

Westover Baptist Church Virtual Sunday School Lesson

Lesson Text: Matthew 11:16-30

11 ¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces 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.”

Woes to Unrepentant Cities

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.”

Jesus Thanks His Father

²⁵At 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. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (NRSV)

Reflection

The title of the lesson for today is “The Yoke” by author Lori Walke, from our Connections Study Guide published by Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc. The yoke metaphor means that our work will continue, but in partnership with Jesus. To choose the yoke of Jesus is to reject other ways of living.

Jesus is expressing frustrations at the people’s rejection of both John the Baptist and him. They behave in juvenile ways. They accuse John of being too judgmental because of his minimalist existence and they accuse Jesus of not being judgmental enough because he dines with “sinners”. Sometimes Jesus’ teachings demand we change in ways we don’t want to change. Are we guilty of rejecting Jesus because his ways are challenging and inconvenient?

Jesus calls out cities for not repenting. In doing so he speaks of individuals in those cities. Repentance means reorganizing our lives so that we participate in the kingdom of God.

Every generation has its blind spots. How does our generation refuse to recognize the prophets of our time? What “deeds of power” (V. 21) happen among and around us? Do we fail to notice them? If so, why? If we are intentional about looking for what God is doing in, among, and around us, we will develop a spirit of repentance.

Jesus also notes that some people accept his teachings. They are not the religious or political elites, but “infants” (V. 25). These are the marginalized and dismissed people...those without authority. The powerful elites of Jesus’ day have all the necessary information, but they lack understanding. Receiving a revelation from God doesn’t depend on ones’ status or authority, but on one’s heart.

Pray for the outpouring of God’s revelation on everyone. Jesus insisted that we all are eligible to receive God’s grace. Pray that you will be open to whatever God wants to teach you.

Jesus invites those who are weary to find rest in him. The rest Jesus offers is solidarity, partnership, and freedom from legalism. Religion can become a list of rules that enslave people, which doesn’t glorify God or contribute to the kingdom’s work. It can make life oppressive. Jesus’ teachings help us engage in spiritual practices that refine us rather than weigh us down. Jesus does not promise the absence of difficulty; he invites us into a mutual sharing of the load as we learn from him.

What is today’s religious legalism? The church must regularly reflect on whether we participate in the religious legalism Jesus warned against. Who helps you shoulder life’s burdens? Does the church? How does the church make clear that its ministry involves the sharing of burdens? Pray that you will recognize the burdens of others, and respond in ways that reflect the model of Jesus, offering partnership to help lighten the load of your fellow travelers.