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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**August 18, 2019**

**The Net and the Fishes**

**Matthew 13:47-52**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again, I'm so thankful that we know where we're going when we fly away. I thank you for the cost that you were willing to pay for the cross that enables us to know where we are going when that day comes. We are just so grateful and thankful for the gift of your Son. We're grateful and thankful for the gift of your word. And, Lord, as we begin once again looking into it, I pray that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, guide us as we open up your book, give us the grace, strength and wisdom to understand what it is that you're giving us and to again make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, this morning we are -- we're finishing up the series that we've been doing on the study of Jesus' parables, that one section of the parables that's in Matthew 13. There are many other parables and we may touch on them. I'm not quite sure yet. But these particular ones were stories that were delivered during a time of intense instruction for the disciples. Jesus was basically

giving the disciples a crash course on the kingdom of God and this mystery of this thing called "the church." For the disciples it was a brand new paradigm, a brand new lens to view all of life through. The old lens was the Old Testament. And, you know, to them it wasn't -- it wasn't the Old Testament at all. It was just the way of God, it was the word of God. There wasn't even an idea of a New testament, because they had no understanding of the big picture that God was unfolding. I mean the disciples understood God, they understood God from Moses and the prophets, they understood God was holy and righteous and that man was not. They believed that Messiah was coming, and they believed that Jesus either was that messiah or some great prophet that was preparing for. I mean they had been following John the Baptist who had prepared the way for the Messiah. They were expecting this holy righteous king would bring justice at last to a people who were so downtrodden and oppressed. *Luke 3:15* captures the Messiah that the disciples were expecting. It says this: *As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable*

*fire." So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. Well, John's speaking of a Messiah who's supposed to bring "shock and awe" in his hands. This is a Messiah who was going to usher into a new golden age where Israel's God and people would once again be on top. The justice that they hungered for would at last flow like water and Messiah's winnowing fork would sweep the chaff into the everlasting fire of God's judgment. Well, Jesus had the task of deconstructing that paradigm. And neither John the Baptist nor the disciples understood what this Messiah's plan was at all. I mean as it unfolds you see even John the Baptist grows disillusioned. Scripture says in *Matthew 11*, it says: *Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."**

Jesus understood John's confusion. He also knew that his own message was going to be very hard to swallow. And many indeed did desert him and his ministry. But John's words about the Messiah were prophetic and they were true. He would winnow the wheat, he would punish the chaff, but first things would come first, and the

first thing was something John and his disciples could never have imagined. It was this unfolding of this mystery called "the church," the body of Christ. I mean little did the disciples know although there were already signs of it, that Israel's rejection of the Messiah would open up the gospel to the entire Gentile world. I mean this was part of Messiah's plan that they never even began to anticipate. God said of Israel in *Romans 11*: *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.* I mean Israel's transgression was something that only God could understand, imagine or anticipate. I mean just imagine what that included, God himself would be executed in our place. He'd be arrested and beaten and crowned with thorns and stripped and scourged and executed by driving nails into his hands and feet and then suspending him on a cross. And soon after this is -- the people that worshiped him would find that everybody was turning on them. Most of them would be martyred for believing in him. They'd see no winnowing fork. They'd see no separation of the wheat and the chaffs, certainly no fires of God's judgment. I mean what they did see instead was the head of John the Baptist sliced off by Herod and presented as a party favor for a salacious dance. What they would see is the apparent triumph of wickedness. I mean something that Paul sums up in *1 Corinthians 4* when he's describing himself and the role that he sees himself in, he says

this: *For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world -- right up to this moment.*

I mean Paul was seeming to see a kingdom reduced to garbage. And you know, we look at this passage and there's four little words that happen to jump out there and they are the words that really control what this passage means, and those words are "it seems to me." You see, there's a huge difference in what "seems" and what really is. Jesus's final parable addresses the difference between what seems to be true and what is actually true. And it has to do with the very thing that Paul and the disciples and even Jesus didn't see happen while he was here on earth, and that was this winnowing fork of God. Jesus's final parable in this section reaffirms what John the Baptist prophesied but it gives it its proper time frame. Let me just read you, this is, *Matthew*

13:47-52, this is Jesus's final parable. He says: "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

Jesus is telling the disciples the same thing that John the Baptist had said. He's telling them that God's winnowing fork is in his hand and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. But now Jesus gives a time frame. He says, "This is how it will be at the end of the age." And he's telling them a story about fishing. And like the story of the wheat and the tares, and the wheat and the chaff, it's about sorting good from bad, it's about sorting the righteous from the wicked. And here it is that Jesus is extremely straightforward, extremely blunt. And here it is that we have what seems to be a huge disconnect with what seems to be and what really is. I mean, Jesus is speaking here about hell. What possible

alternative meaning is there to these words? Let me just read them again. *"This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* Worse still, this is not an isolated statement, this is just a repetition of the very same statement that Jesus made only three paragraphs previously. There he's speaking about the wheat and the tares and he says: *"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age."* We all know that those words no longer resonate in our present day culture. I mean, Jesus frequently said, *"Whoever has ears, let them hear."* I just wonder if there's ever been a time when a culture thought less about having ears to hear. For most of the world, hell is not even up for discussion. It's thought to be a primitive artifact of unenlightened society, something that's still used and abused by these fundamentalist types who love to use it to scare people into believing in their God. And when it comes to the difference between what "seems to be" and what is, you know, hell seems to be, to most people, an old-fashioned nightmare.

Joel Osteen is the pastor of the largest evangelical church in America. He refuses to even discuss the word "hell". He says, "I just don't go there!" He's got thousands and thousands of people packed into his church each week and they all just don't want to go

there. But Jesus is in the business of exposing what "seems to be" to what "is." I mean he's just turned the disciples' world upside down. They have this Old Testament understanding and he has this New Testament plan that challenges their very understanding and challenges them to grow. I mean they all knew how things "seemed to be," but Jesus starts deconstructing how that was and he starts telling them how things really were. I mean he does this through all of these parables that we've been studying over the course of the summer. I mean, the parable of the soils said this kingdom was going to be this ideological mix of stony, thorny and good soils. He said that the church would have many false and temporary believers within it. That's not at all what it seemed to be to the Jews, I mean, the Jews thought that there was one group of people and they alone were the chosen people, period. Jesus also tells them in another parable that the kingdom was to commingle the wheat with the tares, that the church was to be in the world but not of the world. Well, that's not what it seemed to be to the disciples. That's not what they understood before. I mean, Jews were supposed to remain separate, they were supposed to be apart, so they thought. Jesus also told them in another parable that instead of being a great political power as they hoped, this new idea of the church was going to start as a humble little mustard seed, that it wouldn't have any of the political power that they thought that it would have. It would not be reflecting Israel's glory. And again,

what seemed to be was not what was actually true. He goes on to say that the kingdom is going to permeate the culture like leaven in a dough, that it's a treasure, but it's a treasure that's hidden, a treasure than unvalued like treasure in a field. And over and over again Jesus challenges the disciples with what seemed to be real and lasting, saying that it was not the same as what actually was real and lasting.

You know, the disciples have been with Jesus for three years but understand, Christ has been at this task literally for multiple thousands of years. Christ has an eternal plan that's now slowly beginning to unfold in time. And as we touched on last time, Jesus asked this difficult question at the end of the passage, he says, *"Have you understood all these things?"* *"Yes,"* they replied. Fat chance. Fat chance. Not even close. There's no way they understood these things. And when they said *"yes,"* he says this in *Matthew 13:52*, he says: *"Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."* What Jesus is saying there is that when you really get it, when it really hits and you really own it, when it's really settled into your being, you will start to bring out of your own storehouse old treasures like the old covenant, such as God's holiness and his righteousness and his justice, but you will be bringing also new

treasures, new treasures that you will learn, such as Jesus's righteousness given to us through faith. And he's telling them that what seems to be good is going to be supplanted by what is actually good. That's what Jesus has been teaching and that's what the parables are really all about. They're all about new treasures from the storehouse, new ways of advancing the kingdom into the Gentile world until the King returns. But right in the center of this new truth is this very old truth that Jesus insists on repeating over and over again, and whether it's the wheat or the chaff and the wheat and the tares or the good fish and the bad fish, it's all still the same. There will be a harvest, there will be a separation, and there will be a fiery furnace. That doesn't seem real at all to us any more. But Jesus doesn't trifle with what "seems to be." What he cares about is what really is. And he cares a great deal about the fact that hell is. See, almost every single thing we know about hell comes directly from Jesus, comes from his teaching.

Leslie Schmucker in the Gospel Coalition addresses this in an article entitled: *"The Uncomfortable Subject Jesus Addressed More Than Anyone Else."* She says this: "A friend once challenged me to show her where Jesus talks about hell in the Gospels. Even a cursory read-through shows Jesus talked about it plenty. In fact, Jesus talked about hell more than any other person in the Bible.

In Luke 16, he describes a great chasm over which 'none may cross from there to us.' In Matthew 25, Jesus tells of a time where people will be separated into two groups, one entering into his presence, the other banished to quote 'eternal fire.' Jesus doesn't only reference hell, he describes it in great detail. He says it is a place of eternal torment in Luke 16:23, of unquenchable fire in Mark 9:43, where the worm does not die in Mark 9:48, where people will gnash their teeth in anguish and regret in Matthew 13:42, and from which there is no return, even to warn loved ones in Luke 16:19-31. He calls hell a place of 'outer darkness' in Matthew 25:30, comparing it to 'gehenna' in Matthew 10:28, which was a trash dump outside the walls of Jerusalem where rubbish was burned and maggots abounded. Jesus talks about hell more than he talks about heaven, and describes it more vividly. There's no denying that Jesus knew, believed, and warned against the absolute reality of hell."

Now you all know, every one of you know that this stuff does not play well in our culture. And because this message is so unwelcome, we tend to blame the messenger, so messengers tend to avoid it. Hence, the Joel Osteens of the world just don't go there. But Jesus said, "*Let him who has ears to hear, hear.*" And Paul gives us a good reason why we so seldom even have the chance to hear. In *2 Timothy 4* Paul is warning Timothy in the time to

come, he says: *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.* Paul's giving us the actual reason why we so seldom hear this warning. It's because the people themselves have made it very clear that they don't want to hear it. It's the monster under the bed, and it's if we pretend that it's not there, maybe it'll go away. But for the last fifty years our culture has pretended a lot. And let me tell you, it seems to have disappeared. And if it was just a primitive, nasty nightmare, than so much the better to be done with it. But if it is true and there really is this dreadful place, a place of darkness and pain and isolation and horror created for the devil and his minions, if this place really does exist, then the last things that those creatures who occupy it want is for you to find out before it's too late.

John MacArthur points out that Jesus's parable of the net and the fishes addresses the very same idea. See, in Jesus's day there was really basically three different kinds of fishing. Number one was a hook and line. We're all familiar with that. A hook and line is described in Matthew 17. Jesus tells Peter, go, catch a fish this way and take a coin out of his mouth to pay for his taxes.

Secondly, there was a casting net. You know, when Jesus called Peter and Andrew in Matthew's gospel, they were "casting their

nets." These nets were small, little circular things with weights that opened up and dropped down to capture a fish with a drawstring. And Jesus told the disciples they would no longer be fishers of fish but they would become fishers of men. Well, we're not talking about either of those two types here. We're talking about a third type, and this is the type that Jesus is speaking about in this parable. In Greek this particular net was called a Sagen. It was a seine or a trawl net. And the first thing we know about these kind of nets is that they're huge, they're gigantic. I mean, I actually saw one once when I was in India, I saw them actually deploying it. They still use the same nets to this day and they could be up to a half mile long. I mean, they would be anchored on the beach and then a boat would kind of take it out and just swing in a huge circular path, dropping the net and as it's dropping the nets, the weights would bring it down to the bottom and then the boat would draw the net in a huge circle and tighten it as it pulled it toward the shore.

MacArthur sums up why Jesus presents that particular image of a net. You see, when the fish first begins to feel the net, it doesn't panic because it can always move forward, so it always feels free. Well, the net is God's judgment and it's God's judgment moving through the sea of time and it moves imperceptibly, but the point is it's always moving and it's always gathering.

When men sense God's law and God's righteousness and his judgment, they either respond with repentance or, just like the fish, they just keep moving forward. I mean the net moves so slowly it's very easy to miss its movement, I mean, for most folks it takes 60 to 90 years to sweep and envelope the fish. By then they're so used to moving forward that they think they'll never face the other side of the net, the side that they're being pushed toward. This is how MacArthur puts it. He says: "Men move about in this world imagining themselves to be free, fulfilling their own desires, with little knowledge that the net of judgment is coming closer and closer. Each time men are touched by the net, they move a little further along. Eventually they will find themselves hitting the part of the net in front of them. They will make a wild dash to escape, yet find themselves totally surrounded by that net. Finally, they will be dragged onto the shore flailing as they enter death. Men may not see God moving in this world, but he is moving. When they are touched by the gospel of Jesus Christ, or become scared by the threat of judgment, they dart away into the freedom they think is ahead of them. But sooner or later, they will find they are still caught in the net that is moving them toward judgment. The kingdom will ultimately engulf all men, and God will separate them with his angels." You know, life just seems to move forward. And, again, we have Jesus saying again: *"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and*

*caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on shore. They sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age."*

And so the question this confronts us with is hell and judgment, what this world insists it seems to be and that is a non issue or is it what Jesus tells us it really is? I mean the question really is is who do you choose to believe? Jesus Christ created hell as a place of punishment for the devil and his fallen angels. He spoke, talked and warned people more about hell than he did about heaven. He came to this planet and he lived out a perfect existence so that instead of you and I experiencing the very heart of hell, he, himself, would do that. He would take our place on the cross, taking our punishment by becoming sin for us. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Jesus came for us, he lived for us, and he died for us. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

I mean, so here's the question: Do you really think God would have given over his Son for a slaughter at our hands if it wasn't an absolute necessity? If hell itself wasn't real? I mean Jesus came

for us, he lived for us, and he died for us. Do we not owe him the respective ears that are willing to hear him when he warns us? On the other hand, we have the argument that hell isn't real and that it is itself a myth. So we have to ask, okay, what's the source of that information? It definitely doesn't come from scripture.

We've seen Jesus's own words on the subject and that leaves only three other sources, all of which are obvious. The first one is the world. I mean the world laughs at the idea of hell. You know, one of the ways that the world diminishes hell's impact is to make it a part of our lexicon, make "hell" so familiar a word that it gets bled of its impact. We say, "What the hell." "The hell you say." "How the hell." "Go to hell." We say that all the time. I pointed out that Shop Rite sells a cheese that's called Helluva Good Cheese. The world is happy to tell you that hell is an adjective, an adverb or a noun, but it's never, never to be taken seriously. In fact, if you do take it seriously, the world's going to tell you you're a fearmonger at best and a sadist at worst. Joel Osteen won't go there because the world punishes ministers who do go there.

C.K. Chesterton once said: "If you take away the normal and proper fear of God from people, instead of fearing nothing they will begin fearing everything." That's exactly what's unfolding today. I mean this world has no fear whatsoever of God and his judgment.

What we do fear is virtually everything else, from global warming, to Ebola, to terrorism, to the recession. You name it, we fear it. I personally find it fascinating that it was about a hundred years ago that the world began rejecting the horror of hell. And right about that very same time, we actually began to embrace the idea of horror itself. I mean it first started in literature with Frankenstein and the like. You know, now hundred years later blood and horror and mayhem and death has become the staple of our entertainment. You can make the argument that God designed us to have a certain set of fears for what is appropriately frightening. And having cast out that one true fear, we have simply embraced a whole new set of substitute fears. So that's what the world serves up instead of a fear of hell.

All right. What about the flesh? We'll, if you ask folks if hell is actually real, how do you wind up going there? Well, folks will tell you any variety of things except what the scripture says over and over again. You're going to hear that good people go to heaven and that bad people go to hell, that God puts your deeds on this little balance beam and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, off to heaven you go, you got St. Peter up there with a clipboard and he's checking all of your life out; and if that balance beam goes the other way, downstairs you go. What almost no one imagines is that hell is the default place for every single person ever

born. You don't have to do a thing to be worthy to go to hell. See, we have a holy God who owes all of us nothing but judgment. And that God is absolutely flawless and he demands that we be absolutely flawless as well, and he doesn't grade on a curve. *James 2:10* says: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* You know, so many people you talk to say, well, I tried my best to live up to the ten commandments. Well, the ten commandments was the standard that God gave us to show us you're not capable of doing that. He says if you break one of those once, you're guilty of all of it. I mean that puts every one of us in a position of not being good enough, so that all of us find ourselves, by simple virtue of our birth, fallen, sinful and worthy of that awful place. And that makes our flesh angry. Have you ever tried to explain *Isaiah 64* to someone? That's a pretty famous verse. It says: *But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.* I mean have you ever tried to get someone to fully grasp the idea that our righteousness -- not our sins, he's not talking about sins -- he's talking about your best behavior. He says the best thing you have ever done is as filthy rags in God's sight. I mean think back about the best thing that you've ever done. If you're a Boy Scout, maybe pushing -- pushing kindly some little old lady across the street, or whatever it is that you've done, if you examine something that you did when you were particularly kind and

particularly compassionate or did something that you feel really good about, just think hard about that. Was it flawless? Was it transcendentally perfect? Because that's the standard that God is judging us by. I mean have you ever told someone that God's standard of perfection makes our best deeds grossly unacceptable to him? That's not an easy sell to the flesh. Tell somebody that their very best is not good enough, that God says in *Romans 3:10*: *There's none good, no not one*, and see how the flesh reacts. "That's not fair." "What kind of a God is that?" The flesh's reaction is perfectly summed in this quote from atheist Robert Zepp. He was asked -- quote -- Does he think he'll change his mind as he gets closer to his own mortality? Will he regret his stand? He shakes his head: "I'm of the opinion that says if it there is a God and he's supposed to be merciful and all the rest of it, he will find me infinitely better company than most Christians who just believe in him blindly. And if he isn't that kind of God, then I want no part of him anyway." I can't tell you how many times I've heard those exact same words from people I've shared the gospel with. The flesh wants no part of the real God. I mean the most violent reaction to the gospel I've ever gotten have all been from "good" people who have been told their goodness is not good enough. See, our core sin is pride. And the gospel and pride are antithetical. One of them has got to go. And in the flesh it's always the gospel that's going to go.

So the world denies hell as a concept and the flesh denies hell as an assault on our pride. What about the third source? The third venue outside of scripture, what about the prince of hell itself? What about the devil? I mean, do you think you're going to get an accurate picture of the final fate of all unbelievers from the prince of this world, from someone who's already been condemned to the very same hell? I mean, the devil is referred to repeatedly by Jesus himself as the prince of this world. When Jesus saw the cross looming, he said in *John 12:31*: *"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out."* The Bible says he was the greatest created being ever, and that he fomented a rebellion against God himself and that he was defeated and literally tossed out of heaven. Guess where he landed? *Revelation 12* says: *Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down -- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to earth, and his angels with him.*

See, this planet, planet earth, is the temporary headquarters of the devil himself. I mean, we know that because Jesus gave him the title the "prince of this world." So do you think the prince of

this world is going to give you an accurate picture of what "is" verses what "seems to be"? Jesus said in John 8 that he's the father of lies and that when he's lying, he's just speaking his own native tongue. I mean can we expect any truth from the father of lies? Well, you might say: "I wouldn't listen to anything he had to say." The problem is you don't hear what he says. You don't hear that from him, you hear it from every other source. You hear it from the world, you hear it from the flesh, and you hear it from the mouthpieces that the devil uses to masquerade with. Those are not my words also, these are God's words. He says: *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.* That's also why popular preachers just don't go there when it comes to hot button subjects like hell.

See, I think the greatest threat to the gospel today is not the world, the flesh or the devil, it's the so-called evangelical gospel. There are now two distinct gospels in the evangelical world. The good news of one is that we are fallen, absolutely imperfect, helpless sinners, but that God has sent his Son and through faith in him we can be made perfect again, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The other gospel says God wants you to be the best you you can be, that he wants you happy

and healthy and prosperous and he doesn't want you wallowing in negativity. He wants you always aiming at the positive in life because he wants you to be all that you can be. That's not the gospel. Actually it's an old Army advertising campaign. But it can easily pass itself off as the gospel in many evangelical churches. And over against that positive confession lies the most negative thing in human existence and that is hell itself. That's why we just don't go there. The net effect is just what the prince of this world delights in, a hell that seems nonexistent. Not only does this "gospel" prevent the fish from filling the net as it's closing in, but it also stops the fish from warning other fish. I mean who wants to look like a prophet of doom? One of the most powerful incentives there is for sharing the gospel is the certainty that folks without Christ are lost, that they're headed for an eternity without Christ. If that doesn't break your heart, then there's something wrong. 100 years ago that was common knowledge. Today people are shocked, shocked to hear that. Hell seems to have disappeared. And I know that because I see it. I see it as I tell folks the real gospel and see the shock on their faces. I mean, I tell people that the natural default position of everybody walking this planet including all of the good people that I know and love who don't have a relationship with Christ is an eternity outside of God's presence which is, by definition, hell. People are astounded at that.

And if you doubt that this alternative gospel has had its effect, just consider your own personal evangelism. Ask yourself how often have I told anybody about hell? Do I still have a passion for saving the lost? Is the consequence of being lost one of a Godless eternity in hell or is it just losing out on being the best you you could be? I mean it's popular to say that today in the end love wins out and everyone gets saved, that everybody's going to wind up going to a good place regardless of whether or not they ever even heard the gospel, but that negates Jesus's own words. What that's saying is that there's two ways to heaven, one is the gospel itself and the other is ignorance of the gospel. I mean, if that's true, that ignorance of the gospel entitles you to heaven, then the worst thing Jesus could have done for any of us is to let anybody even have the vaguest idea that he was coming to earth, should have been the best kept secret there was, I mean, if his perfect life, execution and resurrection remained a guarded secret and every single person would get into heaven by virtue of their ignorance of the gospel, then why in the world would Christ ever say what he said in *Matthew 28*: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Why would he command we go into the entire world when that same world is going to heaven? When virtually the entire

world is going to heaven by virtue of their ignorance? See, when hell becomes the thing of myths, when you are surrounded by that gospel, the gospel gets hard to see and harder still to be faithful to. And one is extraordinarily pleasant and nonthreatening and the other one is not. One certainly seems to be true, the other gospel contains aspects of hell that are unpleasant and highly threatening but it is true. The false gospel can help you win friends and influence people. The true gospel can get you in real solid trouble. I'm not saying it's time to go out and get one of those sandwich signs that say "repent or be damned," I mean, it's really a question of how you decide to get the message out. But what matters most is that we care that we get the real message out in the first place. I mean, Jesus cared enough to make the final parable of Matthew 13 all about a net that would close, about fish that would be caught and be separated into good and bad. Let me repeat it again. He says: *"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

How often do you hear this in church? So the real question we need to ask is whose words are you going to believe? Are you going to believe the world, the flesh and the prince of this world, they all say, "Don't worry, be happy." Will you believe them? Or will you believe Jesus Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, God in the flesh who died for us, who tells us what "is" instead of what "seems to be." I mean, it is Jesus who told us this in *Luke 12: But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*" There's absolutely nothing positive or even attractive in those words. They're not designed to make you into a better you. They are designed, however, to save your soul and to save the souls of those you share with. That's the gospel I believe, that's the gospel that we have to proclaim, that's the gospel that saves. Let's pray.

*Father, again, these are brutally difficult words to hear. This is a subject that nobody likes to hear. It's a subject that I don't like to preach. I would much rather spend time on much more pleasant things, on the wonderful, glorious things that you have accomplished for us, on the glorious future that awaits us. But Lord, there is this awful, awful truth of hell. And so I want to pray first and foremost if there's anybody in this room right now that is fearing whether or not they are one of your children, is*

*fearing hell itself, that you would speak to their hearts, have them come to us, speak to myself, speak to one of the elders or deacons, just sit, let's sit down and get this right, right now here today. And, Lord, if not, I just continue to pray that you would press in upon us the incredible privilege that we've been given. We've been given the good news, and along with that privilege comes the responsibility of sharing it. Give us the boldness, give us the courage, give us the desire to share that good news, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*