

The Great Net

Matt. 13:47-50

Intro. In the seven parables of the Kingdom in **Matt. 13**, the theme of the last three is the *outcome* of the **end of the age** or the period of history we are presently living in.

The parable of the **Hidden Treasure** concerns God's Program for **Israel**. Because of unbelief and unrealized potential, the nation's glory is hidden. Yet Isaiah prophesied a day when Israel's glory would be revealed. "**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.** - **Isa.60:1-3** Like treasure hidden in a field and rediscovered, Israel will be glorified when the nation finally embraces Jesus Christ as their Messiah and King.

The parable of the **Pearl of Great Value** concerns God's Program for the **Church**. All who put their faith in Jesus since Pentecost are made a part of the Church, the Body of Christ. Like a **pearl** that results from the suffering of a living organism, the Church is the product of Christ's sufferings. The pearl has long represented ideals of **purity** and **unity**. It symbolizes the Church because believers have been purified by the blood of Christ and made One by His indwelling Spirit. Saved people are the most prized possession of Christ! We are kept in Him and for Him!

This AM we'll consider the final parable which has been called the **parable of the Great Net**. This parable concerns the *outcome* of the Kingdom of Heaven for the third category of people living on earth...the **Gentiles**. This category is made up of all people everywhere who have not trusted Christ for salvation. These are the unsaved...the lost. They are people who have not responded in faith to the seed of the Gospel. In some cases they may be like the **weeds** growing among the **wheat**. But here in the final parable they're compared to **bad fish**. Their outcome is tragic.

There's no way to soften the impact of these verses. This final parable was given as a sober warning. A crisis is ahead for the unsaved. **Rom. 11:22** says, **Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God:** Any Bible teaching that skirts or omits the sternness or severity of God lacks balance. God is good, we know that...but God's judgment for sin is severe. God is love...but He is also just. He can not allow sin to go unpunished forever! A day of reckoning is coming...a day of final and ultimate separation. The **weeds** will be separated from the **wheat** and the **sons of the evil one** will be separated from the **sons of the kingdom**. This coming day of judgment will bring extreme calamity to all who have rejected Jesus Christ. I pray this morning that God will use His Word to remind us / awaken us / and stir our hearts.

READ Matt.13:47-51 - "**Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 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. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.**

1. The Metaphor - vs.47, 48

It was natural for Jesus to use fishing as an illustration. Several of His followers had been fishers of fish before they became fishers of men. So these men would quickly understand the analogy and method of fishing Jesus spoke of. The kind of net referred to here is called a *draw net* or *seine*. The bottom edge of a *draw net* is weighted so it sweeps along the bottom of the sea. Buoyant corks are attached to the top of the net. *Draw nets* are known to be as much as 1/2 mile in length.

After the net is stretched out, the ends are drawn together. Everything inside the circumference of the net is captured. Once the ends are joined, the net is either dragged to shore or lifted aboard the fishing vessel. In days before hydraulic lifting mechanisms, the nets were dragged to shore.

A *draw net* doesn't discriminate. It captures every specie of fish in reach. For years the US has had a controversy with foreign nations over off-shore fishing rights. Their trawlers use a more sophisticated version of the net mentioned here. Operating just 10 miles off our shores, they net and process everything, regardless of size, specie, or usefulness. Lobsters, dolphins, starfish and sharks...draw nets capture everything in the water. You can imagine the impact this type of fishing has on an ecosystem.

Many types of fish and marine life are good to eat....but some aren't. I found it interesting to read a recipe for baking a King Mackerel. The instructions said this...*Bake the fish in an old boot. After 20 minutes in a 300 degree oven, "Throw the Mackerel away and eat the boot."* According to the dietary laws of Leviticus, not every fish was to be eaten by God's people. Fish **without fins or scales** were created as scavengers and unclean. Even touching the carcass of an unclean creature resulted in defilement. In some cases God created certain species as food for other species and to keep the oceans clean. If you tried to fry the fish called Moss Bunker, he'd probably catch fire in the pan...that's how oily they are. They make great bait for game fish and are useful in the manufacture of cosmetics, but you wouldn't want to eat one. Then there are Blowfish, Skates, Sea Robins, Starfish, Flying Fish, and Sally Growlers. You wouldn't want to eat any of those fish either! They're just too ugly to eat!

So all sorts of marine life are captured in a *draw net*, but not every specie is **good** in terms of acceptance by God or usefulness to man. The **good and bad** in this parable relate to the nature of the fish...what it is by virtue of creation. Fish aren't capable of being **moral** or **immoral**, **spiritual** or **unspiritual**. You'll never catch an immoral bass or an unspiritual walleye. By virtue of creation, they are what they are...useful or worthless.

According to the parable, the fishermen netted all sorts of fish. After they dragged the net to shore, they sat down and sorted them out on the beach. The **good fish** went into baskets to be taken to the marketplace...the **bad fish** were thrown back or thrown away.

2. The Meaning - vs. 49, 50

This is how it will be at the end of the age. Here once again, the interpretation is given by the Lord Jesus. **The end of the age** tells us when this will take place. Most people are oblivious to the fact that God has any relation to time. They dismiss the idea that like an alarm, an end time has been set. But **the end of the age** is a specific moment in history when the Great Tribulation has run its course and the Lord Jesus Christ personally and visibly returns to earth. Following the Battle of Armageddon, the Judgment of the Nations will take place. These events are prophesied in the OT, here in Matthew's Gospel as well as the Revelation. This separating judgment will happen in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom Christ will establish at that time.

As we've seen in previous parables, **the angels** will assist Jesus in the task of separating humanity into two basic groups....the **wicked** and the **righteous**. In **v.39** it was the angels who separated the wheat from the weeds. The **same judgment** is in view in both parables. This judgment described in **Matt. 25:31, 32** - "**When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.** Here the righteous and the wicked are compared to **sheep and goats**."

Just as God has drawn a distinction between **good fish** and **bad fish, wheat and weeds, sheep and goats**; there is an eternal difference between the **nature** of believers and unbelievers. Believers are justified or made **righteous** by God by faith alone. We are indwelt by the Spirit who produces in us the life of Christ. We have a new DNA. Unbelievers are **wicked** because of an inherited sin nature which expresses itself in sinful thoughts, motives, words and deeds.

Again, the emphasis here is on the act and results of this future event when God separates the **wicked** from the **righteous**. Notice that this parable doesn't say what the righteous are **separated to**. Instead, the emphasis is on the fact that the **wicked** are **separated from** the **righteous**. The purpose of the parable is to *warn unbelievers* of the destiny that awaits them if they persist in their rejection of the Savior God sent. In language that requires no interpretive skills, Jesus warns the wicked of their fate in **v.50**. They will be literally cast into a fiery furnace. In that place there will be literal weeping and literal gnashing of teeth. The clarity of this warning is intended to answer the question / clarify the reality / and erase any uncertainty concerning the destiny of the unbelieving wicked.

With the time remaining, we need to somehow absorb this warning. The impact of these verses shouldn't allow us to walk away unmoved. They should terrify us the way we were terrified standing before a fire that raged out of control. These verses should alarm us like the wail of a siren in the middle of the night...or like the ache felt when we learn a loved one has a terminal illness. The message here is terrifying in its prospect / arresting in its urgency / and alarming in its certainty.

Consider the warning presented in this parable under the heading of **four verbs**.

1. Caught - Fish hooked on a line often get away. The hook can pull loose or the line can break. Worst of all, a fish can flip out of the fisherman's grasp as he lifts it to take a selfie. But fish caught in a net that is dragged to shore don't get away. In the parable, **the net** represents the total gathering of earth's inhabitants. It's a picture of the sovereign power of Almighty God.

Now someone may think...*"I just won't show up!" "I'll pass, thank you very much"*. That won't be an option. Someone else may imagine, *"I'll get out of it somehow...I'm good at that"*. Forget it...you're not that good. Well, *"I'll just get lost in the crowd"*. No you won't! The Bible teaches that people will be gathered **one by one**. No one will be excluded or exempted. Just as a draw net gathers every fish in reach, so God will gather every person alive at that time to judgment. Listen to **Zeph. 3:8 - Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them-- all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.**

Sin often goes unpunished today. Sinners strut like peacocks as though mocking the idea of a future judgment. But one day all mocking will cease and sinners will be caught. It will be a desperate and hopeless calamity to be caught in God's net. There will be no escape and no opportunity to turn back the clock. All possibility of a change of heart will have passed. There will be no second chance to think and do differently. This terrible fate is enacted in courts of Law everyday as people convicted and sentenced are led away in handcuffs. On this day sinners will be caught and there will be no escape. Like the fish taken in the net, people who thought they could believe and live as they please will find themselves in the hands of the Righteous Judge of the Universe. **Heb. 10:31 - "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God"**.

2. Confronted – The parable describes a sorting process that takes place after the net is dragged to shore. The fish are examined one by one. In the same way, sinners will be confronted by the God who is Holy and perfect in all His ways.

The first Psalm says, **the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.** - **Psa. 1:5** This means that no one confronted by God will be able to stand on their own two feet. Any who presume to defend themselves before God will be silenced and removed from the presence of the Holy God who knows everything about them. And just as fishermen distinguish good fish and bad fish, the Bible says **the Lord knows those who are His.** - **II Tim. 2:19** With perfect discernment, the **wicked** will be separated from the **righteous**. All pretence will be exposed. **Matt. 7:21-23** - **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"**

It's sobering to realize that every person alive at that time will be **caught and confronted by Christ**. Those who attempt to stand before Him in the filthy rags of their own righteousness will be cast out. But those who stand in the righteousness of Jesus, will be accepted. Like the separation of the fish, this separation is determined by the **nature of the individual**. Each of us was born with a sin nature. By our first birth, we were **bad fish**...everyone of us. Jesus told religious Nicodemus, **"you must be born again"**. Despite his religious devotion, Nicodemus was still a **bad fish**. His religion and self-righteousness was inadequate. It couldn't change the person he was on the inside. Nicodemus needed to be reborn and given a new nature. This is the essential difference between believers and unbelievers. It's a difference pedigree / religion / and human potential can't produce. It takes a miracle of grace to change the nature of a man or woman. **II Cor.5:17** says, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!** This is why every human being needs Christ. The Creator alone has the power to change our nature.

3. Condemned - The bad fish were discarded, thrown away. The bad fish were rejected because of what they were. The same is true for all who reject God's offer of salvation. I say "is true" instead of "will be true", because unbelievers are under the condemnation of God already. **John 3:18** - **Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.** Like a convicted criminals waiting for their sentence to be carried out, unbelievers are on death row. They're putting in time until their day of judgment arrives.

Three terms describe the condemnation of the wicked:

- First, their condemnation is **absolute**. No appeals or arguments are permitted in God's court. With sovereign authority and penetrating discernment, hearts will be tested. No jury of peers will sympathize with the accused and judgment will be entirely impartial and just.
- Second, their condemnation is **predetermined**. When Christ appears with the angels of Heaven, the day of salvation will have passed. Sinners will be sealed in their sinful state just as the righteous are sealed in Christ's righteousness. Like the game we called "freeze tag," it will be too late to make any movement toward God.
- Thirdly, the condemnation is **permanent**. The results of this judgment are irreversible. In human courts rulings can be overturned by an appeals process...but this judgment is binding and permanent. And this judgment isn't merely for time...it's for eternity! There is no reformation or rehabilitation in hell. The fire of hell will not cleanse what only Christ's blood of Christ could purify. The sinner's opportunity to be forgiven and declared righteous will have passed.

The words caught, confronted, and condemned are terrible enough but there is still one final word to describe the destiny of the wicked.

4. Confined. The wicked will be confined. The wicked will be cast into **the furnace of fire**, and from this furnace, they will never be released. The definite article indicates this is a specific fiery furnace. This is Hell. This is the place of conscious torment reserved for the devil and his angels and for all the ungodly who have rejected the love and grace of God.

Please turn with me to **Luke 16** as we finish. Luke 16 contains the story of a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Some say it's merely a parable...a fictional account told to teach a lesson. I'm not of that opinion. For one thing...proper names are never used in parables. Like the widow who gave her mite and the Pharisee Jesus heard praying at the Temple, every indication leads us to believe Jesus was referring to an actual case when He told the story of these two men.

3. The Message from Hell - Listen as I read **Lk. 16:19-31** and a story which explains why Hell is so terrible. **"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ""No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"**

1. The suffering in Hell is real. In the parable of the great net, the wicked are cast into the fiery furnace where there is **weeping and gnashing of teeth**. I've been to the burn center in several hospitals. Just last summer I visited Scott McGuinness who was burned when his dad's barn caught fire. Scott was not burned badly, but in that ward, I heard the anguish of someone burned more severely. Despite anesthetics, cries like this are often heard. The rich man who lived in luxury and felt no pain during his earthly life...was in **torment** in Hell. The words **torment** and **agony** appear 4x's in these verses. The flames and the suffering of Hell are real and the pain is beyond our imagination.

2. The past will be remembered in Hell. Notice the rich man recognized Abraham and the beggar Lazarus for whom he had shown no mercy. (**v.23**) Then in **v.25** Abraham said, **"Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony."** Abraham appealed to the rich man's ability to remember the blessings of his earthly life. This may be the most chilling verse in the Bible. In Hell, people will remember how good God was to them and how many opportunities He gave them to repent and be saved. Every memory and wasted opportunity will haunt those who are confined and alone in Hell.

3. There will be guilt and regrets in Hell. In **vs. 27, 28** the rich man now has 20/20 spiritual vision.

His one desire is that someone be sent to testify to his 5 brothers to prevent them from coming to this place of torment. I'm sure you've heard someone say, *"I'm going to Hell because that's where my friends are"*? Maybe you thought that way yourself at one time. Here's the answer to that foolish claim. *If your friends are in Hell, they are praying that you won't join them!*

4. The torment in Hell is forever. 37 different words found in Scripture describe the destruction of the ungodly and not one of them suggests annihilation or extinction. Unsaved people do not cease to exist after death, nor will the wicked cease to exist in Hell. The punishment of Hell is everlasting.

Conclusion - I don't know what this passage provokes in you...but I know it ought to do something. It's a sober reminder that judgment is ahead. A day of reckoning is coming. Unbelievers will be caught / confronted / condemned / and confined in the torment of everlasting punishment. The Bible couldn't state this more clearly. These warnings should make believers forever thankful for our salvation. But they should also stimulate compassion for the lost around us. We have family and many friends around us who aren't prepared for this eventuality.

But this warning should shake the grates of those who aren't sure they're saved. **Heb. 12:25 - See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?** Future judgment is certain. The time to prepare for tomorrow is today! The way to prepare is to trust Jesus Christ who died to save you and give you a new nature.

I have to smile when I read v.51. Notice what it says. **"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied.** At this point, I'm quite sure the disciples had little or no idea what Jesus was talking about! Later they would understand as the Holy Spirit brought to mind the things Jesus said and led them into His truth. But Christian friend...follower of Jesus...have we understood all these things? I mean, have we really understood them? To really believe and understand this sobering warning is to take appropriate action. Are we doing that?