

## Catch 'Em All; Let God Sort Them Out!

*Matthew, a Preaching Series*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 4:19; Matthew 13:47-50  
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Matthew 4. Now, Brett, I have to tell you, usually when I hear one song for four and a half or five minutes on the radio or on a CD, I think to myself, "That must be on Luke because no one can do that for five minutes." And sure enough, I'm wrong. That must take some muscle memory or something. Just thinking about other things, right?

So I noticed something a few weeks back on reading my Bible, I do that from time to time, and sort of joking, even preachers should read their Bibles. And I noticed something and I knew it was back in Matthew a little bit but I wanted to make a little space, preach a few sermons to get us further into Matthew and before I showed this to you. Oh, is there another song? Okay. So I'm going to show you a connection that I found in the book of Matthew tonight. I'll think you'll remember it. I think it'll be a blessing to you.

Look at verse 12 of Matthew 4.

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; 13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. 20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

One more time of prayer, please.

*Master, I pray that you bless the preaching of your word and bring forth fruit. For those who have family members that are away traveling for our church family that has folks*

*away traveling, I pray that you would help them feel like they are here tonight and that you would minister to them through the webcast if they are able to watch it even now, and that you would strengthen your people through the preaching of your word. We know that it is quite enough to do the job and I pray that you would do it for your name's sake. Make yourself famous tonight. And for those who are hurting, I think of Brother Bill Hogan who had surgery to clean out a wound. I think of Jessica Green, recovering from the delivery of their dear son, Charlie, Adam and Jessica's dear son Charlie. I think about people who are recovering from other procedures. I think of little Cam D. who is recovering from a little surgery this morning. I'm thinking about our brothers and sisters who are still in deep mourning in Charleston. I'm thinking about our friends who are struggling in Iraq and Sudan and Eastern Africa, Somalia, Christians who are existing and you really are all they have. And I pray that you would strengthen them today and help them to dream of a better land, and I pray that they will look forward to that city whose builder and foundation is God. And we look forward to that soon reunion with you. Help us to love the prospect of your coming more than anything on this earth, the prospect of promotion or anything else. And we will thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So I've read to a verse and I don't think in verse number 19, I don't think anyone in here would argue with the idea that you are to be and I am to be a fisher of men. As a matter of fact, we are told, "Follow me." There are actually two words, it's actually, "Hurry up and come after me," in the Greek. It's, "Follow me and I will make you fishermen of men." So Jesus said, "I want to redirect your attention."

I am encouraged week after week to get emails from many of you asking for guidance, wisdom, help, insight – oftentimes you provide it to me – for people that you are trying to influence in the Lord through the Gospel, people you are trying to witness to, family members you are having real hard conversations with about the Gospel, something as simple as God in the flesh dying for sinful people and saving them freely. It seems so good to be true, doesn't it? And it is good and it is true, but it is not too good to be true. I think we ought to be careful about using words like, "That's unbelievable." If it were unbelievable, I wouldn't believe it. It is quite believable. It's so good I feel like a parched man in the desert that has found water finally when I know that the God of heaven has crucified his Son on my behalf and has satisfied his sense of justice so that he can legitimately and realistically and judiciously pardon me because someone has been dealt the deathblow of a convict. Jesus made his grave with the wicked, Isaiah 53 says, and with the rich in his death.

So I don't think any of us have a hard time believing that we are supposed to be preaching good news and fishing for men. And of course, I don't think I have to bend this scripture too much to get you to see that we're not talking about fishing for males. Certainly they are included with the term "mankind," right? So I think Jesus wants females to follow him too. That seems so elementary but I feel like we have to say it.

Then there are folks in our church, some ladies in our church who are married to unsaved men, men that do not appreciate their Maker or his Son Jesus, and all I can say to you is stay faithful. God is interested in their salvation more than you are. He paid an

unspeakable price for every man, woman, boy and girl, and he is far more interested in their salvation than you and I are. He gave his life a ransom for many. So be patient and keep fishing.

On that thought, I'd like to read to you just something short called "The Parable of the Fishless Fishermen."

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Year after year these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, they talked about the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing.

Continually they searched for new and better definitions of fishing. They sponsored costly nationwide and worldwide congresses and meetings and conferences and training sessions to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing.

These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called "Fishing Headquarters." The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. But one thing they didn't do, however after the conferences and the discussions and the buildings and everything; they didn't fish.

They organized a board to send out fishermen to where there were many fish that were yet unfished. The board was formed by those who had the great vision and courage to speak about fishing. People would weep about far-away lakes and streams and oceans where there were fish that were yet uncaught. They would define fishing, promote the idea of fishing in far-away streams and lakes where fish of different colors lived.

Also the board hired staffs and appointed committees at several echelons and held many meetings to define fishing, defend fishing, to decide what new streams should be fished next. But the staff and committee members did not fish.

Expensive training centers were built to teach fishermen how to fish. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology, but the teachers, behold, they did not fish. They only taught fishing. Year after year, graduates were sent to do full-time fishing, some to distant waters filled with fish.

Further, the fishermen built large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Speaker's bureaus were built and provided to schedule special speakers on the subject of fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded, and were sent to fish. But like the fishermen back home, they really never fished.

Some also said they wanted to be part of the fishing party, but they felt called to furnish fishing equipment instead. Others felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen.

After one stirring meeting on "The Necessity for Fishing," a young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he caught the fish.

So he quit fishing so he would have time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fishermen's General Board as a person having considerable experience fishing.

Now it's true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water, but they didn't fish. They bore the smell of dead fish every day near that water, but they didn't fish. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's clubs and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen, but they never fished.

They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the Master who said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men?"

Imagine how hurt some of them were one day when a person suggested that those who didn't catch fish were really not fishermen after all, no matter how much they claimed to be, no matter how much they said they were, no matter how many books they wrote about fishing, how many conferences they attended about fishing, how much they rejoiced over stories of big catches from the past. It just didn't sound good. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish?

I don't think that I need to convince you that it's important that we fish. Fishing is a mandate for all the disciples. It's what we do. And so what we think is if we're actually successful in catching a fish, all fish will be real long-lasting disciples. That's what we would get out of this passage is, "Okay, I am going to follow Jesus. He's going to make me a fisher of men and so I am going to catch fish and they will be long-lasting disciples." And we come away with an idea that once they are caught, they are always

brought, and that's true, that is true, we catch them in fishing. And by the way, in this passage, I hope you're not getting this idea where you have 12 disciples sitting on a beach somewhere casting a line and pulling it in and they are catching a fish at a time. No, they fished with nets and they would catch many fish. As a matter of fact, in John 21, I believe it is, they caught 153 fish in one drag of the net. So apparently you can catch a multitude of fish if you're in the right place at the right time. You have to let down the net. So we're not surprised when we catch a fish and when we attempt to catch fish, we think that once they are caught, they are always brought, but the truth is once they are caught, it's true they're always bought. All fish have been paid for.

Now, watch it because what we're going to talk about now is just really quite thrilling. It's a connection that I saw, I have to say. But let's first of all before we leave this passage, let's be real clear here: you are not allowed to even feign the idea of being a disciple of Jesus if you do not fish. I'm not saying you're not saved, I'm saying it's an embarrassment for disciples of Jesus to not be fishermen. I'm not saying that you have to be as good of a fisherman as Brother James here or a better one than Brother Jim or Sister Jennifer. I'm not saying you have to be as good of a fisherman as anyone around you. I'm saying that if you don't fish, I'm not saying you're not saved, I'm saying you probably shouldn't be too rowdy about claiming to be a follower of Jesus. People who are reserved in their testimony, you blend in and that's really cute but the problem is it's hard to catch fish when you're not casting the net. We are not allowed to just finance fishing. We are not allowed to just build big buildings, build big buildings for fish to come to once they are caught. We are not allowed to just have a comfortable place for fish to be. We are commanded to go fishing. We are commanded to fish everywhere.

I heard someone the other day say that fisherman, that was what Jesus used because all of his disciples were fishermen. That is a completely inaccurate statement. Tax collectors and zealots made the payroll. They weren't all fishermen. And if they were all fishermen, don't think that meant they were ignorant. John was rich enough to live in Jerusalem and Galilee. He had a house in Galilee because that's where Jesus found him, and a house in Jerusalem because Jesus said, "John, this is your mom now," and it says that he took her to his home there in town. Moreover, John was so well known that he was the only disciple allowed into the courtyard of the high priest. You don't give ignorant fishermen that kind of backstage pass.

Now, when we say fishermen, we're talking about fishing bosses. These people were pretty wealthy. You don't get to own boats by being a pauper. You don't get nets and crews by being ignorant peasants. These people are well-to-do and so when you were to say to them, "What is the first thing you were told to do, you were expected to be when you were called to be his disciple?" They would have said, "We were supposed to be fishermen."

So Jesus is still looking today, and this is just an aside, but he's still looking for positive passionate people to be fishermen. These are the people that don't mind witnessing everywhere they go. Positive, persistent. Positive and passionate. I mean, you expect that since God has decided to save some, that if you knock enough doors, so to speak, made

some of you nervous there, if you hand out enough tracts, if you visit enough neighbors, eventually you're going to find that one of them gets in the net. How many can testify to that? You just keep writing enough letters to grandpa and eventually, eventually someone is going to get in the net.

It's so simple. He's not looking for positive passionate people but persistent and patient people. People who don't get angry because the sinner doesn't get the Gospel the first time remembering that, "I wasn't that soft and tender to the Gospel the first time either." And sometimes it's because they are rebellious, sometimes it's because they are flat meaner than a snake, and sometimes it's simply because they have clouded thoughts. They might be one of the nicest people you know. So we've got to be patient and persistent. We have to be people that just hate to lose a fish.

Having said all that, the idea of fishing, the idea of fishing for fish, the idea of fishing for fish that are people is found only one other time in the book of Matthew. Now, fish are mentioned in several miracles. You know that. They are mentioned when you talk about someone's trade but fish are identified with people only one other time in the book of Matthew and so I don't think it's a mistake.

Let's look at chapter 13. You know, Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:19 while you're turning to Matthew 13, Paul said, "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not also going to be in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes?" We get this idea, I know some of us are new to church, others of us are not, and we were raised with the idea that you get certain kinds of crowns when you get to heaven, and I suppose there may be some truth to that, but Paul said that the crown of rejoicing, I always heard growing up that's the soul winners crown. You need to read that verse. It says, "you are our joy and crown," 1 Thessalonians 2:20. There is just going to be something amazing about being in heaven the first day or when the kingdom comes, being in the presence of the King the first day and to look right or left and see somebody that God saved because he used you to save them.

Look up here. I love you so let's quit the pious stuff about how we don't save people. You're supposed to be a fisherman and so am I. We sometimes church up stuff because we don't want to be guilty of not fishing but since we are on the language of saving, here's what Jude said in verse 22, "And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." We do saving. Now, I know what the Bible says about who the real soul winner is. I get all that. I've heard preaching just like you have. 1 Corinthians 9:22, Paul said, "I became all things to all people that I might by all means save some." 1 Corinthians 3:9, we are called the fellow laborers of God. Somehow we are involved in this thing, and I have a feeling that when you take that chance and go fishing, I have a feeling that when you get to heaven and when you wake up in the presence of the King, I have a feeling that you will not be sorry. It will be a joy.

Now, folks, you may be a member of Berean Baptist Church or not but if you are not yet born again through faith in Jesus through the shed blood of Christ, I'm not even talking to you. There is no chance of you being a fisherman. You are still a wanderer.

But now let me show you something that is incredibly striking. I'm not going to overload you tonight. Look at Matthew 13, look at verse 47.

47 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.

Well, what do we say about these bad fish and these good fish? 1. They all come by way of the same fishermen. Now, I know when I showed you Matthew 4, I showed you the human side. We are called to be fishermen. But here's the God side. In these parables I combated about six weeks ago with you that there is a good strong chance that Jesus is the main character. We see that the angels are the ones separating the fish but we are not told that it's the angels pulling the net to the beach. We are told that a net is pulled to the beach. We are told that it's in verse 48, "when it was full, they drew it to the shore." They drew it to the shore and sat down but the angels, it doesn't look like they're even in the act until verse 49.

I want you to notice, please, that you have good and bad fish in the net. Are you catching this? In the final analysis, the good fish and the bad fish both had the same fishermen. I mean, it was not like you have a better chance of being a better fisherman than me because you look better, sound better, talk better. It's not like I've got the upper hand because I'm a pastor. It's not like I've got the upper hand because I study my Bible and, you know, let's just say it: and get paid. It's not like I'm of the upper hand because I have been saved longer than some in this room nor are you in the upper hand because you work in the world. No, there is a place for everyone on the net. They drew it to shore

And what determines who is good or bad? Well, the good news is not the fishermen. We are so concerned, sometimes when we want to let ourselves off the hook, sometimes we say things like, "Well, I don't want to pluck them green." That's the idea of taking them before they are ripe. You know that. It's the idea of leading a Judas to Jesus. We are already promised that at the end of the world we are going to find out we caught some bad fish. What a relief. I'm grateful that I'm promised I'll catch some good fish. That's wonderful. But we've already talked about. I am really comforted to know that after all of my toil and labor, I am promised I will catch some bad fish. They ain't all gonna be ripe. They are not all going to live for Jesus until the end of the world. They are not all going to turn out saved.

Yes, they got in through the net and what is the net? Well, if the net is a consistent thing at all, look in verse 19 of this chapter. Look there, please, with me. Look at verse 19, "When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart." Look at verse 23, "But he that received seed into the good ground," what is the seed? The word of the kingdom.

You remember there are seven parables in this chapter for those who have been with me a while. We find out that Jesus is the doer of most the action in these parables and we find out now that it looks like the tool of getting people into the kingdom is the word of the kingdom. So we are all preaching, if you are preaching the unadulterated Gospel of Christ came to be a ransom for many, then we are all casting the same net even.

"So you mean to tell me I cast the correct net and I still get bad fish?" Now, here's what a bad fish kind of sounds like. This is the person that's in the middle of a crisis and they "get saved" but when the crisis passes...now let me tell you, when the crisis passes, now the crisis could be they are jobless, the crisis could be their marriage is on the rocks, the crisis could be there is a storm that just came through and took out my power, the crisis could be my career is not going where I want it to, the crisis could be that I have just failed to pass an exam and now that could be the crisis. And I want you to know that sometimes God uses that to save some and they come in the net and we find out, yep, they truly were saved when they said they were saved. But then there are others, there are others, they look like the real deal, they are in the same net, pulled by the same fishermen to the same beach and we don't even find out whether or not they are good or bad until the end of the world. But we are still called to be fishermen. We don't control the net. We cast it. We don't control the one dragging it. In fact, we are so out of the game, we don't even separate the fish.

Now, here's what I would imagine, I would imagine, this is really neat as far as I'm concerned. I would imagine that if you find a good fish, what's the next thing you do? Not sell it. We're going the opposite way. We're kind of being utilitarian here. If you find a real good fish and you don't throw it back. I don't understand that. Fishermen, please don't educate me on that. I don't understand the idea of putting a hook in the flesh, okay and then tossing it back. Okay, so I'm not about that but usually if you catch a good fish, I'm talking about like in Madison where the king fish that you wanted to catch in Wisconsin was a muske. Smoked sturgeon if you're up there on Lake Michigan up around some county. You wanted smoked sturgeon. A sturgeon was an exoskeleton fish. You know, I mean, all the meat is on the inside and you wanted it smoked. I'm talking about smoked catfish out on the Mississippi River somewhere around the crescent of Wisconsin, the cross down there through Lansing, Iowa. I'm talking about if you pull a catfish out and go to a smokehouse, probably not allowed anymore, God knows everything is bad for you, but I remember my parents would come out of one of those smokehouses with a catfish wrapped in newspaper and they would say, "You need to eat bread with this because it's too sweet." I said, "Sweet fish?" Sure enough. That smoked catfish was so sweet. It's incredible.

When you catch a good fish, what do you want to do? You want to eat the thing and sometimes you cook it. I thought it was all the time then I went to Hawaii and found out you sometimes cook it and it was pretty good anyway. I don't know why it's more expensive when you don't cook it but in any case. It's strange. It's like what's up with the math here? You haven't done anything with it. You cut it and I've got to pay more. It's weird.



But please notice in verse 49, it's the rejects that get cooked. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." I'm very very very sorry. In a way I feel poorly for anyone going to the furnace, and hopefully hopefully everyone in here, saved or not, dreads the idea of hell. And honestly that is a truth that puts some people just completely out of the running for faith. In their mind how could a God of love, how could a God of love send anyone to hell. And I will flip the table on you and say, first of all, it's not your right to judge your Creator. But secondly, he proves he is a God of love by allowing you to hear the escape route. It's called the Gospel and here you are hearing it tonight. So if you want proof that God is a God of love, how about the fact that you are in a place, some of you multiple times, where you can hear that you don't have to go to the furnace. You can sit and find fault with the furnace if you want to but it's still going to happen.

I got saved and I was 21 when I put faith in Christ and settled that thing once and for all and quit praying the sinner's prayer over and over and over and over again. It just doesn't do the trick, friends. Put faith in Jesus, then your testimony will fit John 3:16 and you can go on with your life, "Trust Christ and you will not perish but have everlasting life." I'm going to tell you this: that is pretty awesome. The not perishing part made me very happy. I can sit around and talk about how wrong it is that God allows people to perish all day. It doesn't settle the fact that you're not going to have all your questions answered. We're not going to be able to figure out why God allows some people to perish and do you know what? That is a wide open discussion that is going to be much longer than picking up your kids from summer sizzlers. No pun intended at all. At all, Jeff.

The fact is we are not going to get rid of the furnace so you might as well avoid it. But a word to the fishermen in the room, the fisher-woman, the fishermen: you are not in any control over who does and who does not go to the furnace. You are in control of casting the net and at the end of the world, you let God sort them out. Catch all you can and let God sort them out. "I don't know if they'll mean it." Mean what? Mean faith?

Today I was, every now and then if I feel like I need to engage sinners, I just go on Facebook and if I'm not sure where to look, I go to a soccer page and found out the Chicago Fire was hosting a gay pride night tonight. They are giving out rainbow shirts and all such and all that. Well, first of all let me just say that being a homosexual is no more sinful than being an adulterer so let's be careful that we don't champion certain causes over another. If you're shacking up, you are as sinful as a homosexual. So I love you but that's the truth. And if that's true, if that's true, and it is, then I want you to be clear that I only knew where to find sinners in that post because I saw the post. And I went there and I said, "I pray that they will find freedom from their sin like I am finding freedom from mine." Do you think I drew any attention with that? Oh, good heavens. All kinds of opportunities to fish.

Now, you don't have to be quite as direct or rambunctious as I am. You could actually do something very crazy, you could get out of your car before you shut your garage door and see if your neighbor is outside and get their name. That's crazy. A first name is good

enough for now. "How are you? What's your name? I'm Bill." Now, if your name is not Bill, don't tell them that. That's the wrong foot to start them on. But that's a good place to start. "But my personality." Please notice no one gives a rip about your personality in this parable. "But it's not my...." No one cares. You are called to be a fisherman. Are we having fun?

So let's see how long we are supposed to do this and then I'm going to cut my sermon in half and give you the other half some other time. Look at Matthew 28. How long should we fish? How long should we fish? Look at verse 18. Jesus has been raised from the dead to justify us, Romans 4 says. He got up from the dead to prove that he died right. If he would have stayed dead, that would have proved he was a sinner, but because he didn't stay dead, that means he was not a sinner and that means that when he died for us, he really died for us and not for himself. So he had to get up from the dead or else he stays dead and we have to die for our own sin.

So in verse 18, "Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All authority or power," exousia is the word in the Greek, "all authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." There it is, that same phrase that we read where the fish are sorted out at the end of the world. I know. I know we are concerned. We don't want to witness to someone because they're just going to get me off their back and say the right thing and do the right thing just to get me off their back. Take the risk. Take the risk. They might be a good fish. "Oh, they are such a manipulator." Maybe not this time. And we are required while we are waiting for the angels to come and separate the fish, we are commanded right here to keep pulling the net.

So I don't know where you fit in that story line tonight but I have a feeling that we can all fish. While we are busy paying school bills, buying groceries, weeding our yards, fixing drywall, planning lessons, asking for help, working on relationships, we are mindful of always sowing the seed, always pulling the net, looking forward to the last day and facing the reality that we don't control the type of fish that enter the net. Catch them all, let God sort them out. Don't super-qualify, don't disqualify who would make a good catch. Just pull the net. En route to picking up the children, pull the net. While working in the nursery, pull the net. While rocking your baby, talk to that little infant like they can hear you perfectly and pull the net. Washing the dishes, pull the net. Changing the oil, pull the net. When it looks like you're doing something totally mundane, preach the Gospel to yourself and there might be a little one around the corner listening to you as you pull the net. It's very simple.