

Judgment on the Cities of the Northern Shore

by Steve Gallagher

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Scripture: Luke 9:10, Proverbs 9:7, Matthew 11:20, John 6:66, 1 Peter 5:2, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 7:21, Hebrews 3:7

Topics: "Repentance", "The Danger of Familiarity"

Description

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Transcript

Because we need the word of God also, don't we? We need a well-balanced diet. We need the word and we need his presence so much. Okay, we're going to be in Luke 9, as you know, and the title of my message is Judgment on the Cities of the Northern Shore.

Judgment on the Cities of the Northern Shore. I'm saying cities, but actually they're just towns. But cities sound so much better.

Sounds more impressive, right? I want to give a little background on this area up there, just north of the Sea of Galilee, before we actually look at the story. Of these three cities that were there, or towns or villages, whatever you call them, Capernaum is the only one that's actually right on the shore. Chorazin is about four miles due north of Capernaum, and Bethsaida is six miles like east-northeast.

So Bethsaida was like a mile from the shore, pretty close to where the Jordan River comes into the Sea of Galilee. Just to kind of give you a perspective of that, Dry Ridge is four miles from Williamstown and six miles from here. So it's kind of the same basic thing, you know.

And just like we go to Walmart, everyone in this region goes to Walmart at some point or another, I assume. And it would have been kind of the same, you know. Everyone in that region is a farming region,

and everyone would have come into the market on some day, you know, the week, there in Capernaum or maybe Bethsaida.

So there was, you know, kind of a, I don't want to say a close-knit culture or region there, but people intermingled a lot in those towns. They knew each other. In fact, Bethsaida is where Peter, Andrew, Nathaniel, and Philip all were raised.

They were born and raised in Bethsaida. And maybe even James and John, it's possible that they were also. Maybe some of the other disciples, I don't know.

Eleven of the disciples were from Galilee, we know that. Judas was the only one who wasn't. He was from Judea.

But another thing we should note is what it was like to live in those days. They didn't have entertainment to distract them like we have. I mean, we have three million different forms of entertainment at our disposal anytime, right? We have so many different ways to just get, like, get our minds somewhere else.

But they didn't have that back then. And so they did do a lot more intermingling. And they didn't have Fox News or whatever, you know.

So anything noteworthy that happened, they found out by talking with each other. And so when you think about Jesus, and he had made Capernaum his hometown, all the stuff that happened in Capernaum quickly became known all over that region. And what were some of those things? Well, Peter's miraculous catch of fish.

Can you imagine how that shocked that fishing community? You know, these guys would be out fishing all night, night after night, and they'd bring in just maybe like a little basket full of fish or something with all their toil. And then Peter shows up with a boatload of fish one day. Wow, how did that happen? Then there was that great night of healings.

You know, people were being healed of diseases and demons were being cast out. You know, Peter's mother-in-law was healed that night. Then there was the healing of the paralytic that was let down through the roof.

You see that in Mark 2. And the healing of the woman with the issue of blood. The raising from the dead of Jairus's daughter. The healing of the two blind men in Matthew 9. Casting the demon out of the dumb man, also in Matthew 9. The healing of the man with the hand in Matthew 12.

These are just a few of the things that had happened in that little area right there, up to this point. And on top of that were his teachings. You know, when he gave the Sermon on the Mount, the people were amazed.

They had never heard someone speak who had such a complete understanding and comprehension of what the Word of God actually meant and brought it to life. And he knew how to speak in such a way that his words would go right into the innermost being of people and touch them there and affect them there. So different from the dry nonsense the Pharisees, you know, would dish out.

Just dead words. But when Jesus spoke, there was life and power and authority. Now at this point, Jesus has been crisscrossing Galilee for a couple of years.

I mean, he was everywhere. He had been all over the place. Galilee was not that big.

You know, it's like 50 miles north to south and about 25 miles wide. And so, you know, from here to Lexington is 53 miles. So actually farther from Lexington than it was from Dan down to, well, wherever Samaria begins or whatever.

It wasn't that big. And, you know, just stuff got around everyone knew about Jesus of Nazareth. It says in Matthew four, Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

The news about him, there it is right there. The news about him spread throughout all Syria. And they brought to him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics, and he healed them.

Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. I mean, that whole area there in Palestine knew about Jesus of Nazareth and what was going on. He had saturated Galilee with the reality of his power and his message, which was repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Everyone knew. And then if that wasn't enough, then he sent his disciples out like we looked at two weeks ago. The disciples went out two by two and did the same sorts of things.

So by the time this story unfolds, virtually everyone in Galilee has seen the miracles of Jesus and have heard him share his heart. They've seen his love and his mercy in action. They've heard his messages that have left him amazed.

They've seen him silence the scowling Pharisees with irrefutable truth and logic. They had really seen and witnessed and heard of some amazing things that had never gone on there before he showed up. But now his ministry to Galilee is coming to a close.

I mean, he has done everything he could possibly do, and he knows that it has come to the point where he's got to bring people to a decision. He couldn't just continue on like this. All right, so that's some of the backdrop there.

Let's read this passage or at least start going through it. Luke 9, we'll start with verse 10. When the apostles returned, they gave an account to him of all that they had done.

You know, what an amazing thing that must have been. Taking them with him, he withdrew by himself to a city called Bethsaida. Actually, another version says he was in a remote area, you know, so it was probably right outside of Bethsaida where they actually went.

But the crowds were aware of this and followed him. And yeah, stop right there. Almost went too far.

We're about to read here in a minute that there were 5,000 men. Now, if you add in the women and children, this could have been upwards of 25,000 people. I mean, it's possible.

Could have been 15,000, could have been 10,000, 25,000. That's a lot of people for a remote area like this, outside of a tiny little town. I mean, Bethsaida was probably, what, you know, half the size, if that, of Dry Ridge.

Not even. And can you imagine 10, 15, 25,000 people converging on Dry Ridge? We would be overwhelmed. But what he's about to do now is going to prove to be the climax of his ministry.

And look at what it says here about him and welcoming them. He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God and curing those who had need of healing. Speaking about the kingdom of God.

I mean, maybe he went into the parables. You know, maybe they hadn't heard those parables. They were all about the kingdom, right? In Matthew 13, we looked at a few weeks ago.

Maybe he started sharing that. Or maybe he went into some of the mount. That is like the Magna Carta of the kingdom.

Who knows? I mean, his teachings would have been rich. And he didn't just get up and give a 50-minute message like you're going to get here today. He would probably speak for hours.

I don't know how long, because it's going to tell us that late in the day, you know, some other stuff's going to happen. So, who knows what he shared, but there he is healing people again. Mark's version says, he felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

Now, Jesus had gone there to get some rest, right? He was bringing his disciples for them to get some rest also. They've been out ministering. And, you know, two weeks of ministering for them, probably just about did them in.

But Jesus could go on and on and on and on. It's just amazing. But it can be really trying for a minister when you have really exhausted yourself, giving yourself out, giving and giving of yourself.

And then the Lord puts you in a situation where you've got to give yet more, you know. And you find out in those kind of times, you really come to find out how the Lord will meet your need and be there, and you'll be able to do more than you thought you could do, and handle more than you thought you could handle. That's just what Christianity is like.

So, Jesus wants to spend some time with his disciples. He's changing now. This is kind of a transition, and I'm sure messages that will come forth after this will reflect it.

But he's going to start spending more time with his disciples. He's going to start shying away from the crowds. Actually, he's going to be going up in the Syrophenicia area pretty soon.

But anyway, he wants to spend time with his disciples and start building into them, because he knows his time is coming to an end, and they are the ones who are going to take the message forth in the future, right? So, that's what he wants to see. But he looks out at this vast sea of people, and what comes out of it? Aggravation? Frustration? The disciples want to just get rid of the people. That's what they want.

But Jesus is of a different fabric. He was a true shepherd. In Psalm 23, Jesus is the Lord who is David's shepherd.

In Luke 15, he's the shepherd who hunts for the lost sheep. In John 10, he's the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. And in 1 Peter 5, he's the chief shepherd who honors his servants.

You know, Mark, Luke says that he welcomed the people. I mean, just that alone, when you consider that he was wanting to do one thing, but all these people are coming to him, and he knows what's in their hearts. We'll hear it next week when Dustin speaks, what kind of spirit the people were in.

But he couldn't help himself, really. I mean, he looked at those people with compassion, and it was deep compassion because he could look deeply into their hearts. He could just see inside them their great need.

And so, he had a lot of compassion. He loved them, but he also knew that they were in the valley of decision. These people are hanging by a thread over a Christless eternity.

They are oblivious and out of it, but Jesus sees it all very clearly. And so, you know, his disciples come to him and talk to him about the need. You know, we'll get into it here, but the people have a need and all this.

And Jesus sees this as one more opportunity to reach them. Just one more miracle. One more example of his divinity.

One more calling of these people to come to him, to come into his kingdom. That's what we're going to read about here. Look at verse 12.

Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to him, send the crowd away that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat for here we are in a desolate place. But he said to them, you give them something to eat. Now, you know, let me just stop here for a second because they have been out and they've been doing miracles, right? Healing people, casting demons out.

They've been doing some stuff. But to feed, you know, 10 or 20,000 people. I mean, that's a little bit of a jump for these guys where they're at.

And they said, we have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people. And there's that great faith Jordan was talking about. Now we know how Jordan would react.

Yeah. And he said to his disciples, have them sit down to eat in groups of about 50 each, you know, and you see how orderly the Lord is. He just has everything done in orderlies, not like the kingdom of Satan.

It's everything's confusion and strife and all of that. And they did so, had them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them and broke them and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people.

All right, let me stop here. Jesus is about to perform the grandest, most significant miracle he has performed yet. None of his other miracles compare to this one.

You know, there would be like maybe a crowd of people, maybe, well, depending on the situation, maybe 10 people, maybe 100 people in some of those different situations where he healed blind men or whatever. I mean, some people would see that stuff, but this is thousands of people, thousands of people are going to see what he's going to do here. So he starts giving out bread and fish.

Now, this is bread that was never kneaded or baked, right? These are fish that were never swimming in the Sea of Galilee and caught and cleaned and baked and all that. No, he was just reaching into this basket and pulling this stuff out and giving it out. And, you know, one of the commentators said something about also this bread and these fish did not have the curse of God on them, you know, like the food that we eat.

Yeah. Can you imagine? I mean, it must've been absolutely delicious. And it says here in verse 17, and they all ate and were satisfied.

That word satisfied is used elsewhere to mean engorged, you know, I mean, they just gorged themselves. It must've been so good that they just ate and ate and ate until they just could not eat anymore. It's kind of like, if you've ever been to a high class or a higher end restaurant that has a buffet.

I've been to a few and it's amazing, you know, and you get in and there's really like the kind of food that would cost you 25, 30 bucks for one type of food, but this is a whole spread, you know, of all kinds of different stuff. It would have been kind of like that. It was so good that you just could not stop eating.

Maybe it's a little bit like, you know, what you guys had Thursday. I don't know. I wasn't here.

This was a tremendous miracle that he did in front of thousands of people, but I want you to really get the picture of this in your mind. I hope that this, Lord, I pray that you'll make it to where they'll never forget this. The people are sitting out there, you know, in groups of 50 and Jesus is probably sitting on a little knoll.

You know, he tended to get up a little higher so when he spoke, people could hear him and see him and stuff. And they're watching him. So you got thousands of people, they're watching him and they see the disciples bring this basket to him.

And so Jesus, out of the basket, pulls some fish and some bread, you know, and hands it to maybe Peter, and then he pulls some and hands it to Andrew. Then he pulls some more. Now, you know, the first minute or so, this is no big deal, nothing noteworthy.

Oh, that's interesting. I wonder what he's doing. You know, but after five minutes of this, this is still going on.

You know, he's still pulling this stuff out of this one little basket. After about a half an hour, people are astounded. What, is there a hole in the earth or what? Where's this stuff coming from? You know, this, to feed 20,000 people, he must have been doing this for hours.

You know, 20,000 people to get that out, pull it out, and hand it to his disciples and for his disciples to take it out. Groups of 50. You're two groups right here.

You know, how long would it take me to pull out fish and bread to feed just this row right here? You know what I'm saying? It would have taken hours. They're watching him. This is just going on.

He just keeps pulling it out. His arm must have been exhausted by the time he was done. They are watching this happen over and over and over and over.

An amazing, tremendous miracle this was. This really was the pinnacle of his ministry in Galilee. And it's no wonder that we read in John 6, which Dustin will go over next week, this is truly the prophet who has come into the world.

They saw it. If they hadn't seen it before, they had heard the stories. Maybe they even witnessed something or another happen.

Maybe the, you know, different ones in the crowd must have seen some of the things that happened, but they all heard the stories, but they are all watching this unfold right before their eyes. Now, you know, Jesus never sought fame or popularity or, like, to get some powerful position. He was never in it for himself.

All he cared about was that the people would get right with God. That's all Jesus cared about. And after all that they had heard and seen, the tremendous teachings that he has brought forth, and the power, and all that, you know, just this day alone, why were they so unfazed? Why were they so indifferent and apathetic to him? This is the great question of mankind.

Why don't people respond to the Lord? And I would suggest to you that a great deal of demonic activity was at work to exploit man's natural indifference to the call of Christ. I think that's really what was going on there. You know, wherever Jesus is working, Satan is right there trying to counter it.

And the more powerful the Holy Spirit is working in a place, in a location, in a situation, or whatever, maybe the more powerful demons that Jesus—I'm sorry, Jesus—that Satan sends to counter the work of Jesus. I don't doubt that. So let me just go over some different aspects of this briefly.

I suggest to you that devils were at work there to inflame the pride of these people. And what I mean by that is Jesus had a message. His core message was repent.

That was his core message. I mean, everything else came—everything he preached or taught came out of that basic foundational message that something is wrong with you, and if you want to be right with God, something's got to change. That's what repentance is all about, is that you're not in good stead with the Lord.

Therefore, there's going to have to be some changes going on in your life. People don't want to hear that, and that message of repentance is not popular today any more than it was back then. Because, you know, nothing's more provoking to people than to suggest they have some kind of flaw in their character, or somehow they don't measure up, or whatever.

And I know you guys have heard this, but I'm going to read this in the Passion translation. I like this translation. It's a paraphrase, but it's pretty good, usually.

This is Proverbs 9, 7, verse 7 and 8. If you try to correct an arrogant cynic, expect an angry insult in return. And if you try to confront an evil man, don't be surprised if all you get is a slap in the face. So don't even bother to correct a mocker, for he'll only hate you for it.

But go ahead and correct the wise, they'll love you even more. And I know from my years of experience, so I've been in a counseling type ministry for 36 plus years, I can tell you this, that I can pretty well gauge a person's maturity level spiritually by how they respond to correction. You know, if they're defensive and argumentative, or they're blame-shifting and minimizing what they do, then I know, basically, I'm dealing with someone on the lower end of the spiritual, whatever it is, barometer.

But if the person is listening and is really taking in, wants to hear, recognizes truth for what it is and the value of it, and wants to receive that truth, then I know I'm dealing with someone who's going to really

receive what the Lord has for them. He's going to grow quickly, and if he's not already walking in wisdom, he soon will be. I told you two weeks ago, I said, now I need to tell you that people do not want to be told to repent, because that infers that something's wrong with them.

And people will not tolerate anyone telling them there's anything wrong in their lives, or that they don't deserve God's favor. That's just the way it is, you know. But it's just pride, isn't it? Isn't that just pride? I mean, what else do you call it? That resistance to it.

So remember this, there is no salvation apart from repentance, and there is no repentance apart from acknowledging fault. Remember that, guys. There's no way to get around it.

I know a large part of the church has done their best to get around that, but I'm telling you, it's just reality. There is no salvation apart from repentance. All right.

The second thing I want to suggest is that devils were at work exploiting a natural human tendency. And what I'm referring to here is this adage that we've all heard, familiarity breeds contempt. An offshoot of that would be what Jesus said regarding the rejection he faced at Nazareth.

He said, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, in his own household. You know, it's like a guy could be used powerfully by the Lord, but he is not going to get any kind of audience or whatever from family or people who he grew up with or anything like that. It's not going to happen.

And, you know, these people of the northern shore, they didn't grow up with Jesus, but they had become accustomed to him. He'd been there a lot. They had heard him a lot.

They had seen the things that he was doing. They had seen it a lot. At first, they were astonished at his miracles and amazed at his teaching, but they soon became familiar.

You know, those things started becoming familiar to them, and they started losing their excitement level over his power and stuff. And the marvelous truths that he shared with them that were so amazing started becoming stale to them. And their familiarity with those teachings just created a callousness in their heart.

The problem was that even though those people knew the teachings of Jesus, you know, they probably had heard him teach a good number of times, at least most of those people. They knew his teachings. If you gave them a test, they could take that test.

The problem was they weren't responding to what he was saying in their hearts. That's what the issue was. And, you know, for them in that situation, they thought God owed them salvation because they were Jewish.

But you know what? It's not much different from Americans. We think God owes us salvation because of grace. It's really not much different.

So here's what I want you to remember out of this point. It's not what you know. It's what you live that counts.

All right, the third thing I want to suggest to you. We may get through this pretty quick. I know you're looking forward to getting out there in the rain.

I want to suggest to you that the devils were at work giving these people a faulty religion. I was thinking about what Jordan shared about the faith of the people outside of Israel, right? The Syrophenician lady, the Samaritan woman, the Centurion, different ones, different Gentiles. They had great faith.

Something was different about them. What was wrong with the Jewish people? They had the oracles of God. They had been raised in the teachings of God.

They understood these things. Many of you guys were raised in Christian homes. What is it? It's because this is one of the things the enemy can do.

He can give you just enough religion to inoculate you to the reality, the true Christianity. And that's what was happening there. Judaism had become this lifeless list of petty rules and ceremonies.

There was just no reality to it, but it was good enough for them. They just wanted to do, you know, show up at the synagogue on Shabbat and just put in their time and just kind of keep their little rules. And they knew they were going to be in heaven and all that stuff.

Pope commentary says, the Jewish people of Galilee preferred the whited sepulchres of a Pharisaic sanctity and the shallow traditions of Levitical ceremony more than the light and life which had been offered them by the Son of God. And that's the truth because it's simple because it doesn't really require anything. You know, there's no expectation really.

But we have our own version. You know, we have missed the teachings of repentance that are meant to open our eyes to our need. You know, we are given a gospel that shares all the positive things about Christianity, but leaves that kind of thing out.

So here's what I want you to remember here. True Christian teaching is always, always centered in the cross. Always centered in the cross.

If repentance isn't the core of what you're being taught, then you need to question what you're being taught. All right, number four. Fourth thing I want to suggest is that devils were at work trying to discredit Jesus.

I've been listening to a book on the life of Benjamin Netanyahu. Actually, it's his autobiography. He's telling a story.

It's been really an interesting book. I had no idea how much that man did and how much, yeah, he's accomplished there in Israel. But he is facing, because he's in the Likud, which is, you know, comparable to our conservative movement maybe, but he has faced fierce resistance from the liberal labor party and the liberal media.

And they have done everything they can to discredit him. So one of the things they did was they created, made up this whole story about he and his wife stealing money from the government. And they had different things, you know, that were supposed to be proofs that they had stolen stuff.

I'll just give you one that comes to mind. His wife had been at some ceremony, and I think it was like a jeweler's association, and they gave her a pin and, you know, put it on her lapel while she was there, just to honor her and stuff like that. And so the police show up and raid their house, and one of the things they're looking for is, we want to see that pin.

What was it made of? Gold? Is it solid gold? Is there like a one-carat diamond in it? I mean, it's coming from a jeweler's association. It's kind of realistic, reasonable to expect it to be really valuable. And she's like, there was no value in that thing.

They had to go searching all over. She actually found it, and it was worth like 50 cents. It was just some little lapel pin.

It was nothing. But that was the kind of stuff that they were, they have done to Netanyahu to discredit him. And this is the kind of thing the Pharisees were doing with Jesus.

They were calling him a liar, a fraud, a false prophet. They inferred he was born out of wedlock, that he was no better than the sinners he hung out with. They claimed that his miracles were done by the power of Satan.

Anything they could say that would cast doubt on the things he was teaching, they would say. And it was so effective that even these powerful miracles and healings that they had experienced, they'd seen, they witnessed, heard about, even those had just become diminished down to nothing. So here's what I want you to remember, and it's something that Lenin said, tell the people a lie long enough, and eventually they'll accept it as truth.

You know, and that's what Lenin did in Russia, and that's what Goebbels did in Germany, and that's what's happening to Netanyahu, and this is what the Pharisees did to Jesus. They just kept pounding away, pounding and pounding away these same lies about Jesus. And the people bought it, you know, because that's human nature.

All right, so I'm going to start wrapping it up. Jesus ministered for two plus years to the people of the northern shores. They had heard the stories of cripples made whole, blind receiving sight, demons cast out, even the dead being brought back to life.

Now they witnessed for themselves, they all saw it, what Jesus did, and sat there and watched him for hours doing the impossible, absolutely impossible. Satan could not do that. Yet other than a few examples, there was no repentance from the people of the northern shores, no repentance.

Now if you want to just flip the page of your Bible to chapter 10, I'll show you Jesus' response to them. I can't remember where it's at, but I got it written down here. Huh? Verse 13.

Yeah. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. I mean, sackcloth and ashes.

This isn't the kind of weak, pathetic conversions you hear about in the church today. This would have been a dramatic, tremendous change in a person's life for them to rip their clothes, throw ashes on their head. What that is signifying is just tremendous grief.

That's what would have happened in Tyre and Sidon, that wicked seaport just north of them. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. How can that be? People who had sat in church their whole life would face a harsher judgment than people living a wicked lifestyle out there showing no interest in the things of God.

Yes, because that's God's economy and that's how He works. And it should terrify us. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? Oh, we were in the presence of the Lord all the time.

Yeah, Jesus, you know us. No, I don't know you. Yeah, you hung around.

You liked to watch the miracles. You even enjoyed my teaching a little bit, but you didn't respond from your heart. You will be brought down to Hades, Jesus told those people.

This word woe is a word of judgment, but I can assure you that Jesus said it with great, great sorrow in His heart. He loved those people, but that did not mean that they got a free pass to heaven. They had to respond.

It's just the way it is. You have to respond to the Lord. You can't just sit in His presence and sing songs.

You must respond. And this is really so indicative, or however you want to say it, of the way the Lord operates. He gives and gives and gives and gives.

He loves. He extends Himself. He'll do it over and over and over.

For years, He'll do that with people. This is the thing. It can have the ability or the effect in some people that all of that love coming their way just deceives them.

Jesus loves me. This I know. Yes, He does love you.

Absolutely. He loves you so much that He has given and given and given to you opportunity after opportunity, but He is looking for one thing, a real response from your heart. And if He doesn't get it, there's nothing to look forward to but judgment.

That's just reality, man. I'm sorry. I wish I could give you a nice, happy little sermon, but that's reality.

Now I know, and I honestly, I'm aware that this group of people in here, this group of guys that we have right now, is one of the better groups we've had in a while. I know that many of you guys have been responding to the Lord. I don't know where each of you are at, but I would encourage you to really sincerely search your heart.

Make sure that you really have been responding to the Lord in this place.

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