

Verse 20. This verse seems to connect immediately with the discourse about John the Baptist, whose plain preaching had left his impenitent hearers without excuse; how great, then, must be the responsibility of those who hear the Son of man himself! *Then began he to upbraid. Or to rebuke.* There is no hint at hot or bitter temper here; our Lord's words are rather an outburst of holy grief and indignation, which marks in the history a turning from one class of moral appeals and reasonings to another—a radical change in his method of teaching. *The cities wherein most of his mighty works were done.* These "cities" were all on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Greek word translated "mighty works" literally means "powers." *They repented not.* Drop theological prepossessions, and understand these words as Matthew wrote them. The ruinous sin of these people was that our Lord's "mighty works" had made no change in their lives; which shows that our Lord's miracles were not performed for their own sake, were not merely acts of divine beneficence, were more than "Messianic signs;" they were loud calls to change of life and holy living. So are all the works of God to-day (Rom. 2:4; Acts 17:30, 31). God speaks through them so clearly that any man, "though a fool," might hear and heed. But the unbelieving majority in these cities heeded not; some superciliously and perversely denied the genuineness of the miracles; others accepted their physical advantages without any spiritual effect, and sometimes without ordinary gratitude. So to-day thousands treat the works of God. Every refusal of God's mercy hardens the human heart and increases future woe.

21. Woe unto thee. An expression in striking contrast with the "Blessed are ye" of the Beatitudes. *Chorazin . . . Bethsaida.* These towns are selected as typical of the busy region in which they stood. Chorazin is now identified with Kerazeh, a few miles north of Capernaum. Bethsaida Julius stood on the banks of the Jordan near the northern end of the lake of Galilee. It was the home of at least three of our Lord's disciples—Peter, Andrew, and Philip. *If the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon.* Strange to say, no miracle recorded in the gospels is placed in either Chorazin or Bethsaida. Tyre and Sidon are mentioned as the heathen capitals

nearest to Galilee. They had been through many centuries singularly wicked as well as singularly prosperous. Cradles of the worship of Baal, the most vicious influences which had injured early Israel had sprung from them. If such tender appeals could have been made to Phenicia as were now being made to Galilee, it would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes; a keen sense of sin would have brought keen sorrow to its cities, and, forgiven much, they would have loved much. Some pupils may need the explanation that orientals in their bitterest sorrow thrust themselves into coarse garments like sacks with armholes, and throw ashes on their heads. That sinful Tyre and Sidon were thus ready for repentance has pleasing illustration in the story of Matt. 15:21-28, in the fact that thirty years after our lesson Paul found believers there, and in the further fact that Tyre early became a Christian city.

22. It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon. Each city, and each individual soul, shall be judged according to its own opportunities. But corporations have no souls. Cities and nations are said to be punished when "a due proportion is observed between their degree of sin and of ruin." But individual souls—"every one of us shall give account of himself to God." *The day of judgment* here includes the general system of God's judicial decisions. But it is as difficult for us to conceive final judgment without definite date as to conceive a heaven without place. This verse would seem to intimate what seems to be assumed throughout the New Testament, that there are degrees of punishment and reward in the eternal world.

23. Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. The language throughout is highly figurative. "Heaven" stands for the loftiest exaltation; "hell," Hades, for extinction as a city. The Revised Version, following the best texts, turns the first part of this verse into question and answer: "Shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? thou shalt go down unto Hades." "The amount of light given and rejected is the measure of the guilt of the nation and the individual." The site of Capernaum is still in doubt. For many years Dr. Thomson's identification of Tel Hum with Kepharnahum was generally accepted by English and American scholars. Perhaps the chief reason for this identification is a resemblance of the