

Introduction

The very first verse of Matthew’s gospel declares that Jesus is the son of David. It is clear from the outset of the gospel that Matthew’s objective is to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ, the Jewish Messiah promised by God. He is the one who comes in the line of David to fulfill God’s covenant. He comes to rule and to reign from the throne of David. He comes to exert authority over the world as King of the kingdom of heaven. By the end of the gospel after Jesus was crucified, died, and rose from the dead, Jesus gathers his disciples together. He himself states that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He is king! And in that light he gives to his disciples a royal commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

So from the beginning to the end of this gospel, Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ royal authority. It culminates with the charge to make disciples. This is the central responsibility of the disciples of Jesus: Go and bring more subjects into the kingdom by making disciples. Now, as we are making our way through the midst of Matthew’s gospel, we observe that all along the way Jesus was equipping and preparing these disciples in order to carry out that commission. That is exactly what he was doing right here in the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13.

There are a total of 8 parables in Matthew 13. We have been studying these for the last 6 weeks or so. A survey of these parables reveals a number of key matters in the work of discipleship. The parable of the soils teaches that the main task in disciple-making is to communicate the gospel message. Many will reject it or will embrace it only temporarily. Some will persevere. By the parable of the weeds and the wheat, Jesus warns his disciples that they will face resistance and their lives will be hard. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven assure the disciples, however, that though the kingdom and its message will largely be disregarded, it will not be deterred. Then come the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value. They add to the reassurance of the disciples. Even though the world largely disregards the kingdom, there is nothing of greater value. It will cost its disciples everything, but the worth of the

kingdom surpasses all else. A wiser or happier investment of one's life cannot be made. The two remaining parables in Matthew 13 complete this set of lessons.

[Read Text; Pray]

These final two parables of Matthew 13 round out the whole of the lessons on discipleship in the kingdom. In the parable of the net, Jesus redirects attention to the final judgment and the consequences for those who reject the kingdom. The reminder serves to underscore the urgency of disciple-making. It points out what is at stake—eternal life and eternal judgment. In that light the last parable alerts the disciples to the fact that they are responsible to teach what they have learned. The truths of these final two parables relate to the central theme of judgment. So that is how we are going to look at them.

First, I want you to see . . .

I. The Inescapability of the Judgment.

In verse 47 we read that “the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.”

There were several different fishing techniques in NT days. In this parable Jesus references the use of a huge net, a drag net. It was incredibly large with floats on the top and weights on the bottom positioning the net from the surface of the water to the bottom of the lake. This wall of net would be strung between two boats or attached to a point on shore and pulled through the water circling back to that point. The net captured everything in that area of the water. That included fish of every kind—desirable and undesirable. The net was then drug to the shore by a company of men who separated the desirable from the undesirable.

The picture is quite clear. Jesus says it will be like this at the end of the age. We see he is pointing to judgment. And his point here in verse 47 is that there is no escape. If you are a fish in the lake in the area where the drag net is swept, you are going to be taken and pulled to shore. Jesus explicitly notes that this net gathers every kind of fish. The scope of the net for the lesson of the parable is comprehensive. It catches every kind of

fish. I read where there were about 20 different species of fish in the sea of Galilee. And in the world there are all kinds of people. You can look at people physically, ethnically, socially, financially, and influentially. There are all kinds of people in the world. And no kind of person is going to escape this net. All will gathered and all will be brought to the shore to face the judgment of God. Revelation 20 depicts the great white throne judgment. John writes, "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened . . . and the dead were judged by what was written in the books . . . the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged each one of them."

Nobody escapes. The small and the great alike will stand before the throne. No one will be able to buy their way out. No one will be able to charm their way out. No one will be overlooked. There are people of all kinds and all of the kinds will be gathered for judgment. It is inescapable.

Here is a clear message for every human being. You will give an account of your life and your deeds to God. You cannot escape it. If you live and move in this world, you cannot avoid the drag net. It will sweep you up, gather you in and drag you to shore. And you will stand before God's great white throne. Does that concern you? It certainly should. You cannot escape.

There is also a very important message for followers of Jesus—something Jesus desired to impress upon his disciples in their mission. There are all kinds of people in the world—different colors and classes and shapes and sizes, some great and some small. But what we need to see when we see people more than anything else is that not one of them will escape the net. What stands out above any of our differences is the one thing we all have in common. Not one will avoid the judgment of God. We will all stand before him. And therefore all of us have the same need. We need Jesus. Steve Green reminds of the need with these words:

Everyday they pass me by, I can see it in their eyes

Empty people filled with care, Headed who knows where
On they go through private pain, Living fear to fear
Laughter hides their silent cries, Only Jesus hears

We are called to take His light To a world where wrong [is called] right
What could be too great a cost For sharing life with one who's lost?
Through His love our hearts can feel All the grief they bear
They must hear the words of life only we can share

People need the Lord ... when we realize we must give our lives
for people need the Lord.

That is what we need to see when we look at all the kinds of people in the
world. People need the Lord NOW for when they stand before him THEN.

Before you see anything else about the people in the world, see their need.

II. The Timing of the Judgment.

In verse 48, Jesus continues the parable. He says that when the net was
full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted them.

When it was full was the time when the net was drawn to the shore. In the
fullness of time God has a place for his every purpose. In the parable of the
wheat and the weeds, as soon as the servants discovered the weeds, they
asked the landowner if they should go and gather them. They were told no.
They should wait. The separation would come at the time of harvest.

God's patience and waiting about the judgment does not mean it is not
coming. The Bible warns that in the last days scoffers will come. They will
say, "Where is the promise of his coming? Everything is going along just as
it did from the beginning." Peter says they deliberately overlook the fact
that the world exists by the word of God and that judgment came by the
flood and that by the word of God what exists is being stored up for the day
of judgment. That day will come like a thief. It will come at a moment of
human disregard. Humanity will be caught by surprise. But the day is
clearly marked on God's timetable.

Time is almost irrelevant to God. A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day to him. He is not in a hurry. Time is a boundless resource for God. But there is a time for his every purpose. His patience in waiting is not an indication that he will not carry out what he has warned; rather, it is an indication that the time is not yet full.

In the fulness of time, God sent his Son (Galatians 4:4). And in the fullness of time he will judge. When the net is full, it will be dragged to shore.

Do not be lulled to sleep by the patience of God. Do not be caught by surprise, and not just for yourself but for the sake of others. Along with us, our lost neighbors and co-workers will also be gathered in the net. Their eternity hangs in the balance.

III. The Categories of the Judgment.

A. When men drew the net ashore, they sorted the fish. While every kind of fish was gathered, and while that meant a number of different kinds, the sorting process recognized only two categories. In verse 48 the categories are good and bad. There were those that were worth keeping and those that were not. In Jesus' explanation of the parable, he clarifies that the good fish are the righteous. The bad fish are the evil. The world looks at itself and observes many kinds of people. But when God engages in judgment he sees but two kinds. There are the righteous and there are the unrighteous.

B. Here is where the interpretation gets a little tricky. You see on the one hand "none is righteous, no, not one." All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one to his own way." And if anyone is looking for some kind of religious righteousness, there is none to be found. If you hope to be counted righteous because you have tried really hard to keep God's law, your hopes are dashed according to the scriptures. Romans 3:20 says that "by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight." Galatians 2:16 declares "a person is not justified by works of the law."

Indeed, on the one hand there is none righteous. But on the other hand, the Bible recognizes that there are righteous people. Proverbs 4:18 says that "the path of the RIGHTEOUS is like the light of dawn, which shines

brighter and brighter until full day." It is contrasted with "the way of the wicked" which is "like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble." Biblically speaking, there are two senses in which a human being may be righteous. First, there is the sense of being DECLARED RIGHTEOUS by union with Jesus Christ. When a sinner trusts in Jesus Christ to save him or her, he or she is reckoned as righteous. They obtain as a gift from God a righteousness not of their own but that which comes through faith in Christ. Thus they are COUNTED righteous. This righteousness is perfect. It meets God's just and unbending demand for perfection. It satisfies his requirement for peace and fellowship with him.

If you do not have this righteousness, you do not belong to the kingdom of heaven. You are an outsider. You are without hope and without God. You will stand before God at the judgment in your works and your works will condemn you. You will be pronounced bad, evil.

But there is a second sense in which a human being may be righteous. There is a righteousness of life that pleases God (Hb 13:16), imperfect though it may be. God's gift of forgiveness in the sense of counting sinners righteous is inseparable from his gift of sanctification, growing people in living out righteousness. We have been studying this wonderful work of God on Wednesday evenings in Learning and Leaning. And this past week we looked at the fact that in sanctification God sets apart a people for himself and equips and transforms them for the fruit of good works, for holiness, for serving God. You cannot separate holiness of life from right standing with God. You cannot think that you are truly converted if your life does not bear the fruit of righteousness.

I am not saying you must be sinless! But as John says in 1 John 3:7ff., "Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. . . . No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God." A person who lives any old way they want is not righteous. That

person is not a true convert, a true disciple, is not forgiven. They are evil. They are a bad fish. Faith without works is dead.

Those who treasure the kingdom supremely, as in the parables of the treasure in the field and the priceless pearl, treasure the righteousness of the kingdom.

Listen, when you talk about judgment and the terror of standing before holy God, the flesh itself will motivate people to seek an escape. No one wants to spend an eternity under divine judgment. Likewise, calamities in life will often result in people crying out to God for help and deliverance from their hard times. Everybody everywhere wants relief. But this is completely natural. There is nothing supernatural about the instinct to preserve yourself. However, when a person is truly born again, born from above, they do not just want to be preserved; they want righteousness and they pursue righteousness. They do not make a practice of sinning. This is the righteous. This is the man or woman fit for heaven. They are declared righteous by faith and they are born of God and as a result they pursue righteousness in their life.

I wonder about you today. Do you actually love God and love his righteousness or have you merely come to God because he has been presented to you as positive and encouraging? Merely as an escape from punishment or hard times?

In the fullness of the times, when the net is dragged to the shore, the fish are recognized either as righteous or evil. Which are you?

Now that brings us to . . .

IV. The Outcome of the Judgment.

The good fish are put into containers. They are kept. The bad are thrown away. The righteous are kept, but the evil are thrown into the fiery furnace. Looking back to Revelation 20, we read that if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The outcome is horrific. Jesus declares there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I spoke on this in some detail a few weeks back in conjunction with

the parable of the weeds and the wheat. I am not going to belabor these terrifying details today. But terrifying they are, not in a sense of injustice but in a sense of their shame and their pain. These details are a repulsion to the world, but they should wake you up to the nature of God's disposition toward sin. And they should spur you to seek not just escape from pain but love for God, love for Christ, love for righteousness.

The equivalent of the fiery furnace is what Jesus endured on the cross. He did it to satisfy God's righteous demand for all who will turn and trust in him.

V. The Present Implications of the Judgment.

In verses 51-52, Jesus asks his disciples if they have understood "all these things." And they say yes. So actually what he is going to say pertains to everything he has been teaching through these parables. But it certainly includes the judgment he has just illustrated.

He uses a final parable to close out the series and point the disciples to the implications of what he has been teaching them. He brings together the figure of a scribe and a master of a house. Scribes were teachers of the scriptures. The master of a house was a dispenser of wealth. Bringing out of his treasure should be understood not as showing off his wealth but putting it to some good use.

Thus, we understand Jesus to be saying to his disciples that they have been entrusted with the treasure of the knowledge of these kingdom principles. They have been equipped to teach, to make disciples. And they must bring out the wealth both new and old. Because these disciples have gained understanding from Jesus, they have a storehouse of new things and a better grasp of the old. What Jesus has brought them is not a departure from the old things but the addition of new things. The bottom line is that they need to teach the whole. It is a foretaste of what Jesus tells them in the great commission: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Conclusion

See how this conclusion fills out the whole of the cohesive message of the Matthew 13 parables! When the word is sown like seed, many will reject, some sooner than others. Those who receive the word are in for a difficult road. However, the resistant world cannot keep the kingdom from expanding or exerting influence. Those who receive it are only too happy to suffer loss because they see the kingdom's surpassing value. Those who reject it will face terrible but just condemnation. The stakes could not be higher. They involve the expansion and effect of the kingdom and the judgment of the wicked. Understanding these things, disciples of Christ are stewards of these mysteries and bear responsibility to make them known accurately and comprehensively.

That is what we as a church are charged with. Discipleship is a comprehensive ministry of teaching one another and the lost around us the truths of the kingdom. The lost need to hear it. The saved need to be built up in it. This is why preaching in this place is focused on the Bible, and on the NT and the OT. There is a wealth to be learned in both places.

Your responsibility and mine is to recognize the wealth of truth God has invested in us. There is a sense in which we are all teachers. We need to bring out of the storehouse to share with others the treasure God has given to us.