

## WHEREUNTO SHALL I LIKEN THIS GENERATION?

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During the ministry of Jesus Herod Antipas arrested John the Baptist and put him in prison. According to tradition John was held in the old fortress-like Machaerus prison east of the Dead Sea, a prison noted for its undesirable qualities. At one point in his stay there, John called his disciples to him and sent them to Jesus to ask, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" Jesus responded, "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, who-soever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." (Matt. 11:3-6).

Shortly after John's disciples had departed to report to their leader, Jesus paid this tremendous compliment to John, "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." Then, emphasizing the greater blessings that we who live in the kingdom were to receive, Jesus added, "Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he," (Matt. 11:11). A few moments later Jesus came to speak the words which constitute our text on this occasion, Matt. 11:16-30.

### Hard To Please

Our text begins, "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market-places who call unto their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn." Either from his own childhood experiences or from observation of other children, Jesus pictures for us a group of children sitting in the market place of some village or town who suggest to other children that they play the game of weddings. They begin to play their flutes or other instruments, in the happy mood of a wedding feast, but the other children are unimpressed and will have none of it. Then, the children suggest that they play the game of funerals and begin to wail. Again, the other children will have none of it, and do not respond by beginning to mourn.

At this point Jesus suggests the application of the story, "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a demon." We remember that John the Baptist was born in the hill country of Judea, a son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. He was reared in the wilderness, wearing the rough clothing of the outdoors, camel's hair cloth and a leather girdle. His food of the outdoors, locusts and wild honey. Even his preaching was not done in the cities, for he preached in the Jordan valley far from Jerusalem.

The text continues, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" In contrast to John, Jesus lived in cities. He was born at Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth, and did his major work in the cities of Jerusalem and Capernaum. The point of Christ's comment is that the people were exceedingly difficult to please. They rejected John; then they rejected Christ, though he was very different from John. This paragraph of our text ends, "And wisdom is justified by her works." (Matt. 11:16-19). Luke says it, "Wisdom is justified by her children." The meaning seems to be that wisdom is justified by her results.



## A Generation of Complainers

Our text has as its basic theme, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation?" At this point we ask the question not about Christ's generation, but about our own. Our generation, like the generation in which Christ lived, is hard to please. Ours is a generation of critics. Everyone thinks of himself as an expert in other people's affairs. As a nation we often criticise, protest, demonstrate, and dissent about everything and everyone. Part of the problem is instant news. By means of the newspaper, news magazines, and newscasts on radio and television, everyone is well informed about everything that is going on both in our nation and in the world. This encourages everyone to pass judgments on everything he sees and hears.

There is widespread criticism of the President of the United States. There is criticism of the Congress. There is criticism of the Supreme Court. Domestic programs come under fire. Foreign relations are scored, especially in the war in Viet Nam. As a nation we are critical of big business, critical of organized labor, critical of higher education, critical of young people, critical of parents, critical of various professions, and on and on. Time Magazine has recently featured on its cover two professional critics of our society, William F. Buckley and John Kenneth Galbraith.

The combination of instant news and complete freedom of the news may well combine to be one of the built-in problems of modern democratic America. In fact, it may even be the problem that ultimately destroys America. The problem is seen when we stop to realize that the news primarily pictures the problems, weaknesses, break-downs and failures in the world about us. When a train travels successfully from Chicago to Nashville, it is not news. However, if it is derailed along the route and several people are killed, it makes the headlines. Our military establishment has planes in the air constantly, logging hundreds of thousands of hours. These flights, without mishap, are not news. Yet, when one plane crashes in Greenland the whole world is disturbed about the possibility of a hydrogen explosion. The whole world is critical in one way or another.

Unlimited news means that the riot in Watts, California, triggers riots in Chicago, Cleveland and Harlem. It means a garbage strike in New York triggers a strike in Memphis. Far more significant perhaps is the fact that these problem situations in our world are so constantly before the public eye that they dominate the conversations of the entire population. They dominate the thinking of our people concerning our nation and the world.

After we have been critical of the President in the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court, we ought not to be surprised when our children have little respect for government and little reverence for law and order. Negative, destructive, biting criticism will tear a family, or a business, or a nation to pieces. What is needed is more people who can see the good in our society, people who will speak words of encouragement, comfort and confidence.

We Americans are great salesmen. By radio, television, newspapers, magazines and through other means we sell every conceivable kind of product. We put it before the people and the result is they buy it. Our problem is that we are putting destructive, negative world scenes before our people constantly and these scenes are dominating the thinking of the people rather than constructive, helpful scenes. Somehow we must put the genius of America's advertisers behind the idea that America can be a great and wonderful nation. The good must be sold rather than the problem situations of our world. Like the people of Jesus' day, we are hard to please. We have become complainers and critics of everything.



## Opportunities Determine Responsibility

Our text continues, "Then began he to upraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works that had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you." Here we pause to remember that Chorazin was a little city a few miles north and west of Capernanum. Bethsaida was located a few miles north and east. Neither exists today, and even the ruins of Chorazin cannot be located with certainty.

Christ continued, "And thou, Capernanum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Thou shalt go down unto Hades: for it the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Matt. 11:20-24). We remember that Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone from heaven, during the time of Abraham.

The point of these comparisons is simply that Christ had worked many miracles in these favored cities of Palestine. He had caused their lame to walk again, had given sight to the blind, had given hearing to the deaf, had healed the sick, had cast out demons, and had raised the dead. Still more, he had preached to them the good news of salvation. Their greater judgment was a result of their greater opportunities.

Again, we make the comparison with our own day and country. No nation on earth has been so blessed as we. We have had a good climate, wonderful natural resources, and a government which provided freedom of opportunity, freedom of thought and speech and freedom of religion. Ours is a land of Bibles and spiritual opportunity; This is in sharp contrast with nations like Poland, where some of our own brethren are on trial this very month for their Christian faith. Ours is a land in sharp contrast with the religious opportunities in lands like Russia, China, India and many others. No nation on earth has as many blessings as we have had; no nation on earth has as much responsibility. In Luke 12:48 Jesus said, "To whosoever much is given, of him much shall be required."

## Christ's Tender Invitation

Again our text reads, "At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight." These verses imply that the enlightened leaders of the cities just named had rejected Christ. It is similar to what Paul said in I Cor. 1:26-27, "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong."

Christ then added, "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." Here Jesus declares that he alone knows the way of eternal life, for he alone knows the Father that giveth life. It is almost his message as we find it in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." Finally, our text reads, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:25-30).



This is perhaps the warmest, most appealing invitation Christ ever gave. Christ loved people, even when they rejected him. He especially loved the poor and heavily burdened. In this great passage he is suggesting a change of yokes--his lighter yoke for the heavier one under Moses' law. While this reference to Moses' law was the immediate application, Christ is concerned with lifting the heavy yokes of all kinds that men wear--yokes of guilt, yokes of fear, yokes of drudgery, yokes of uncertainty and confusion. Matthew Henry says of Christ's yoke that it is easy because it is "lined with love."

The carefree life is not free of care. We always are happier and do better when we are working within Christ's yoke. It is only when we have disciplined ourselves to work within the harness of Christ's yoke that we pull any loads. There is an imaginary legend that birds at first had no wings. Later when wings were given they rebelled because the wings seemed to be a burden. It was then that they discovered that the burden lifted them to the sky. Only with wings could they fly.

Augustine, one of the top dozen or two dozen minds in all history, turned away in his youth from the religion of his mother, Monica. Turning from Christianity he sought the answers to the world's problems in classical philosophy. Later, in mature life, he turned back to Christianity. Concerning the invitation which we find in our text Augustine remarked that he had not found such an invitation in Cicero or Plato. How could they offer rest for those who would accept their philosophy? They did not know the Father in heaven who provides rest. Only Christ can offer peace and rest.

#### Conclusion

The Christian does not bury his head in the sand, refusing to see the world's problems. Rather, seeing them he is not concerned with emphasizing them, but rather he is concerned with finding a way to overcome them. When wicked men dragged an adulterous woman before Jesus, calling upon him to give the word that she should be stoned, Christ turned away with the comment, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Then, after his writing upon the ground, when the accusers had slipped away one by one in their own shame, Jesus lifted himself up, and said unto the women, "Did no man condemn thee?" The women replied, "No man, Lord." Jesus responded, "Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more." (John 8:7-11). It would have been easier for Jesus to condemn the woman, but his great love for fallen humanity led him to lift her up and send her on her way with hope in her heart.

The Christian follows a wholesome, constructive, optimistic way of life. It is free of destructive criticism. It is full of constructive help for every problem situation. Paul wrote, "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high places." Remember the kind of rulers for whom Paul would have men pray: even the dictators of Rome and the petty politicians of Palestine.

Again, the Christian makes use of the opportunities of his day and land. He uses them to the full for every constructive work. As a result he saves himself and many of those about him. If you would like to be that kind of person, come now as Christ's invitation is extended.

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