

Woe Be To You

Within the culture of this generation that we live in today, we as Americans have come to strongly assume that we have the power and the ability to make choices about most anything and everything that we think and say and do. And further, that our power and ability to make any choice that pleases us is an inalienable right, never to be denied to us.

And in some ways that may be a correct assumption. But a difficulty that will surely always accompany the choices that we make is that consequences, real consequences will always inevitably follow along after each of those choices.

And why would that be so? It's because God, being absolutely sovereign and omniscient, knowing all things, things past, things present and things future, has established some very simple, but absolute rules of law that will govern any and all of those choices that we make. One of those rules being simply that each of us will surely reap whatever we choose to sow. Listen to those words given to us in Galatians chapter 6.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

These words are an absolute truth folks. Consequences really are sure and certain. With the only possible exception being those occasions when we have made some wrong choices, and we humble ourselves before God, repent and beg for His leniency. Then, sometimes, He might relent and our consequences are mitigated.

Here in the words of the passage we'll study today, the Lord Jesus has just given seventy of His disciples instructions about how they were to minister as they traveled throughout the towns and country sides. And along with those instructions, He is giving them some simple words of reality, the reality that while yes, some people that they encounter will respond well and will receive their ministry joyfully. But others would not. Some, perhaps many would reject their words and their efforts.

Listen to Jesus' instructions, beginning in verse 10 of Luke chapter 10,

¹⁰ . . . whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' ¹² But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.

¹³ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. ¹⁶ He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:10-16)

In Romans chapter 11, verse 22, we are told to consider both the "kindness and the sternness of God". And here, we are seeing an excellent demonstration of both. The gospel that can save the people's souls is being presented to them, but they are also being confronted with a warning about the consequences when they reject the gospel.

Folks, as we well know, this Man Jesus who is giving these instructions to His disciples is no ordinary man. He is the God of all creation, heaven and earth. And His instructions have accountability within them.

In Exodus chapter 34, God gives us a very clear and plain portrayal of who He is. In those words, we are able to clearly see the Holy and righteous character by which He governs the world and all of its people. Listen to those words!

⁶ . . . "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

In these words, God declares to us that He is first and foremost loving, merciful and gracious, not desiring that any should perish. But just as equally, He is also "just", requiring that every sin that is committed be dealt with and paid for fully and completely.

This first part of the heart and character of God is revealed most clearly in the person of the Lord Jesus, as He came to live among us for a while, to die on the

cross on our behalf to pay the penalty for our sin, then to rise again that we might be able to have a newness of life, a life that is free from the power and the control of sin. And then to have eternal life in heaven with Him.

And yes, Jesus will later, at the "Great White Throne Judgment" fulfill the second part of the character of God, and hold people accountable for their sins. However, during His days on the earth, His desire was to fulfill the first part of God's plan and purpose for mankind, the mercy and the grace.

And Jesus was carrying that plan and that purpose forward as He sent forth the seventy evangelists to proclaim the gospel of His salvation to the people in the towns and villages where He would be visiting.

Those disciples were the representation of the "Kingdom of God" coming near to the people to tell them about the great privilege of receiving salvation from their sins.

But also, implicit within the precious offer of God's love and salvation is a warning, a stern and serious warning. And that warning declares, "Woe be unto the person who refuses to receive the great salvation that God offers to them." Listen, beginning in verse 10,

¹⁰But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' ¹²But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. (Luke 10:10-12)

And in verse 16,

¹⁶He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:16)

Sometimes, perhaps often, we aren't aware that the "kingdom of God" has come near to us. Yes, God truly is everywhere at every moment. But there are also very special moments in time, when God's Holy Spirit pays a special visit to our souls bringing with Him a special unction that appeals to our souls to come and follow Him. And in those moments, God really does hold us accountable for our response.

And those special moments are almost always presented to us by other people. Yes, the Holy Spirit is present within their words, but the voices and the faces are

almost always other people, disciples like those seventy that went out from Jesus.

And for us today, it is most often preachers, and teachers, and other ordinary people, people like you and me.

And if we, you and I, are the disciples that are chosen to give God's invitation to salvation, we need to be faithful to make that gospel clear and plain, because the listener will surely be held accountable for their response to our invitation.

The Bible Commentator, Matthew Henry, words it this way.

“. . . tell them plainly, and bid them *be sure of it, The kingdom of God is come nigh to you*. Here is a fair offer made you; if you have not the benefit of it, it is your own fault. The gospel is brought to your doors; if you shut your doors against it, your blood is upon your own head. Now that *the kingdom of God is come nigh to you*, if you will not come up to it, and come into it, your sin will be inexcusable and your condemnation intolerable."

Here, in these words, Matthew Henry is making the stern requirements of the gospel very clear to us, and that is, to receive this gospel will bring salvation, but to refuse it will bring a sure and certain condemnation. There is no middle ground. Again, in verse 16 Jesus said,

¹⁶He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:16)

In Matthew Henry's words, he spoke of the blood being upon the head of anyone who is disobedient to God's word. And that is so, whether it be the giver of those words or it be the receiver of them. Listen to how God gives us that warning in Ezekiel chapter 3!

¹⁷" . . . hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ¹⁸When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ¹⁹But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, you and I have an obligation to go out and to give His saving gospel to others. But in doing that, we need to always remain aware that it is not we ourselves who save people, nor is it perhaps some clever words that we might think up.

No, it is only the blood of Christ that is able to save people. Our responsibility is simply to give the gospel as clearly and plainly as we can give it, and then leave the response to the people who hear.

Fortunately, some will receive the gospel with great joy and be saved, but regretfully, others will refuse to listen and will reject our message of the gospel and thereby reject the Lord Jesus Himself.

As for these disciples who were sent out by Jesus, in giving the gospel message in the way that God commanded, they were doing all that was being asked of them. Yes, they would mourn the rejections they would receive, but their task was finished.

And to those who rejected their message, Jesus ordered these disciples to do as He had ordered the apostles to do when they went out earlier, to say to them, not with rage, or scorn, or resentment, but with compassion for their poor perishing souls, "the dust of your city, we do wipe off against you". And then, they were to move on to the next town and to the next people.

But note here also, that a subtle, but absolute instruction is also being given to these seventy messengers of the gospel, the instruction to only go where they were sent. Messengers of God must always be faithful to listen carefully and to go only to those places and to those people that God intends to hear His message, otherwise, their efforts will be in vain.

But why would that be so? Should we not be generous with the gospel and always be "spreading the bread upon the waters". Yes, we should do that, but a true messenger must always be faithful to deliver the message to the exact people His master intends to receive it.

Why is that so? It's because those intended recipients of God's word have already been having their hearts prepared to receive it. That is done by God's Holy Spirit whose special ministry is to go ahead of the messengers and to soften

and prepare the hearts of the people, otherwise it will be like sowing seeds upon dry or rocky ground. It will never take root.

I'm reminded of an account given in the bible study "Experiencing God", by Henry Blackaby. In that study, Reverend Blackaby tells of a "church planting" team who made a careful study of a particular city with a desire to plant a new church somewhere within it. And finding a particular area of town that had no church, they decided to establish one there. And they did, but no one came to their new church. And the church languished and eventually failed.

But after much prayer and consideration about what might have gone wrong in their efforts, they decided to try a new approach. They decided to intentionally look to "see where God was working and to join Him there". And when they did that, they were successful.

They simply allowed God's Spirit to lead them to the people where He had already gone out ahead to prepare hearts to receive the gospel. That is when men and women will truly listen and hear the good news of Christ.

That is part of the special understanding of the verse that speaks of the fields being "white for harvest". A farmer does not try to harvest a crop that is not yet ready for harvest and neither should a disciple attempt to rush the work of the Holy Spirit within a person's life.

This is such a clear and simple illustration and we need to be faithful to it, but I must confess that as I consider these next words of the Lord Jesus, the sure judgment that awaits those who reject Him, I want to go out and begin to try to bring them into the kingdom through any means possible.

And that is not right. I know that, but the temptation to try is there, because folks, God truly does have that other part to His character, the "Justice" part. He is holy and therefore must also be "just" in all of His dealings with us, which means that He must hold us to account for every sin and especially for our refusing to believe in Him.

There truly is, and will be a consequence for every decision we make. And for everyone who rejects God's free gift of eternal life, the consequences will be an eternity of punishment in the pit of hell.

Here God uses the simple word “woe” to describe those eternal consequences. “Woe” is such a simple word, but it is a word that describes suffering beyond anything we can imagine.

The word “woe” is a cry of extreme “grief”, a kind of “weeping and wailing”, a crying out for relief from suffering and pain and loss, but with no possible consolation or help. It represents a point in time when all mercy and grace has been exhausted and now only the consequences remain, and they are awful.

And again, the woes that come from God are eternal. No quick and simple severance of life as some people think or hope, where the pain and suffering is short-lived and then done. No, the woes of God are eternal, relentless and never-ending.

Why is that so? Why is the penalty for sin eternal, relentless and never-ending? It's because sin, of any kind, is truly that awful in the sight of God, unbearable to the holiness that resides within Him.

For God to allow a person who has not had their sins completely wiped away by the blood of Jesus to come into heaven would mean that God Himself would have to give up His own holiness, and He cannot do that. That is the one thing that God cannot do, that is why sin must always be kept separate from Him.

To the eternal loss of anyone who rejects Christ, once they have been judged and sent into the pit of hell, there is no further opportunity for redemption. They must remain there in the relentless, never-ending sufferings and woes, never to get out and never to truly die.

That is why the word “woe” is used. Those who suffer a never-ending death in hell will cry continually with a cry of horrible “grief”, “weeping and wailing”, crying out for relief from their suffering and pain and loss, but there will be no possible relief or consolation or help. Their loss is eternal.

In Mark chapter 9, Jesus describes hell as being that place,

⁴⁸ ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’(Mark 9:48)

And as if that were not enough, God gives us one further warning within these words. His words tell us that there will be an even greater degree of suffering for some people than for others. Listen as He pronounces the "woes". Verse 13,

¹³"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. ¹⁶He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:13-16)

Who were Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum? Those were cities where Jesus often personally ministered His gospel, but the people of those cities would not turn and receive Him.

And His warning to them cannot be any more simple. It is this! For anyone who has heard the good news of the salvation of Christ, but has refused to accept it, it will be, more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for them.

And who are these people of our day? It is the ones who have grown up in Christian families, who have often sat in the pews of our churches and heard the precious good news of the gospel, but have refused to take that next step of receiving the Lord Jesus into their hearts. Woe be unto them!

I really can't fathom how one kind of suffering in hell can be worse than another, but it will surely be so for those who have been so close, but yet so far away from receiving the Lord Jesus. That is why we must take this warning very seriously.

The kingdom of God truly has come near to you and me today and we dare not reject it. And I'll close with these words of warning to us. Jesus said,

¹⁶He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:16)

May we pray.