforming of their hearts, and the reforming of their lives.”⁷

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 3:1–2, ESV)

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”” (Matthew 4:17, ESV)

“But if the miracles of grace and faith do not end by working repentance, there is judgment. The purpose of Jesus' dynamic is changed lives or discipleship. This is the special theme of Matthew's moral Gospel. Lives unchanged by the work of Jesus the Savior are lives summoned before the bar of Jesus the Judge. Miracles are intended to lead to repentance.”⁸

⁵ *mighty works* δύνάμις “...a deed manifesting great power, with the implication of some supernatural force— ‘mighty deed, miracle.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁶ *repent* μετανοέω “...to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness—‘to repent, to change one's way, repentance.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 1668.

⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 524.

“Every member of a church has Jesus, for Jesus is present in his Word, people, and sacraments. But Jesus does not *have* every member of his church; he has only those who, under the impact of his miraculous grace, are actually changing.”⁹

Although called to repent and given miraculous reason to do so, still, they did not. This would continue to be the case for forty years and at the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Jews still refuse to repent:

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”
(Revelation 9:20–21, ESV)

In Revelation 9, “We read of ***the rest of mankind (9:20)*** [or, *the rest of the men*] which would refer the current survivors of this holocaust. Having long repudiated God and His law, the Jews who ostensibly worship the true God of heaven and earth are here revealed as being not one bit different than idol worshiping pagans.”¹⁰

The Coming Judgment (11:21-24)

Judgment on Chorazin and Bethsaida (11:21–22)

- A. Pronouncement of judgment (v. 21a)
- B. Reason: contrast with Tyre and Sidon (v. 21b)
- C. Proclamation of severe judgment (v. 22)

Judgment on Capernaum (11:23–24)

- A. Pronouncement of judgment (v. 23a)
- B. Reason: contrast with Sodom (v. 23b)
- C. Proclamation of severe judgment (v. 24)

Matthew 11:21 Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

“Three large theological propositions are presupposed by Jesus’ insistence that on the Day of Judgment (see on 10:15; cf. 12:36; Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17; Jude 6), when he will judge (Mt 7:22; 25:34), things will go worse for the cities that have received so much light than for the pagan cities. The first is that the Judge has contingent knowledge: he knows what Tyre and Sidon would have done under such-and-such circumstances. The second is that God does not owe revelation to anyone, or

⁹ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (vol. 1, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 522.

¹⁰ Ralph E. Bass, Jr. (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (p. 245). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

else there is injustice in withholding it. The third is that punishment on the Day of Judgment takes into account opportunity. There are degrees of felicity in paradise and degrees of torment in hell...."¹¹

We often hear Christians say that there are people that have not heard the Gospel and that, as a result, it would be unfair for God to send them to hell. Here Jesus says that there are people that have not heard the Gospel and that they will suffer eternal damnation. Worse, if they had heard the Gospel they would have repented. It seems that fallen man never tires of accusing God of injustice.

¹¹ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; vol. 8; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 8273.



Chorazin! ... Bethsaida! It was probably one of these cities that Jesus was teaching in at this time. They were in an area north of the Sea of Galilee.

Chorazin was about two and a half miles north of Capernaum and Bethsaida was about three miles to the east near the Sea of Galilee. Both cities were near Jesus' adopted home of Capernaum. The nearness of both towns would have made ministry there easy, although there is no mention of Jesus ministering in Chorazin in the New Testament. Yet the way Chorazin is mention here shows that Jesus ministered there often—**where most of his mighty works had been done.**

As for Bethsaida Philip, Andrew and Peter were from this town.

“Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” (John 1:44, ESV)

“In the light of earlier accounts of widespread enthusiasm for Jesus in the area (4:23–25; 7:28–29; 8:1; 9:35–36), and particularly in Capernaum (8:16, 18–22; 9:8, 10, 26, 31, 33), the stark accusation that the communities as a whole have failed to repent is surprising.”¹²

Matthew 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

more bearable¹³.... This phrase suggest degrees of punishment in hell.

“But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12:48, ESV)

Tyre and Sidon... “Talk of the better position of Tyre and Sidon is not particularly to offer hope to Tyre and Sidon, but rather to identify the future situation of the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida as worse than that of cities clearly identified in Scripture as ripe for judgment....”¹⁴

The mention of Tyre and Sidon would prove that Jesus is not talking about a near judgment as in the one in A.D. 70. There was no judgment of Tyre, Sidon or Sodom at that time. We must therefore conclude that these judgments are referencing the final judgment at the end of the world.

Matthew 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

Capernaum.... By using Isaiah to address Capernaum, Jesus is comparing Capernaum to Babylon; one is analogous to the other.

“But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.” (Isaiah 14:15, ESV)

¹² R. T. France, (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 437). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

¹³ *more bearable* ἀνεκτός “...pertaining to what can be borne or endured—‘bearable, endurable, tolerable.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁴ Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (467). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

“The OT passage is a taunt against the wicked and arrogant city, personified in its king; and Capernaum is lumped together with Babylon, which all Jews regarded as the epitome of evil (cf. Rev 17:5).”¹⁵ In time, the Jews and Jerusalem their chief city will be called Babylon. In the Book of Revelation the term Babylon “... refers to Jerusalem. Her harlotry, both physical and spiritual, is set forth as the basis of her judgement.”¹⁶ So, the relationship of Jesus’ use of Isaiah to describe the spiritual condition of the Jews in Capernaum is according their spiritual similarities with Babylon.



“The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.”” (Revelation 17:4–5, ESV)

will you be exalted to heaven.... “...we have no information to enable us to identify any such desire on its part to “be exalted to heaven.””¹⁷ For some reason they thought they were superior to others. Jesus response to that is an allusion to Isaiah 14.

“You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 273). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹⁶ Ralph E. Bass, (2004). *Back to the Future: a study in the book of Revelation* (p. 384). Greenville, SC: Living Hope Press.

¹⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 439.

Most High. ' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit."
(Isaiah 14:13–15, ESV)

"It is difficult to make the application of the first rhetorical phrase to Capernaum more precise, but it seems to refer to an unwarranted, prideful confidence in an exceptional degree of eschatological blessing. The imagery of v 23 is clearly borrowed from Isa 14:13–15...."¹⁸

Hades.... "Hades is the place of the dead rather than a place of punishment ... it symbolizes destruction."¹⁹ However verse 24 expands on this idea of destruction by identifying this destruction with "the day of judgment". "So the "descent down to Hades" is not the physical destruction of the city but the eternal judgment it was facing."²⁰

Sodom.... "Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God for their terrible wickedness (Gen 18–19), and their name became proverbial for evil and destruction (Isa 1:9; Matt 10:15; Rom 9:29; 2 Pet 2:6 = Jude 7)."²¹ In the Book of Revelation, Jerusalem will be identified with Sodom and used to describe the spiritual condition of the Jews:

"...and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified." (Revelation 11:8, ESV)

"Sodom was the consummately proverbial city of sin. Yet Sodom too, had it been privileged with the revelation of Jesus' miracles, would have been gripped by the reality of the gospel of the kingdom and would have repented."²² The condemnation on Capernaum is almost beyond description. Much was given Capernaum, therefore much was expected. Failing to respond to the light, "much will be required."

¹⁸ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (vol. 33A; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 314.

¹⁹ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 439). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 434.

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (vol. 1; Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 434.

²² Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 420.

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“...when those who have been privileged to witness Jesus’ ministry in their own communities fail to respond, they must expect to face a more serious judgment than the notorious pagan cities which had no such special revelation.”²³



Matthew 11:24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Although Sodom was judged and destroyed some 2,000 years earlier, yet Jesus states that there will be another judgment for Sodom. This makes it clear that physical death is not the end of our lives, there is still a final accounting yet to be made to God. On that day, Sodom, known for its great evil, will receive a lesser judgment than will Capernaum. The reason is found in the ministry of Jesus. Capernaum saw and heard **mighty works** in the ministry of Jesus that if done in Sodom would have resulted in repentance. The judgment pronounced on these cities was not in the near future but on the last day.

“Capernaums abound in the modern Christian West. Miracles of love are performed daily in Christ’s name by a tiny minority, but their revelatory significance is missed. What really counts is the workaday world where money is earned and spent.”²⁴

This condemnation of Jewish cities to degrees even greater than the evil pagan cultures around Israel would be comparable to Jesus condemning various communities in

²³ France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 437). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.

²⁴ Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 126.

American to greater condemnation than the major Muslim cities of the Near East. That would not set well with us either.