

Matthew 13:47-50. To appreciate this parable let's begin at the beginning where we find God making judgments about what needs to be separated and what needs to be joined together.

I. God judged in the beginning. We tend to equate judgment with condemnation but the word means "to assess something and make a decision based on some kind of criteria." That's what happens as God gives birth to the universe...

Gen. 1:4 – He separated the light from the darkness.

Gen. 1:6 – He separated the waters from the waters.

Gen. 1:9 – He separated the sea from dry land.

Gen. 1:14, 18 – He separated the day from the night.

Gen. 1:27 – He creates man and separates male from female.

After all this separating God joined together the man and the woman. In Gen. 2:24 God declared them to be "one flesh." Jesus, commenting on marriage, says, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." **Matthew 19:6**

God, the Author of the Universe, calls all things into existence and gives them a name. (In fact, He even delegates to Adam and Eve the authority to share in this process. For example, Adam was given the authority to name the animals. Adam and Eve were image-bearers of God.) Once things are called into existence, God has the ultimate authority to assess them and decide what to separate and what to join together. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God they became confused in their decision-making. One of the inevitable outcomes of rebellion against God is confusion about what to separate and what to join together. For example, in our fallen condition we separate people based on the color of their skin or their language or their socio-economic status. On the other hand we join together what God has called us to separate. Out of a concern for loving people we remain silent as men marry men and women marry women. There is constant confusion about many things that God has made clear. That is why I am so thankful for God's word. Without the word of God we wouldn't have a clue about how to live in His Kingdom where the King rules. That's why Jesus taught about this subject constantly.

Last week, in the parable of the treasure in the field and the priceless pearl, Jesus reminded His disciples of the value of the kingdom. The kingdom is of immeasurable worth and no sacrifice is too great to insure our inclusion into God's eternal kingdom. But in the parable of the net, Jesus reminds us that the day is coming when God will assess the response of all people to His mercy and grace and those who do not worship the King will be excluded - separated from the King.

This final parable of Mt. 13 is in keeping with Matthew's habit of closing a discourse with a warning about God's judgment. Up to this point we have considered parables that deal with the present kingdom, the rule and reign of God in our hearts. This parable speaks of a future separation at the end of this age. Remember, Jesus calls the kingdom of God a "mystery." In other words the OT prophets did not anticipate this "interim period" between the first and second coming of Jesus. Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God is available during this period but will not be fully realized until His second coming at which time He will sit on the throne of David and rule on the earth for a period of one thousand years. This is called the millennium and it precedes a final judgment referred to in this parable.

This parable is similar to the wheat and tares. The difference is that the earlier parable emphasized the present nature of the kingdom, that believers and unbelievers will live side by side in this present age. The Parable of the Net focuses on the future separation between the two.

This parable is sometimes called the Parable of the Dragnet. A dragnet is different from the fishing nets featured in many of the stories of the NT. A dragnet is stretched between two boats and dragged through shallow water toward the shore. The net is indiscriminate when it comes to the fish that are caught (vv. 47-48). "Good fish" may mean valuable or may mean "clean" as opposed to those that were "unclean" or off limits according to Jewish law. (Lev. 11) The point is that the fish are "judged," or assessed. This activity of judging fish mirrors the process that awaits men at the end of the age. The angels will separate the righteous from the unrighteous (Mt. 13:39-40). The day will come when the unrighteous will be excluded from God's kingdom.

II. God will judge in the end... vv. 49-50. Just as He will separate the wheat from the weeds and the sheep from the goats He will also separate the clean fish from the unclean fish. Those who reject His mercy and grace will be excluded from His presence and spend eternity in Hell.

Let's consider this morning the doctrine of Hell. This subject rarely comes up in polite conversation for a couple of reasons: 1) Because we live in a fallen world. There is a general rebellion against God's word and God's ways. When we encounter a disturbing doctrine or one that doesn't make sense to us we tend to either reject the biblical teaching or change it to something more palatable. I appreciated Martha Buhman's observation in her JJJ devotional this past Thursday. "I believe the gospel message gets covered up with human attempts to make it something God never intended (politically correct, complicated, confusing, and so forth)."

2) Because sin obscures our understanding of God and His ways. I can't understand why God would create such a horrible place like the one described in the New Testament. Let's take a look at the way Hell is described in the Bible.

In Mt. 5:22, 29, the word translated "Hell" is Gehenna. This is a reference to the Valley of Hinnom, a deep valley that runs through Jerusalem. This place was a popular meeting spot for pagan worshipers during the dark days of Israel's idolatrous past. One of the most notorious gods worshiped there was Molech. The worship of Molech involved sacrificing children by burning. Needless to say, this place became symbolic of the tragic consequences of turning away from God. (Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35) This defiled and desecrated valley became a garbage dump where garbage as well as the dead bodies of criminals and animals were burned so that there was smoke arising from the valley constantly. So you can see why Gehenna becomes a metaphor for Hell.

Mt. 3:12 describes Hell as, "unquenchable fire;" Mt. 13:41-42, a "furnace of fire;" Mt. 18:8 "eternal fire." In Mk. 9:44, 48, Hell is described as a place where "*THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.*"

Whatever you may believe about all the details of Hell, whether people burn forever, whether there are actual flames, believe this: it is a place to be avoided at all costs. You don't want to go there! Words can't describe the terrors of Hell.

"How could a good God plan such a horrendous future for millions of people? How can we reconcile these images of Hell with the love of God?"

1. Jesus warned us about Hell in advance. If I knew that the road had washed out in a particular place and I stopped you and said, "If you continue down this road you will go into a ditch," and you ignore me and continue on, am I a bad person?

2. God sends no one to Hell – we choose it. If, over the course of your life, you want nothing to do with God or with Jesus Christ then God will simply allow you to have your way. As C. S. Lewis says, "There are only two kinds of people in the end, those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'" *The Great Divorce*

3. Hell is required to fully appreciate the glory of God. "The infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of the glory of God. The biblical assumption of the justice of hell is a clear testimony to the infiniteness of the sin of failing to glorify God. All of us have failed. All the nations have failed. Therefore, the weight of infinite guilt rests on every human head because of our failure to cherish the glory of God. The biblical vision of God, then, is that he is supremely committed, with infinite passion, to uphold and display the glory of his name. And the biblical vision of man without grace is that he suppresses this truth and by nature finds more joy in his own glory than he does in God's. God exists to be worshiped, and man worships the work of his own hands. This twofold reality creates the critical need for missions. And the very God-centeredness of God, which creates the crisis, also creates the solution." Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, p. 28

4. If there is no Hell then what we do does not matter. The righteous and unrighteous share the same destiny. How we live does matter to God (as we shall see at the end of this message) and we will be held accountable for our decisions and our actions.

5. If there is no Hell we need no Savior – there is nothing to be saved from.

6. God is sovereign, He does whatever He pleases. Since He created Hell, He must have had a good reason to do so? **Psalms 115:1-3** "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth. Why should the nations say, 'Where, now, is their God?'³ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He

pleases." I have always appreciated the candid comments of a wonderful Texas author named Virginia Stem Owens. She says, "Let us get this one thing straight. God can do anything he damn well pleases, including damn well. And if it pleases him to damn, then it is done, ipso facto, well. God's activity is what it is. There isn't anything else. Without it there would be no being, including human beings presuming to judge the Creator of everything that is."

How should we respond to the warning Jesus gives us in this parable? First, we should worship and give glory to God. We give Him glory for His countless blessings but we also give Him glory for His judgment. We give Him glory because He is a loving Savior but He is also a just Judge.

Secondly, we reaffirm our faith in Jesus. We weren't there in the beginning with God but we will be there in the end to stand before that Great White Throne. And on that day, we will be judged based on our relationship with Jesus. Listen to John's description of what happens in the end: "And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of

Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, **according to what they had done**. The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead in them. They were all judged **according to their deeds**. And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death -- the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire. **Revelation 20:11-15**

The vision John had was one of a courtroom where the evidence is presented. All that we have done is in a book and we are judged accordingly. "Wait a minute. I thought we were saved by grace and not by works." We are. The only way you get your name in the book of life, the only way you avoid the lake of fire, according to Jesus, is by transferring your trust from yourself to the finished work of Christ upon the cross. **John 5:24-29**, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." ²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, ²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment."

Then why does it say we are judged according to our deeds? Because the Judge will look over those deeds and say, "You have done some bad things and some good things. But the one thing you have done that makes all the difference is that you invited my Son to come into your life and abide with you. As a result, there are some things recorded in this book that could never have happened apart from Christ. Well done, enter into the joy of your Master, welcome home."

If you are not sure of where you stand with God, make sure today. "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **so that you may know** that you have eternal life." 1 Jn. 5:11-13