

MATTHEW 11:20-30 “The Three R’s” – BACK TO BASICS

OUTLINE

David Hillson, Hope Church, Sunday 16 August 2009

INTRODUCTION

Quick context setting – part of third teaching block:

- narrative = chs 11-12, discourse = ch 13:1-52, topic = The kingdom of God
- Key question for chs 11-13 – “What does this tell us about God’s kingdom?”

Three sections = Three Rs

20-24 Repentance

25-28 Revelation

29-30 Rest

Note these three Rs form a progression, and are a basic description of the Christian experience – come back to this at the end (application)

SECTION 1: REPENTANCE (20-24)

Verse 20 – Jesus did much more than is recorded in the gospels:

- John 20:30 “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book”
- John 21:25 “There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

So these are selected by the gospel writers for a reason – we need to know why!

Jesus was based in Capernaum (Matthew 9:1 calls this “his own town”) but he travelled to surrounding towns (Chorazin, Bethsaida) and did “mighty works” (RSV) or “miracles” (NIV).

Jesus expected a response – they should have **repented**, but didn’t

He said this matters, because not repenting brings judgement (verses 22 & 24)

He contrasts the actual response of local Jews to his ministry with likely response of notorious cities: Tyre, Sidon, Sodom = bywords for wickedness, spiritual pride, rejection of God (see Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26-28, Genesis 19)

Repeat of his earlier comment (Matthew 10:15) comparing towns which reject the gospel message with Sodom & Gomorrah

Note: Repentance

- What? (Greek *metanoeo* = change of mind). Adjust thinking to match God’s perspective
- From what? Own perspective, limited world-view, human values
- To what? God’s perspective, see as he sees, agree with his assessment
- So what? Essential first step to understanding God and his kingdom. Impossible to enter God’s kingdom without repentance.

Q: Why is repentance an appropriate response to encountering Jesus?

- Wrong thinking keeps us from understanding God's kingdom – pointing in the wrong direction, wrong priorities, misunderstanding, wrong judgements & decisions
- Jesus brings first-hand experience of the kingdom of God in action – demands a response. If this is true I need to re-evaluate my thinking, my whole position needs to change...

Key question – “What does this tell us about God’s kingdom?”. Repentance is the gateway into the kingdom of God

This is still true today – human thinking can never get us into God's kingdom.

Which leads to the theme of the second section...

SECTION 2: REVELATION (25-27)

[Some commentators say 25-30 is structured like a poem in Aramaic, rhythmic phrases, common structure, possibly early church hymn, or used by Matthew to aid memorisation]

Not everything is obvious to all – need for revelation

Verse 25 – Contrast: God's kingdom is “**hidden** from the wise and learned” but “**revealed** to little children”

- Reason and experience is insufficient
- Need to be innocent, trusting, dependent (Matthew 18:1-4 “Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”)

Compare with I Corinthians 1:18-31, comparing worldly “wisdom” with heavenly “foolishness”:

- Verse 25 “the foolishness of God is wiser than men”
- Verse 27 “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise”

I Corinthians 2:6-10 God's wisdom is imparted by the Holy Spirit, can't be imagined by the human mind

Revelation is God's sovereign act:

- verse 26 “Yes Father, this was your good pleasure...”
- verse 27 “...to whom the Son chooses to reveal”

What has been revealed? V27 – The answer to one of life's difficult questions: “What is God really like?” How has this been revealed?

- The Father knows the Son, no-one else does
- The Son knows the Father, no-one else does – UNLESS the Son reveals him (see John 14:6-11 “If you had known me you would have known my Father also... He who has seen me has seen the Father”)
- So we can know the Father if Jesus reveals him to us!! Amazing!!!
- “knows” – not ginosko (basic knowledge) or oida (see, know about) but epiginosko (full knowledge, personal experience, acquainted with) – based on relationship

Key question – “What does this tell us about God’s kingdom?”. Personal knowledge of Father God is at the heart of the kingdom of God, can only be revealed through Jesus

Note the exclusive claim of Jesus, both here and in John 14:6 – he is the ONLY one who knows the Father and can introduce us to him. Unpopular in today’s “tolerant” society, but that doesn’t make it untrue!

SECTION 3: REST (28-29)

This is a popular “promise text”, but it is not a panacea, no guarantee of trouble-free life – “Come to Jesus and all your problems will be gone”

But an open invitation to “all” (v28)

Jesus offers another contrast: verse 28 “weary and burdened” vs “rest”

- Which are you? Which am I?

Verses 29-30 Jesus uses “yoke” as an illustration because it was a common sight, and also it was an image used by the Pharisees.

- The Pharisees used this image to describe the purpose of the law: “The yoke of the law is glorious obedience to God which frees man from his obligations to the world and gives rest and peace of mind.” In other words, “If you keep the law by always obeying God, you don’t need to worry about anything else” (a big IF!). Martin Luther said something similar (misquoting Augustine!) “Love God and do what you please.”
- But the Pharisees added to the law “just to be on the safe side”. Jesus said this became “heavy, hard to bear” (Matthew 23:4).
- In contrast Jesus brought a different law (“Learn from me”), based on gentleness and humility. His yoke is “easy and light”, it produces rest for the soul.
- How can we rest? Yoked with/alongside Jesus, connected to him. He helps us do what pleases God, not in our own strength, but relying on his efforts. We can rest in what he has done, and what he continues to do in us and through us.
 - Zechariah 4:6 “Not my might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord”.
 - Ephesians 1:17-21 “...his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might...”

How does this bring “rest for your souls”? [Isn’t that something we all yearn for??]

- In this passage Jesus was challenging the Pharisees teaching that if we could only keep the law we’d be OK (acceptance based on performance, people were afraid to fail).
- He also challenges the core elements of today’s society. People today are **restless**, arising from lack of meaning & purpose (Where did I come from, Why am I here, Where am I going, What’s the point?), loss of identity & value (e.g. unemployment), no sense of right & wrong with no clear boundaries for behaviour or belief, supremacy of self ...
- He says “Learn from me for I am *gentle and humble in heart*” – counter-cultural!
- He can release us from these strong cultural influences to live in a different way. No need to prove myself, I can rely on him.

Key question – “What does this tell us about God’s kingdom?”. Relying on Jesus brings freedom in the kingdom of God

CONCLUSION

There is a progression of themes in this passage, 3 R's: Repentance, Revelation, Rest

These three are central characteristics of the Christian experience, in two ways:

- Entering the kingdom of God: starts with *repentance* and turning from sin, requires *revelation* of who God is, leading to a personal knowledge of him, results in ongoing relationship with Jesus where we can *rest* in his finished work and rely on his Spirit in us
- Continuing Christian walk – repentance-revelation-rest is not a one-off experience when first saved. It is a repeated cycle throughout our lives:
 - We constantly need to repent, change our thinking to align with God's kingdom perspective
 - We always need revelation to understand God's truth and his ways
 - We should live in rest and peace as we rely on Jesus each day

A similar OT passage links repentance and rest: Isaiah 30:15

- For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength"
- "returning" = Heb *shubah*, literally turning again = repentance
- Last four words of Isaiah 30:15 are a tragedy, "But you would not..." What is our response to God's offer of rest, accessed through repentance and revelation? Will we or not – it's our choice.