

WE PLAYED THE FLUTE FOR YOU, BUT YOU DID NOT DANCE



Scripture:

Matthew 11:16-26

¹⁶‘But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,
¹⁷“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.” ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

²⁰Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent.

²¹‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

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

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.



***We played a flute for you, but you did not dance.
We cried, but you were not moved.***

What’s up with that?

I got an e-mail from one of our church members who knew we would be reading this lesson today. She said, “The angry Jesus scripture would be fun to read. Intriguing sermon title. I’ll be all ears. I wonder what you will have to say?”

Well I don’t have much to say, but I just wonder what Jesus would have been angry about?

Let’s see if we can “connect the dots.”

Jesus had been on the road with the disciples making slow progress in proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It was hard work, so he returned to home base, to the places where he had performed the miracles, preached on the mountain, and prayed in the synagogue.

These three anchor cities are in the foothills and on the shorelines that surround the Sea of Galilee.

- Bethsaida, home of the fishermen.
- Capernaum, Jesus’ adopted home after he left Nazareth.
- Chorazin, a beautiful city perched above the shore line with stone homes and a beautiful synagogue.

These are the three cities from which many of his disciples had been called, the place where he stayed at the home of Peter, the locations of miracles, the

Sermon on the Mount, and the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. “Home at last, praise God Almighty, I’m home at last.” This was the “home court advantage,” and after weeks on the road, Jesus was ready.

On the way home, Jesus thought to himself:

- I remember when they were so anxious to learn.
- I remember when they were so ready to change.
- I remember when we wanted so much to try something new.
- I remember when we were open to the preaching of God’s word preached in new ways, to a people who were hungry to find out who they were in the face of a crushing Roman army.
- I remember when we had hope in our hearts.
- I remember when we claimed the moral high ground, and people looked to us to be a shining example.

We had such great hopes.

And when he got home, he looked around, and he listened to the people, and he thought, “What in the world has gone wrong here!”

Jesus was a tremendous teacher. He had a good memory, and he was quick on his feet. He was observant, and he was anchored in the world around him. He drew lessons from the birds overhead, the fish of the lake, the lilies of the field. It’s almost as if he

had a camera to bring the images that were familiar to the people of these three cities and say to them there are spiritual lessons every where you look.

Some of the disciples were so excited to follow Jesus that they gave up promising careers to become disciples. One of the people who wrote a Gospel had thought about becoming a practitioner of medicine. Being a fisherman was an important occupation that served the people's needs; building construction was important. Jesus said he wanted them to be fishers of men, and he had something even more important. So they changed their lives to follow him.

But the angry Jesus said they had become like children, playing in a marketplace and shouting at each other. "You're still arguing about the things you fought about a decade ago. I brought you hope and you are still blaming others for the conditions in which you live."

And here is the metaphor that outlasts every other example. He compared the word of God to music, and he said, "We played a flute for you, and you did not dance."

Jesus compared the life of the Kingdom to the deep seated emotions of a family mourning the loss of a loved one. Jesus said, "We wailed, we cried out from the deepest places in our hearts, and you did not mourn."

We gave you the best we had and you were unmoved, and you just folded your arms and were critical.

Jesus said John the Baptist was not a drunkard or a glutton, and yet people completely missed the importance of his words, and they lost the opportunities for spiritual growth that he brought them.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago ...²²But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? ... For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.'

THREE CITIES THAT JESUS CURSED

I have been to each of the three cities that Jesus cursed. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Two of them were medium-sized fishing cities.

But Bethsaida was lost shortly after the first century, and only rediscovered twenty years ago. It is interesting as an untouched example of life from

another time that just faded out. It was used as a Syrian military outpost from which attacks were launched; but only in recent times has it been restored as a Christian landmark.

I have pictures of some friends that I took to Capernaum to see Peter's house, the remains of a synagogue, and a rock that has an image of the Ark of the Covenant carved into its face.

Chorazin is four miles up the hill overlooking the lake. It is part of a national park, and its most famous relic is a Moses seat that is part of the furnishings of the temple. But no one lives there. No one lives in Bethsaida, and the only residents of modern Capernaum are the men of the religious order that cares for the remains and conducts services in a Roman Catholic Church built above Peter's house.

So what happened? The scriptures say that Jesus cursed these cities, because he did his most powerful works in them and they were unmoved. They didn't care. They just didn't think it mattered enough to fight for.

Matthew says Jesus denounced these three cities because they did not respond to his gifts of healing and education. Better to have never heard of Jesus Christ, than to have seen his miracles and not be motivated by them. That's the point.

Try not to live in a place where the word of God is preached, and where the people don't care.

So what was Jesus looking for?

THE "GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH"

The Presbyterian Church, USA, has an answer for that question. They call it "The Great Ends of the Church." It begins *The Book of Order*.

We say that the church exists to:

- **Proclaim the gospel for the salvation of humankind.**
- **Shelter and nurture the spiritual fellowship of the children of God.**
 - **Maintain divine worship.**
 - **Preserve the truth.**
- **Promote social righteousness.**
- **Exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.**

Whether we get together as a youth group, a women's organization, have a parking-lot sale, give money to mission, or meet together for worship, the

activities of the Christian church make sense only when we see it in relation to what Jesus had called the disciples to do.

Now we can debate every word in this “Great Ends of the Church” mission statement, and we should.

- What is salvation?
- What is truth?
- What is social righteousness today?
- How do we know when our worship is “divine,” or just bringing the music off the radio, and the flavor of the month into the sanctuary and calling it blessed?
- How do we know when the preacher is telling us the truth or just telling us his own prejudices and taking out his or her own frustrations on any group that will listen? (That could never happen here. 😊)

THE SIX KEY COMMITMENTS OF CHURCH MEMBERS

A couple of years ago, I challenged our congregation with Six Key Commitments of Church Members. I based them upon the great ends of the church. And when someone asks what we expect of our members, this is my answer.

I believe our church will prosper if our members do these six things, because I have seen other churches prosper who practiced them.

**PRAY FOR OUR MINISTRIES
WORSHIP REGULARLY
INVITE OTHERS TO WORSHIP AND
EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITH THEM
PARTICIPATE IN A SMALL GROUP
GIVE A PERCENTAGE OF OUR INCOMES
VOLUNTEER TO DO SOMETHING**

Let’s look at these six characteristics of a vital church.

① PRAY:

Jesus told his disciples, “Ask and you will receive.” Identify in prayer the life that YOU want God to bless, and ask for it in Jesus’ name. Pray for the church that you believe Christ wants. If the staff, and the teachers, and the Deacons and Elders, and if I, don’t have your prayers, then none of the other things matter. Pray for each other when we are doing our best, and pray for each other when we don’t meet your expectations. Let’s create a healthy church home, so

that we can spread health to our community, not sickness.

② WORSHIP REGULARLY:

How often is “regularly”? “Regularly” is more often than it is convenient. “Regularly” means a member might have to juggle their schedule; it might mean a showdown with the athletic coach; it might mean altering your plans. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to celebrate the Sabbath. God has asked for one day a week for as long as people have worshipped. It is part of the Ten Commandments.

You must worship God regularly. We cannot expect our children to learn about God if we are not participating. Worship is part of the balance of life. Can you believe that one day a week balances six others? Indeed, that is the power of the Sabbath.

Can you worship alone? You can; you should. But alone you are not the church. The church is all five fingers on your hand; it is every bone in your body; the church is all of us together. When we worship together we express that we are the body of Christ. I think about how important the Sabbath is in the Holy Land where the great religions converge! It is the significance behind the battle.

We have many excuses that range from our own schedules to a critique of the “entertainment” we find on Sunday morning. None of that is the reason for worship. It is not cool, it is not sophisticated, and it is not even intelligent to think that the universe begins and ends in you alone. At Roses we take worship seriously; we try to give our best, and we try to be creative and honest in our services. But the value of worship is not in what you get, it is in what you give.

③ INVITE OTHERS:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations and teach them to observe all that I have commanded, and lo, I will be with you.

People will come to our church if you invite them. It’s better than reading our street sign; it’s better than looking through the phonebook; it’s better than if we are able to get twenty seconds of coverage on the television. What does our church expect of its members? That you be our ambassadors and that you help us out.

There comes a time when each of us must graduate from being a critic to being an advocate, from consumer to giver, from watcher to doer. If this is the church we are praying for; if this is the place where we come to worship; if this is the place where we gathered for inspiration after the stock market tumbled and terrorists tried to attack us, then this is the faith we need to defend.

④ PARTICIPATE IN A SMALL GROUP:

This one is obvious, but if you can't find a small group, you will not connect. The Bible mentions several large groups that Jesus preached to and that he fed. But most of the stories of Jesus are Jesus with a group of five to ten: Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper; Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha; Jesus with the fishermen on the boats.

⑤ GIVE A PERCENTAGE OF YOUR INCOME TO OUR CHURCH:

God wants your heart, not your spare change

God knows how the true values of your heart are expressed, and so do you. God doesn't want what's left over. We ask our new members to give a percentage of their income to the church. Historically that percentage is called a "tithe" it is one-tenth of your income. It is a tremendous challenge that is rooted in 3,000 years of history.

No one else sends this church the money we need to do our work. We send money out. We pay for our ministries, we maintain our buildings, and we give money to hurting families in our church and community. But only our members bring money in. We are not a United Way Agency. We are not tax supported. We don't have a gift store, and we don't sell coffee mugs with the minister's thumb print on it. No group in our city slices a dollar thinner than we do. No group gives their accounting more scrutiny. But the truth is our budget should be much larger than it is. We need to be giving more money away. We have some delayed maintenance we should be getting to. We are facing some critical staff needs now. We have only one source for all of this - that is our members. Are you doing all you can?

⑥ VOLUNTEER TO DO SOMETHING:

This is God's house, and this is your church. At the very simplest level we should notice that which no one else has noticed.

Volunteer. Some of the most interesting groups are those that appear to have organized themselves at Roses. There are people who call other people; people who eat lunch together; people who come over to the church with a leaf blower and a broom.

Volunteer to help with mission planning and giving. Volunteer with the children. The greatest joys in the world are the joys that we voluntarily initiate.

TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE?

Do you think these six key commitments are too much to ask of our members? Or is it too little to ask of those who call themselves Christ's disciples?

It's a place to begin. If we are true to the character of our church we will want to amend this list, or add one more, or change one. Just keep it simple. Can you remember them without looking at the words?

- Pray for our ministries.
- Worship regularly.
- Invite others to worship and education with you.
- Participate in a small group.
- Give a percentage of your income.
- Volunteer.

Jesus cursed three cities around the Sea of Galilee because he taught them, and he performed miracles there, and they did not respond. I've been to Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida. They are charming little archaeological relics. But there is nobody home; they are ghost towns. They are not Rome. They are not Geneva, Switzerland. They are not Jerusalem. They are not Santa Rosa, California, where people take the words of Jesus seriously and press them into action against the injustices and the hopelessness and illnesses and the needs of a world that is hungry for spiritual direction.

I like the happy Jesus. But the angry Jesus makes me nervous.

The Son of God can get our attention in a lot of ways. And some of the lessons we remember the longest are not the happy ones. Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida. Not much going on there any more, and in today's lesson Jesus tells us why.

So let us:

- **Pray**
- **Worship**
- **Invite others**
- **Small groups**
- **Give**
- **Volunteer**



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