**Calvary Fellowship 9.18.2022 Mathew 13:24-46 “The Story of Us”**

* **Man, 22 years - I remember when I started this church - I was young**
* I was 26 years old & barely shaving - and I distinctly remember my wife telling me, “When we celebrate 20 years, you’ll be 46.” - I said, “I’ll never be that old.”
* Well, now I’m 48 - I do remember when I turned 40 & my wife threw me a big party & both of my friends were there - but Mia was 7 at the time
* She asked, “So Dad, how old at U now?” - I said, “I’m 40 years old.”
* She started to cry & she hugged me & said, “Oh no. Dad, I don’t want U to die!”
* So I can only imagine what my kids are think now that I’m about to turn 49
* We started Calvary 20 years ago in 2000 - In 2000, we were just getting over the Y2K scare (pic) - we became obsessed w/ celebrity couples (Pic)
* This is Brad Pitt & Jennifer Aniston - people started meshing names - so their relationship became known as “Brennifer”
* I told my wife we should never do this b/c if U mesh Bob & Carey, we become Barry & that’s just weird
* But if U wanted to talk to us, U had to call our Nextel (pic)
* Coldplay released Parachutes & we’ve never looked at color Yellow the same
* To give U an idea of how long ago that is, the top songs of 2000 were bye, bye, bye, Oops I did it again, Smooth by Carlos Santana, & Say my Name by Destiny’s Child - before Beyonce went solo & became Destiny’s Grandchild
* All of which U can hear on 97.3 The Coast - official radio station of all middle aged people living in South Florida & the only people still listening to the radio
* **I will tell U this - I got asked to speak at an event for the city & the person who introduced me is a DJ that I listened to since I was in high school**
* I brought my son w/ me to the event & she loved Xander
* I told her I used to listen to her on 94.9 Zeta when I was HS & starting college & she said, “So U must be in your mid 40’s, but your son is young.”
* I said, “Yeah. It took my wife & I a few years to figure it out.”
* But she says, “I always know how old people are based what station they remember me from...and Zeta is 1 of the older ones.”
* **But there’s things that I miss - people ask me if I miss the old days of Calvary - And mostly I don’t - we met in a movie theater for years**
* That sounds cool - except for the fact that your feet would stick to the floor b/c of the buttered popcorn that had dried
* But we had to do children’s ministry - so we bought these giant yoga mats & we’d line the floor in the front of the theater so the toddlers could crawl
* So we stored everything in the under the screen behind the curtain that was in front of the theater, but we started noticing something
* We’d get there on Sunday morning & the mats we were using for the toddlers were out of the bins & the kids’ snacks containers were opened
* We had no idea what was happening - some people thought it was bugs
* I said, “U think bugs are opening bins & jars. This isn’t Jurassic Park.”
* Well 1 night we go to the theatre to put some items behind the screen & there’s this kid sleeping on top of our mats w/ crackers all over him
* It turns out the kid had been sleeping there on top of our stuff for 2 months
* So I talk to the kid & it turns out he’s homeless - I ask him why he’s homeless & he says it’s b/c he got into a fight w/ his mom
* I said, “Here’s my phone. You’re going to apologize to your mom for whatever dumb thing you’ve done & ask her if U can go home.”
* He said, “How do U know I’m the 1 in the wrong?” - I said, “Am I wrong?”
* He said, “No. I’m the 1 in the wrong.” - So he called his mom & he went home
* I still remember that he lived in Doral - only b/c I sent him a bill for all the Goldfish & animal crackers he ate
* So do I miss the old days? Not really - I’m having a great time living in the present w/ all that God is doing right now at Calvary
* And I’m grateful that His plan for us for the next 22 years is greater than what’s happened so far - by the way, in 22 years I’ll be 70 - that’s horrifying
* **Here’s what I love - the power that a story has to bring all of us together & connect us emotionally to a powerful truth**
* That’s what parables are - stories that connect us to a principle & they’re so powerful - that’s why 1/3 of Jesus’ recorded words are stories
* Last week we started looking at what are called the “Kingdom Parables” in Matthew 13 & we looked at the most famous 1 - the parable of the sower
* But Jesus gives 7 more parables that we’re going to look at today & they are all going to connect us to what Jesus wants us to focus & find valuable…

**———(v. 24-30; 36-42)———**

**#1 - The Kingdom of God has Real Enemies**

* **This parable starts w/ something that almost unheard of in this culture b/c it was so evil & insidious - adding tares to the wheat**
* Remember, this was an agrarian culture & any kind of farming, fishing, or shepherding illustration would have hit home
* **So let me explain what’s happening - there is a faithful farmer who is sowing good seed in his field - this also means he’s been working hard to get the ground ready to receive the seed & produce a good crop**
* But in the middle of the night, an enemy sows tares among the wheat
* Tares means weeds - literally the Greek word is Zazanion & it refers to what’s called a Darnell weed - this type of weed looks exactly like wheat at 1st
* It’s only after the wheat begins to bear grain that U can tell the difference
* This was such a hateful thing to do, it was almost unheard of - in fact, the Roman Empire made this practice illegal - that’s how serious it was
* So why would someone risk imprisonment by the Romans & does this? B/c they hate the farmer that much
* But I’m grateful that we don’t have to try & decipher the meaning of this parable b/c Jesus explains it to us like He did the parable of the sower
* He says that He is the 1 who sows the seed - the field is the world & all the wheat that springs forth are believers - followers of Jesus
* The tares are people who are opposed to the kingdom of God - they are agents of the evil 1 whether they recognize it or not
* **The decision of waiting until harvest time is what’s the focus here b/c that’s what Jesus spends the most time explaining w/ His disciples**
* And the focus is on being patient & seeing how it all plays out
* **Let me explain it this way - our family just finished watching a show**
* It as 5 seasons & now we’re trying to figure out what the watch next & in the day & age we live in, finding a new show is hard
* U have to decide if you’re into it & if U want to emotionally commit yourself to these new characters & it is going to be as good as the last show?
* I was telling my kids that these moments make me miss Blockbuster video
* **There was nothing more exciting on a Friday night than going to Blockbuster & walking the perimeter wall to see the new releases**
* And if it wasn’t there, you’d hover by the counter to see if that new release of Face-Off got returned so I could scoop it up
* Now I have 10,000 movies at my disposal & I don’t know what to watch
* I preferred driving to this video store that was called 10,000 movies b/c I always had something to watch
* **But Blockbuster has a special place in my heart - when my wife & I were 1st dating - I got my Blockbuster membership - it was 1993**
* And I put her on the membership & the girl who worked there said, “Well, U know if you break up, she’ll still have access to the this account.”
* And Carey & I said, “We’re not going to break up.” - And the girl gave us this look & said, “Well, we’ll see.” - So 4 years of dating & 25 years of marriage later
* This December we’ll be together for 30 years-U were wrong lady at Blockbuster
* That’s why U went out of business - U should believe in your customers
* But, the Blockbuster girl was right - well have to wait & see how this turns out
* Now, here’s where we struggle - the workers wanted to start swinging their sickles immediately & tearing everything up
* We want to do the same thing - we want God to fix it now & make everything that’s wrong in the world right now - and He says, “Let’s wait until the end.”
* This is what happens whenever there’s a shooting or a tragedy of some kind
* People say, “Where was God when this happened? Why didn’t God stop it?”
* Well, there is a place where God will keep all sin from happening - it’s called heaven & this isn’t it
* B/c mankind was given a will - the ability to make choices to follow God or reject Him & for God to deny a person of the ability to make a choice (even a terrible one) is denying that person the ability to be human
* So when we ask God to intervene, we are asking Him to rob us of our ability to love - And in doing so, we’re asking God to rob us of our humanity
* And here’s the other thing - we’re asking the question of God to stop the bullet b/c we were created w/ the ability to choose
* If God stopped every evil thing from happening, we wouldn’t have the ability to ask the question b/c the freedom of choice had been taken away
* And we have the ability to choose b/c we were created to love God & love others - that’s why these moments hurt us so deeply
* We all want God to stop every bullet & keep every disaster from happening, but this isn’t heaven & everyday the world reminds us that this isn’t heaven
* **Let me dig a little deeper b/c this is an important topic to understand**
* Gottfried Leibniz (pic) was a 17th century philosopher, mathematician, scientist, & diplomat - every time I read about these guys, I feel like I’m doing nothing w/ my life
* If you’re a fan of Marvel & Dr. Strange in particular, you’d love this guy
* B/c Leibniz presented this view called the Greatest Possible World Theory
* This is the idea that God created the best possible world out of the infinite number of world that could have been created
* Meaning, that even though this world is broken, it’s the best possible world that could have been created b/c God is supremely good
* This theory stood & was debated & then about 40 years ago, a guy named Norman Geisler updated it - Geisler’s books were required reading when I was getting my undergrad in theology
* But Geisler updated Leibniz’ theory by saying that his world was the way to get to the best possible world (heaven)
* Simply put, Geisler brilliantly is teaching us that God created this world & gave people a choice to enter the best possible world
* B/c God wasn’t going to force anyone to go to heaven by force
* U see, this is why the subject of hell is such a misunderstood 1
* Jesus ends this parable by saying that sons of the enemy get thrown into the furnace - this is a picture of judgment
* There are a lot of metaphors that are used to describe hell - 1 is fire & another is darkness - but last I checked, if you’re in darkness, fire would bring light
* But we need to understand the metaphor - God isn’t burning people alive
* What does fire do? It disintegrates - we see that disintegration begin in this life
* Even met someone consumed by their addictions, anger, or ambitions? That fire starts disintegrating their soul to the point where only the addiction is left
* And even though their lives would be so much better is they let go of the addiction, it’s all that’s left b/c the fire has disintegrated everything else
* Darkness is the 2nd thing - it’s what isolates the person in their choice - they say, “No 1 understands me. Everyone is against me.”
* Tim Keller writes, “In short, hell is simply one’s freely chosen identity apart from God on a trajectory into eternity…No one ever asks to leave hell. The very idea of heaven seems to them a sham.”
* My point is no 1 is going to hell against their will - God created us as free beings who can make choices & for God to force us to choose Him violates that choice
* That’s why C.S. Lewis called hell, “The greatest monument to human freedom.”
* **Hell is a place of torment & that’s different b/c torment is internal**
* Some people are tormented now - by their past, by the words that someone spoke to them, by the pain of someone leaving
* In fact, in Luke 16 in the marble of the rich man & Lazarus, the rich man finds himself in hell & he says he’s in torment
* When he says, “I’m in torment in this flame” - it’s the Greek word “Odunao” that means to grieve or sorrow - This is hell - perpetual grief
* However, there’s another ingredient as well that’s important to talk about
* “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.” (Luke 13:28)
* Gnashing is a word throughout the Bible that is associated w/ anger
* The emotion isn’t repentance - instead, it’s anger - It’s rage over the fact that they got caught, not sorrow & repentance & desire to change
* The torment of those in hell are of their own doing - it’s the world they wanted
* But can’t God just forgive them & give then heaven anyways? Lewis says...
* *C.S. Lewis in his book, The Problem of Pain writes, “In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: ‘What are you asking God to do?’ To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But he has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what he does…The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; the doors of hell are locked on the inside…They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.”*
* If you’ll forgive the analogy, the tares have every opportunity to become wheat
* But they refuse & in the end, the get the thing they ultimately wanted - an eternity w/o God & w/o anyone forcing them to do anything

**———(v. 31-35)———**

**#2 - The Kingdom of God is Quietly Working**

* There’s some debate over the meaning of these parables - especially b/c of the birds that are mentioned - scholars are divided on the issue
* Some believe that the birds in this parable are evil b/c the birds take away the seed in the parable of the sower - others believe the birds are good
* I’m predisposed to think birds are evil b/c of my experience w/ them
* **About 2 year ago I pick up my 11-year old son at lunch time b/c he was going to finish his schoolwork w/ me in the office**
* But we walk outside of my house & there’s a painter in the neighborhood & he asks me something & we start talking
* We’re standing in front of my car & my son Xander is behind me & says, “Dad, can U help?” - I say, “Just a minute buddy” & I keep talking
* The he says, “Dad, can U take a look at this?” - I say, “Buddy, 1 minute & then I’ll help U out.” - then he says, “Dad, a bird just pooped all over the car.”
* I turn & look at the car & it looks like someone took a can of white paint & poured it all over the car - so I say, “OK buddy, we’ll clean it in a minute.”
* He says, “Dad, U don’t understand” - now I’m getting frustrated
* He says, “The bird poop hit the car & splashed on me.”
* And I turn around & this poor kid has been standing there w/ bird poop on his neck b/c his dad wouldn’t turn around & look at him - I felt so bad
* We cleaned him up & I said, “Xan, I’m so sorry. I’ll buy U whatever U want. Do U want an iPhone. A car. The life of your enemies.” - He said, “Maybe a Coke?”
* However, in this case I don’t believe the bird are evil - we’re going to see that they are a symbol that all the nations of the earth are blessed b/c of the tree
* Why? Remember, Jesus doesn’t interpret either of these parables - which means there’s something His hearers would have understood
* I believe they understood an OT teaching that gave this parable context
* **Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon at the zenith of their power**
* He was an absolute monarch - he could do whatever he wanted w/o any worry about laws, pushback, or political fall out
* Here’s what he said about his kingdom & its influence…
* “These were the visions of my head while on my bed: I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. Its leaves were lovely, it's fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.” (Daniel 4:10-12)
* All nations of the earth are blessed b/c of this tree - it’s the point that Jesus is making - that the church’s influence will be a blessing to the entire earth
* Just like the parable of the leaven, the parable of the mustard seed shows us that the church starts small, but becomes a blessing for the entire world
* The church in Acts 1 was 120 people - by Acts 2 it was 3,000 & kept growing
* Today, 1 out of 3 people on the earth identifies as a Christian
* And the truth is that, even if U aren’t a Christian, if you’re in a country that is influenced by Christianity, U are living a better life
* Everywhere that Christianity has flourished, human life has flourished
* And if U don’t believe me, look at the places where the practice of Christianity is illegal b/c of communism or Islamic rule for example - humans are suffering
* This is why, when people say the Christianity is oppressive, it leads me to believe that these people don’t know how to read & at the very least, they know nothing of history & how modern world came to be
* And this isn’t just Christians saying this - historians recognize this as well
* *Historian Tom Holland wrote, “In almost every way, [the classical world] is unspeakably cruel, to our way of thinking....[Paul’s portion of the New Testament] is not a very lengthy amount of writing, but compacted into this very, very small amount of writing was almost everything that explains the modern world.... Concepts like international law, for instance, concepts of human rights, all these kind of things—ultimately, they don’t go back to Greek philosophers; they don’t go back to Roman imperialism; they go back to Paul. His letters, I think, are, along with the four Gospels, the most influential, the most impactful, the most revolutionary writings that have emerged from the ancient world....*
* A guy who isn’t a Christian affirms the thing that Jesus said would happen - that human life would flourish wherever the Church was influential

**———(v. 44-45)———**

**#3 - The Kingdom of Heaven is Worthy of My Life**

* **Once again, we have 2 parables saying something similar - a person finds something of tremendous value & sells everything to get it**
* So the question is, who is the person who finds the treasure? Who is the treasure? And what is the field?
* Jesus is the person who finds the treasure - the field is the earth - he sells everything - that is, He dies so He can buy the field
* Do U know what that means? It means the treasure is U
* Jesus is the merchant who finds a pearl of great price & sells everything to buy it - here’s what I find interesting - Jews didn’t care about pearls
* They didn’t find pearls valuable - only Gentiles found value in pearls
* This parable is cluing us in on something - that Jesus is seeking to reach everyone - Jew & Gentile alike
* **So why does this matter? Jesus died for U - you’ve been hearing that forever - we’ve heard it so much, sometimes it can lose its meaning for us**
* Not only does it mean He’s paid for our sins & given everyone who receives Him a place in His kingdom eternally - that’s the forever part
* But that about right now? What does that mean that I’m the treasure right now?
* It means that eternal life doesn’t begin after U die - it means that as someone who is treasured by God, eternal life - real life, starts right now
* “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)
* Jesus doesn’t just want to save U from an eternity separated from Him, He  
  wants to save U from mad decisions, evil intentions, & even from ourselves
* If you’re a Christian, do U have any idea how many times God has saved U from your own madness? All the time - He has saved me from me many times!
* Here’s the other cool thing - if you’re a Christian, God will use U as an instrument in His hand to save other people from themselves
* **A couple years ago I meant to call my older brother on Christmas Day**
* But I hit the wrong contact & I called someone else instead
* It was a Pastor friend of mine who was planting a church in another state
* I heard his voice & was a little shocked to hear him pick up my brother’s phone
* But I started talking to him & asked how his Christmas services had gone
* He said they hadn’t gone well & that he was deciding to close the church down
* So we talked for a little while & I told him that he can’t close it down - I told Him   
  that God has called Him & to give it 6 more months
* I started investing in him, we as a church assisted them & today that church is   
  thriving & they’re getting ready to buy a piece of property
* Why? B/c I meant to call my brother & I called him & that’s the person God   
  wanted me to talk to right then b/c Jesus saves people even from themselves
* Do U know why? B/c He treasures U - He doesn’t just love U, He likes U
* My wife & I tell each other we love each other daily - but when 1 of us does something unexpected, we say, “I really like U”
* When U realize you’re the treasure, you’ll never devalue yourself again
* You’ll stop sabotaging your future b/c U believe “this” is the best U can do
* You’ll start having a bigger vision for your life - all b/c 1 person, the only person who really matters, the person that impacts everything, believes you’re a treasure worth sacrificing everything for
* When U realize that’s the story of us, your life will never be the same…