

Matthew 13:47-58

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[0 : 00] Good morning, and allow me to add my word of welcome to Robbie, and a big thank you to Malcolm for reading there. My name is James, and I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas, and a big warm welcome to you if you've joined us for the very first time here at St. Silas on YouTube.

Let's pray as we start. So, Father, we thank you for your word. We pray that we'd sit under it. We pray that we'd listen carefully now, and try to hear what you are saying to us through this passage. In Jesus' name, Amen. And if you've just joined us for the first time this morning, we're in the last of a little series in the Gospel of Matthew that we've been looking at over the summers at St. Silas. And when we talk about a gospel, we literally mean good news. And it's good news about Jesus, the Son of God, God's appointed Savior.

And so, as we approach this morning's passage and heard some of the things that were said in it, we might have felt a bit uncomfortable there. But it is a passage that is filled with good news.

[1 : 11] And it's an invitation to us to believe the good news about Jesus. And the gospel is not so much a set of rules to be kept and obeyed and believed, but it's a person to be loved and adored and trusted.

And so, listening this morning, some of us might be listening having just got our results from school. And you might be thinking about, well, I've got some big decisions to make in my life.

But the big decision that we need to make in our life is, and that our reading this morning encourages us to make, is what do we think about Jesus?

To decide who we think Jesus is. And the truth is that all of us, no matter where we are, most people in the world, have made up their mind about Jesus, have come to an opinion about Jesus. So my lovely Muslim neighbor down the road, they might say that Jesus was a man, a great prophet. My liberal Catholic friend might say that Jesus was a spirit-filled man, a good example to be followed.

[2 : 29] My devout Jewish neighbor might say that he was a good teacher, but not the Son of God, and certainly not the Messiah. My activist colleague who practices mindfulness might say that he is a myth.

All of those folk have an opinion on Jesus. And so, when I'm out and about in the neighborhood and I'm hoping to share the good news of Jesus with my friends, it's really quite easy.

Because all I have to do is sit and listen carefully and listen to what they say and think about Jesus. And then I simply have to point them to what the scriptures say about Jesus.

And the message of this passage is, as Jesus teaches his disciples, and not the crowds about the kingdom of heaven, is to encourage them that they have a mission.

And Jesus' disciples have a mission, and you and I have this mission, because we, as Jesus' disciples, will escape judgment.

[3 : 39] And that's our first point there, that Jesus' disciples will escape judgment in verses 47 to 50. And they do so by trusting in the Lord Jesus.

And Jesus, in the section, he's talking about the very last day of history, and what it will be like when his kingdom is fully revealed.

And it will be ushered in by a separating out of the righteous from the wicked. And the picture that Jesus paints here is of a fisherman who's separating out a good fish from bad.

So that one's good, that one's bad. That one's good, don't like cuttlefish. That one's good, no crustaceans. He's separating them out. And the emphasis there, this is here, is that only the righteous will escape that blazing furnace where there'll be a weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And by righteous there, the criteria that Matthew is using in the section of what makes a good fish or a bad fish is not how many good works they've done, how much money they've given away, and

how kind they've been to their neighbors, although those are all good things, but on what they have decided about Jesus.

[5 : 00] What do they think about Jesus? Is he a God and a Savior to be loved and adored and trusted, or is he simply a man, a prophet, a good example to be followed, a myth?

And so Matthew writes here, as Jesus' disciples, not to dishearten us, but to encourage us of what we have escaped, and to challenge us, and to motivate us into action.

And the encouragement that this passage gives us is that we are on a mission, and that we need to take life seriously. And so when we're younger, and for those who have just finished school, or maybe just finished university, you might be wondering, what is your life going to be like?

What is your life's mission going to be? Who will you marry? What job will you do? Will you be a success or not? What's important for you?

But lots of us, if we are honest, we may have taken our foot slightly off the gas a bit, and we might have been slightly distracted by life's distractions.

[6 : 09] We might be thinking about the next holiday, when we can travel abroad once lockdown's over properly. We might be thinking about retirement.

Have I got enough money in my nest egg? We might be thinking about the next house that we'd like to get, or the next motorbike, something with a bit more engine capacity.

Or we might be thinking about football. And they're all distractions from what life is really about. And the speaker, John Piper, gives this great illustration.

It's a story of someone who meets God on the final and last day. And God asks him, what have you done with your life? And the person pauses, and he reaches down from his bag, because obviously you can't take a bag with you.

And he pulls out this picture, and he uncovers the picture. And it's a collection of seashells that have been magnificently arranged.

[7 : 12] And there's some beautiful ones on there. And he says, God, look at my seashell collection that I've collected on my holidays. And it's totally absurd.

It's not saying that holidays are bad. Holidays are a good thing for a rest. But to go on holiday and forget the end of all things, and to forget about our mission, is completely absurd.

And the reason that Matthew challenges us here and encourages us that we do have a mission is that because as disciples of Jesus, we have a unique understanding of God's, of Jesus' kingdom. And this is our second point here. Jesus' disciples understand his kingdom, verses 51 and 52. And it's an understanding that's given by Jesus.

So I wonder if you might just flip back slightly one page in your Bibles and just look earlier in the chapter to verse 10. And Jesus' disciples come to him, and they ask Jesus, Jesus, why do you speak to the people in parables?

[8 : 24] And Jesus answers them, because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.

And so when Jesus asks his disciples in verse 51 of our reading this morning, have you understood all these things?

He is asking them, have they understood the secrets of the kingdom of heaven? And they answer, yes, because this is a knowledge that Jesus has given them.

And so because they and every disciple that has ever lived has been given this knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, they have become like a teacher of the law, like a scribe with a unique understanding, who becomes like the owner of a house, who brings out of his storeroom new treasures, as well as old.

And the secrets there that he's referring to is the good news of Jesus, of who Jesus is. They see Jesus clearly.

[9 : 44] They see that Jesus is God who has come near. He is Emmanuel. They see that Jesus is God's king forever, great King David's greatest grandson.

They see that Jesus is the fulfillment of human history, that all history is his story. It's all about Jesus. And they see that by his death on the cross, Jesus has taken away the sin of the world and has brought his people into relationship with God.

He's turned bad fish into good fish. And that by his resurrection from the dead, he gives us a hope for a future, a glorious future that is lived with God.

And it's through the secret knowledge that Jesus' disciples will escape that blazing furnace. But I wonder if you might just look down at the end of verse 52 and look how Matthew describes the secret knowledge and its effects.

Just look down at the end of verse 52. One word. Treasures. Treasures. And the temptation for lots of us about treasures, if we get any, is that we like to store them away and try to get a good rate of interest and live off them.

[11 : 11] And when the interest goes down, we're broken by it. And when it goes up, we're delighted. But the picture here is of a treasure that is not limited, but that is abundant.

And that is freely available for everyone. It's a treasure that's not to be hoarded away, but to shed abroad. And these are treasures that only those who have been given the understanding of the kingdom of heaven have.

And that only they can share. That as they look at the world around them, as they look at human history, as they look at the history of God's people as outlined in the Old Testament, as they look at a world that's crying out for a Savior, they see that the answer is Jesus.

That Jesus is God's King forever. That He is God come near. That Jesus is God's greatest act of love to His people.

That He is our Savior. And there are lots of ways that we might share these treasures. And you think of the father who diligently reads the Bible with his children night by night.

[12 : 28] This may be starting with one word when they're quite small, but eventually reading more and more. I think of a dear friend of mine. His father passed rather abruptly, but in the last days before his father passed, his father was diligently reading a good Christian book, reflecting on the scriptures with him, discipling him, sharing treasure.

Or we think of someone who has a friend who's going through a particularly tough time, and they may ask, why would God allow this if he's a good God? And they might say, I don't know, I don't know, but I do know that God is good and that He loves us so much that He gave His only Son. Flee to Jesus. Trust Him. Sharing treasure. Or you think about the student who's wondering about life, the universe, and everything, and someone comes alongside them and opens up Mark's Gospel with them and points them to Jesus, explaining the bits as they go patiently and diligently, sharing treasure.

Or you think about the guy who has a friend struggling with pornography, and he comes alongside them and he says the hard things, and he challenges them because he's a real friend.

And he takes them to Psalm 51, and he explains to them how they can have forgiveness and how Jesus is worth more than all those treasures, all those pleasures.

[14 : 01] He's sharing treasure. And we're called to do this because we're on a mission. And like every mission, there is heartache and tough times and rejection.

And it was true for Jesus, and so it will be true for us. And this is our third point that we're coming to there. Jesus' disciples will suffer rejection, verses 53 to 58, and they'll do so for following Jesus. And as we come to this last section, the temptation for us might be to get distracted by verse 58 there. I'll just read it for us. And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith. And what we might do is we might interpret this verse exactly the opposite of the way that it is meant to be read. We might say, if only I had enough faith, and we turn our faith into work to be done, and we work ourselves up, then we would see and do miracles, and then people would come to faith, as if the miracles were the things that we're going to give assurances of our faith and convince our friends of the gospel.

But neither of those in this section of Matthew can read further from the truth. You see, the issue here, and throughout this little section of Matthew, is not do we believe the miracles, but how clearly do we see and understand who Jesus is?

[15 : 38] And do we understand his kingdom? So just look down at verse 54 there, and I'll read it for us again. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in the synagogue, and they were amazed.

Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? And they asked, they hear Jesus' teaching with authority, and they see the miracles that he does, but verse 58, they still don't believe in Jesus, and they reject him.

And so the judgment that Jesus teaches about at the start of the section is entirely reasonable. They have all the privilege and access in the world, but they still reject Jesus as the Son of God.

And we won't spend any time on it this morning, really. We've spent the last few mornings considering this point in Matthew's Gospel in depth. But consider the reason that Matthew gives for their rejection in verses 56 and 57.

You see, they consider that Jesus is a local boy, that they know all his relatives. And what does Matthew comment? And they took offense at him.

[16:58] And that's a fancy way of saying that they were too proud to follow Jesus. They wouldn't humble themselves. And it's desperately sad, isn't it?

You see, it's maybe something that a number of us can identify with as we're going through lockdown. It's a great struggle for us, isn't it, that a number of those who are closest and nearest and dearest to us take offense at our faith in Jesus because they've known us from small.

They've seen all our warts and all. And they won't believe in something that we take so seriously. But Jesus asks us to come to him in our weakness and to trust him.

But also, I wonder if you might, it might just be that although we trust in Jesus, we still struggle with pride as a born-again believer in Jesus.

And we might be watching this morning and wondering about Jesus, but the only Christian that we know is that rather dim but kind humanities student down the hall.

[18:10] And as a STEM student who's a bit of a jock, we're definitely not going to ask them. And we might be struggling with an eating disorder or some other issue, but we're too proud to speak to a Christian about it, to tell someone about it.

We might be a dad and a mom who'd love to read the Bible with our kids and we'd love to have a Bible time with them. But to be honest, we feel a bit clueless ourselves and we wish that someone would have a kid's Bible time with us so that we understood a bit better.

But we're too proud to ask one of the other parents at church, what are they doing? In case we get thought of as poor parents or something like that.

We might be on great terms with our neighbors. Get on with them really well. And we don't want to speak about Jesus because we're too proud of being politely put down by them.

And so we continue with friendship evangelism. But I wonder if you noticed the wonderful irony in this section. You can tell that Matthew was a tax collector.

[19:20] He's got a great sense of irony. Because the people in Jesus' hometown, they list all Jesus' relatives as reasons why they shouldn't accept them, that they know them.

But the great irony here is that lots of those same relatives did accept and trust Jesus as their Savior and as the Son of God.

And so we see Mary there, Jesus' mother, who was there when he died and when he was resurrected. We see James, his brother, who spoke at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, one of the leaders of the early church.

we see Judas, who we think wrote the short Bible letter of Jude. And the great message of this section is that we are on a mission and that we have been given an understanding, a treasure to share, and that there will come a terrible and glorious day when all their accounts will be settled and where the only currency of any worth will be a true and lively faith in the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray as we close. Dear Jesus, help us not to be ashamed of you. Please help us to share what you have given with us, with others, to share that treasure to folk who are crying out for it and so desperately need it.

[20:46] Please help us to stay faithful to you even when we suffer hardship and struggles from those nearest and dearest to us. Amen.