

Matthew 11:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

Analysis

'But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.' Jesus's pronouncement is severe: Phoenician cities Tyre and Sidon—Gentile, pagan, condemned by Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 23, Ezekiel 26-28)—will face less severe judgment than Chorazin and Bethsaida. The phrase 'more tolerable' (*ἀνεκτότερον/anektoteron*) indicates degrees of punishment in final judgment. Reformed theology affirms this: while all unredeemed face eternal separation from God, judgment varies according to light rejected and sins committed (Matthew 11:24, Luke 12:47-48, Romans 2:12). Why more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon? They never witnessed Jesus's miracles or heard His teaching directly. Had they done so, they would have 'repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes' (v.21)—extreme expressions of contrition. Chorazin and Bethsaida had incomparably greater revelation yet remained impenitent. Greater privilege brings greater accountability. This verse warns against presuming on religious heritage or exposure to truth without genuine repentance and faith.

Historical Context

Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician port cities on the Mediterranean coast, north of Israel. Old Testament prophets condemned their pride, materialism, and idolatry. Tyre boasted of its commercial empire and resisted Nebuchadnezzar's siege for 13 years. Sidon was equally wealthy and pagan. Both cities epitomized worldly power and ungodliness. Yet Jesus says they would have repented if they'd witnessed His ministry—unlike Galilean cities that saw His works and remained unmoved. This

comparison is devastating: Jewish cities with scriptural heritage, messianic expectation, and direct exposure to Jesus proved more resistant than pagan Gentile cities. The prophecy foreshadowed gospel reality: the gospel spread through the Gentile world (including Phoenicia—Acts 11:19, 21:3-7) while much of Israel remained in unbelief (Romans 11:25). Paul quotes this pattern: 'I was found of them that sought me not' (Romans 10:20, quoting Isaiah 65:1). Those without privilege often receive grace, while privileged rejecters face judgment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the reality of degrees of punishment affect your understanding of God's justice?
2. What does this teach about the danger of religious exposure without genuine heart transformation?
3. How should this warning affect those raised in Christian contexts who are familiar with but not transformed by the gospel?

Interlinear Text

πλὴν	λέγω	ὑμῖν	Τύρῳ	καὶ	Σιδῶνι	ἀνεκτότερον	ἔσται
But	I say	for you	for Tyre	and	Sidon	more tolerable	It shall be
G4133	G3004	G5213	G5184	G2532	G4605	G414	G2071

ἐν	ἡμέρᾳ	κρίσεως	ἢ	ὑμῖν
at	the day	of judgment	than	for you
G1722	G2250	G2920	G2228	G5213

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:24 (Judgment): But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Matthew 10:15 (Judgment): Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

1 John 4:17 (Judgment): Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

Matthew 12:36 (Judgment): But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

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