

Becoming Fishers of Men
Part 4
“Hauling in the Net”
Matthew 13:47-50
Pastor Charles Price

If you have got your Bible, I am going to read to you this morning from Matthew 13. Matthew 13, and while you turn there, let me just remind you (and those of you who have been here the last 3 weeks will know this) that we have been looking at the very first thing that Jesus ever said to any of His disciples.

Matthew 4:18 He said,

“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

There is an invitation there – “Come, follow Me. Keep in step with Me.”

And there is a promise – “If you do, I will make you fishers of men.”

And we have been talking about this whole issue of being fishers of men because we want to remind ourselves as to why we exist as a church. What does it mean to really be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

And I want to finish this four-part series by looking at a story Jesus told about fishing in Matthew 13.

And by the way, He did not say, “I will make you hunters of men,” but “fishers of men.” And fishing is much more gentle, much more subtle, a lot of patience, a lot of persistence in order to get a hold of the fish.

Now the story I want to read you this morning is a very short one. It is a story Jesus told, a parable. And it is about what He calls the end of the age. It is in Matthew 13. I will read Matthew 13:47 onwards.

“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 fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“ ‘Have you understood all these things?’ Jesus asked

“ ‘Yes,’ they replied.”

This is an incredibly sober story that Jesus told about the end of the age. And He uses this imagery of fishing, which He has used on several occasions, as being when the net is finally pulled in for the last time.

And I want to suggest that in these verses there are three periods of time that are spoken about. There is a time of invitation when the net is out in the lake.

There is a day of culmination, a day when the net is drawn in.

And then there is, thirdly, an eternity of separation when the fish are divided, the good from the bad. And the bad, it says, are thrown into the fiery furnace.

Now these images are very sober and very solemn and very challenging.

Let me talk first about a time of invitation. Matthew 13:47:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.”

And this gospel net, as we might call it, is being let down during this period between the first and the second comings of Christ. This is what we call the gospel age. And it is a gospel that is offered to everybody.

This is not a gospel that is available for those who are inclined to this kind of thing, who like this kind of thing. Like certain people like to play golf and some people play tennis and some people go to ballet classes and some people go to church; it just happens to be their thing.

This is not some kind of recreational club to coincide with our self-interest. The gospel is about a universal remedy being offered to a universal need. And the plea, such as in 2 Corinthians 5:20, when Paul says,

“We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

This is something, which is extended to every man, woman, boy, and girl - with urgency we implore you, that it is fundamental to you and your wellbeing that you be reconciled with God.

And the church is called to be a fishing boat – that’s the imagery – not a pleasure boat. A fishing boat and a pleasure boat are altogether different in design and different in purpose.

A pleasure boat is built around comfort and convenience. A fishing boat is built for action. When Jesus, on two or three occasions, met the fishing disciples of His outside of their boat, they weren’t polishing the boat; they were mending their nets. They were preparing themselves for action.

And it is the essential work of God in our world to bring men and women, boys and girls, back into being reconciled to God. It is a universal remedy for a universal need.

In 1 John 2:2 John writes there that Christ

“...is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours...”

(In case we get the idea this is just our thing, this is for us – we’re inclined this way) –

“not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

This has a universal application, says John.

And the Scripture makes very clear that it is God’s provision for all people to be drawn into that living, vital relationship with Himself.

1 Timothy 2:3 speaks of God our Saviour

“...who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.”

That is that all of humanity might be saved.

Titus 2:11 says,

“The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.”

(All people, that is.)

2 Peter 3:9 says,

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

I am just giving you some statements of Scripture, which are universal in their application.

Romans 8:23 [32]:

“God spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all.”

Isaiah 53:6:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

So the “all we who have gone astray” are the same “us all” on whom Christ has taken our iniquity, and our sins were laid on Him.

And the great commission that Jesus gave to His church at the end of His life as a man extends to the whole world.

Matthew 28:19:

“Go and make disciples of all nations,” He told His disciples.

In Mark 16:15:

“Go into the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Luke 24:47 says,

“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.”

In Acts 1:8 the last words of Jesus before He ascended to heaven were that

“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

There is no limit on the scope of the gospel, is what Jesus was telling them.

But there is a limit on the time of the gospel. It is not going to be available for all times. 2 Corinthians 6:2 Paul writes,

“I tell you, now is the day [time] of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

Hebrews 4:7 says,

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Now it is of course the work of God Himself to draw people to Himself and draw people to Christ.

Jesus said in John 6:44,

“No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

There is a time when He draws us, when the Spirit of God works in our heart, making us aware and restless and recognizing that there is something in our lives that is inadequate, that is missing, that we are not complete. Because we are so created as to be complete only in relationship with God, because His presence in our lives is what energizes us and makes life make sense.

But it is the work of God to draw us to Christ. But, having said that, we may resist His drawing. In Acts 7:51 Stephen said to the leaders in Jerusalem,

“You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

That is, that God is at work and He is speaking to you and He is revealing to you and He is drawing you, but you resist.

Hebrews 2:3 says,

“How shall we escape if we ignore (or neglect) such a great salvation?”

And I wonder if there are not some folks here this morning and you have heard the gospel perhaps on many occasions but you have delayed and you have delayed and you have resisted and you have resisted. And the result is your heart becomes harder and hardened so that you are no longer moved by the gospel. And you say to yourself, “Well there’s always tomorrow.”

But that is a reckless expectation. Proverbs 27:1 says,

“Do not boast about tomorrow. You do not know what a day may bring forth.”

In the book of James 4:14, James says,

“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

Yes, you are here today, but that is all you can be sure of, and you will be gone tomorrow.

Yesterday morning I took a walk, and just near where I live there was a funeral procession that came down the road. And as it drove slowly by with the car at the front with the flashing light indicating that this was a trail of vehicles coming behind, I stopped and paid my respects as the hearse drove by.

I have no idea whose funeral it was, but I do know that one day I am going to have a funeral, and so are you.

But this life is temporary and don't boast about tomorrow.

There was a man who boasted about tomorrow in the Bible. Jesus told a story about him. It's in Luke 12:16. And He said,

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’”

“Then he said, ‘This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.’”

Jesus talked about this man gaily doing along, enjoying life, successful. He was planning his better tomorrow. But what he had not realized was that that very night he had an appointment for his soul. And Jesus says, “You fool!”

I wonder if that would describe somebody here this morning regarding the reckless way in which you are treating the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maybe you are here this morning with your wife and she is a Christian but you are not. And it might have some convenience about coming with her but you have never yourself settled the issue with God. Maybe you have thought it's something for her, not for you.

Maybe you are a wife and you are here with your husband and he has gotten right with God and you haven't.

Or maybe your parents are Christian and you are a teen here this morning. And you think, "I have got all the time in the world." And at that age in life you have nearly every right to think that you do. But you may not. And you have never settled this issue with God.

Not only, you see, is the gospel limited to this time, this brief time that we have; it is limited to this life. Hebrews 9:27 says,

"It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgement."

We are not appointed to die and we are going to get a little bit of time beyond that to really make up our minds. No, after that the judgement; it is for this life and for this time.

And that is what gives urgency to our own need to be right with God, to be reconciled to God. And there is a time of invitation. And we live in that time of invitation between the first and the second coming of Christ. But it is limited too to the length of your own life.

And everyone in this building this morning has an opportunity. Whether you have taken it or not is the response of your own heart to the working of the Spirit of God within your own life in drawing you to Christ.

But if there is a time of invitation, the second thing I suggest to you is that there is a day of culmination. That is, a day when this era of time will come to an end. Matthew 13:48 says,

"When it was full," (when the net was full) "the fishermen pulled it up on the shore."

This is described in Matthew 13:49 as the end of the age. You see time does have an end. There is a calendar in heaven and occasionally that is evident by things the Scripture says about God's calendar.

Galatians 4 says,

"When the time was fully come, God sent his Son."

Jesus Christ was born as a man into this world right on schedule. There was a time and when the time was come, God sent His Son.

Jesus spoke in these terms too. In Mark 1:15 He said,

“The time has come. The kingdom of heaven is near.”

In Luke 19:44 He said to some people,

“You did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

John 17:1, praying to His Father, Jesus said,

“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son.”

He spoke elsewhere about the time has not yet come. And in John 13:1,

“Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world.”

So you see the whole of Jesus’ life is characterized. There was a time that fully came when He was born. There was a time when the kingdom was inaugurated. There was a time not yet come when He would die, but the time did come. And there was a time when He was ready to leave this earth.

You see God has a calendar and that calendar has a future tense to it.

John 5:28 Jesus said,

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice.”

In Acts 3:21 it says of Jesus,

“He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

These are a lot of Scriptures – I don’t apologize for giving you a lot of verses from Scripture this morning. But these are a lot of verses that talk about the time, the time, the time, the time. You see, this time in which we live has an end coming to it.

You know science has established that in recent years, relatively recent years. Time is not an absolute; it is something, which has a beginning and has an end.

Last Sunday night I flew from Toronto to Dusseldorf in Germany and on the flight, I watched a documentary on this whole question. And it was a fascinating documentary.

As recently as Albert Einstein, the conventional wisdom believed that we lived in a closed static universe, in that everything that is, had always been and would always be, that space had always been there, time was always ticking.

But it was in 1929 that Edwin Hubble made the observation that wherever you look in the universe, in whichever direction you look, galaxies appear to be moving away from each other.

In other words, the galaxies are expanding, the universe is expanding. And apparently, they have now worked out, that it is growing at a rate of about 5% every 10,000 years.

And every galaxy is moving further away from each other as the universe expands. If you take a balloon and you were to put some spots on the balloon and then blow it up, every puff of air would make the balloon grow bigger and every spot on the balloon would grow further and further away from each other.

Well that is how Hubble saw what was happening in the universe. And so Hubble said to himself, “Suppose all of this went into reverse and went the other way?” And this has become known as Hubble’s Law.

If the expanding universe was to contract and you were to trace it back through time (and they have come up with a figure of 13.7 billion – we’re not going to debate that; I’m just telling you what they have come up with) and you go back in time, you go back to a singularity, they call it, which marks the very beginning of time and the beginning of space.

And Hubble established that time is not constant; time has a beginning and therefore will, at some point, have an end.

Albert Einstein actually went to see Mr. Hubble to thank him and to apologize for his own ignorance in thinking time was always there.

Hubble, by the way, couldn’t go back to the very, very, very beginning of time but he got close, according to what they now tell us. They got to the first one ten million trillion trillion trillionth of a second of the beginning. They can’t get back that last multi-trillionth of a second to the

actual beginning, which Mr. Hubble called “a big bang”, which has now been known as “the big bang”, but which Genesis knew about long before that, whether there was a bang or not in the beginning because there was a beginning.

“God created the heaven and the earth.”

But the interesting thing is that it’s standard scientific knowledge now (though it was not 100 years ago) that time has a beginning, and time will have an end. What that end will be, science speculates.

Stephen Hawkins suggested that the expanding universe will reach a point where the gravitational pull at the center of the universe will be such it will begin to contract and go right back and end up back as a tiny little finite, almost impossible to see compression of matter. And then he says maybe it’s a bouncy universe – it’ll explode again and then it will go out and come back. Who knows?

But the point is it’s very interesting that it’s not just Scripture that tells us time has a beginning and time has an end. And before there was a beginning there was something called eternity. And God existed in that era called eternity before time because when the beginning began, God was already in existence. Genesis 1 and John 1:

“In the beginning was”

Not is - was (past tense)

“The Word. The Word was” (past tense) “with God. The Word was” (past tense) “God.”

And God in His calendar has set a day (Acts 17:30 tells us)

“...has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this...by raising him from the dead,” said Paul.

But it is going to come unexpectedly. 2 Peter 3:10 says,

“The day of the Lord will come like a thief.”

And,

“You ought to live godly and holy lives as you look forward to the day... and speed its coming.”

We need to be ready because that day will come like a thief. Thieves don't call you and say, "Will you be home at 3:00 this afternoon? If you are, please leave the door open and then you won't have to replace the lock because we are coming anyway." They don't tell you that; they just turn up when you least expect them."

And the end of that time is going to be marked by certain things, and one of the things that will mark the end of that time is the hauling in of the gospel net according to this parable of Jesus here that they pulled up the net onto the shore.

But this is why this is so serious because the time of invitation in which we now live will be followed by a day of culmination when all of time will come to an end, when the net will be hauled in. There are many other things Scripture tells us.

The Lord Jesus will step out of heaven and say with a loud voice – loud enough for everybody to hear – "Ladies and Gentlemen, time is up. Please put everything down, everybody come this way; it's over."

There is going to be an end. Then He says this:

"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."

My third point from these few verses is that this time of invitation followed by a day of culmination will lead to an eternity of separation. This is a truth that we have to recognize.

When it was full,

"the fishermen pulled it up on the shore, then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets and 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 fiery furnace, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

That's sobering stuff, isn't it? Who is in the net? Well, clearly they are what Jesus calls good fish and bad fish. If the net is like the kingdom of heaven, as He says it is, it seems to me that includes those who have affiliated themselves with the kingship of Christ (that's what the kingdom is about) and yet are not saved.

There are those caught up in the net but are not saved. You say, "Are there such?" The answer is, yes, there are.

This parable is in Matthew 13. It's always good to read Scripture in its context. There are 8 parables in Matthew 13; all about the kingdom of heaven is like. And nearly all of them have failure in what the kingdom of heaven is like.

The first is a sower sows seed in the field and all the seed germinates at first, but one is on a hard path and has no root, one is amongst stones and rocks and it can't put its root down. It's the one on the hard path that gets picked up by birds. It's the one on the stony path that it can't put its roots down. One is amongst weeds – the cares of this life, the love of money (He speaks of these things) strangle it; it doesn't grow.

Only one part of the four parts lands on good soil and produces a fruit.

So He says the kingdom of heaven is going to be full of failure – it's going to appear that way.

And then He talks about another story of the kingdom of heaven, sowing good seed into a field. But then an enemy comes and he sows weeds into the very same field. So the servants say, "Should we go and pull the weeds out?" And the master says, "No, because then you will destroy the wheat as well. Let them grow together and we'll sort them out all at the end."

And we won't go through all the parables, but if you go through them and look carefully, there is an element of failure in most of them – not in all of them but most of them.

And there is in this. There is a net being hauled in but there is in that net good fish and bad fish. That is, caught up in the kingdom of heaven are all kinds of people who are actually not the genuine thing.

Do you know that statisticians tell us that 2.1 billion of the world's population are Christians? That's a third of the world are Christians.

I am not anybody's judge. I find that hard to believe. How come they claim to be Christian?

Furthermore, even harder to believe, at the last Canadian census, 77% of Canadians claim to be Christian.

Now I don't know what the census asks them. They probably check a box – "which religion" and you can have all kinds of things. And there are probably some who just checked it because they were born in Canada. "So what am I? I am not a Buddhist; I must be a Christian."

There may be a few who checked it because when they were little, so they are told, they got sprinkled with water. They don't remember it, but they know they have got a godmother and a

godfather who send them presents every birthday, so it's good to have. "So we'll check that – I must be a Christian."

Maybe they go to a church in some way. And it might be relatively easy if we wanted to do so, to dismiss the claim 77% of Canadians are Christian.

But you know, this separation that comes here is more than just a superficial sense that somebody might or might not be a Christian.

This comes much closer to home. These are folks actively in the net.

Let me read you what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 – let me read it to you. He says,

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?"

"Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Now you may be familiar with that text. You may not be, but it is again, it's a frightening text. These are not just folks who are somewhere out on the periphery checking a box somewhere; these are folks who are doing impressive work. They have prophesied; they have driven out demons. In the name of Jesus they have done it. They have performed miracles. They have exercised what we might call spiritual gifts – it certainly looks like them.

They are not nominal Christians, these folks; they are active. Some of them are leaders in ministry but they do not know the Lord and the Lord does not know them.

They have deceived themselves. They argue with Jesus,

"Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?"

They use this as anecdotal evidence that of course we are okay; we have done all these things.

He said, "I never knew you. Depart from Me."

The Scripture warns us of this, as it does. It is possible for a person to be actively involved in the things of God yet not be born again of the Spirit of God with that incorruptible life that He plants within us.

You know Jesus spoke to a group of Pharisees and scribes. They knew their Old Testament Scriptures well, their Torah.

And Jesus said, John 5:42,

“I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.”

“I know you have the Word of God in your hearts, but you don’t have the love of God in your hearts.”

They had the Word of God because they quoted it and they memorized it and they lived by it and they built even fences around the laws to make sure they couldn’t even close to breaking the real law – renowned for their discipline. “But there is no evidence of the presence of God in your life.”

You see, it’s not just believing certain things, getting our doctrine in order and checking the right boxes – “do I believe this, this, this, this, this, this, this – yeah, I believe all of that.”

It is something much deeper than that. You see, Romans 8:16 says,

“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

How do you know that you are a Christian?

There are different ways and different ways in which we can be affirmed of that, but one of the most important ways is the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit.

In what way? The Spirit within me creates in me an appetite for things we never had an appetite for before. It creates a hunger and a thirst after that which is right.

In Romans 5:5 Paul said,

“Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given.”

He says we have experienced this pouring of the love of God into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That's how we know that something has gone on in my life. Not just because I prayed a prayer at the end of a meeting. You can have prayed a prayer 20 years ago and it mean nothing.

Do you know, nobody in the gospels ever prayed a prayer to become a Christian? Nobody in the epistles or in the book of Acts prayed a prayer.

Now I always pray with people and we had the joy of seeing people come to the Lord in the first service this morning and we prayed with them. But that isn't what makes a person a Christian – at least it never did in the New Testament.

It's a change of heart that recognizes that I am what I am – a sinner, powerless, weak, separated from God. And I recognize that Jesus Christ alone, by His death on the cross, satisfied the judgement of God for my sin and I turn from myself and I trust Christ. Period.

And do you know what happens? The Spirit bears witness with our spirits we are children of God. The love of God flows out of our hearts. And the evidence a person is a Christian is not an evidence that comes because somebody tells you they are; the evidence is you can see they are because the life of God is within them and it's flowing through them.

And you can swear till you are blue in the face that you are a Christian but if it doesn't show in your life, there are no grounds by which to believe it.

“By this shall all men know you are my disciples” said Jesus “that you love one another.” (The evidence that Jesus gave.)

And what He said to those Pharisees was, “I know you do not have the love of God in your hearts. And if you don't have the love of God in your hearts, it's because you don't have the life of God in your heart.”

Now we must believe the promises of Scripture. There are objective grounds on which we may know that we are genuinely born again of the Spirit because there are things the Word of God says that correspond to what has gone on in my life.

But there are subjective grounds too – that there is that inner sense of the Spirit of God.

I remember talking to somebody who had just become a Christian one day and we were driving in the car and he was telling me about things he was going to have to put right in his life, things he had done that were wrong.

And I said, “Well, why do you want to put them right?”

He said, “Because it’s obvious I need to.”

I said, “Why is it obvious?”

He said, “Well, because they are wrong.”

I said, “Was it not obvious when you did them?”

He said, “No it was smart when I did them?”

“So why is it obvious now?”

He said, “I don’t know. It’s just obvious.”

I said, “I’ll tell you why: because Jesus Christ lives in your heart now and you have an appetite for what is right.”

“The angels,” said Jesus, “will come and separate” (this is now the fish in the net) “the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

This is a picture of a full and final destruction.

We don’t like to talk about hell. In the New International Version of the Bible, which I am using, the word hell occurs 14 times in the New Testament.

Some other translations will have more than that simply because there are Hebrew and Greek words for Sheol, for Hades, for hell, and they are translated sometimes for instance in the King James as hell all the way through. Others distinguish between those.

It doesn’t matter for the moment. I just want to make the point that of the 14 times in the New International Version of the Bible when the word hell is used, 12 of those 14 times it is used by Jesus. Hell is a doctrine of Jesus.

Don’t get the idea that Jesus was the One who was just about love and good stuff and then along behind Him came some apostles and they had to write down the really hard stuff. No, no, this is a doctrine of Jesus. In love He told people the truth.

More interesting, if not more challenging than that, is He never talked to the crowds about hell; He only talked to the religious people or to His disciples, when the doors were closed and He was alone with them.

To those who were completely outside, He talked to them about the joys of heaven. When He did talk about that, He promised them.

In fact, earlier in Matthew 13 there is a story He told of the bad seed and good seed growing in the same fields and then He said it will be separated at the end (so, very similar to this one). But He said the good seed will go into the barns – that's where the good seed will go.

Now when He told that, the crowds were listening to Him. And then He said to His disciples, "Alright, let's go inside." They went into the house, closed the door and then He told them this story.

And this time He didn't tell you about where the good fish are going; He said the bad fish will be thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Probably the crowds couldn't take it but the disciples needed to take it. There are fish in the net and you'd better not be satisfied with the fish swimming around within your Christian net; you'd better make sure they understand.

You don't become saved by associating with Christians. That's when you can be most deluded because in that context you think, "I must be okay." But there is no work of God in your heart.

Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes, the people who were the teachers of the Word of God, Matthew 23:

"You snakes! You brood of vipers!"

(Very strong language, because about their hypocrisy He was talking there.)

"How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

He wasn't saying this to the pagan Romans. He wasn't saying this to thieves or robbers or killers or tax collectors or pimps or prostitutes. He was saying this to the religious people who were caught up in the net but were not born again of the Holy Spirit.

And the evidence of being born again is exactly what that phrase indicates – that there is new life. And that new life in you begins to give you new appetites, new desires, new direction, new power.

And I want to ask you this morning, not whether you come to this church – you may have come to this church for 20, 30, 40 years, or some other church.

But do you know Jesus Christ experientially, with appetites that are godly appetites?

Paul only once asked the people he was writing to, to examine themselves. Introspection is always a dangerous occupation, but what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:5 was,

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.”

He doesn’t say, “Examine your Bible”. Examine yourself at this point. And then he says,

“Test yourselves.”

Not “test your doctrine”; “test yourselves”

“Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you – unless...you fail the test.”

The Amplified Bible says,

“Do you not yourselves realize by an ever increasing experience that Jesus Christ is in you?”

So Paul says, “Examine yourself, test yourself. Is there evidence that there is spiritual life within you?” Because there are so many, many people hanging around the Christian church who don’t know life. And that is who this parable is about. They are caught up in the net.

I talked to a man this morning who told me that for 52 years he had been in the church. That is, he was 52 years of age and from the time he was born in a beautiful Caribbean country to a family who were church-going and his grandmother, especially, he went to church.

He moved up here to Canada. And one of the first things he did in his first weeks here was to find a church and went to it and went week after week after week. And it got increasingly tedious to him. And he began to go less and less and less until he stopped going altogether.

And as he told me this morning, “I was lying on the couch one Sunday and I flicked on the TV and I saw Living Truth from the Peoples Church, so I listened.”

And he said, “As I listened, I felt something going on inside of me. I felt this is something I have not heard before in this way.” He said, “At the end of the program I knelt by the couch I had been lying on and Jesus came into my life. And my life changed.”

And he said he’s been coming here for months now. I never met him until this morning, and his wife too. And as we talked together right here an hour or two ago, his wife began to weep. They had had evangelical Christian religion but no real Christ.

There might be some watching on television this morning and that describes you – you have given up on the church.

Why? Because there is no real life in your own heart – spiritual life, where Jesus Christ is present and active.

And that may be true of some people here this morning. You may be here for the very first time. But you don’t know life. It’s not about Christianity.

We never preach Christianity; we preach Christ, a living Person who you were designed to know, present within you to make you complete and whole and make this life here, now, make sense in this space we call time, but to give you assurance of life in that period we call eternity.

Let me finish by going back to the beginning of my message. I said there is a time of invitation, and we still live in that. We call it the day of God’s grace, when God’s love is extended, when the work of the cross can be made effective in your life. And as Paul writes,

“Now is the time of God’s favor. Now is the day of salvation.”

King James puts it,

“Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.”

Hebrews 4:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

(Because a hardened heart becomes more difficult to get through to.)

And I believe that God is drawing some people here this morning into an intimacy with Christ, into a relationship with Christ that is much, much deeper than being part of any church, or this church.

It is a relationship with Christ where you acknowledge to Him your need of Him and you confess to Him your sin, which is a barrier to His presence in your life. And you thank Him that Christ died on the cross to satisfy the judgement of God for sin, and was raised again to come and live within you by His Holy Spirit.

And my prayer is that there are going to be those here this morning and this is something you are going to enter into. And don't think it's for somebody else, if you have been around here even for many years.

If you do not have the witness of the Spirit in your heart where God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit we are children of God, where the love of God sometimes you almost feel you could burst with it because it's real and it's deep and it's supernatural. It's the work of God, not a human thing engineered.

There have already been people this morning in this church who have been around for a long time who realized they didn't know Christ themselves. And I believe there will be more here now.

I am going to lead you in prayer. If God has been speaking to you, as only He can – it's not a human voice but deep inside there is a resonating, something inside is going on, and the Spirit of God is drawing you, I am going to ask you to pray with me.

And I am going to ask everybody to be bowed in prayer and there are many of you here who can be praying for those in whose heart God is working this morning.

And if God is working in your heart in a fresh way and you realize you don't know Him and you are not safe and secure, then would you pray these words with me? They are no special words, but these will help you.

Lord Jesus Christ, I realize I do not know the fullness of life that You have for me. I confess to You my sin. I confess my separation from You. I thank You that Christ died to satisfy the judgement of God for me and I can be forgiven. I confess my sin. I repent; I change my mind about it. And I ask You to come and live in me, that Your life in my heart will bear witness with my own spirit that I belong to You. Give me that joy that comes with that. Pour Your love into my heart. Thank You for hearing my prayer.

Remain in a spirit of prayer. If God has spoken to you and you have responded to Him, you are saying this morning, "I need to know this life, I need to know the real thing" and you prayed with me that express desire of your heart, I am going to ask if you would just stand wherever you are, just stand to your feet.

I know this may be a hard thing for some of you, but it will be a very important thing just to stand wherever you are. If you are up in the balcony, you are down here below; there are a few on their feet and there will be others. I am sure God has spoken to you. Maybe you are a young person, maybe your family are Christian, your parents are Christian, but you don't have that assurance in your own heart, but you want it, would you just stand.