

BARN AND BONFIRE

Matthew 13:24-29, 36-43, 47-50

GET THINKING: Spend just a few minutes discussing our themes for this evening...

- What are some of the challenges we face as Christians living in a world that is still sinful?
- Why is hell so hard to talk about with non-Christians?

PRESENT UNCERTAINTY: Read Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43

The Parable of the Weeds focuses on our present experience of living in a time when the Kingdom of God is here, but we still live in a world where sin has a powerful influence. Life remains a mixture of good and evil.

- Life would be so much easier if becoming a Christian meant not having to live in a fallen world anymore! **How does Jesus reassure us that this continued mixture of evil alongside good is...**
 - ...intentional? [v28-29]
 - ...temporary? [v30; v40]
- **Why did God do it this way?** Why not harvest straight away? [v29; 1 Tim 2:1-4]
- **What does the future look like for those who accept the saving love of Christ?** [v30; v43]
- **How can this parable help us to wait patiently and persevere in our faith?**

FUTURE CERTAINTY: Read Matthew 13:47-50

The Parable of the Net focuses on the future judgement: our experience of life now may be a mixture of salvation and sin, but one day Jesus the Judge will make all things right.

- In v38, Jesus says ‘the field is the world’. **How is the imagery of the net different? What might it add?** [v47-48a]
- It seems possible here that the net refers to the *church* – those who have been ‘caught up’ by the Kingdom here on earth. **What might it mean to be ‘caught up’ in the church, yet still be a ‘bad fish’?**
 - *This sounds unsettling! Yet we know that church membership and ‘Christian behaviour’ aren’t what save us. Jesus here is challenging religious self-reliance: those who are depending on their own religious behaviour to be saved might ‘look the part’ on the outside, but they do not really know Christ’s salvation. Good fish, by contrast, have tasted his grace!*
- To Matthew’s Jewish audience, the challenge to trust in Jesus rather than in their own outwardly religious behaviour was clear. **When do we find it easiest to slip into the mindset of trusting our ‘good works’ rather than the saving grace of Jesus? How can we combat this?**
- **What are the consequences for the bad fish?** [v49-50]
- Jesus teaches about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. It’s a crucial part of His good news, yet we often avoid talking about it! **So... let’s discuss now how the reality of hell helps answer the following problems:**
 - *“If God is good, how come so much evil in the world goes unpunished?” [Psalm 37:7-9]*
 - *“Even when I forgive someone, I still feel like I want to get my own back!” [1 Peter 2:22-23]*
 - *“I know evangelism is important, but sometimes it seems hard to make it priority!” [Matt 13:49-50]*
 - *“It’s hard to know how much Jesus really loves me.” [Isaiah 53:5-6; Matthew 27:46]*
 - *“What’s so amazing about grace?” [Romans 5:6-9 and 18-19]*
- In sharing the gospel with non-Christians, we probably won’t start with hell – but the Good News won’t make sense if we never mention it! **When and how can we best share this part of the gospel?**

Closing thought... C. S. Lewis in ‘The Problem of Pain’:

*“In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: ‘What are you asking God to do?’ To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? **But he has done so, on Calvary.**”*

PRAYER SUGGESTIONS

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From the study:

- For perseverance as we live in a world where sin still has such an influence, and that we’d rely on Him while we wait.
- Thanks – for the greatness of our free salvation in light of the Jesus’ teaching about hell!

For your group, our church and others:

- For our Pastors, Elders and Deacons
- Prayer requests from your group.
- Who can we share the good news with?