

Final and Permanent Separation

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Preacher: Rev Robert Sinclair

[0 : 0 0] I'd like us to turn again to the second passage of Scripture read, Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, and reading at verse 47. Matthew 13, at verse 47.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad.

So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace in that place, and they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man, but it is like a net that was thrown into the sea. The kingdom of heaven was like a net that was thrown into the sea.

The whole of chapter 13 is given over to parables told by the Lord Jesus Christ. It was one of his main mediums of teaching and instructing, not only his disciples, but also the people who gathered around him.

[1 : 2 2] And although it's the main medium of his teaching, we have to read all the way through the Gospel of Matthew until we get to chapter 13 before we find the first one.

But when we get to it, suddenly we find seven parables. The parable of the sower and the seed. It's a parable talking about the establishment of God's kingdom, of the Son of Man sowing good seed into soil.

It's a parable of not only the sower and the seed, but a parable of the soils, the soils which had to be prepared and made ready to accept the good seed.

It's not the quality of the seed which brings forth the good fruit. The seed is always good because it's the Gospel seed, and it's the seed that's sown by the Son of Man.

It's the soil that has to be prepared. And in the experience of those who are brought under the sound of the Gospel seed, that soil has to be nurtured and prepared and worked on, even as a crafter or a farmer would prepare soil for the planting of seed or potatoes or whatever else.

[2 : 3 7] So the soil has to be prepared. And as we know, the one who does the planting of the soil is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the sower. He's the preparer of the soil also.

And so the first parable in the chapter, we didn't read it, but it's there, is to do with the establishment of the kingdom. The next few are to do with the work or the agency of the devil in trying to work against that kingdom.

The second one which we read was about the enemy who sowed tares among the wheat. There were also the parables about the mustard seed and the leaven.

And also the parables about the treasure is hidden in the field and the pearl of great price. All these have an element of the devil's working against the kingdom.

The Lord is establishing his kingdom, doing everything to bring his kingdom to fruition, and yet the devil using every agency to try and work against his kingdom.

[3 : 55] He never succeeds, but he continues to attempt in every life, in every desire, to work his evil and his degeneracy so that God's name might not be glorified but abased.

And here in this final parable, we have what we can see is the culmination of that kingdom. The kingdom being brought to fruition. And the Lord here helping us to understand, helping us to grow in grace and in knowledge and to get to understand the Lord's will for us.

One thing the Lord does in this chapter 13 is to repeat himself in the hope that what he's saying will get through to us, will get through to our subconscious and there bring us to understand the greatness of his love for us and his desire that we might enter into his kingdom.

Now, this aspect of repetition is something that has been used down through the ages. One evil aspect of it was seen with Hitler in the country of Germany, where he repeated lies against the Jews time and time and time again until the people believed them.

Another instance is told of Winston Churchill going back to his old school. And using the same device, he says, never give up, never give up, never, never, never give up, always continue.

[5 : 47] You also, I think, know it in the story that was told about Robert the Bruce in the cave with the spider, how the spider continued to weave his web against every obstacle.

If he failed, he would start again. If it was destroyed, he would start again. And so that's what we're encouraged to do in our lives, in our desire to serve Christ, is never give up.

Always do everything in our power to follow the gospel, to try and understand what we're hearing and to engage with the gospel in every aspect of our lives.

And so here the Lord repeats the warning that there is to be a separation. There is going to be a separation between the righteous and the unrighteous.

Here the Lord repeats that aspect of separation in the wheat and the tares, and now here in the good and the bad fish.

[6 : 53] Both parables describe this separation between the righteous and the wicked. The question is, why is the Lord here engaging and teaching two parables which teach the same thing?

The mix of the good and bad fish in the parable, also in the parable of the wheat and the tares. There's the angel's work. There is the work of separation.

There is the terrible end of the wicked. It's all there in the previous parable. But the Lord wants to introduce something new in this parable as an element to warn the wicked of their latter end.

That there is a coming judgment, and the fate will be terrible on that day. So we see first of all here in this parable the separation will be final.

The Lord often speaks of a separation. As in the good and bad fish, as in the wheat and the tares, as the unrighteous and the unrighteous, and the sheep and the goats.

[8 : 15] There's always this aspect of separation one from the other. In later parables, he talks about the five wise virgins and the five foolish ones.

The fruitful and unfruitful servants. And especially in the rich man and Lazarus. And the point is made in that parable of a great gulf fixed between the righteous and the unrighteous.

And no one can cross it. Now there are some important aspects about this judgment that the Lord here is talking about.

He wants us to understand that this judgment is final. It is absolute. We live in an age when there are no absolutes, no finalities.

But the Lord here is teaching this aspect whereby he says this judgment is going to be absolutely final. There will be no going back on it.

[9 : 27] At the moment, as in the day when Augustine wrote his city of God, there is a mixture of the good and the bad.

In Augustine's city of God, there was a city of God against the pagans is the full title. But the city of God against the Lord, the city of God against the Lord against the Lord.

The city of man are those, the majority of the people in that city who don't believe in God, who disobey all his laws and live entirely for the flesh.

And God in his mercy brings about a separation. He brings about the separation where one is taken entirely to be in his kingdom while the other is left.

And God's judgment there in that narrative that Augustine writes, he talks about this aspect of separation and it being absolutely and totally final and there's no going back.

[10 : 38] People used to say, as the tree falls, so shall it lie. And so at the end of time, the Lord sends his angels to execute judgment.

Either we'll be redeemed, we'll be cleansed, we'll be blessed forever, or we will be not.

And we will be in this place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, which the Bible very often calls hell or Hades.

No one will be partly in one and partly in the other. There won't be a time when perhaps you'll go to one first and spend a few years or centuries there and then be transferred from the one to the other.

That might be the teaching of some churches, but it is not the teaching of the Bible. The separation is full, it's final, it's absolute. Secondly, the separation will be determined by what we have chosen here on earth.

[12 : 00] And that's quite an astounding aspect of the judgment that God will bring to bear on us. It's how we've lived, it's how we've chosen, it's who we followed while we've lived out our days here.

It's the question of whether we've received the seed of the gospel. Whether we've received Christ or not.

There's this aspect of knowing in our experience whether he is God's son. And if he is God's son, what do we do with him while here on earth?

Did we commit our lives to him? Did we follow his teaching? Did we kneel before him? Did we bow in wonder, love and praise?

That's what we're asked to do. That's all we're required to do. Is to fall before Christ as our Lord and as our God.

[13 : 13] It's a question of whether we've lived wholeheartedly for Christ. Or as the catechism says, receiving and resting upon him alone for our salvation.

We should be asking ourselves as we make our lives through this world.

What has been our desires? Have we, like Paul, pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

Or are we leaning towards this world? It's remedies, it's rewards, it's applause. But Paul used to be a man like that and he boasted of that fact.

But when Christ met him, when Christ drew him to himself, he had this desire for the world put out of his mind, out of his imagination.

[14 : 20] And he says, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. Counting all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him.

If we're without Christ now, we'll be without Christ in the world to come. We'll be without God in this world, without hope in the world to come.

And the devil wants nothing more than that from us. We want to prevaricate, we want to put it off to another time. We want to think we are being grown up and adult and we want to debate the fact and we want to perhaps disagree and discuss all the Bible has to tell us.

But that's not being grown up and that's not being adult. That's returning to childhood. The Bible tells us in very plain and clear terms.

What is the truth and what is error? And we don't stand in judgment or discussion over the scriptures. We believe them, we accept them as God's revelation to us for our salvation.

[15 : 50] And so as we press toward the mark of God's high calling in Christ Jesus, if we close in with Christ, if we are in Christ, we will be with him now.

We shall know heaven while we're here on earth. And we shall know heaven while we're here on earth. And we shall know the reality of heaven in the life to come. And so it's absolute and it's final.

It depends upon how we are living our lives now. And it's permanent. Nothing could be more permanent than throwing the tears into the fire.

The tears to be burned. Nothing could be more permanent than throwing the bad fish away. The day of prayer, the day of hope, the day of salvation is past.

We could hope and we could wish it would be different. For those whom we've known, perhaps those whom we've loved, who have left the scene of time without a desire for Christ, whose lives have been led in perhaps opposition to Christ and his designs for us.

[17 : 19] All hope is past. We could wish that it were different. But it won't be. Not because the church or a minister says it, but because the Lord Jesus Christ himself says it.

Only one person will tell you otherwise. And that's the devil. The father of lies, he's been telling millions.

But the day of reckoning is a long way off. Especially while you're young, the day of reckoning is 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 years away.

You don't have to worry about it now. There'll be plenty of time to turn over a new leaf. Plenty of time for repentance.

Plenty of time for reconciliation to God. He tries to lull us into a false sense of security. That's all the devil wants.

[18 : 27] He wants us to put off till another day. What should be done today? Scripture tells us, now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation.

Why does it say that to us? Because tomorrow is not promised. None of us can go out of here and promise ourselves tomorrow. We've all known those who have been friendly with, those who we've loved, perhaps even part of our families, who were on earth with us in one day and the next day would have moved from the scene of time.

Whether through illness or accident or some other tragedy. And we don't have to be old to experience that. Remember, some months ago now, there was a story on the news of fishermen out somewhere in Fife.

and they were heedless of what was happening around them. There was the warnings, there was clouds, there was a buildup of wind as a scald came across them.

But they didn't realize, they didn't recognize it. And when the storm struck, there was a great tragedy of their being lost at sea.

[19 : 58] And so, we also live careless lives. Giving no heed to the approaching storm that each and every one of us has to face.

And so, don't listen to the devil. He's got absolutely no love for you. He's condemned himself. And he takes great perverse delight in taking others with them into a lost eternity.

That's his only desire. For you to join him in a lost eternity where there will be no God, no love, no fellowship, no togetherness, no light, no joy.

And so, listen to Christ, the Lord and shepherd of his flock. when he says, again, now is the accepted time.

Today is the day of salvation. And then, the judgment is final.

[21 : 07] It's permanent and it's also final. terrible. It's terrible for the ungodly and the sinner.

It will be a terrible outlook for those who are not in Christ Jesus. It's for our eternal good that the Lord warns us in such stark terms, very clear terms.

that the latter end of all unbelievers will be a weeping and a wailing and a gnashing of teeth. He doesn't pull any punches.

He doesn't try and water down the end of an ungodly and unrighteous life, a life that was not Christ. He tells it straight in these dark terms. The Lord speaks more of hell and of a lost eternity than anybody else in the scriptures.

The Prince of Peace, the Prince of Love and yet he warns us because that's what love is, is to warn us about the hard things. Sometimes when we're growing up we get warnings from our parents and we think they're being very hard but they do it because they love.

[22 : 22] And so also in these warnings the Lord gives to us, he does it because he loves us. He wants our spiritual good. He wants us to know him for time and for eternity.

And what makes hell so terrible is the unending suffering. If we think about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, although the Bible doesn't say it's a parable, it might be a true story, the Lord's relating.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus. It tells us that they both died. The rich man goes to hell or Lazarus dies first, Lazarus goes to heaven, into Abraham's bosom and the rich man goes to hell.

And in hell he lifts up his eyes being in torment and he prays to Abraham. Initially it's the wrong person to pray to Abraham, can't hear or answer prayer.

But he prays to Abraham and his prayers send Lazarus that he might give me a drop of that water upon my tongue for I am in deep torment.

[23 : 47] what he's asking for there is a drop of water from the river of life. He's refused it all his days, he's rejected it in every aspect of his life and now he's asking simply for a drop.

He could have had the whole river and bathed in it during his life but now he wants one drop of it. Abraham tells him you've had your good things during your life, you used them for yourself, you were selfish, you were greedy, you were not kind to others, you did it all for yourself much like in the story of the man who wanted to build bigger barns for himself.

The rich man is identical to that sort of person. He's told to remember all the blessings and the opportunities he had in his life.

We can turn that to ourselves and say much like ourselves in the West today, there are parts of the world where there is much suffering and much hardship and much that people don't have but not in the West.

We seem to have everything we want. And you know, as we're told, he gives us our heart's desire and yet he brings leanness to our souls. And so we have also departed from God, departed from the opportunities we've been given, departing even in the Western Isles, all the goodness that we have received from his hand.

[25 : 45] But to whom much has been given, much will be required. Possibly the hardest part of all will be the guilt of knowing that by our example others perhaps have entered into a lost eternity.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers that they might not come to hell.

Now it's not a sense of his love towards his brothers, there's no love in hell. It's a sense of guilt that by his example his brothers are going to be there also.

And that applies to us as parents or brothers or sisters that by our example others might be led to follow our godless life and to follow our neglect of the scriptures, to follow our neglect of the means of grace.

And so whether as parents or grandparents, husbands or wives, it's a warning to us. A warning to us that sometimes our example, if it's a bad example, can have calamitous effects upon those whom we love.

[27 : 05] And just then briefly, the Lord says, have you understood these things? That we know how difficult parables are. And yet the disciples here say quite easily, yes, we have understood all these things.

No doubt they meant they've heard all these things and that they are grappling with them. whether they really understood everything.

What the Lord is asking is, have you believed what you have understood? And I ask the same question. Perhaps we sit under the gospel and we don't understand all that we're hearing.

But have we believed, have we tried to get to grips with what we are hearing and what we are understanding? Sometimes the scriptures are deep.

But other aspects of the scriptures which are easy to understand and so we're asked in the understanding, do we believe it? Do we act on it? so the Lord is saying not only have you intellectually understood the precepts that I'm speaking about, but do you actually believe them?

[28 : 35] Do you do them? If we know these things, we should be blessed in the doing of them and in the teaching of others to do them also.

The fool says in his heart that there is no God. But there's a greater fool than that. The fool who knows there is a God, believes there is a God, but then doesn't take him seriously.

Doesn't think his warnings amount to much or his threatenings are any big deal. So the parable reminds us that when the judgment comes, the Lord will send us holy angels to separate the wicked from the righteous.

And where then shall we be? And whose side then shall we take our stand? It'll be too late then to practice righteousness or to pray or to think good thoughts or do good deeds.

Separation is final, and the separation is terrible. But may it be that as we sit under God's word, may it be that we will be on the Lord's side, and that we shall know his love, and his grace, and his mercy, that his peace fulfill us, and we will know the joy of the Lord, but only here, but also consequently in the world to come.

[30 : 29] Let us conclude our worship. Thank you.