



Matthew 13:47–50

47 “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the blazing furnace,

where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Reflection

Jesus' seventh and final parable in Matthew chapter 13 is drawn from the local fishing industry. Four of Jesus' disciples were fisherman, as were many in the crowds who listened intently to him by the Sea of Galilee. We can add to this that Jesus was most likely still preaching to them from a small boat just off the shoreline with his back facing the sea. This parable too may have particularly caught at the hearts of Peter and Andrew. Brothers and fisherman, on the day that Jesus had called them to be his disciples he had promised to make them 'fishers of men'. But whether you are of the fishing persuasion or no,

Jesus could hardly be clearer, in not only offering, but also explaining, this parable to the crowds.

In verses 47 and 48 Jesus paints the picture. The kingdom of heaven is like a drag net, the oldest type of net used on the Sea of Galilee, and even into modern times the most important fishing method used in the region. Drag nets were huge, up to 200 metres across and as high as 8 metres at their centre. They trawled at a distance behind one or more fishing boats, heavy sinkers at the bottom and large corks floating at the top, ensuring that they caught everything in their path. A good catch required the most strenuous of effort to pull to shore. The net would collect everything, good fish and bad, and everything else besides, and so once on shore the labo-

rious effort would begin of untangling the nets and sorting the catch. The kingdom of heaven is like this, says Jesus.

But unusually, Jesus goes on to explain what his parable means in verses 49 and 50. And he could not be clearer.

49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

At the end of the age, when the kingdom of God is fully and finally here, there will be a great separation. God's angels will separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace,

where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In both clearly stating and then explaining his own parable Jesus is saying with all possible emphasis: 'There is a coming judgment, and the fate of the ungodly will be terrible in that day.'

Now you may have noticed that this parable is very similar to the parable of the weeds which we have discussed at length over the past few days. In fact they even share verse 50 (cf. Matt 13:42). In both verses angels throw the wicked into a blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And being honest with you, speaking at length again about this graphic depiction of hell is almost the last thing I feel like doing. Chances are you feel the same in terms of what you'd like to be reading and thinking about this morn-

ing as you head out into your day. But if you feel the same way as I do then this is something we both need to repent of.

Because in this, as with everything, we need to follow the example of Jesus , and Jesus spoke about hell more often than anyone else in the bible. Even just consider Jesus' preaching in Matthew so far. In Matthew 5 he spoke of being 'in danger of the fires of hell' and warned about 'being thrown into hell'. In Matthew 7 he taught us about 'the broad road that leads to destruction', and of 'bad trees bearing bad fruit being cut down and thrown into the fire', while in Matthew 8 he warns of others being 'thrown out of the kingdom of God into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' In Matthew 10 and 11 Jesus warned towns that it would

be more bearable for the most wicked cities in the Old Testament than for Chorazin and Bethsaida, and that Capernaum, his second home, would go down to hell for rejecting him. Then in Matthew 10 Jesus says gravely to ‘be afraid of the One who can destroy both the soul and body in hell’ and warns us with these words ‘whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven’. In Matthew 12 Jesus warns the Pharisees that unless they change their ways they will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come. On Judgment Day they will have to give an account for every empty word they have spoken; by their words they will be acquitted or condemned. Finally, and twice now in chapter 13, Jesus has warned us in the parable of the weeds and in the parable of the net that at the end of the age the

wicked will be separated from the righteous and thrown into a blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Hell is real and terrible; yet we rarely speak about it, think about it, or hear it preached on Sundays. Whereas Jesus can't stop warning people about it. He loves them so much that he's not only prepared to regularly speak about such an uncomfortable topic but in the end he will offer himself up to be killed on a Roman cross so that as many people as possible might avoid such a terrible fate.

In the passage in front of us Jesus teaches us that God's judgment is thorough, determined, permanent and that the end of the wicked will be terrible. On Judgment Day

there will be a thorough separation of the members of the kingdom of God and the members of the kingdom of this world. The overlap of the ages will be at an end. People's fate will be predetermined by their response to Jesus. Judgment will be once-and-for all and eternal. And the end of the wicked will be terrible. Jesus describes it as eternal burning, and as eternal torment expressed in the never-ending weeping and gnashing of teeth. In another parable Jesus describes part of this agony as being the remembrance of the blessings of one's previous life and the lost chances. If you're living without Jesus, you should realize that however disappointing you think your life is now, there will come a day when it will seem good compared to your suffering. And the memory of your good things will haunt you and increase

your suffering, unless you repent now and come to Jesus.

Think & Pray

But if you are living with Jesus as Lord and Saviour over your life then follow his leading this morning. Take some time now to think and pray about the reality of hell. Consider its place in our conversations and thought life. Is it loving to never speak of it, to hold back warning of it, to rarely think of it now that we are saved? But above all today, please pray for the lost.