



The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...

Matthew 13

07-05-19

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...
Part 9, The Parable of the Dragnet

We've been blessed with another Friday! Another weekend is upon us!

Our theme for these last two months has been, "The Kingdom of Heaven is Like...". In Matthew 13 Jesus teaches eight parables. A Parable is a story, usually a simile, using a common practice of the day such as agriculture or homemaking, told to teach spiritual principles to born-again children of God, but to hide those principles from God-haters! We have covered six of Jesus' eight stories.

Parable 1 - The Sower and the Four Soils

This story taught how the glorious Good News of Jesus's Kingdom (the Gospel) is sewed liberally, without discretion, to the whole world, but sadly, it is only accepted by a relative few. Even though all are bidden, few accept Christ's gracious invitation!

Parable 2 - The Wheat and the Tares

This story taught how the Enemy (Satan) is hard at work opposing Christ's kingdom work. One of Satan's most successful strategies is to plant pseudo-Christians—charlatans, spiritual wolves, deceivers—alongside genuine born-again believers.

Parable 3 - The Mustard Seed and Parable 4 - The Hidden Leaven

These two parables taught that even with carnal and worldly humanity's limited acceptance and even with Satan's significant hindrances, Jesus' spiritual kingdom—while starting small, seemingly insignificant and hidden (like leaven in a lump)—would grow surprisingly large and eternally significant!

Parable 5 - The Hidden Treasure and Parable 6 - The Pearl of Great Price

In these two stories Jesus taught how genuinely simple it is to become an eternal kingdom citizen. We can't buy our way in. We can't earn our way in with good works. We can't get in through bloodline or lineage. We can't qualify by observing rites and rituals as a member of some religious organization. No, the ONLY way to enter God's Kingdom is to recognize God's Kingdom as THE most precious, THE most costly, THE most amazing gift that a spiritually-lost and dying human being could ever experience, and to be willing to

trade everything that we have, or could possibly ever have, for that forgiveness and that Kingdom citizenship! When we, like that praying publican, realize that we are actually SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT, that we are spiritually dead, condemned already, Lake of Fire-bound enemies of a Holy and Righteous God, and then we are crushed by our guilt, and terrified by our fear, and consequently we cry out, *God be merciful to me a sinner* (Luke 18:13), THEN our dead spirits are born-again, they are born from above, and we become eternal citizens of that spiritual Kingdom of Heaven.

And now this week, Part 9 and Parable 7, The Dragnet.

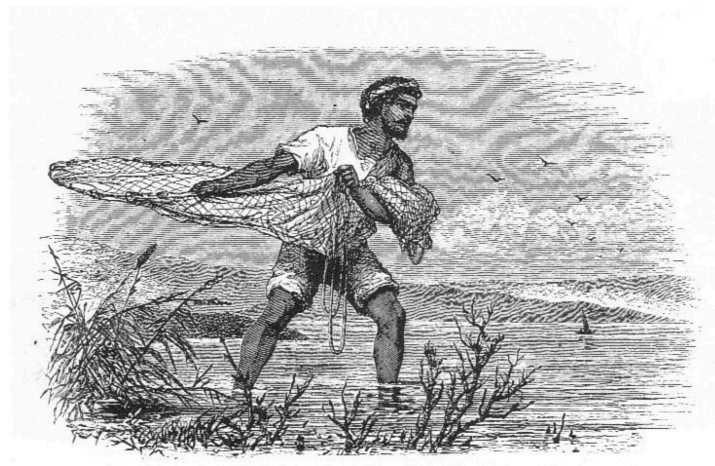
Matthew 13:47-50 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: 48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. 49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, 50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

If you have been paying attention you have noticed that Jesus has given a logical and somewhat chronological overview of His Spiritual Kingdom. He taught that only a few would be interested, how Satan would oppose, how it would start small and hidden but would grow large and victorious in the end of this world, and finally how any human being can be a part of His Kingdom... for He is not willing that any should perish! It should not surprise us then to discover that Jesus now teaches a frightening warning about the sure separation and judgment of those who reject His Amazing Grace. In this story that we name The Parable of the Dragnet, Jesus gives us a **Picture**, a **Principle**, and then warns of a **Peril!**

The Picture—

Like all of the parables this story really related to the hearers. First, the listeners were literally sitting and standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, a.k.a., the Sea of Galilee. Second, several of Jesus' 12 disciples made their livings by fishing; it was their family business. Third, even those who didn't fish directly for a living knew all about fishing because fishing was an integral part of the Galilean economy and society.

Three basic fishing methods were used. First, there was hook and line fishing. This was the kind of fishing Peter employed when Jesus ordered him to catch the fish with the coin in its mouth to pay the tax (see Matthew 17:24-27). Then there was fishing with a small one-man casting net (from the Greek *am-fib'-lace-tron*). The casting net is pictured in the adjacent figure. Peter and his brother Andrew were taking turns casting this kind of net when Jesus called them to become fishers of men (see Matthew



Throwing the cast-net from shallow waters, 19th century drawing

4:18-19). The third kind of fishing employed in the Sea of Galilee was with the *net* mentioned in Matthew 13:47. This *net* is from the Greek word *sag-ay'-nay* and it connotes a HUGE net that required a team of fishermen to operate. One end would be attached to the shore, with floats on the top of the net and weights on the bottom. In your mind you can imagine that this net created a huge wall in the water stretching from the lake bottom to the surface. It would be dragged in a large arc out into the lake. And then with great effort, many men would pull the net ashore. The two adjacent photos show dragnet fishing underway. The top photo is on the Sea of Galilee.



Also, as you can imagine, all kinds of freshwater aquatic life and refuse came in with the net. There would be fish of various kinds, both desirable and undesirable, weeds, driftwood, and items dropped out of boats. As Jesus described, once ashore, the fishermen would sit down and start the sorting process. The *good* fish, i.e., those in demand or marketable were gathered into vessels. But the *bad* fish, those having no commercial value, were cast away as refuse. Note that these were not returned to the lake. They were discarded; they were tossed up on the bank to asphyxiate and rot!

The Principle —

Jesus gives us the principle in Matthew 13:49, *So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just...*

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares vividly illustrated the co-existence of believers (the just) and unbelievers (the wicked) in our current spiritual phase of God's Kingdom. We call this present age the Church Age dispensation. You may recall that the husbandman told the workers to let the tares grow, lest when trying to root them up the workers might root up the wheat also!

But there is coming a day when God's spiritual kingdom will also become PHYSICAL AND VISIBLE! We call this the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. John foretells the coming of Jesus the King in Revelation 19,

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Revelation 19:11-15).

At that time King Jesus will start His process of separating the Tares, i.e., the pseudo-Christians, and also those who are outright God-haters, from His born-again children. Just as the parable indicates He will separate the good (those made good by the blood of the Lamb) from the bad (those who have refused salvation and remain dead in their sins).

There are many methods and events that God now uses, and will use, to separate the saved from the lost.

1 - **Physical Death** is certainly a VERY effective separation method that has been in place since the fall into sin. At physical death the eternal spirit of the born-again believer goes to be with the Lord Jesus Christ Who is presently at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Conversely, the eternal spirit of the Christ-rejector is stored in a repository called in the Greek "Hades", the place of the dead, and later to be eternally incarcerated in the Lake of Fire.

2 - The "**Rapture**", a.k.a., the Great Catching Away, is the next big event on God's prophetic time table; it is the next big separation that will take place (1Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1Corinthians 15:51, 52). In a moment, the twinkling of an eye, Christ will resurrect every passed believer and give them an eternal glorified body, then every living mortal believer will be caught up into the air with those already resurrected and they too will be changed and given glorified bodies. At this moment every born again human being will be removing from planet earth. This does NOT mean that more will not be born-again, because more will! Millions more will be born-again during the Tribulation period! Indeed the purpose of the Tribulation is the refining of the nation of Israel! And along with the Jews, many Gentiles will also be saved!

3 - And then after Jesus' Second Advent, at the start of His 1000-year Kingdom, He will personally perform two **Separation Judgments** for the MORTALS who have lived through the horrendous 7-year Tribulation Period. During that terrible time many MORTALS will have recognized the Antichrist to be an impostor, and will have trusted Jesus and become born-again! Indeed the very purpose of the Tribulation is to refine Israel! There will be a

Separation Judgment for Gentiles called the Judgment of the Nations (ethnos) described in Matthew 25:31-46, and a Separation Judgment for Jews described in Ezekiel 20:33-38 and Malachi 3:2-5.

I don't believe that any of these three separation methods are the specific interpretation of this parable's separation of the good from the bad. I believe this parable does foretell a specific time and a specific separation. But the principle of the parable is that there IS going to be a separation, and human beings need to prepare now for that separation! Paul writes in 2Corinthians 6:2, (*For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*) I like the comments of one writer,

“The dragnet of God’s judgment moves silently through the sea of mankind and draws all men to the shores of eternity for final separation to their ultimate destiny—believers to eternal life and unbelievers to eternal damnation. Men move about within that net as if they were forever free. It may touch them from time to time, as it were, startling them. But they quickly swim away, thinking they have escaped, not realizing they are completely and inescapably encompassed in God’s sovereign plan. The invisible web of God’s judgment encroaches on every human being just as that of the dragnet encroaches on the fish. Most men do not perceive the kingdom, and they do not see God working in the world. They may be briefly moved by the grace of the gospel or frightened by the threat of judgment; but they soon return to their old ways of thinking and living, oblivious to the things of eternity. But when man’s day is over and Christ returns to set up His glorious kingdom, then judgment will come.”¹

The Peril —

So... when WILL the Lord’s angels literally, *...sever the wicked from among the just?* Jesus says emphatically it will occur, *...at the end of the “world”*. And from Scripture we know exactly when this will occur! In Peter’s Second Epistle we read,

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2Peter 3:10-13)

The scriptures seem to describe a thermonuclear dissolution of our universe, the Holy Spirit literally dissolving all matter back into Himself in its most fundamental form... energy. And then in Revelation 21:1 we read of a New Heaven and a New Earth—*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea*—which we assume are formed from the dissolved and purified-by-fire old

¹ MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Matthew 8-15, p. 395.

Universe. And so here we have the “end of this present world”. And just before the end of this world we have what... ? We have a separation, of all things! Isn't God's Word amazing? The separation that Jesus was speaking of in His Parable of the Dragnet was undoubtedly the FINAL separation that will ever, ever, ever occur, the sentencing of the damned at the Great White Throne Judgment.

In Revelation 20:11 we read about an ominous event,

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

This event is described in Christian parlance as the Great White Throne judgment. It is the sentencing phase for all the lost, for every Christ-rejector. Every lost soul is resurrected from their respective grave, given an eternal body, and then each will fearfully and individually stand before the Savior Whom they rejected.

Perhaps no other doctrine is harder for humanity to accept than the eternal punishment of Christ rejectors in a place called the Lake of Fire, yet Jesus warned of Hell more than He spoke of Heaven.

The peril of eternal separation from our Creator, eternal separation from all that is good, lovely, and beautiful, and eternal immersion in pain, misery, and regret is simply beyond the finite human mind's ability to comprehend. Let us end this installment simply by stating this obvious question asked by God Himself, through the ancient prophet Ezekiel to His chosen nation Israel,

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

God bless and consider!