

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 28 April 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

To Whose Tune Are You Dancing?

Matthew 11:16-24

Years ago, one of the most famous women in the world, **Oprah Winfrey**, invited a panel of New Age authors to her television program, to discuss the matter of “spirituality”: and as she was summing up the content of a book that one of her guests had written, she said, “One of the mistakes that human beings make is believing that there is only one way to live, and that we don’t accept that there are diverse ways of being in the world—that there are millions of ways to be a human being.” At this point, a Christian woman in the audience, who had been trying to speak up for the Lord, began to ask, “But how do you please God?”; however, Oprah quickly cut her off, and went on to say, “...and that there are many paths...to what *you* call ‘God’—that *her* path [speaking of her guest] might be something else; and when she gets there, *she* might call it ‘the light’; but her loving and her kindness, and her generosity—if it brings her to the same point that it brings you—it doesn’t matter whether she called it ‘God’ along the way or not.” As the crowd erupted in applause, she said, “There couldn’t *possibly* be just one way!”

At this point, another woman in the audience spoke up and said, “*You* say there isn’t one way. There *is* one Way, and *only* one Way, and that is through Jesus.” In obvious anger and frustration, Oprah retorted, “There couldn’t *possibly* be [one way], when there are millions of people in the world. There couldn’t *possibly* be!...Does God care about the heart, or does God care about whether you call His Son ‘Jesus?’”

For many years now, Oprah has been using her fame to push her message that “the God force...lives inside all of us, and once you tap into that, you can do anything.” Yet, this is extremely different from the message that she heard in the Baptist church in which her grandmother raised her in her early childhood. What put Oprah on the path toward New Age spirituality? Well, for one thing, she had a very tragic childhood, in which she was neglected and unloved by her mother (who had had her out of wedlock in her teen years), and was molested by male relatives; and this clearly gave Oprah a very distorted view of who God is. However, the plain fact of the matter is that she *chose* to reject the God of the Bible. In one of her programs, she recounted the turning point in her life, when she began to search “other paths.” She said that when she was about 27 years old, she went to a Baptist church; and in his message, the pastor was talking about the fact that God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and transcendent. But then, he said something that Oprah didn’t like. He quoted from the book of **Exodus**, where Moses said, “**For the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.**” Oprah didn’t like that word “*jealous.*” She thought, “God is *jealous* of what? Jealous of *me*?” She didn’t understand that God is “jealous” of us in that He desires our *love*, our *heart*, and our *whole life*. In fact, He loves us so much, that He sent His Son to die for us, just so that we could have our sins forgiven, and be reconciled back to Him! *That* is how much God desires us! God doesn’t *need* any of us, because He is totally self-sufficient; yet, God created us to serve Him, and to have a loving relationship with Him through His Son Jesus. But Oprah didn’t want that kind of God. She often *speaks* of “God,” and “Jesus”; but her “Jesus” is not the Jesus of the

Bible. She doesn't want to *serve* God, or *submit* to Him, or *love* Him with all her heart and life. Instead, she wants to *be* God. In spite of all the charitable things she does, her real "god" is *self*.

Most people don't want the true Jesus of the Bible. Instead, they want a "Jesus" who will dance to *their* tune, and tell them what they want to hear. This morning, I would like to challenge *you* with this question (which is also the title of this message): ***"To Whose Tune Are You Dancing?"***

Read Matthew 11:16-24.

I. The reward for not dancing to the world's tune (vv. 16-19)

In last week's message, we read about the time, after John the Baptist's arrest, when Jesus gave John a high honour. In fact, it was the highest honour that any prophet ever received. Jesus called John the greatest of all the prophets born of women. Then, as Jesus wrapped up His tribute to John, He gave the people of Israel an offer: but in this offer, a *warning* was implied, as well. He said, ***"And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, who was for to come."*** Jesus was giving them a condition. If the people would receive ***"it"*** (the message of John—the message that they needed to repent of their sin and believe on Jesus as their King and Messiah), *then* John would be "Elijah" to them. In other words, *if* they would receive Jesus as their King, then John would be the "Elijah" that Malachi had foretold (the one who would come just before the Day of the LORD); and the Kingdom would be ushered in within their lifetimes. However, it all depended on whether they would believe John's message, or not. That is why Jesus said, ***"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."*** Jesus was giving them the invitation to receive Him as their King; but would they hear Him?

Tragically, most of the people did *not* hear Him. Even at this early stage in Jesus' ministry, when Jesus was still at His peak of popularity, it was already obvious that the nation was *not* going to accept His invitation. They liked Jesus' miracles; but they didn't like His words about repentance and belief on Him. Jesus likened their attitude to that of selfish, bratty little kids who say, "We're not going to be your friend anymore, because you won't play the game we want to play!" Let's read that passage again. **(Read Matthew 11:16-19 again.)**

What did Jesus mean by this analogy? Who were these ***"children"*** in the marketplace who were playing the flute? And who were their ***"fellows"***? The ***"children"*** were the people of Israel at large; and their ***"fellows"*** were John the Baptist and Jesus. The ***"children"*** were demanding that Jesus and John dance to the tune that *they* were playing; but neither John nor Jesus was caving to their demands. On the one hand, John spent much of his time fasting, and mourning over the sin of the nation, and praying for their repentance; but the people said, "Why won't you dance for us, John? Why are you always mourning? We're trying to play a peppy tune to you, but you won't dance for us. You won't even put on some decent clothes. You live in the desert, and dress in camel's skins. You're always talking about sin, and repentance, and doom, and fiery judgment. Lighten up, John!"

On the other hand, *Jesus* (though He did often privately fast) also spent much time *feasting*. Why? Because He was their God, who had come to dwell among them. He was their Bridegroom; and He was offering them the marriage covenant of salvation, and of the Kingdom. He was constantly going to people's homes, and dining with them, for the purpose of speaking the words of life to them. Yet, how did they respond to Jesus? Did they appreciate His dining with them? No. They said, "We've mourned to you, Jesus, but you won't mourn. We want to play *funeral* today; but you want to play *wedding*. You should be *fasting* twice a week, as the Pharisees do. What kind of Messiah are you, anyway?" They accused Him of being a glutton, and a "winebibber"! Not only that, but Jesus was a friend of those wretched publicans and sinners. He actually went into their homes, and ate with them! (Can you imagine that?) No matter what Jesus and John did or said, the people rejected them.

What, then, can we "take home" from this passage? What is the reward that we can expect in *this* world, as we follow Jesus' example, and refuse to dance to the world's tune? **Criticism, mischaracterisation, and slander!** When Jesus and John mourned, they were criticised for it; and when they *dined* with people, they were criticised for it. Likewise, we who have trusted in Jesus, and who follow Him, can expect to be criticised, mischaracterised, and slandered in this world. Remember what Jesus said: "***The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.***" If you are living godly in Christ Jesus, you *will* be persecuted for it. If you, out of love and concern for people's souls, tell them that living in fornication (sex outside of marriage) is sin, or that adultery is sin, or that pornography, or homosexuality, is sin, and that they must repent of their sin and believe on Jesus in order to go to Heaven, you will be called "evil," and "mean-spirited." If you tell them that the *literal* music that they want you to dance to—the music of this world (Rock and Roll), which has always been about immoral sex, drugs, and rebellion against God and authority—is of the devil, you will be mocked. If you tell them that Jesus is the *only* way to Heaven, and that their good works, charity, and religious rituals won't get them there, you will be called a "bigot," and "narrow-minded." Your deeds of love and kindness *will* be questioned and slandered. You will be called a "hypocrite," and will often be repaid for your kindness with a swift kick in the backside. If God have called you to be a pastor or missionary, you will be accused of not having "a real job," and of "being in it for the money" (even though you work to exhaustion, and personally sacrifice a great deal of your money and possessions for the Lord, and for others). Being reviled and spoken evil of is simply "part of the territory" of being a Christian.

Read Matthew 5:10-12.

We can always expect the world to slander our Saviour. How, then, should we respond when our Saviour is slandered? By *justifying* Him! Let's read **verse 19** again. (**Read Matthew 11:19.**) What does Jesus mean when He says, "***But wisdom is justified of her children***"? To

answer that question, let's start by going back to the Old Testament, and finding out who this "woman" called "Wisdom" is.

Read Proverbs 1:20-33.

In this passage, and in other parts of **Proverbs**, Solomon spoke of the wisdom of God as though it were a *person*; and since the Hebrew word for "wisdom" (*khakma*) is a *feminine* noun, Solomon portrayed God's "wisdom" as though it were a woman. By the way, the word "wisdom" here in **Proverbs 1:20** is actually *khacmoth*, which literally means "wisdoms"! It is plural in **Proverbs 9:1**, as well. Why? Because in Hebrew, nouns are often made plural in order to express the greatness, or magnitude, of something! The idea is that God's wisdom is great, and *infinite*!

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at **Proverbs 1**. As Solomon introduces us to this woman called "Wisdom" in **verse 20**, he portrays her as crying in the streets, and calling out to the simple ones. However, as "Wisdom" continues to cry out to the simple ones, it becomes obvious that the real speaker is *God Himself*! The metaphorical "woman" named Wisdom virtually fades into the background, and the Person left speaking is God Himself. Only *God* "pours out" His Spirit and His words upon the simple. *God alone* is the Source of counsel and reproof. Only *God* calls us to Himself, so that we may " *dwell safely*" in Him!

Now, if the real Person that "Wisdom" represents be God Himself, then what does that make the Lord Jesus Christ? It makes *Him* Wisdom (because He is *God*)! That's exactly what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 1:30**. He said, "*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*" It is *Christ*, the Son of God, whom Solomon portrayed as "Wisdom" throughout the book of **Proverbs**. In **Proverbs 8**, He is portrayed as the "Wisdom" who existed alongside God the Father from everlasting, before He created the world; and in **Proverbs 9**, He is portrayed as the "Wisdom" who established a "house" (the Temple)—a house where men could go to worship Him, and to make sacrifices to Him, and to receive spiritual nourishment from Him.

Now, perhaps it seems strange to you that any part of Christ's attributes would be personified as a woman. Obviously, Christ is not feminine, nor does He live with a woman named "Prudence" in a literal house with seven pillars. Why, then, does the Lord use this analogy? Because by using this analogy, He was able to contrast *His* wisdom to the wisdom of the world. You see, throughout the book of **Proverbs**, Solomon keeps warning his son to stay away from the "*strange woman*," or the "*evil woman*." Just like "Lady Wisdom," this "*strange woman*" is *also* a metaphor. The "*strange woman*" is portrayed as an adulteress, and a prostitute; and though she certainly does represent a *literal* adulteress, she is much more

than that: she represents the evil, fleshly, apostate desires and wisdom of man, which are always the enemy of God! Those who pursue the “*strange woman*” (whether she be a literal whore, or a personification of the world system) will always bring destruction to themselves.

Read Proverbs 7:1-27.

So, we’ve seen that this lady called “Wisdom” represents the Wisdom of God Himself; and since Jesus is God, He Himself *is* the Wisdom of God. With this in mind, let’s go back to **Matthew 11:19**; and then we will compare it to a very important statement that Jesus made in **Luke 11**. (Read **Matthew 11:10** again.)

Read Luke 11:31, 46-51.

In **verse 31**, Jesus said that one “*greater than Solomon*” had arrived. Who was this one who was “*greater than Solomon*”? It was Christ Himself! Though Solomon was the wisest man on the face of the earth, Jesus is greater than Solomon, because He is the “*wisdom of God*” incarnate. And what did Jesus say about the “Wisdom of God” in **verse 49**? He said, “*Thus saith the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute.*” Jesus, the Wisdom of God, sent His Apostles to the people of Israel, to preach the Gospel to them; but in the years to follow, these men were slain for their faith in Jesus, one by one. *That* was how the world responded to Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God—by murdering Him and His Apostles! Most of the people scorned His wisdom and His love, and chose to follow the seductive siren call of the “*strange woman*”—that woman who represents all that is ungodly, unclean, unfaithful, fleshly, prideful, foolish, and apostate.

Now, this brings us back to my original question: what does Jesus mean when He says, “*But wisdom is justified of her children*”? We’ve seen that Jesus is the Wisdom of God; but who are His “children”? *We who are saved* are His children! In **Isaiah 53**, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah “*shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days.*” *We who are saved* are Christ’s spiritual “seed”! *We* are His “children,” for whom He gave His life, and prolonged His days (rose from the grave), so that we might be saved. How, then, do we, His children, “*justify*” Him? What does it *mean* to “justify” Christ? It means that we declare Him to be righteous. We acknowledge His ways to be just, right, and all-wise; and *because* we are persuaded that His ways are just, right, and all-wise, we also *comply* with His ways, and obey His commands. This is what Luke meant when he said that the publicans who believed on Jesus “*justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.*” Because they considered Christ’s requirement of baptism to be just, right, and wise, they therefore *obeyed* His command.

The *world* considers it “unfair” of God to allow them to suffer in this world. The world blames God, and hurls insults at Him, whenever anything bad happens to them. In contrast, Christ’s children *praise* their Lord, even when evil things befall them in this life. They gladly “justify” their Master, Jesus Christ, because they know that He *is* the Wisdom of God. They realise that even though they must face persecution in this world for their Master’s sake, it is *more* than fair that they suffer for His sake. Why? First of all, because Christ gave *His* life for *us*, even though we didn’t deserve it; and secondly, because they know that the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared to the glory that is coming! Christ, in His love and mercy, has promised to prepare a place for us in His Father’s House!

Read John 14:1-4.

On **22 December 1899**, the famous evangelist, **Dwight L. Moody**, lay down on his deathbed in Northfield, Massachusetts; and after he had slept for a while, he suddenly awoke, and said, “Earth recedes! Heaven opens for me!” His son, William, thought that he was dreaming; but Moody insisted, “This is no dream, Will...It is beautiful! It is like a trance! If this is death, it is sweet! God is calling me, and I must go!” As the family gathered around, he went on to say, “This is triumph!...This is my coronation day! I have been looking forward to it for years.” He then lit up even more, and said, “Dwight! Irene! I see the children’s faces!” (These were his grandchildren, who had recently died in infancy.) He closed his eyes again, and appeared to be unconscious; but then he awoke again, and said, “No pain! No valley! If this is death, it’s not bad at all! It’s sweet!” After this, he got up and walked around, confused as to why God had allowed him to come back. He said that he had been “to the very portals of Heaven.” However, a few days later, the Lord finally brought Moody home.¹ Apparently, God allowed Moody to have this little glimpse of Heaven before his death, and to share it with the rest of us, to confirm that *there is a heavenly reward coming* to all who reject the world’s tune, and follow Jesus! In this world, we *will* be rewarded with criticism and rejection, as our Master was; but in Heaven, we have an everlasting home prepared for us!

II. The reward for dancing to the world’s tune (vv. 20-24)

(Read Matthew 11:20-24.) Jesus had just compared the people of Israel to selfish children, who demanded that He dance to their tune, or else they wouldn’t follow Him anymore. Now, in **verses 20-24**, Jesus tells us what the *reward* for their rejection of Him would be.

First, what was their reward in this world? *In this world*, their reward was acceptance by society. In **John 7**, Jesus said to His own brothers (who didn’t believe on Him), that “***The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.***” In **Luke 6**, Jesus said, “***Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!***” In other

words, “If the world speak well of you, then you are on the wrong side!” In **Galatians 5**, Paul said that if he were to preach a “gospel” of salvation through good works, “*then... the offence of the cross*” would be “*ceased.*” In other words, if you preach a false gospel of salvation through good works, it’s not offensive to anyone—because it is *natural* for sinners to fancy that they are “good people,” and that they *deserve* to go to Heaven. However, the moment you tell them that they are *not* good, and that their sin has earned them eternal death in hell, and that Jesus had to *die on a cross* to pay for their sin, they are offended!

Sad to say, most of the people in the cities of Galilee were offended by Jesus’ words. Even though Jesus poured 80% of His ministry into the cities of Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and other cities in the narrow stretch of land around the west side of the Sea of Galilee, most of them rejected Him. Think of that! These cities had the incredible privilege of being on the “ground floor” of Christ’s ministry. Capernaum was *especially* “*exalted,*” because it was Jesus’ “home base” throughout most of His ministry. Jesus spent more time in Capernaum than He did anywhere else. If there were *any* city in which every soul *should have* believed on Him, it was Capernaum. Yet, most of them rejected Him. And what would be their reward *in the next life* for rejecting Him? Jesus said that it would be more tolerable for the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, and Sidon in the day of judgment than it will be for those cities!

Folks, that is an incredible statement! **Sodom and Gomorrah** were unspeakable wicked cities. According to **Genesis 19**, not only was homosexuality rampant in these cities, but huge gangs of perverted men went around the city seeking other men to assault. These cities were so wicked, that they earned themselves fire and brimstone from Heaven, and everlasting infamy. As for the Phoenician cities of **Tyre and Sidon**, they were centres of Baal worship, and human sacrifice. For hundreds of years, these cities were powerful centres of commerce in the ancient world; and their ships travelled all over the earth (probably even to the Americas). Yet, God spent most of **Ezekiel 26, 27, 28, and 29**, as well as part of **Zechariah 9**, in declaring that the famous, impregnable, prosperous city of Tyre would be destroyed—first by the Babylonians (in *part*), and later by Alexander the Great, and then by many successive nations, until it finally would be reduced to a bare rock, where fishermen would dry their nets. Historically, that is exactly how it played out! As the centuries rolled on, foreign invasions came upon Tyre like sea waves, one after another. Tyre fell to the Babylonians; the Persians; the Grecians; the Romans; the Byzantines; the Muslims; the Crusaders; to the Muslims again; to the Ottomans; to the Egyptians; and to the Arabs, French, and British. Today, the rock citadel where Tyre stood is bare and uninhabited; and, just as Ezekiel prophesied, it is a place where fishermen spread their nets! Tyre’s sister city, **Zidon**, was also destroyed for their iniquity, just as was prophesied in **Isaiah 23, Jeremiah 25, Jeremiah 47, and Ezekiel 28**.

Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, and Sidon suffered God’s wrath here on earth; and to this day, the citizens of these ancient cities are suffering in hell. Yet, Jesus said that there would be *much greater* damnation for the Galileans, because they had the incredible privilege of the having

the *Messiah* right in their midst—yet rejected Him. There *are* degrees of punishment in hell, according to how much truth people had at their disposal! Those who knew the Scriptures, and who sat in church Sunday after Sunday, and who knew all about the plan of salvation, yet continued to go their own way, and to trust in their own righteousness, will suffer far greater punishment in hell than will those who never heard the name of Jesus.

Read Luke 12:42-48.

Read Romans 2:11-16.

What, exactly, do the degrees of punishment in hell consist of? I don't know, because the Bible doesn't tell us; but what I *do* know is that *you don't want to find out!* Even the *least* degree of punishment in hell is horrible beyond our wildest nightmares! In the book of **Psalms**, hell is described as a place of "*desolation*," where people are "*utterly consumed with terrors*"; as a place where "*burning coals*" fall upon its inhabitants; and where they are "*cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again.*" In **Isaiah**, hell is called "*the pit*" and "*the prison*"—a place of "*devouring fire*," and "*everlasting burnings.*" In **Isaiah 66**, those who are suffering in hell are described as "*the corpses of the men that have transgressed*" against God. Apparently, those in hell will have real bodies; but they will be grotesque, decaying, and corpse-like: and they will be in this state *forever!* Isaiah also says that "*their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.*" In other words, their bodies will be like writhing worms; "*and*," he says, "*they shall be an abhorrence unto all flesh.*" In the book of **Matthew**, Jesus warned of "*hell fire*"; of "*the furnace of fire*," where "*there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*"; and of "*everlasting punishment.*" Three times in **Mark 9**, Jesus warned about "*the fire that never shall be quenched.*" In **Luke 16**, Jesus described hell as a place where people crave just one drop of water to cool their tongues, because they are tormented in the flame. In **2 Thessalonians 1:9**, Paul warned that the lost will "*be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" In **Hebrews 10**, Paul warned of "*judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*" In **Revelation**, God warns of a "*bottomless pit*," where smoke billows out of it forever, "*as the smoke of a great furnace*"! In **Revelation 14**, God says that "*the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.*" In **Revelation 19** and **20**, we are warned repeatedly of "*the lake burning with fire and brimstone*," and of the "*lake of fire*," the "*the second death*," where lost souls "*shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*" Worst of all, those who reject Christ will *die in their sins*, and *remain* in their sin forever. Because they chose not to depart from their sin, they will be tormented by their sinful passions forever. **Revelation 22:11** says of those in hell, "*He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still.*"

The choice is simple. If you repent of your sin and trust in Jesus, the Wisdom of God, you will be mocked, scorned, and slandered in this world; but you will spend eternity with Christ, in the glory of Heaven. On the other hand, if you follow the siren call of the “*strange woman,*” and dance to the tune of this evil world, and choose not to repent of your sin, you will be rewarded with acceptance *in this world*—but with everlasting torment in the next.

Conclusion: Years ago, the rock musician, **Madonna**, was singing a closing song in one of her concerts. In this song, she kept repeating, “I’m gonna beat *my* drum, I’m gonna ring *my* bell; and I don’t care if I go to hell”; and she urged her fans to repeat it with her. At the end of the song, she and her dancing partners were lowered by a platform below the stage, until the audience couldn’t see them; and as they went down, flames shot out of the front of the stage, so that it appeared that they were sinking into hell! The world laughs at that. They think it’s hilarious. But God isn’t laughing. There *is* a judgment coming: and the *only* refuge on that day of judgment will be the Lord Jesus Christ! If you have never run to Christ for refuge, His arms are open wide this morning. He is calling you! He is saying, “***Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***” If you be saved already, I would close with this question: “Can others see Jesus in you? Or are you blending in with the world so much, that your testimony is worthless?” If so, “***Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!***”! Confess your sins, get your heart right with God, and let your light shine before men!

¹ Robert J. Morgan, “Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations” (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007) pp. 188-189.