

The GREAT DIVIDE

(Matthew 11:20)

Matthew 11:20 (NKJV)

20 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:

This verse marks a MAJOR shift in the ministry of Christ. Recall the two bookends summarizing Christ's Galilean ministry as seen in Matthew 4:23 and Matthew 9:35.

Matthew 4:23 (NKJV)

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NKJV)

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

This is descriptive of Christ's presentation of Himself, and His kingdom offer to the nation. Most of these mighty miracles took place in the region of Galilee, which Christ is now going to severely rebuke because of their blasphemous indifference.

"Those who really wish to know their Bibles should see that we are in a new country from this verse forward. Draw a thick black line between the nineteenth and the twentieth verses. There is a great divide here."

– **Donald Grey Barnhouse**

From this point on, a new aspect of Christ's ministry is being introduced. Prior to this time, a lot of miraculous evidence and space was given for the people to repent and respond to the truth of Christ and His message.

Now the tone has changed. He now begins to pronounce judgment on this generation because they refused to repent. He goes from presenting the evidence to rebuking and condemning the people for not accepting it.

Note the language here: "**Then He BEGAN to rebuke**". This marks a change. The idea of rebuke means to deliver a denunciation.

And in particular He is aiming His rebuke at those cities in which MOST of His mighty works had been done. They had the MOST evidence and therefore were the most accountable!

They had seen the truth the most clearly. The word “**mighty**” is the Greek word “**dunamis**,” from which we get our English word “dynamite”. It refers to the idea of might, power, or strength. These were powerful miracles that were irrefutable. They were kingdom miracles here referred to as “**mighty works**”. Power characterized them, as Christ did what no one else ever did, both in terms of scope and uniqueness.

Christ evidenced total power over the demonic realm, over the realm of disease, and over the realm of nature. In every realm, His power was shown to be total. This was POWERFUL evidence that Jesus was no ordinary person. He was the God-Man. He was the prophesied divine/human Messiah. He is the God-King that the Messiah would be, as seen in the power displayed in performing these miracles.

Isaiah 53:1 (NKJV)

1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

The answer is that the arm (power) of the LORD was revealed in a special and unique way in the ministry of Jesus to these people in this day. Yet as Isaiah 53:3 goes on to say, He was despised and rejected by men.

And note again the problem here. In spite of all this powerful evidence, yet the people refused to repent. This was the response that God was demanding! The response of repentance is what John the Baptist called for (Mt. 3:2). It was also the response that Jesus called for at the very outset of His ministry (cf. Mt. 4:17).

The people, to a point, took an interest in Jesus’ teaching, and they loved the healing miracles and free food, but their hearts remained unchanged, and therefore their lives were unchanged. As Jesus said, people are ultimately known by their fruits (cf. Mt. 7:15-20).

The word “**repent**” literally means to change your mind. It means to think differently, where we admit we are wrong and align our thinking with God’s truth. Repentance is saying, “**God you are right – I am wrong in my thinking, and therefore I change my thinking**”.

Repentance realigns our thinking with God's truth. In this case, the issue is WHO Jesus is, and of course, if you truly change your mind about WHO He is, that affects how you respond to His teaching and how you live.

Christ was calling on the nation to acknowledge Him as the prophesied Messiah and to align with His kingdom teaching. This would require a change of mind concerning their legalistic ways steeped in the rabbinic traditions and dead formalism.

Christ was really saying, ***"It's not about your dead religion, but rather it's all about ME – because I am the Messiah. Turn your back on your legalistic religion and follow Me."*** And this is why the religious leaders hated Him. He was a threat to them. They got it that Jesus was calling for repentance that forsakes legalistic Judaism and turns to follow Christ with an all-out commitment to Him as Lord.

Jesus made it all about Him, and the religious establishment had a problem with that. You can't faithfully follow legalistic Judaism and Jesus as Lord at the same time. They are diametrically opposed. This is the point of the parable, showing that new wine must be put into new wineskins (cf. Mt. 9:17).

A complete change of mind was required, which is called repentance. Repentance jettisons the old form of religion and follows Christ as your religious authority on everything. Most of Israel was not ready to do this. It was a "Lordship" issue, and most of Israel was still under the Lordship of religious legalism and was not willing to repent and align with the Lordship of Christ. That at core was the issue.

Footnote: Miracles do not necessarily guarantee that faith will follow. Sometimes Christians seem to think that if we just saw more miracles more people would believe. The ministry of Christ proves that is not true. In fact, Christ put the number one convincer as being the Word.

Luke 16:31 (NKJV)

31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "

Christ is saying that there is nothing more convincing than the Scriptures themselves. If people won't believe the Word of God, there is no miracle that would be more convincing. Do you believe what Jesus said? The Word is its own power because it has the convicting power of the Spirit behind it.

But miracles did play a role. They did provide powerful evidence for which the people were accountable. The physical miraculous evidence could not have been stronger, and yet they brazenly rejected it. Hence the strong language of judgment!