

LVII. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
The Kingdom of God and the Word of God
“The Parable of the Dragnet—The Kingdom Now and Then”
Matthew 13:47-50
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
August 23, 2015 – Morning Sermon

I want to start by looking at a passage in Matthew 7, at the concluding part of the Sermon on the Mount and then I will come back to Matthew 13:47. Matthew 7:21-23 says [21] *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Yesterday I had a very important conference with one of our elders. He was asking me about how I put a sermon together, my schedule, and how many hours I put in for a sermon. I was trying to share all of that with him and I didn’t get to everything I’d like to have gotten to for we kept getting distracted in our conference since we were playing around of golf at the same time.

What I didn’t tell him were the three most difficult parts in preparing a sermon, at least for me and has been for at least four decades now. Number one is the introduction to a sermon which is what I’m doing right now. In a football game you get the two minute warning at the end of the game but in preaching the two minute warning comes at the beginning. I have two minutes to say something that makes you convinced that you don’t need to color in the zeroes on the bulletin for the next 35 minutes. The second thing that is difficult is to be faithful to the text to give that thematic preeminence to Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer – how does this text point to the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ, faithfully and effectively in its implications? The third thing is to land it, the conclusion.

One of my homiletics professors compared this to an airline takeoff where most would want the takeoff to be non-eventful, enjoyable, keep your attention but not too much of your attention and just enjoy the flight. Then what goes up must come down so I want to make sure that this man knows how to land this plane. His student took off pretty well, handling the text marvelously, faithfully, effectively and made his applications but then he could never quite land the plane. We kept circling the airport and never got landed but finally he just kind of quit.

So how do you conclude a sermon? Paul, James, John, the Prophets, and most of all Jesus, all consistently and interestingly concluded their sermons. Usually in a conclusion you’ll find the burden of a pastor. You can see it and feel it and it’s no different in Jesus. We are looking at one of Jesus’ five sermons recorded in the book of Matthew. It is the one on the Kingdom in which He puts together seven Kingdom parables to tell us what the Kingdom is like. We have already looked at the structure as we have been riding the journey with Jesus.

There are seven parables that He puts together in three sets of twos. They are couplets and I call them fraternal twins because the two that are put together deal with the same issue but will be a little different because they have a somewhat unique emphasis in each of them. For instance the first two are parables about sowers. There is the Good Sower Jesus pouring out the seed everywhere indiscriminately but we learned that the fate of the seed is determined by the condition of the soil. So how do you know who the Lord is saving by His grace? It's not hard ground or thorny ground or rocky ground but it's good ground. The difference is the good ground has a root, a shoot and fruit. The thorny and rocky grounds have a shoot but no fruit and the root is gone. The hard ground doesn't have anything. By the sovereign grace of God the good ground has been worked upon so that when the seed falls the heart is prepared to receive it so that it puts up a root, a shoot and bears fruit, some thirty, some sixty and some hundred fold.

Satan is an imitator. Satan creates churchianity to mimic Christianity. Satan has a seed that he over sows the field with, called the tares or weeds. This was the second parable of the wheat and the tares or weeds. The tares look just like the wheat and even mimics the fruit with a fungus, called the bearded darnel but that fungus brings death. There is no evidence of life in this fungus so Satan is not only an intimidator and infiltrator but he is an imitator. Jesus says at the end that the angels will separate the wheat from the tares and the tares will be cast into the fiery furnace.

He moves on to say that now that this Kingdom has come to move upon the hearts of men, what does it look like? Then He goes to the next two parables where one it's like a mustard seed and in the other it's like leaven. It is something that is insignificant that is put inside. It is invisible. As the mustard seed is dropped in the ground the leaven is put into the lumps of dough and is dismissed by the world as meaningless and insignificant. It's relentlessly doing its work inside and it grows up until it is ultimately triumphant. The mustard seed is the largest plant in the garden and the leaven leavens the whole lump. It is this relentless movement of the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of the Kingdom in the hearts of men and from nation to nation to nation.

The third set of parables was the costly pearl and the tenet farmer who discovers a hidden treasure in his field. Both of them teach the same lesson which is without total liquidation you can't have full acquisition of the treasure. The difference is that the farmer is just out there plowing and comes upon this treasure and in the costly pearl there is a treasurer seeker who finds a treasure but in these there is one that wasn't seeking and one that was seeking. By the sovereign grace of God they now discover a treasure that in comparison everything else fades away therefore they are ready and willing to totally liquidate everything in order to possess that one thing. As they are liquidating they don't feel like they are liquidating anything because in comparison to the treasure everything is nothing because in Him I have everything for nothing compares to Him.

This is not the means by which you purchase the treasure for this is the means by which you receive the treasure. The treasure is a gift but the way the King says you receive it, is you don't add Jesus in, you receive Jesus as King and Lord. You lay aside all that would compete with your allegiance and affection to Jesus. So it's not Jesus for my family. It's Jesus who has me and now through me Jesus comes to my marriage, my family, my life, my appetites, my work, my everything. This is the means to receive the treasure that God has allowed you to find, not the means to purchase it. The King who left everything to save you when you were nothing to make you something by His grace,

now says ‘you leave everything.’ You don’t know all the implications of this yet but you leave everything to receive the King as Lord and Savior.

Now it’s time to land His sermon. He lands it with another parable. It is the summation parable where Jesus takes these three couplets and brings them to a conclusion. Matthew 13:47-50 says [47] *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. [48] When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. [49] So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

What is He saying here? Remember that parables are similes that have one single point but with many applications. What is the single point of this parable? To understand that we need to go to the parable and like all parables this would have been a very common experience they would have seen. Galilean fishermen did this every single day and have been doing it literally for thousands of years. Here Jesus is telling a parable about fishermen right next to the Sea of Galilee and those sitting in His audience are the premier fishing company of Lake Galilee, called James, John, Peter and Andrew. Yet Jesus was raised as a carpenter’s son. They are probably thinking ‘Ok You’re going to tell us about fishing, Jesus.’

Last week I used a J.R.R. Tolkien illustration and I can’t tell you how many emails I received from J.R.R. Tolkien. I was deluged with them. So here is Jesus using a parable about fishermen and it is something they all would have been very familiar with for they had been doing this all their lives until they left their nets to follow Jesus. So I’d like to walk you through this parable by looking at the five elements of this parable.

Number one there is a net. Number two is that there is a sea that the net is going into. Three, there are fish. There are fish in the net and there are many kinds of fish. Four, there are some men and very qualified men for they draw the net up on the shore and sort through the catch to see what to keep and what not to keep. These would have been Biblically educated men. The Disciples know He is talking about the book of Leviticus here. There were certain fish you were not allowed to keep for there were only some fish that were kosher. The other fish were thrown away and burned up. The good fish are saved and kept in containers that have been prepared to save and keep them. Fifthly, is the sorting, where they sort through the fish – those that are to be saved and kept and those that are to be thrown away and burned.

What is Jesus teaching us here? It isn’t very hard. Jesus makes it easier but when He makes it easier He also makes it challenging. What do I mean by this? Let’s look at each of these elements a bit closer. First there is the net. There are three ways you did fishing on the Sea of Galilee. One is to wet a line where you use a rod, a line and throw it out to the water, then pull in a fish, but you can’t much of a living just wetting a line. So secondly they use nets, called cast nets. It is a big circular net that is thrown out a particular way and as it lands on the water the weights start taking it down to the bottom of the sea that is catching all the fish and then someone pulls the cord which draws the weights together as the net is being pulled back up with all the fish in the cast net.

Thirdly there is the dragnet and that is the net in this text. This is what industrial fisherman use. You could supply fish for a whole town after a couple of nights work. They would get a couple of boats and go out at night. They would take one side of the

net and tie it to one boat and the other side to another boat and then they would sweep that net underneath the water all the way across the sea filling it up as the boats got closer and closer together. Then those that were trained would pull the net onto the shore and sort through the fish to be kept and those to be thrown away. That is what Jesus is picturing here in this parable of the dragnet. The dragnet is the Gospel of the Kingdom that has been thrown out into the sea.

Secondly, there is the sea. What is the sea? In the parable of the sower what was the field? It was the world. What was the lump of dough? Everything that is happening with the Kingdom of God is happening in the world and it is not just in one nation any longer. Now it is going into all the world, into all the nations. One of the favorite pictures in the Bible of the world is called the sea. In a Biblical world and life view, rivers are good and seas are bad. Seas are roaring foam, drowning, overcoming and swamping you but rivers are good. The Bible pictures the Gospel as the River of Life. The sea is where the beast of the sea comes up, with all of its turmoil. The sea is the world of nations under the curse of sin with its consequences. So the picture is the Gospel net is moving many times unseen but its moving steadily through the nations of the world and it's doing its work. What is that?

Number three is fish. It is capturing all kinds of fish. This beautiful conglomeration of fish is going through the sea, all the nations and it's bringing all these people to profession of faith in Christ. They are being drawn into the net of the Gospel which is capturing them. There is unbelievable diversity – black fish, brown fish, white fish, yellow fish and all kinds of fish that are out there. There is rich fish, poor fish, young fish, old fish, female fish and male fish. It is the very picture of Ezekiel 47 where the river empties into the sea and the fishermen are bringing all kinds of fish out of the sea. The Disciples have already heard this from Ezekiel. Jesus wants them to see this unbelievable variety that is being drawn together from the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Four is the men and it is all coming to a conclusion for there is coming a day where there will be no more gathering. I don't know whether I'll miss it or not but there are two things in heaven I won't do. One is sin and all God's people said 'amen.' The other thing I won't do in heaven is evangelize. There will be no more sharing the Gospel for in heaven that day is done. Oh we'll rejoice in the old, old story but we won't be sharing it with lost people any more. Right now we're gathering and then there is coming a day called the close of the age. At that day there are people who have been prepared to sort through the catch in terms of what are saved fish and what are lost fish. These people are called angels.

Fifthly, is the sorting. Those that are saved will be kept in the place prepared for them. According to the parable they are put in containers and you can just hear the words of Jesus when He said "I go away to prepare a place for you for that where I am there you may be also." They will be kept with Jesus in a new heavens and a new earth. Those who are in there with profession of Christ but no possession of Christ will be cast away into the fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Remember a parable has a single focus. What is the single focus of this parable? The dragnet gathers many fish and many kinds of fish, but not all of the fish in the net are saved. The Gospel dragnet is moving through the world, many seen places and unseen places in the world. As the church of Jesus Christ is doing its work through preaching, missionaries and evangelism through gathering there will come a day when that net is

drawn upon the shore and there will be a sorting through the catch because not all that are in the net have a saving relationship with Christ. That is what Jesus is making clear in this parable.

I almost did not use that as the single focus of this parable for up until a few weeks ago I thought the singular focus was something different. I kept thinking Jesus was telling us that this was the day of gathering and that we're to keep gathering knowing that there is a day of judgment coming. I do believe the parable is calling us to continue in the call of making disciples of all the nations and gather people with the Gospel but I don't believe that is the burden and focus of the parable. The reason why is because Jesus takes the time in this parable to do what He doesn't do in most parables. He interprets it but He doesn't interpret the entire parable. He interprets the concluding statement of the parable. In other words, He interprets what He doesn't want you to miss.

What does He do with the interpretation? Matthew 13:47-50 says [47] *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. [48] When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.* (Now Jesus interprets the parable but only interprets the last statement of it because He doesn't want you to miss it. This is the burden of the parable, the focus.) [49] *So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

So if the focus is that the dragnet is gathering many kinds of fish into the net but not all of the fish in the net are saved fish, then what is our takeaway from that? The takeaway is simple. The Gospel of the Kingdom is relentlessly gathering many from all the nations, but not all professing to be in the Kingdom know the King as Lord and Savior. I don't know who all are reading this today and perhaps you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior for you heard the great news about the King who laid aside everything to come not to a throne, but to go to a cross and at that cross that King bore all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity. That King drank the cup of judgment for you. He drank that fiery furnace to the bottom so that you could have eternal life. When you heard that message of the treasure of the Savior who is the King who will reside in your heart, liberate you from the guilt of sin because He paid for it and liberates you from the power of sin because of His Spirit who indwells you. He will give you a new record, a new heart, a new family, a new home and you have gathered today to praise His holy Name. That treasure was so glorious that you were willing to surrender all that you would come to Jesus Christ alone.

You are going through your Christian life finding out the implications of that new life for I didn't know all the implications but I did know to receive Jesus nothing in my hands I bring but simply to the cross I cling. You don't come to Christ as an addition, Christ becomes your ambition. You don't come to Christ as a god among gods or to fill in the gaps of life although there are many, you come to Christ who becomes your life. You heard that and you came. Now you are wanting to grow in it and you're wanting to praise His Name not only when you assemble but when you go out in the world in all that you do and say for Jesus.

Some of you are not sure why you're reading this. You're kind of like that tenet farmer who just showed up in a field and just found out about a treasure. Some of you came looking and that is because the Lord has already started looking for you because we

don't seek Him. If you're seeking Him it is because He sought you. He brought you to this study so you could hear the Savior who loves you that much. He will set you free from sin's guilt and power. You have heard that you can receive Him as you put your trust in Him alone to follow Him. Trust and obey. Your obedience doesn't save you. Your obedience is the fruit of a Savior that you have trusted in. Trust and obey for there is no other way.

Who else am I going to go to? If you are reading this and decided not to come to Jesus then I would love for you to come and tell me what is more glorious to trust than Him. Who will love you more than Him? You don't have to come to me to put your trust in Him, just go to Him. So you have heard and by God's grace you'll come but as this Gospel goes through the world there are some who hear the blessings but they don't surrender to the King. There are some churches that preach a false gospel that say you can have salvation just by trying Jesus out or adding Him into your life. Jesus never did that. Jesus said "Come follow Me."

This parable is only the burden of the other parables. What about the parable of the wheat and the tares? It's not enough to mimic Christianity for you have to have Christ. What about the parable of the sower? The rocky and thorny ground had shoots but no root and no fruit yet they are lost. When Paul is writing to churches with professing believers he says many times to examine yourself and see whether you be of the faith. James says you're saved by faith alone in Christ but faith is never alone for faith without works is dead. It's not your works that save you but saving faith works. It is also the burden of Peter when he says to make your calling and election sure in Christ.

It is the burden of Jesus not only in the parables but in His other sermons, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. How does Jesus end the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7? He ends it by saying that it is the one who knows Me and does My will that is in the Kingdom. It is not doing the will that earns you into the Kingdom but doing the will is the evidence that you know the King. They trust and obey. Do they obey perfectly? Absolutely not. Do they have seasons of ups and downs? Absolutely but the warp and woof of their life is simply to trust and obey. *[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).* If there is a new heart, a new record and a new family then there is a new life. It doesn't save us but it's the evidence that the Savior is in us.

[22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'
[23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22-23) This is what will happen on the Judgment Day. He is warning us in the Sermon on the Mount, in the parable of the dragnet that there are many attracted to the message and the blessings that don't surrender to the King. There are many (Jesus' words) who come in the orb of the Gospel of the Kingdom, Christianity and His Church and who can mimic Christianity but not have Christ. There are many who are professors of Christ but not possessors of Christ. The answer on that Day is never what did I do but the Savior I knew and know. The evidence is not workers of lawlessness but those who out of love to Christ, unevenly, imperfectly are committed to following Christ.

I'm going to conclude with this. There are some actions words in this parable like gathering, drawing, dragging and sorting. One that stands out for it is used three times is

throwing. We are supposed to throw the net and we need to throw this Gospel net like never before in our city and to all the nations of this world. Throw the net into the sea. Let's intentionally, indiscriminately throw the net and send it everywhere in the sea to bring men and women from everywhere to Christ. Then it says that net will be drawn up and on that day there will be some in the net that profess but didn't possess. The text says they will be thrown away, into the lake of fire.

We live in a day of gathering. There is coming a Day of Judgment and there are only two destinations on that Day. There is either the gathering into Christ for all eternity, saved and kept, or there is thrown away into the lake of fire. Where will you be? If you think you'll be in heaven because you're a member at Briarwood that is the wrong answer. I hope that every member at Briarwood will be in heaven but I confess to you today that I have two great fears in my life. One of them is that I will go through life and lose my zeal for lost people to come to Christ. I have asked God to please let me never lose that but then I've asked the Lord to help me preach the Gospel, a robust Gospel that's a true Gospel and let my methods and my message never give false assurances. I don't want anyone to stand in heaven with a false assurance from me.

I could tell you about a church that lets people come into a booth to confess their sins and then they'll be told to go say these three things, give this to somebody and do this to somebody and then you're sins will be forgiven. We look at that and think that's so terrible because it's a works salvation and false assurance. I think that many times in evangelical churches we do the same thing by preaching a single thread gospel in which people can come for the benefits of the cross without the demands of the crown. Then we give a false assurance when they agree to the benefits of the cross but they don't surrender to the demands of the King. I don't want to give false assurance because there is coming a time of a judgment.

I remember when I was a kid and used to say in my rebellion "Hell, yeah that's where I'm heading because all my buds are going to be there. I can't wait to get there with them." No one is going into hell gladly. Read the Bible for every time someone heads into hell after the Day of Judgment they are thrown there for nobody wants to go there. When they get there, there is no repentance. There is wailing and gnashing of teeth. That is not remorse. That is a temper tantrum. That is what your child does. That is what they did with Stephen for they gnashed their teeth on him. Do you remember the Rich Man and Lazarus? The Rich Man didn't come to repentance for he still wanted to use Lazarus as his water boy. Hell does no redemptive work. It only confirms the agonies of the isolation of sin. Outer darkness means no contact. We who were made for relationships will be isolated for all eternity under the judgment of God in that place.

We very seldom hear about this for sermons on hell have disappeared from our pulpits like mist from a summer morning but it didn't disappear from Jesus' sermon. When He concluded He took us there. He said before you get to the Day of Judgment there is a day of gathering but after that day of gathering there will be a day of sorting because some are professing but not possessing. I heard a pastor say something who I know was well meaning when he said it and he was trying to emphasize that you're saved by grace and not by works. He said "When you get to heaven there will be people you didn't think we're going to be there." I know what he was trying to say when we think 'can that person possibly be a Christian' yet we can't judge someone's heart. There are people who have difficulties in life who know Christ but it might look like they don't at

the time but it was interesting to hear him say there will be ‘many’ there that you don’t think will be there.

I actually think that Jesus’ ministry turns it the other way. It is Jesus who said ‘Many, many will say to Me...’ There are many who are not going to be there that we thought were going to be there. They had the churchianity but not the Christianity. They mimicked it and professed it but didn’t surrender to it and possess Him. My dear friends, I pray that you leave here today and know Christ. If you do then let me give you Biblical assurance. [47] *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes (surrenders) has eternal life. (John 6:47)* Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. If you’re reading this today, you have this imperfect life but you have surrendered and Jesus is pointing out all the places He is going to grow you, then just take a moment and give Him thanks for His unmerited, relentless, unstoppable love. Perhaps you’re reading this and you have been among Christians, you know about Jesus but you don’t think you’ve surrendered to Him, then would you surrender now? Say “Jesus, I come, nothing in my hands I bring. I’m not asking You to fill the gas of my life or to be the top of the list in my life but I’m asking You to be my life. Jesus, I surrender all because I surrender to You for everything else I count as loss for the sake of knowing You.” Draw me up to that shore and as I enter into the palaces of glory in the new heavens and the new earth I will hear, ‘well done, good and faithful servant’ and You will hear from me, ‘praise God from whom all blessings flow’ in Jesus’ Name, Amen.