

Matthew 11:25-30

We thank God for blessings in life; for successes, both big and little. Here in our text Jesus thanks Him for failure. Yes, for failure. “*I thank You, Father,*” He prays, “*that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding...*” “*At that time,*” we’re told, Jesus said this. At what time? After He had been rejected by the people living in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Jesus did many mighty works there. He taught in their streets. He spent much time there. But they remained stubborn in their hearts. They did not repent. Time to question God and ask, “Hey! What gives? Jonah had more success in Nineveh than I’ve had here! Even the people of Sodom would have repented had I taught, and done the same things, there!” No. Jesus, who is gentle and lowly in heart, very humbly opens His mouth and gives thanks to His heavenly Father for failure; for failure in His ministry among all these people.

If today’s pastors are to follow Jesus’ example here, our prayers of thanksgiving will come not when the church pews are filled, but when most, if not all, sit empty. But that hardly sounds reasonable. For one thing, pastors make their living from those who hear the Word of God, and in whom that Word sprouts and grows. And what pastor is thankful for being seen as a failure in his ministry? Not only that, but we love those within our communities, and so we want more of them, not less, to be saved through the faithful hearing of God’s Word. Yet, all this being said, Jesus’ prayer is here before us. He said what He said. He gives thanks to His Father in heaven that person after person, heart after heart, refused Him.

“Let Your Word have success,” we pray as Christians. But what we see as success can be quite different from success as God sees it. It is the Father’s gracious will, Jesus tells us, to hide the Gospel from those who are wise and understanding, but to reveal it to little children.

Little children here is not referring to age. A Greek word study shows something interesting about the word Jesus uses. *Little children* means “not speaking.” So those who are wise and understanding sound forth with their mouths, but the little children, to whom the Father in heaven reveals His Gospel of salvation, keep their mouths closed. They are the unspeaking ones. They are spoken to; they are taught; they receive instruction. But they, themselves, have their mouths closed.

How are we to take this? No more and no less than the way it is intended. Jesus taught, and did miracles, in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, but these towns were filled with people who were wise and understanding. They were too wise for their own good. They were wise in their own minds. Their understanding kept them from seeing the simple truths Jesus was teaching. They were not unspeaking. They opened their mouths in objection. They offered excuses. They met Jesus with opposition. Their *but* was always in the way. “*But* what about this, Jesus? *But* what about that?” They were not teachable. They closed their hearts and minds to Jesus and refused to repent.

When Jesus speaks, we must be the unspeaking ones. In His gracious will, the Father in heaven chooses to hide His salvation from those who put their *buts* in the way. And He reveals His Gospel to the unspeaking little children.

Yet how easy it is for us to open our mouths when our Lord would teach us. How quickly we offer up excuses. How readily we object, and oppose the very things God Himself would teach us. Just like the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, our *buts* get in the way.

I have yet to meet someone who does not have a good, solid excuse for not coming to church. “Yes, I should come, but...” I have yet to meet a church member who is not ready with a great excuse for not sitting in Sunday School and Bible Class. “Yes, I should be there, but...” When our mouths should be closed, and our ears open to listen, to learn, to receive, like little children, we can always find a *but* to put in the way. No wonder we have objections to Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, and to the way our church distributes these Sacraments. No wonder we have objections to our way of worship. Let us be careful here. If we keep opening our mouth to offer excuses, and to raise our voice in objection to God’s Word, we are just like the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. We are the unteachable ones; those who speak when Jesus is speaking. They did not repent; but we must.

So let us be little children. Let us be the unspeaking ones. When it’s time to confess with the congregation, “*I, a poor, miserable sinner...deserve Your temporal and eternal punishment...*” let us not object and say: Well, I’m not that bad; others are worse sinners than me. When it’s time for Jesus to speak His word of absolution through the pastor, let us be unspeaking, but listen with due attention, and believe the words given us to believe; and then open our mouth to give our cry of faith: Amen! When it’s time for Jesus to speak His words to us in the sermon, let us not be objecting to the man in the pulpit He chooses for His mouthpiece, but let us believe what Jesus says about him: *he who listens to you, listens to Me*. And when it’s time for Jesus to speak His words of institution over the bread and wine, let us not offer up excuses as to why we know better than Jesus what we need, but let us come up taking Jesus at His word, and receive the gifts He offers and gives to us.

Let none of us here be wise and understanding. These walk by the light of their own understanding. They invite the world’s wisdom into their minds, and what they invite, they receive. This is not God’s way. We do not invite Him; He invites us. “*Come unto Me...*” says our Lord. His salvation cannot be figured out within the human mind. It can only be given by Him as a gift and be received by humble faith.

This gift is here for you. It is given by Jesus to you. God is merciful. He did not open His mouth to condemn us. Instead, He closed His mouth to accept our condemnation. Before Pilate, Jesus was the unspeaking One. He closed His mouth in silence refusing to defend Himself. He went to the cross charged as the Guilty One in your place and mine.

You, my friend, have a Savior. Your sins, all of them, are forgiven. Jesus died for all. He died for the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He died for you. Repent, therefore, and believe as little children. Every one of you Jesus invites with His gracious words, “*Come unto Me...*” No one here has a sinful past too awful that Jesus will not receive you. Your sins are wiped clean by the flood of your baptism. God’s mercy is far greater than even our most hideous sins.

Jesus is not asking you to understand it. He wants you to believe it. He does not call out: *Understand Me...Figure Me out*. He calls, “*Come to Me...*” *Believe in Me. Trust Me when I say that I forgive you; when I promise to you eternal life in heaven as My gift to you.*

No excuses from us. No objections. No *buts*. Just little children who listen to Jesus, trust Him, and rest ourselves in Him. Amen.