

Sermon- The Parable of the Net

Introduction

- Welcome.
- Set context- we've been exploring the parables that Jesus tells in Matthew 13.
- Jesus often used parables and stories to make key points in his teaching about the Kingdom of God.
- Stories are powerful and often I find that when I listen to sermons, it's the stories that can stand out more and help me remember the message better.
- The parable we are looking at today is related to fishing.

Matthew 13:47-52

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ 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. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

- Fishing was common practice in Jesus' time and throughout the gospels you will notice all kinds of references to fishing.
- For example, Jesus calls fishermen to be His disciples.
- Jesus says he will make his disciples 'fishers of men/people.'
- A coin comes out of the mouth of a fish when Jesus tells Peter to go and look- Matthew 17:27
- Jesus appears after his resurrection to his disciples and helps them catch a miraculous amount of fish- John 21.
- These are just a few fishing references.

- This was so that Jesus could relate to people's experience and understanding of fishing when explaining to them truths about the Kingdom of God.
- I'm not much of a 'fisher' myself. If I am honest, I always think it looks like quite a cold and boring hobby.
- Josh and I like to do the railway walk in Wombourne and there's a canal where you often see people fishing. They set up their net and rod and camp chairs and bait and will settle in for the day. Maybe you're a fisher yourself.
- The closest I've come to fishing was family holidays when I was a child. My brother and I each had a plastic fishing net that we'd use in the sea to catch crabs or fish. It was so exciting when you finally caught one. But amongst the fish and crabs you would also get all kinds of dirt and rubbish in your net.
- In a similar way, in this parable Jesus uses a net to show how just as it catches fish, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that is let down to catch fish, although this metaphorical net will catch people.
- We live in the sea of the world and are surrounded by different things and people, good and bad, wicked and righteous.
- The net will catch all kinds of people at the end of the age. People who have followed Jesus, people who have claimed to follow Him but not really done so, people who have never opened their hearts to Him.
- All these people will be sifted out depending on righteousness- right standing before God, or wickedness.
- It's quite a sobering parable and explanation of the Kingdom of Heaven and judgement day.
- There are 3 things I want to draw out for us from the parable today.

1) What kind of fish am I?

- The first question to ask ourselves is what kind of fish am I? At the end of the age when my time here is finished, how will I be found?

- Will I have lived righteously, right before God, or have I just lived for myself?
- It's a challenging question; not one to shame us but to make us examine ourselves. David examines himself in Psalm 51:10: *'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'*
- At the start of the Psalm, he says *'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.'* Psalm 51:1-2.
- He recognised his need for the Lord to renew him and cleanse him and have mercy on him.
- It's a humble place to be but a good place to be before the Lord and He has unfailing love for us.
- Despite our mess and stuff, He is merciful and compassionate towards us when we seek Him.
- I grew up in Anglican churches and a powerful liturgy that we used to say each Sunday was a confession. It involved confessing to God that we had sinned and not always got it right, yet asking Him to lead us and guide us in walking with Him.
- It's a powerful prayer to pray if you mean it, and we are going to pray it in closing later.
- We aren't going to be perfect and live righteously all the time. However, we *'seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,'* Matthew 6:33, and this is done in our choices and decisions.
- Philippians 4:8 says, *'Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.'*
- We can obey teaching like this in the Bible and become 'good fish,' - fish that bear fruit and live lives worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10).
- Being a 'good fish' means we fix our gaze on Jesus and what is true, noble, right, honest and pure.
- We obey His teaching and His truth.
- And at the end of the age, we will be with Jesus forever.

- What are the choices we are making each day and are they bringing us closer to Jesus?
- I remember a time in my life where I stopped going to church or investing in my relationship with God.
- I definitely wasn't making good choices that honoured God.
- However, I look back on that time of my life and I am grateful for it because it made me realise who I wanted to be and who God was and that I wanted to live with Him instead of without Him.
- A life with Jesus is so much more rewarding and fruitful.

- Let's not be hypocrites- the NT Greek meaning of the word 'hypocrite' means to wear a mask. It's like playing a part but it's not really genuine. How easy can it be to wear a mask when we come to our Home Church or the church building or even to family and friends? We might be able to fool people but we can't fool God...

- The encouragement to us today from this parable is to examine our hearts and lives and ask God to bring to our attention anything that doesn't honour Him so we can repent and love Him wholeheartedly.

- What kind of fish are you?

2) Live now with eternity in mind

- Secondly, do we live our present lives with eternity in mind?
- This parable refers to the end of the age.

- I've started listening to a podcast called 'matters of life and death.' It's broadcasted by a Christian doctor and journalist and they have some really interesting discussions about Biblical perspectives on life and death. In a recent episode they were speaking with a palliative care doctor and she was saying how death is not something we are comfortable speaking about in our western world or very prepared for. I can understand why and when you do lose somebody you love it is incredibly painful.

- However, death is sadly a reality in our broken world.

- BUT in Christ Jesus we have eternal life and an eternal hope and healing.

- Jesus says in John 3:16 that whoever believes in Him shall not die but have eternal life.
- In John 11:25, Jesus says, *'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.'*
- As Christians, our perspective on the value of life here and the eternity we have in Jesus, shapes the way we live now.
- It means that we look to Jesus' teaching and to model His kindness to the people around us.
-
- We won't be in our twenties or thirties or 'insert the blank' forever (even if we think we will be)... time goes by and then one day we will meet our Creator and Saviour.
-
- How we live our lives now matters in eternity.

Tape illustration

Imagine this tape here goes on forever and ever and it represents a timeline. See this piece of tape that is red? This represents your time here on earth. You have a few short years here on earth, and then you have all of eternity to come. And for some of us, all we think about is this small red piece. We want the nice house, the nice car, the good job. But what about the rest of this tape? What about the years and years and years of eternity?

The Bible teaches us that how we live now, in this red bit, determines how we are going to live forever and ever and ever. So why do we live this red bit trying to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, yet forget about the moment when we move from this final red bit to the rest of the tape?

- Galatians 2:20 says, *'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'*
- So we don't live the red bit of tape for ourselves, but we recognise that we live for Jesus and this will continue into eternity- an inheritance that never spoils, fades or perishes (1 Peter 1).
- We don't know how long we have in this life. We don't like to think about it but the reality is that it could go tomorrow.

- I am reminded of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12. This rich man was so focused on his wealth and building more and then that night, his life was taken from him. He was rich in this life but poor in eternity. A sobering thought for us.
- Let us store up our riches in heaven and live not just for now but for eternity- Matthew 6:19-21.
- At the end of the age, how will we be found?
- What kind of fish will we be?
- How will we have lived our lives?

3) The net catches all kinds of people.

- The Good News of Jesus is for every person, from every tribe, nation and people group.
- Revelation 7 paints this incredible picture of the worship of Jesus in heaven. John says in verse 9, *'After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.'*
- There is such diversity in the worship of Jesus and we see the Great Commission from Matthew 28 fulfilled, where Jesus tells us disciples to *'go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'*
- Salvation in Jesus is not limited to a certain people or gender or colour, but to everyone.
- Have you ever seen the movie Finding Nemo? I hope you have because it's a classic. Nemo is a fish who gets caught in a net by humans and his fish Dad goes on a huge adventure to try and find him. There are all kinds of fish and sea creatures in the movie. Nemo is a clownfish, with orange and black stripes, there's also a surgeon fish, a great white shark, puffer fish, yellow

tang, black and white damselfish... the list goes on and there are creatures I've never even heard of!

- The net in the Kingdom of Heaven will catch all kinds of fish, and there will be people from nations and places we have maybe never heard of or seen before.
- This parable reminds us of the responsibility we have as Christians to share Jesus with others so that *all* people can respond to Him.
- We need to cast our net into the world so as to capture all people with the Good News and hope of Jesus.
- This includes the people where we live, as well as those in other places in the country and even the world.
- Jesus says in Matthew 5:13-16, *'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'*
- How salty and light are you? Do your work colleagues know that you are a Christian? Do your neighbours know, do your friends know?
- This Easter, Josh and I handed out Easter cards to our neighbours. We wanted to choose Easter cards that had the Christian message on, such as a picture of the cross, not just Easter bunnies and rabbits, because we wanted to be intentional in pointing people to Jesus at Easter. It was our way of 'casting a net' and continuing to build relationships with those we had already got to know. We didn't want to be too over the top by writing long Bible verses in the cards, as we pray that the deeper conversations will come when we continue getting to know them and can share more fully in that way.
- That's just a small example of how we tried to be salt and show light this Easter. As we were handing them out, one couple down the road invited us into their house for a quick chat and we continue to pray for our neighbours weekly.

- How's your net casting?
- If you aren't already, I would encourage you to have a prayer list of people that you pray regularly for to come to know the love and hope of Jesus. This is a way of spiritually casting your net, and then pray for opportunities to demonstrate the love of Jesus in words and actions.

So, three things for us from this parable:

- 1) Be a fish that lives for Jesus.
- 2) Focus on the big story of eternity.
- 3) Cast your net out so that all people can hear about Jesus.

Application

1- Be a true disciple, a 'good fish,' by putting Jesus at the centre of your life.

- Realign ourselves today with Jesus and His calling on our lives.
- In Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus calls His first disciples:
- *"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.'*
- I believe that is still the call of Jesus today, to me and to you. He says, 'come, follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.'
- What that means is, follow Jesus and in following Him, invite others to follow Him too.
- We often say here at All Nations that the greatest commandment is to love God and then to love others, because Jesus asks us to do this in Mark 12:29-31: *'the most important one (commandment)," answered Jesus, "is this:... Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 'The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*
- Being a true disciple and being caught as a 'good fish' in the net at the end of the age, means loving Jesus first and then loving others.
- In loving others, we invite them too into discipleship.

2- Cast your net and share the Gospel with others so that they may become true disciples too.

- Discipleship starts with you and me today. Not just the 'up front' leaders or teachers or evangelists, but with you and me.
- There's a lovely café at the end of our road which I like to visit. I tell Josh that it's my mission field and he jokes that it's a convenient excuse to visit it, but I mean it when I say it. I'm getting to know the staff there and they know that Josh and I go to church. We did a Youth pray-over recently- the young people pray from 10am-2pm and then stay over at church. We went to the café on the way back from the pray-over and as I was telling one of the women from the cafe, she asked me 'so can you pray for anything' and I was able to talk to her a bit about prayer and growing closer to God. I really see this as planting seed and I pray for more conversations and relationship building where I can go deeper.
- Where's your mission field for net casting? Is it your neighbours, your local café, the school run or colleagues? We must remember that people are people, not projects, yet we do also want the boldness to share Jesus with them.
- We want them to be part of the crowds worshipping Jesus for all eternity.

In closing, I'd love to invite you to examine your heart before the Lord. Ask Him to draw near to you and show you any areas of your life that need attention. And we are going to close by praying this prayer:

Pray- Anglican Confession prayer

*Most merciful God,
 Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 we confess that we have sinned
 in thought, word and deed.
 We have not loved you with our whole heart.
 We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
 In your mercy
 forgive what we have been,
 help us to amend what we are,
 and direct what we shall be;
 that we may do justly,
 love mercy,
 and walk humbly with you, our God.
 Amen.*

References:

- <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/13.html?msclkid=543c25ebbbf111ec9d3f19647a44dcda>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86dsfBbZfWs>