

Botany Bay is located in Sydney, Australia about 13 km south of the central business district. It is about 55 km or 21 square miles in size. Despite its relative shallowness, it serves as the main cargo seaport for the city. 2 runways from Sydney Airport extend into the bay as you can see from this picture. But it is also surrounded by natural wonders and beautiful beaches.

Now I've never been there. But author Rico Tice talks of a time he was in Australia visiting a friend. His friend took him to a beach on Botany Bay. So Tice decided to go for a swim. He was just taking off his shirt when his friend said, "What are you doing?" Tice said "I'm going for a swim." The friend said "What about those signs?" And he pointed to some signs that Tice had not really noticed – DANGER! SHARKS!

Tice then writes "With all the confidence of an Englishman abroad, I said: 'Don't be ridiculous – I'll be fine.' His friend said: 'Listen mate, 200 Australians have died in shark attacks – you've got to decide whether those shark signs are there to save you or to ruin your fun. You're of age – you decide. " Tice decided not to go for a swim.

When you see a warning sign, how do you respond? I think we all go through some sort of mental process when we see or hear warnings. Maybe the process can be summarized in 3 questions. How reliable is the source doing the warning? How close does the danger warned about appear? How willing are we to respect legitimate warnings before it's too late?

Warnings present a challenge because ignoring them and taking risks can be pretty exciting. Imagine you see a sign saying "Danger, thin ice" by a river or a lake in the winter. But the ice looks pretty thick and it would be cool to walk down a river. How do you respond? I remember some ponds in a park near a friend's house when growing up. We would go to those ponds in the winter and walk on the ice to see who could make the ice crack. We thought it was thrilling to get on the ice, hear the crack and run off before anything more happened. I think those ponds were 2 or 3 feet deep so it wasn't really a huge risk. But we decided that the thrill of taking the risk outweighed the value of respecting the warning.

I mean if you're friends ask you "what did you do on the weekend?" whose going to have the better story? We went onto some lake ice until it cracked and then ran off before it broke. Or – "we walked by a lake and respected the

thin ice warning sign by walking by?” Do you see the dilemma? So how do you respond when you see or hear a warning.

You’ll need to think about that because we arrive at a warning text today in Matthew. Last week we looked at John the Baptist and his doubt about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. We saw Jesus answer John’s doubt and help the crowd with some of their doubts. Today, we continue with what Jesus said next. He will utter some warnings in this next section. We will have to evaluate them. How reliable is the source? How close does the danger warned about appear? How willing are we to respect legitimate warnings before it’s too late? After we’ve done that, I’m going to invite you to spend some time with Jesus to pray and discuss with Him what you’ve heard.

Matthew 11:16-24 (ESV)

¹⁶ “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,

¹⁷ “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

²⁰ Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Jesus has just finished inviting the crowds to believe that John the Baptist was in fact the Elijah who was prophesied to come in the Old Testament. He concludes by saying “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Or “understand and take to heart the things I’m telling you.” Then Jesus describes responses to His ministry. .

Verse 16 – *But to what shall I compare this generation?* In contrast to those who hear with their ears or respond to Jesus’ message, what about this generation? How have people in general respond to Jesus and his forerunner John the Baptist? Verse 16 – “It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates.” This was a common sight during Jesus’ time. Lots of people gathered at the marketplace. Children came with their parents. If the parents were sellers of goods from out of town, the children had to stay there all day. So what do kids do? They find

other kids to play with. Or they maybe find other groups of kids to interact with. Apparently, they liked playing the game of wedding or funeral. So they would pretend to be part of a wedding procession. Or they would line up and be part of a funeral procession using maybe a grasshopper for the body of the deceased. And other kids would sing the appropriate songs. A wedding procession included a flute and dancing. A funeral song was called a dirge.

But as is often the case with kids, sometimes one group doesn't want to do what the other group wants. Maybe the older kids tried to force the younger kids to march in the procession. But the younger kids didn't want to. So the older kids would quote this poem "We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we sang a dirge and you did not mourn." It's the song of children who didn't get their way. They wanted the other group to respond to their song or dirge appropriately. But they didn't play along.

So how does this relate to "this generation" that Jesus talks about? He explains in the next verses. "John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, 'He has a demon.'" Last week about John the Baptist's ministry style. He adopted the posture of a prophet; living in the wilderness; wearing rough clothes; eating locusts and delivering a harsh message calling for repentance. He and his disciples adopted a very strict view of what it meant to follow God. Basically you lived in repentance and a constant readiness for the coming of God's Messiah. There was no time for attending banquets to eat and drink.

But this generation did not accept John this way. They collectively rejected him as the forerunner or the last prophet from God. They concluded he had a demon. Perhaps John's severe message or his seriousness put people off. Maybe lots of demon possessed people went to the desert to live because that's the only place society allowed them to live. So this generation dismisses John as just as another crazy desert dweller who probably was demon possessed. His message and ministry did not fit they're expectations. Like the children singing the song, he did not do what the generation wanted him to do.

Jesus goes on to show how the people responded to him in a similar way. Verse 19 – The Son of Man (a title Jesus adopted for Himself) came eating and drinking, and they say 'Look at him! A glutton, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' If John was strict and severe in his ministry style, Jesus was celebratory and welcoming. For some, he was too welcoming. He spent time not only talking to sinners and tax collectors. He even ate and drank with them, an ultimate symbol of acceptance into his social circles. So they conclude Jesus can't be the Messiah. He is too

casual; too celebratory; too joyful for their liking. Instead they conclude that he was just a glutton or drunkard and friend of the worst. Jesus did not perform according to their expectations. So they rejected him.

In this section we find Jesus' first warning. **Jesus warns about rejecting Him because He does not meet our expectations. (11:16-19)** It's almost like Jesus is says – this generation believes that it played a flute for John the Baptist. They wanted him to lighten up. But he did not dance. He stuck to his message and his style. So they rejected him. Then they played a dirge for me. Some wanted me to be more strict and certainly stop attending those banquets at tax collectors houses. But I kept going. So like children who did not get their way, the generation complains and rejects both the messenger and Messiah. Jesus did not conform to that generation's expectation of the Messiah. So they rejected Him.

Before we quickly condemn them, might we have done the same thing with God or Jesus? We expect Him to do something or say something or change something or make something right. He doesn't do it according to our timetable or maybe He doesn't do it all. So the response is "forget you God. Forget you Jesus. If you're not going to be who I want you to be; if you're not going to be a God that fits my expectations, I want nothing to do with you."

We might even use this approach with other Christians or pastors. Maybe we want them to be more serious and severe. They are not strict enough for us so we begin to question their morals. Or maybe we want them to relax a little and lighten up. But that's not their nature. They are wired to be serious and very focused on some aspect of the faith. So we dismiss them as legalists or people who need the enlightenment that we have. But doesn't this passage reveal that God sends people of different types, temperament and ministry style? God Himself is Holy, Righteous and Pure along with Merciful, Forgiving and Gracious. We don't get to choose which character traits of God we like and then shape Him into a god to our liking. We have to take God for who He is and has revealed Himself to be. Beware of rejecting God because He doesn't conform to your expectations.

Jesus describes this rejection. But then he pronounces a verdict on their rejection. End of verse 19 – "Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds or by her children." Wisdom will show who was right by what comes out of the ministries of John and Jesus. If their work was lasting and eternal, then the generation was wrong to reject them. 2000 years later, the faith goes on and the kingdom of heaven continues to advance. So that generation had it wrong about Jesus and John.

Then he moves on in verse 20-24 to give another warning. But this time it's much more severe and direct. Here Jesus speaks like a prophet of old. Anyone who thinks Jesus was meek and mild and never had the strength of character to speak a hard truth hasn't spent time in passages like this. **Jesus warns against responding to Him with self-satisfaction or complacency.** Jesus denounces the cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent. Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida were relatively close to one another. Jesus did many miracles, healings and casting out of demons there. Yet, the majority of their populations did not repent. Maybe they enjoyed the new fame of their villages or cities. After all, people came from all over the country to see and hear Jesus. Maybe they liked having such a celebrity in their town. But they didn't ultimately respond to Jesus' call to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

This lack of response is no small thing from Jesus' perspective. It's not like he's saying "I'd really like you to listen to what I'm saying. It would be really nice if you sincerely took my message to heart and changed because of it. But if you don't, it's no big deal. Everyone has to find their own way.

Verse 21 – *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida!* That should have gotten their attention. In Israel's history, prophets said woe a warning of coming trouble or consequences. They warned because Israel turned away from God and so they called them to come back before it was too late. If they didn't, God would allow them to be conquered by other nations. Yet the vast majority of the nation ignored these warnings. So they experienced invasion, defeat and occupation multiple times in their history. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and now the Romans ruled over them. So the prophets pronouncing woe proved to be right. Jesus adopts a prophetic stance for this part of his message.

Then he delivers the evidence. "If the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Sackcloth was like our burlap today. It was a plain and basic garment worn by those in mourning. Someone who wore sackcloth and put ashes on their head because of repentance showed they were very serious about it. Tyre and Sidon had no history of repentance. These were Gentile cities along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They were known for their wealth, materialism and arrogance. Yet Jesus says if He would have done the same works in those cities as he did in Chorazin and Bethsaida, these unbelieving Gentiles would have repented. Yet the people of these two Jewish Galilean cities did not repent despite the powerful evidence of God's

presence among them. So Jesus concludes in verse 22 “But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Then he directs his attention to Capernaum, his home base for ministry. “And you Capernaum. Will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades.” Somehow, the citizens of Capernaum thought they would become a highly exalted city in the region. Or maybe they believed that Jesus’ ministry among them indicated God’s favor on them. Therefore they were guaranteed heaven. But Jesus brings them down to earth with a striking comparison. “For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Sodom was the poster boy for sin city in the Old Testament. Everyone knew that Sodom was the worst of the worst. God leveled it in Genesis 19 because of universal wickedness. Yet if Jesus had gone there and done the mighty works he did in Capernaum, the people of Sodom would have repented and the city would have existed until Jesus’ time.

So I hope we get the force of Jesus’ words. He’s saying that obviously immoral and secular people will have a more tolerable judgment day than those who were supposedly God’s people. Those who appear to be God’s people can be some of the most hard hearted towards God.

We might think that Jesus is being too extreme in his denouncing. But think about the opportunity they had. We think Jesus ministered publicly for about 3 years. That’s the only time people anywhere had opportunity to see God in flesh as He ministered. These were physically touched by God. They lived by Him. They could hear his teaching. They knew people who had been healed by him. They met many who would share stories about Him. They marveled at His teaching and saw that it was profoundly different than that offered by their teachers. They lived during a time where there was a very obvious fulfillment of prophecy. They were seeing the hopes of generations fulfilled. People came from all over the country to hear and see Jesus.

Yet in Chorazin and Bethsaida,, they seemed to respond with boredom. And it somehow came to be all about them in Capernaum. So this people with this once in history opportunity to interact with God in flesh missed it.

So Jesus has warned against rejecting Him because He doesn’t meet expectations. He warns against casual self-satisfaction to His ministry and message. But **what will happen if people don’t heed these warnings? Jesus warns it will lead to God’s judgment.** When that day arrives for those who have rejected or ignored Christ, it’s not going to be just another day or a minor slap on the wrist for not taking Jesus seriously. The Bible talks about this day as one of

foreboding and dread. People will want to run to the hills or caves or have the mountains fall on them rather than face the great and dreadful day of the Lord. This day, God's Holy and Righteous wrath will be justly poured out on those who rejected or did not respond to Christ's message. That day will be verdict day when they will hear the decision pronounced – Guilty. The Bible tells us those who rejected or ignored Christ will have to depart to Hell.

But Jesus came to rescue us from this dreadful day of reckoning. When Jesus began to preach, His message was simple. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. God is coming so get ready by turning away from a life opposed to Him. And you know those sins that you committed ultimately against the Holy God. I will die in your place to pay for them. All you have to do is repent and put your trust in me and you will be saved. And Romans 8:1 will be true of you – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. True Christians already know the verdict that will be pronounced over them on Judgment Day - Not Guilty based on Christ's sacrifice and the Christians trust in Christ. That's the good news.

Jesus warns that rejection of Him or complacency towards Him leads to God's judgment. **But repentance and living under Christ as our Lord leads to forgiveness and eternal life.** Repentance was the appropriate response to Jesus' works and messages. "They would have repented," Jesus says. That is what Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum failed to do. Yet repentance is not easy. It requires humbling ourselves. It means we have to admit we were going the wrong way. Who likes to admit that?

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He has written a little book called "Is God anti-gay?" In one of the earliest chapters he writes "Is God anti-gay? No. But he is against who all of us are by nature, as those living apart from him and for ourselves. He's anti that guy, whatever that guy looks like in each of our lives. But because He is bigger than us, better than us, and able to do these things in ways we would struggle to, God loves that guy too – Loves him enough to carry his burden, take his place, clean him up, make him whole and unite him forever to himself.

Then he also talks about repentance – He writes "the response Jesus looks for is repentance and faith. Repentance means turning around, to change course. The implication is pretty clear and a little uncomfortable. We're not heading in the right direction. We're like the elderly man who in a moment of confusion in the middle of the night

ended up driving a mile or so on in the wrong direction on the motorway. Thankfully, at that hour there was hardly anything coming the other way; if it had happened when the commuters were up, it would have been a very different story.

Jesus says that we're heading in the wrong direction, and that rush hour of God's purposes is heading towards us. We need to change direction and line up with what God is doing. And that means believing the gospel; the announcement that through Jesus death and resurrection, we can be put right with God; that we are being offered a fresh start to begin to live as God always meant us to. This is his message. Our response begins with repentance.

So we've received some warnings today from Jesus. Rejecting Him or complacently putting Him aside will result in facing God's judgment. But repenting and turning to Christ results in forgiveness and protection from God's judgment.

I started by asking how you typically respond to warnings? We talked about the mental process we might go through in evaluating the warning. How reliable is the source warning us? That's Jesus. How close does the danger warned about appear – it's one heartbeat or failed heart beat away? How willing are we to respect legitimate warnings before it's too late?

Friend, have you rejected Christ because at some point in the past He didn't meet your expectations or do what you wanted Him to do? Or might you have simply ignored Jesus and concluded that He's bound to make everything alright for you? Jesus warns that neither rejection nor complacency will deal with the coming judgment of God.

So if you have never repented before, will you respond to Jesus' call? You need to admit you're headed in the wrong direction and then turn around to a life under His Lordship and leadership.

But if we have already done that big initial repentance when you came to Christ, we're not done with repentance. There are the multiple little repentances that are required throughout the Christian life. God reveals to us little by little, the ways in which parts of our lives are going in the wrong direction.

It's like an iceberg. 90% of iceberg is below water. When the temperature rises and the sun shines on them, the top of the iceberg melts a little. Then the stuff below the water comes above the surface. When we come to Christ we may be aware of 1% of our sin. God slowly reveals it to us – like sun shining on an iceberg - so the stuff underneath comes up above the surface. So repentance continues – not for salvation but for sanctification.

Those who repent are blessed. They walk with God, reconciled with Him, forgiven of their sins and look forward to eternal life with Him. They too will face the day of Judgment but without worry because the verdict has already been pronounced.

So how will respond to Jesus' warnings and call to repentance today?