

WHO IS THE
WORST
OF THE
WORST?

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HILLCREST
BAPTIST CHURCH
Where Truth Matters

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This is a weird question

This booklet has a question for its title, namely who is the worst of the worst?

We are usually fascinated by who is the best of the best. For example, many game shows or reality television competitions will, every now and then, run a series where the winners from each of the previous seasons compete against each other to find out who is the best of the best. I have never seen a series in which the people first to be eliminated from previous episodes or seasons compete to see who is eliminated first i.e. who is the worst of the worst.

In real life, however, we are at times interested in speculating who the worst of the worst may be. As we consider the history of the human race, we are faced with many examples of large-scale atrocities committed by leaders or groups against others. The picture on the front cover of this booklet shows a horrific mass grave as an example of such atrocities. Examples of people that come to mind include Stalin, Hitler and Idi Amin to name but a few. They left a trail of cruelty and bloodshed, making them some of the worst people to have lived.



If we had to single out just one name from this infamous list, who would come out as the worst of the worst? We can only speculate, as we don't have a full comprehension of the exact circumstances, motives, and the extent of the abuses. Some of the abuses remain hidden in the past.

The coming day of judgement

The Bible reveals that there will be a final day of judgement (Rom. 2:5). On this day everyone will stand before God to give an account of their lives (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:12). God will then judge people according to the things they have done (Rom. 2:5-6).



God's judgement on this day will be perfect and complete. He is the best One to judge as He knows every single thing that everyone has done. Nothing is hidden from Him. He even knows the secret thoughts and motives of people:

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of human hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God (1 Cor. 4:5).

This means that on the day of judgement, no one will escape God's righteous judgement with:

- a sharp lawyer to raise a technical inconsistency in the process of judgement,
- lies, deception or covering over of sin

We sense the righteousness and justice of God's judgement against the Hitlers, drug lords and crime bosses of this world. They have abused, tortured, murdered and exploited those around them. It is fitting and appropriate for them to receive judgement from God. Many of these people have escaped justice in this world for a variety of reasons. However, there will be no escape before the judgement seat of God.

But does God provide an answer to our question of who the worst of the worst will be?

A shocking answer

The Lord Jesus has revealed some of the principles upon which the final judgement will be based. As we understand what He says about the answer to the question of this booklet, we find that His answer is shocking.

A key passage is Matthew 11:20-24:

Then He began to reprimand the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that occurred in you had occurred in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades! For if the miracles that occurred in you had occurred in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment, than for you."

(i) *Two types of cities contrasted*

Matthew 11:20-24 requires some explanation, as the cities that are mentioned here existed thousands of year ago and what they represent is generally lost on a modern audience. The Lord Jesus is comparing two groups of cities.

The first group of cities are Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. These cities were notorious for their wickedness. For example, Sodom was known for extreme sexual perversion and homosexuality (Gen. 18:20-21; 19:4-9; Jude 7). Sodom and Gomorrah came under God's flaming judgement and was destroyed (Gen. 19:23-25). After being destroyed, the destruction of Sodom became a symbol of God's eternal judgement in hell (Jude 6-7).

Tyre was also a city of great wickedness and pride (Ezek. 28:1). In fact, it was so filled with pride that the king of Tyre became a picture of Satan himself (Ezek. 28:11-14).

For the Jews at the time when Jesus was speaking, Tyre, Sidon and Sodom represented cities that were extremely wicked and came under God's severe judgement. They were surely cities that represented the worst of the worst from a human perspective!

The other group of cities mentioned are Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida. These were cities of Israel that were outwardly respectable and religious. The people of these cities would have observed the required religious rituals from the Old Testament and gone to the synagogue on Saturdays.

The Lord Jesus then gives a shocking verdict!

(ii) *A shocking verdict*

The Jews would have been shocked to hear the words of the Lord Jesus that followed in Matthew 11, because He was angrily reprimanding the respectable Jewish cities, not the notoriously wicked cities! What! Jesus furthermore indicated that the respectable Jewish cities would receive more severe punishment than that of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom on the day of judgement.

How could that be? That just seems wrong from a human point of view.

(iii) *The verdict explained*

The Lord Jesus explains this shocking verdict regarding God's judgement. The respectable Jewish cities would suffer more severe punishment because they received greater spiritual privileges than the wicked cities, yet they did not repent and turn to God. These Jewish cities had the great privilege of having the Lord Jesus walk through them, perform miracles and preach the gospel. Yet they rejected Jesus and refused to repent.

This explanation reveals a very important principle in God's judgement; namely to whom much is given, much will be required.

And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accordance with his will, will receive many blows, ⁴⁸ but the one who did not know it, and committed acts deserving of a beating, will receive only a few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Lk. 12:47-48)

Those who sin against greater spiritual privileges and light will receive a greater punishment.

The above passage in Luke also reveals that there are degrees of punishment in hell. While all the wicked will face judgement and punishment, some are beaten with many blows and others with fewer blows. Not all sins are equally heinous in God's sight.

It is therefore important to understand how this principle applies to us and to the question raised in this booklet: who is the worst of the worst?

So, who is the worst of the worst?

The above passages from Matthew 11 and Luke 12 caution us about making superficial judgements about who is the worst of the worst. Although Hitler may come out near the top of the list of infamy from a human point of view, it may not be the same with God.

In fact, people who are at the top of God's list may be the respectable, religious people of our day who have many spiritual privileges, but do not repent and turn to God for salvation. They:

- have free access to the Bible, but do not read it or believe it.
- attend church and listen to good preaching, but do not turn away from their self-righteousness and embrace Jesus Christ as their only hope for salvation.



The shocking verdict of the Lord Jesus is that the worst of the worst may in fact be you, if you are the person described above. In God's eyes, your sin may be worse than that of Stalin or Hitler. You have many spiritual privileges, but have never repented of your sin, turned to Christ, and been born again.

Embracing the gospel

The Bible teaches that all people are sinners before a holy God (Rom. 3:23). We have broken His law. We cannot earn our salvation by doing good works (Rom. 3:20), for no "good" we do can make up for the sins we have committed against God. Indeed, even the "good" we do is tainted by sin and falls short of God's perfect standards (Isa. 64:6).

However, God has provided a way- only one way- to be saved (Jn. 14:6). In great love, He sent His sinless Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross in our place (Rom. 5:8). In so doing He took the punishment we deserve upon Himself, and we are set free from our sin and God's anger (Isa. 53:5).

We therefore receive this salvation as a free gift when we turn from our sin and self-righteousness, and trust in the Lord Jesus as our only hope (Mk. 1:15; Eph. 1:12-13).

Facing God's judgement without fear

There is a wonderful promise for those who believe in the Lord Jesus:

Therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1)

When we believe in and follow Jesus, we are made perfect and blameless in God's sight, without fear of His judgement (Jude 24). In fact, as a believer, we may even have complete confidence in approaching God's throne of grace; such is the perfection and completeness of Christ's salvation for His people (Heb. 10:19).

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you are safe from God's judgement because you live a respectable life, or because you are religious and attend church. And especially don't think you will be saved because you are better than the 'Hitlers' of the world! Unless you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, you will face God's anger. The more spiritual privileges you receive in this life the more culpable you are if you don't embrace to those privileges and respond to the gospel!

There is therefore an urgency to obey the gospel and respond to the Lord Jesus, as the passage below indicates:

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—² for He says,

“At a favorable time I listened to you,

And on a day of salvation I helped you.”

Behold, now is “a favorable time,” behold, now is “a day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:1-2)