

Matthew 13:53-58

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[0:00] Good morning, one and all, and it's good to be back. We're still in Matthew 13. It seems to have taken us a long time to deal with Matthew 13. And I had this wild idea that I would knock off the last few verses and I'd plough on into Matthew 14.

And then when I studied it, I realised that I wasn't going to do that. So before we start, a small correction from the last time I preached, which was a fortnight ago.

So you remember we were talking about the parable of the dragnet and we compared the dragnet with the wheat and the tares. And I alluded to the difference between the two because they carry a very similar message.

And one of the things I said, and I misspoke, was that the tares referred to the church, and this is incorrect, the field is the world, not just the church.

But the distinction still remains, and the distinction is that the parable of the dragnet, as against the parable of the wheat and the tares, the wheat and the tares refer to evil and poisonous presences that look like believers and are a distraction and a deception, whereas the parable of the dragnet deals with the whole of humanity at the very end of time coming to the great white throne judgment and how his dragnet will leave no one.

[1:29] It will be indiscriminate in its gathering, and then there will be this great separation. So that's just a small correction, which I felt compelled to make, having been corrected by at least two people in this congregation about my thinking on the matter.

The truth is I didn't think it through. I just said it and then thought I said that wrong. And so we're now at the point in Matthew's gospel, we're at verse 53, and we've come to the end of the kingdom parables.

And the parables have given us a window on what the kingdom of God is like. The Jews have been offered the kingdom. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.

They've had the offering of the kingdom by the king, who has every right to make that offer, and they've rejected both the king and his kingdom. And so God has embarked on this description of what the kingdom of heaven is like, and he's done it in parables in order to reveal it to believers and conceal it from unbelievers.

And so I'm not going to rehearse that again, but we've been through these parables where the unbelievers would wander away confused, but the believers would come back to him and say, could you explain that to me, please?

[2:52] And so we've got this, a brief recap. The kingdom was created by the sowing of the seed of God's word into the fertile soil of willing hearts.

Challenged by the tares, those who would destroy the crop by deception and poison, but the kingdom would grow to accommodate the Gentiles.

This is the parable of the mustard seed. And the Gentiles were considered to be unclean, represented by the birds that are in the tree. And the pathway to this growth was created by an unleavened sin offering, Jesus, who became leavened.

You remember the parable of the leaven? We spoke of how Jesus was the sin offering that, the sin offering was always unleavened because it represented righteousness, but there was one sin offering that became leavened.

He became sin for us or became a sin offering for us. And this new kingdom would have two treasures within it, the buried treasure from the earth, believing Israel, and the pearl of great price, believing Christians.

[4:13] And these two are subsequently seen in the foundations of the new Jerusalem. And based upon all of this thinking, God's dragnet would spread out to capture the whole of humanity, after

which there would be a great separation of the good from the bad, the saved from the unsaved, fulfilling the prophecy in Daniel chapter 12 and verse 2, which says that some will be saved to eternal blessing and some will be saved to eternal condemnation.

So that's where we're up to. And then we've got this short passage remaining in chapter 13, which we'll turn to and read.

And this became a very, very interesting study for me. And I laboured hard on it. And you might not spot that as I share what I found, because we'll just see how it goes.

Verse 53. When Jesus finished these parables, he departed from there. He came to his hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue so that they were astonished and said, where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?

Is it not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary and his brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas and his sisters? Are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?

[5 : 56] And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honour except in his hometown and in his own household. And he did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

So he was teaching around the Sea of Galilee and he moved to Nazareth, which was his former hometown.

And Nazareth was a very small and impoverished place. It was the sort of place that you didn't really want to live. It was a bit like a bad council estate or something like that, where you just wish you lived somewhere else.

But it wasn't great economically. Hence, the parents of Jesus were poor enough that when they went to make offerings at the temple, they took turtle doves, not lambs and bulls and goats and stuff like that.

They took the cheapest route because they were poor. I should tell you, by the way, this is just an aside, but there's a book been written, I can't remember the date of writing, by a guy called René Sam, who actually cast doubt on whether Nazareth even really existed.

[7 : 17] And his postulation is that Nazareth existed later, about 200 years after Jesus was walking the earth.

And it existed after that point. And in his view, the Gospels weren't written until about 200 AD. And therefore, these were all made up stories.

Needless to say, he's been disproved by many. But strangely, I suppose not so strangely, his writings still have traction with unbelievers because they use it as a, well, Nazareth didn't really exist, just like they call into question whether Jesus really existed.

And a little bit of scholarship and study shows that Nazareth did exist. And I'm not going to waste any more time on that. But if you do come across a book by René Sam, it still holds the interest of some.

And sometimes it's handy to read these things so that when people come to you and say these things, you've got a defence. So if it's so impoverished, why would Jesus want to return there is a question.

[8 : 26] And first of all, his motivation was not the same motivation as any other king. You know, kings tend to seek out other dignitaries, people with money and people with position, and they tend to sit with the lords and the ladies and the court.

Jesus' motivation was not for any of that. He wasn't seeking opulence. He wasn't seeking the company of societal leaders. He was seeking the salvation of the common man.

And in his eyes and from his kingly position, because he was the king of heaven, everyone is a common man. You can't shout about your position in the presence of almighty God.

It's meaningless. No position on earth is a high position in his eyes. And so he was seeking the salvation of the common people.

But in this particular case, his immediate family, we read in other parts of the Bible that Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him until after the resurrection. So his own family, he must have had heartache for them because they did not believe.

[9 : 50] And then all the people he grew up with, he would crave their salvation and crave their inclusion into the kingdom that was going to come about, the church, which would subsequently be launched at the day of Pentecost.

He would crave that they would be company for him. I've run a couple of, and I don't know if any of you have experienced this when you've dealt with unsaved people who you're trying to lead to the Lord.

But I've had people in my house doing a Christianity Explored course or something like that. And I've become very emotional at the prospect that they can come into my house and leave and go to hell.

And it's a moment has often struck me where I've kind of, on the one hand, I've been hoping that they will grasp the gospel and run with it and turn to Christ.

And by the same token, having that dreadful feeling in the pit of my stomach that they may not. And that they will have sat under my roof, drunk my tea, eaten my biscuits, studied Bible with me and still gone to hell.

[11 : 12] And the magnitude of that sometimes strikes me and I can't hold back the tears. how much more would that be true of the Lord who goes back to Nazareth to deal with all these people with whom he grew up and to find that they do not want to know.

More about that later. But you notice they have this very ambiguous response as we've read through that passage. On the one hand, they're saying, this is amazing.

Where did this boy get all this knowledge? And although it says he didn't do very many signs there, he had done some. And we know from the reading and from some other reading we'll do in a moment that he had done signs and wonders.

They knew that he was a man of signs and wonders and miracles. They knew these things. And yet they couldn't get past the fact, well, this is Joe's boy, surely. You know, it's not Messiah, it's Joe's boy.

We know his brothers. We know his sisters. They're around us all the time. Come here claiming to be Messiah. And they took offense at him.

[12 : 31] You've probably heard the saying, familiarity breeds contempt. And this was certainly a case of that. Familiarity with the Lord. They knew his upbringing. They knew he was a carpenter.

They knew all the brothers and the sisters. They knew the family, mum and dad. All pretty unexceptional people.

They may have also known that the brothers didn't believe in him. Not even his own family believes in him. That's not stated in scripture. But you could understand them drawing that conclusion. And so, he didn't do many miracles there, just healed a few people.

Interesting. I can't speak for you, but I would be glad of a track record where I just healed a few people. But it kind of gives a window on just how much healing Jesus did and just how many miracles.

In fact, in the book of John, we read that, I think it's in the last chapter of John, that if all of the miracles that he'd done had been written down, there wouldn't be enough books to contain the knowledge.

[13 : 40] So, he obviously was surrounded by a flurry of miracles normally, but not in this case. And we're going to look at why that was. And that's one of the things that gave me some thought in study.

This period of Jesus' life is clearly recorded in two of the Gospels. So, if you turn to Mark's Gospel, chapter 6, and you've got a clear example of the same events with a few subtle additions.

And this gives us our first dilemma and gave me my first dilemma. So, when you read the Mark, the Markan account, Jesus went out from there and came into his hometown and his disciples followed him.

Now, that's an important point because the fact that the disciples followed him means that what we read in Matthew's Gospel was attested to by other witnesses and that these accounts were probably eyewitness accounts, not just a story that some guy made up.

And the fact that his disciples followed him would protect us from any embellishment of these stories. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue and the many listeners were astonished, saying, where did this man get these things and what is this wisdom given to him and such miracles as these performed by his hands?

[15 : 08] Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him and said to him, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.

And he could do no miracle there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he wondered at their unbelief and he was going around the villages teaching.

So I'm sure you probably spotted this as we read but Matthew's account says he did no more, he didn't do many miracles there.

This account says he could do no miracles there. So do we have a contradiction? And I'll tell you this passage does create some pause for thought because you find that a lot of the pseudo-faith healers out there, the word of faith movement and those who say, come to my meeting and you will be healed and then when you go away not healed, they say, well you obviously didn't have enough faith and this is a circumstance just like this where Jesus couldn't heal you because you didn't have enough faith.

I do not believe that's what this passage means. Also, those who demote Jesus from divinity, they say Jesus wasn't actually God, he was God's messenger but he wasn't divine.

[16:38] Those who say that amongst whom are people like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses but also some people who profess to be Christians but can't get their head around the idea of a man who was fully God as well as being fully man.

Bit of a conundrum that. But what they use this to support their view that, well, Jesus wasn't actually divine so in that so circumstance is he couldn't do any miracles.

How they then account for all the times when he did do miracles is never explained. But properly understood I don't think there's any contradiction here at all. So let's answer the first question first. He chose to do no miracles in Matthew's account. He could do no miracles in Mark's account. How do we reconcile that? So I'm going to cover three points.

The first is Jesus being God was and is omnipotent. Means he was all powerful. So he was certainly capable of doing miracles here.

[17:47] And to deny that is to deny huge amounts of scripture. If we look at Matthew 14 verse 33 I'm going to dodge around scripture a bit now.

Matthew 14 and verse 33 says and this is after he had walked on water. No it's after he calmed the storm.

Sorry. After he calmed the storm. And then he got into the boat and the wind stopped and those who were in the boat worshipped him saying you are certainly God's son.

So his miracles astounded his disciples. If you go to John 11 47 what we read there is that his miracles confounded his enemies.

Therefore the chief priest and the Pharisees convened a council and were saying what are we doing for this man is performing many signs. His enemies were confounded by his demonstrations of power.

[19:02] He exercised divine power over illnesses in people who showed no evidence of personal faith. So if you go to Luke 7 probably one of the most conclusive accounts of this from verse 11 onwards what we read is soon afterwards he went to a city called Nain and his disciples were going along with him accompanied by a large crowd.

Now as he approached the gate of the city a dead man was being carried out the only son of his mother and she was a widow and a sizable crowd from the city was with her.

And just as a passing observation when somebody lost their only son or their firstborn son they were losing the one who had responsibility for caring for them when they were old.

So it was a massive loss and in fact I came across this when I used to investigate accidents when I was in the HSE and there was one particular Indian lad who got killed at work and I dealt with his parents and his mother described him and said he was supposed to be my stick for when I was old. That was her perception of what she'd lost. I've lost my support for when I'm old. Verse 13 When the Lord saw her he felt compassion for her and said to her do not weep and he came up and touched the coffin and the bearers came to a halt and he said young man I say to you arise the dead man sat up and began to speak and Jesus gave him back his mother or gave him back to his mother and fear gripped them all and they began glorifying God saying a great prophet has arisen among us and God has visited his people.

[21:00] Dead people do not have faith is the point. This man didn't need faith to get healed. So the whole idea that they were prevented from being healed by their lack of faith in one sense was complete rubbish.

In another sense it does hold water but in the one sense if people cannot believe that they're about to be healed it doesn't mean that they necessarily won't be healed or can't be healed at all. It doesn't depend on your faith it depends on the power of God. we also and I'm not going to go through all of these references they're all in the notes but we also read in John 6 19 that he had power over the laws of nature and in John 2 verse 1 power over the material objects and in Matthew 12 verse 22 he has power over the demonic world and in John 11 verses 43 and 44 he has power over death itself.

So there's nothing over which he doesn't have power so the whole idea that he was incapable of doing miracles in this place was not the correct interpretation of this verse.

So where did we go next? Well Matthew does not refer to capability miracles. He simply states that Jesus didn't do any miracles.

[22 : 33] So that is not a contradiction. The contradiction is only when Mark says he could do no miracles there because of their unbelief.

Well let's see what we can do with that. From what we've just read to infer that Jesus didn't have the capability to do miracles in this particular circumstance just doesn't hold water.

It doesn't stack up against the rest of scripture. So what was meant? The Greek construction of could do no miracles here contains the words and this is an idiomatic way of speaking in Israel. And it often does mean could not but sometimes it means under certain circumstances chose not to. So it's actually not the contradiction it appears in English.

In Hebrew it doesn't provide you with the same contradiction. And some examples if you turn to Luke 14 we'll give you two examples where it was used not to express not to express inability but to express an imperative not to.

[23 : 55] Luke 14 and verse 20 what we read is in the middle of a conversation about people providing excuses for not following Jesus.

And he says another one said I have married a wife and for that reason I cannot come. Now there is the fact that you're married doesn't stop you from coming does it?

So whoever said that wasn't saying I cannot come he said he was saying I've decided not to come because I've married a wife. It's not there's no bar to it.

If we go to 1 John 3 and verse 9 not the gospel of John but the letters of John chapter 3 and verse 9 John explains no one who is born of God practices sin because his seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he's born of God.

Now this does not mean you are incapable of sinning. In fact the same writer in the same book says if you say you have no sin you're deceiving yourself. That's in 1 John 1 verse 9.

[25 : 10] So what he means is if you are born again there's a moral imperative not to sin. You certainly can't rest easy in sin because you get the Holy Spirit banging on your heart saying come on shape up this is not the way you're supposed to live.

And so Jesus' use of this construction in this particular case doesn't mean he could do no miracle here but he was choosing not to and we can infer there was some kind of imperative not to.

So let's look at what that might have been. A parallel that occurred to me if somebody said to you next time you cut your lawn can you do it with nail scissors?

Now you might just say no or you might in your incredulity say I can't do that and you don't mean I cannot do it it's impossible for me to do it.

What you mean is I'm choosing not to do it because it's a stupid idea. Both of these gospel writers record that Jesus did some powerful works here but their number was considerably reduced.

[26 : 26] So why would that be? And I can think of two reasons. And they're very much linked to one another. One is I suppose you say the corollary of the next.

Miracles have been used up to now in Matthew's gospel to give credibility to Jesus' messianic ministry. They'd often been in line with Old Testament prophecies and he was fulfilling prophecy when he did them and some of them were specific messianic ministries that the Pharisees had taught only Messiah will do these ministries.

miracles. And so he fulfilled not only the Old Testament but actually their sometimes suspect teaching.

He even fulfilled that so that they would have no cause to reject him. And this group of people had come to the point where they had rejected him.

So there was no evangelistic advantage whatsoever in continuing to do miraculous ministry. The purpose of miraculous ministry thus far had been to lead people to Christ, to lead people to acceptance.

[27 : 45] They had reached a point of final rejection. It wasn't going to lead them anywhere. So there's reason number one. Reason number two, because the crowd was determined in their unbelief, they had rejected him.

And we're going to read how extreme this was in a moment. This placed this crowd in the same position as the crowd in chapter 12, where they committed the unforgivable sin, or the sin that would not be forgiven is a more accurate way to describe that.

So they were in the same boat. This is a bunch of Jews who'd watched a man fulfill the scriptures, they'd listened to his preaching, and they'd reached a point of final rejection.

So he could not do more miracles without breaking his word to the Jews, because he'd already said to them, you're not going to see any more signs apart from the sign of Jonah, the sign of resurrection.

This bunch of Jews in Nazareth were now in the same position as all the other Jews he'd spoken to. They put themselves in a place where in order to honour his own word, he couldn't do any more miracles with them.

[28 : 59] And we know that he did do some. Now the Bible's not clear as to with whom he did those miracles. My guess is that he did those with believers, but that could be wrong.

It might have been that he did miracles with people up to the point where they completely rejected him and then stopped. I don't know. I wasn't there and the Bible's not clear on it.

But I think that gives us reason to not be worried about what might at first appear to be a contradiction. My experience with contradictions in Scripture is they've been put there on purpose to make you dig at that point because you always unearth a little nugget of something.

So now we're going to look at a Scripture that people argue a bit over, not much, but in Luke's account. If we turn to Luke chapter 4, lots of people, not the majority of people, but a lot of people say this is not describing the same events.

Personally, I think it has to be, not just because it supports my sermon, but as we read it, it rings true.

[30 : 19] Now what we need to remember as we read it, there's an awful lot of stuff included in Luke's account that's left out of the other Gospels and vice versa.

But the Gospels were written to specific audiences and with specific purposes. So Matthew's Gospel was written by a Jew to believing Jews. Mark's account was written to the Romans, as far as we can ascertain.

Luke's account was written to a man called Theophilus. Luke's account comes in two books, comes in Luke's Gospel and Acts.

And those were written to give evidence to a Gentile who it is rumoured, fairly certain actually, that Theophilus had some sway in the court that was dealing with Saul of Tarsus, Paul, as his fate was considered.

And so he was presenting a defence of the Gospel. And so Luke's account often leaves bits out that are only pertinent to Jews. And so when we read chapter 4 of Luke, and we start at verse 14, and it says this, And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

[32 : 14] And he opened the book and found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And we'll read on in a moment, but when he turned up at Nazareth, what he does is he presents himself to preach in the synagogue as any rabbi was entitled to do.

And Jesus was renowned as a rabbi. So it was quite natural for him to pick up the book and start to read on the Sabbath. And then what he said, if I could paraphrase it for our ears, what he said was, I'm your Messiah, I fulfil the scripture, and I'm now here.

It was another way of saying the kingdom of God is here, and I can give you the kingdom. I'm the one who's come to set the captives free, I'm the one who's supposed to give sight to blind eyes, proclaim relief to captives, free those who are oppressed, I am Messiah.

[33 : 44] It was a messianic claim unequivocally, which would have, to a reasonable mind, would have said, okay, tell me more. But to the unreasonable unbelieving Jews, this is blasphemy, what are you saying?

This is Joe's boy. What is Joe's boy doing making claims like this? But let's read on, because in verse 22, and all were speaking well of him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from his lips.

And they were saying, is this not Joseph's son? And he said to them, no doubt you will quote this proverb to me, saying, physician, heal yourself. Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.

And he said, truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown, but I say to you in truth that there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, and a great famine came over the land, and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

And there were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. These are two examples he picked out of scripture to show that when Israel was in need, and had become in need because of their own rebellion and unbelief, he had provided for the Gentiles, not the Israelites, because he was waiting for the Israelites to repent.

[35 : 34] And so he dealt with the widow of Zarephath, who was a Gentile, and they also dealt with Naaman the Syrian, who was a Gentile. The only recorded cleansing of a leper in scripture, or the one that's used when a Jewish leper was discovered and then cleansed, he had to go to the priest, and they went through a ritual to confirm that he had been a leper and was in fact cleansed.

Naaman didn't need any of that because he wasn't a Jew, but there are no accounts other than Naaman of Jewish people being healed of leprosy until the New Testament.

I mean, there is one where he put his hand in his jacket and it came out leprous and then put it back in and it came out cleansed, and there was Deborah who was healed of leprosy, but this is before the law was given.

Once the law had been given, then this ritual to deal with cleansed lepers wasn't used, which is why it was such a shock in the days of Jesus that lepers came forward to the priests and said, dig out that old text and blow the dust off it because I've been cleansed of leprosy.

It was an exceptional, exceptional thing. But coming back to this passage, what Jesus was saying here is that you lot are making a mess of this, and what you're going to find is God will bless the Gentiles instead of you.

[37 : 07] And this was something that was a red rag to a bull to any Jew. You're going to do what to the Gentiles? What, the dogs? You're going to bless the dogs instead of us?

And the fact that Jesus suggested that, which was only the truth, because we then know how history unfolds and the Gentile church is born at Pentecost, but for saying that truth and for trying to bring them up sharp, let's read what they did.

Verse 28, And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things. And they got up and drove him out of the city and led him to the brow of a hill on which their city had been built in order to throw him down the cliff.

But passing through their midst, he went his way. just that verse 30, we overlook the fact that that in itself was a demonstration of his power.

If it were you or I that the crowd was trying to throw off a cliff, we would not be able to just walk through their midst and walk away. The crowd would win. But verse 29, what they've done is they've come to the same place as the unbelieving Jews and the dignitaries in chapter 12, they came to the same place of trying to kill him.

[38 : 28] They not only got enraged at him, but they tried to kill him. So I think this is why he could do no miracle there. And I think this brings us to a point of one last dilemma, which I hope to deal with it.

And it wasn't, I didn't find it easy to deal with it. But in Mark's account, it says, Jesus marveled or wondered or was astonished, depending on which version you've got, at their unbelief.

And yet we've read already that Jesus was divine and therefore he was all knowing, he was omniscient. John 14, for example, if you turn there.

I've listed a few scriptures in the notes for you to help yourself to, but I'll just read this one. John 14, verses 6 to 11. I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the father but through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also. From now on you know him and have seen him. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the father and that's enough for us.

[39 : 50] And Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long and yet you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen my father. How can you say, show us the father?

Do you not believe that I am in the father and the father in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own initiative, but the father abiding in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the father and the father is in me.

Otherwise believe on the account of the works themselves. So there's a claim there to divinity and a claim to divinity is the same as saying a claim to omniscience.

So the link is there that Jesus claimed divinity. People who say, well, Jesus never claimed to be God. No, he did in lots of places. Philippians 2, I'll pick that one out as one other, verses 5 to 7. have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ, who although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant being made in the likeness of men.

[41 : 13] He was in the form of God. He was therefore omniscient. things. There are lots of people who debate, and I had a brief chat with Malcolm earlier on, that there were things when Jesus walked the earth that kind of indicate he wasn't fully omniscient, and yet in John's gospel we read that he knew the hearts of men.

He didn't put his trust in them because he knew their hearts. He knew what was in man. Psalm 139, the first few verses of that psalm, tells us that before we even existed for a single day, he knew all about us, and that every single day that we walk the earth, he knows all about us, and every thought we think, he knows it before we think it.

So how does such a man get astonished by their unbelief, is the question. Was he taken by surprise at their unbelief? Was he caught off guard?

Oh my word, they're not listening to me. Oh dear, what am I going to do? I don't think that is the answer, but I think what we need to understand, first of all, the word used is the word tomazzo, which means to be amazed, to admire, to wonder, to marvel, people, and what it indicates is a visceral reaction to something, a gut reaction.

And that gut reaction, it's a kind of extreme gut reaction. Wow, look at that! And it could just as easily be applied to, oh my word, they're really not going to, are they?

[43 : 06] happy or sad is what I'm trying to say. The word is used 46 times in the New Testament and almost all of them are devoted to the reactions of people to the works of Jesus, when their loved ones get healed or whatever.

And this says Jesus was astonished or was marveling at their unbelief. Jesus, this word is used of Jesus also, for example, he marveled at the faith of the centurion and he compared it to the Jews and their lack of faith.

That's in Matthew 8 verse 10 and also in Luke 7 verse 9. It's not conceivable to me that Jesus was surprised at the faith of the centurion.

What is more likely, as far as I can see, is that he was really pleased and really, wow, this is great. that's where it sits with me.

And I think what I came to was this. When Jesus has a visceral response to something, a gut response to something, it's in spite of his full knowledge.

[44 : 28] He doesn't, the fact that he knows that people are going to reject him doesn't mean it hurts any less, doesn't mean it causes a lower level of emotional response.

I've run out of time and I need to finish, so I'm going to finish with this and I might just carry over some bits to next week because there are some important bits that we're not going to get to. Ezekiel chapter 33, verse 11 says, and this is spoken to the house of Israel, say to them, as I live, declares the Lord God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.

Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, why then will you die, O house of Israel? That kind of gives a visceral response to Israel's unbelief, a gut response to Israel's unbelief.

And I, when Jesus went back to Nazareth to speak to those he loved and to those with whom he grew up, and they tried to cart him up a hill and throw him off a cliff, I can imagine that in his heart he said, why will you die, O Israel?

[46 : 04] Why will you not just turn and be saved and live? And it left me thinking, and I will have to return to it next week because there is a bit more to do, but it left me thinking that sometimes I lack that gut response when someone turns away from Jesus?

Oh, well, I tried. I don't always, sometimes I do, but I don't always have that, oh no, why won't you turn and live?

You're going to die in your sins. And this isn't, I think it was Paul Washer, and I don't listen to a lot of Paul Washer, but recently he said, the gospel is not an unconditional offer of salvation to all.

It's salvation to those who believe it, and it's a death sentence to those who don't. And I'm always aware that when I take people into my home and I give them the gospel, when they go away rejecting it, I've led them to a death sentence.

Now the Bible teaches me that it's the right thing to do to give them the gospel and give them the opportunity for salvation. But there's a heavy weight alongside that, that when they reject the gospel, if they never return to it, and we must remind ourselves that Jesus' brothers did return to it after he died and after he was raised, his brothers became believers, but at this point they weren't, they were among the unbelievers.

[47 : 43] And there is, and I think rightly should be, a heaviness in my heart that drives me to pray for them, Lord, don't let them go to hell.

If there's any way to save them, please save them. Father, I thank you for this word, and it's evident that in my heart I've struggled to deal with it well, I think, but Lord, I pray that you would, increase our fervour for the lost, that you would change our hearts so that we cry out for the lost, and that, Father, we do have a right perception of what happens when the lost reject the gospel, and that this doesn't stop us from preaching the word, but actually encourages us all the more to preach the word.

Father, thank you for this word this morning, and we will return to it next week and just deal with some of the applications of it in our own lives. But until then, Lord, I pray that our focus will remain on you and will remain on getting your word richly in our hearts.

In Jesus' name, amen.