

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Dragnet

VIII. The Parable of the Dragnet - Matthew 13:47-50

A. The Central Point of the Parable

The end of the Kingdom will be a time of separation. The good will be gathered into heaven, the bad will be cast into hell.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

As in all of the parables, this one is drawn from common life events. Anyone listening to this parable would find it easy to understand since they could go down to the Sea of Galilee and see it first hand.

1. The Dragnet

There were three basic ways to catch fish in the time of our Lord. These are outlined as follows:

a. The Line and Hook

This was the same method used by recreational fishers today. It consisted of a hook attached to a string with some kind of bait. This is the method used by Peter in Matthew 17:27 to catch the fish for the money to pay the temple tax.

b. The Casting Net - (Greek *amphlibestron*)

This method of fishing consisted of a net that was thrown by the fisherman in a circular pattern. Weights around the perimeter of the net would drag it down towards the bottom. A cord would close the bottom of the net making a sack which would then be dragged onto the shore. This was the kind of net mentioned in Matthew 4:18.

c. The Dragnet - (Greek *sagana*)

This method of fishing consisted of a large net, sometimes in lengths of one-half mile, which was anchored on shore and extended out into the sea. Since the bottom had weights and the top had floats, the net would extend down into the water as a wall. The boat would then slowly close the net which would then catch anything in its path. The net would then be dragged onto the shore where the fish would be separated.

Note that the net used to depict the salvation of men was the casting net (Matthew 4:19), the net used to depict judgment the dragnet (Matthew 13:47).

2. The Fish

Although fish is not specifically mentioned by name, it is obvious that the “every kind”, “good”, and “bad” mentioned in the parable refers to fish.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

1. The Sea

The sea is the place in which the dragnet moves as it catches the fish. Its use only serves to enhance the context of the parable.

D. Interpretation of the Parable

As in the parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares, this parable is interpreted for us by the Lord. As a result, we will not have to do a lot of digging to understand the interpretation.

1. The Net

Once again, we have a situation in this parable where we run into trouble if we try to interpret it allegorically. This is because there is no direct interpretation to the element of the net.

Although we cannot assign a direct meaning to the symbol of the net, we can give it an abstract meaning, that being that the net is the agent which collects all the fish for the process of separation.

As a result, it is not necessary to find a meaning for the net, but to only understand that the net serves in the parable as the collecting agent for the fish. In the final judgment, however, the agents of collection will be the angels. This is explained in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares.

It would be instructive at this point to digress a bit and lay out the various collective judgments as defined in the Bible. By collective, we mean those judgments where entire groups of people are judged with regard to eternal destiny, not those judgments on individuals for sin or on nations. Each of these judgments differ as to place, time, subjects, and result.

a. The Cross

| | |
|----------|------------------------------|
| Place | - the Cross |
| Subjects | - true believers |
| Time | - the past |
| Result | - eternal life for believers |

At the cross, the sin of every believer was judged. Because of this, it is possible for those who place their trust in Christ to receive eternal life.

Probably the best explanation of this is found in Colossians 2:14. In that passage we read that Christ took the handwriting of ordinances which was against us and nailed it to his cross. What Paul is referring to is the Roman custom that whenever a man was being punished for a crime, whether that punishment was crucifixion or scourging, the

specific charges were nailed on the cross or post. Once he had paid the penalty for those crimes, the parchment containing the charges was destroyed. In the same sense, Christ took all of our sin and nailed them on his cross. Once he died, those sins were paid for. How one can understand this illustration and not believe in total forgiveness of sin is hard to believe.

Another explanation of this can be found in Romans 6:1-14.

b. The Believer's Works

Place- heaven

Subjects - true believers

Time - after the Rapture

Result - reward or loss

This judgment is known as the *bema* seat judgment. This is where believers will be judged for their works in reference to their reward.

The *bema* seat was the judge's stand in the Isthmian games of those days. At the *bema*, the victorious athletes would receive the laurel wreaths symbolizing victory. It was not a moral judgment, but a judgment of reward.

The clearest teaching in the New Testament regarding this judgment is found in 1 Corinthians 3. Specific facts to note are:

- Christ is the foundation. (v. 11)
- Materials are varied. Works are seen as gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble. (v. 12)
- The “fire” will try every man's work. The worthless will be burned leaving the good. (Note the the word translated “bad” actually means “worthless”, not morally evil). (v. 13)
- We will receive reward for the good. (v. 14-15)

3. The Living Nations

Place - Valley of Jehosophat (decision)

Subjects - Gentile nations

Time - at the Revelation (second advent)

Result - entrance into or rejection from the Millennium

This judgment takes place at the end of the Tribulation when Christ comes to set up his Kingdom, the Millennium.

The subjects are all of the Gentiles who are alive at that time. They are judged as to whether they will be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Those that are rejected receive the immediate sentence of hell.

The clearest teaching on this judgment is found in Matthew 25:31-46.

4. Israel

| | |
|----------|--|
| Place | - Israel |
| Subjects | - Jews that have survived the tribulation |
| Time | - at the Revelation (second advent) |
| Result | - entrance into or rejection from the Millennium |

This judgment occurs at the same general time of the Judgment of the Living Nations.

The only difference between this judgment, and that of the Living Nations, is that the subjects of this judgment are the Jews.

This judgment is described in Ezekiel 20:33-44.

5. All Unbelievers

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| Place | - somewhere in heaven |
| Subjects | - all unbelievers from all the ages |
| Time | - after the Millennium |
| Result | - degree of punishment in hell |

This judgment is also known as the Great White Throne.

There are many who assert that this judgment pertains only to unbelievers. However, if that is the case then when do the righteous believers who are alive at the end of the Millennium get judged. Either the scripture forgets to mention their judgment, or it coincides with that of the Great White Throne.

Also, we find that Revelation 20:15 states that "whosoever was not found written". It does not say that ALL were cast into the Lake of Fire, only those who were not in the book of Life.

This judgment is described in Revelation 20:10-15.

6. Fallen Angels

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------|
| Place | - not specified in scripture |
| Subjects | - fallen angels |
| Time | - sometime after the Millennium |
| Result | - degree of punishment in hell |

This judgment is mentioned only briefly in the Bible. We find it in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4.

As a result of examining the above judgments, we find that there are two that could be meant by the judgment described in this parable, that of the Living Nations, and the Great White Throne.

The judgment of the Great White Throne would seem to be the best interpretation for the following reasons:

- The angels are specifically seen as collecting the good and bad. We have already shown in previous lessons that the angels are the ones who have been assigned the task of “reaping” or collecting for judgment.
- Christ states that it is the “end of the world”. It would seem that there is a note of finality in that statement that would be out of place had he been speaking of the Judgment of the Living Nations.

On the other hand, the Judgment of the Living Nations can be in view here as well for the following reasons:

- Christ uses the term “world” which is the Greek word for “age.” Thus, Christ could be speaking of the end of the “church” dispensation. This would coincide with the end of the tribulation.
- In the Olivet Discourse the angels are seen as collecting the righteous from the whole earth (Matthew 24:31). Also, angels are implied as the collecting agents in Matthew 25:32.

Thus, we are forced to accept the fact that there seems to be a dual application in the mind of Christ. The most immediate application is the Judgment of the Living Nations. However, the fact that the Great White Throne is in view here cannot be denied either.

2. The Fish

We need not spend a lot of time defining this symbol since it is clear that the fish represent mankind. Jesus uses this same analogy in Matthew 4:19 where he calls Peter and Andrew away from their nets to become “fishers of men”.

Note, however, that there are two kinds of fish in view here.

- The “good”, or “intrinsically good” fish were put into vessels for later consumption. This refers to the “just” (Greek *dikaion*, righteous) in verse 49.
- The “bad”, or “putrid (Greek *sapros*, corrupt, putrid)” fish were cast away. This refers to the “evil” (Greek *ponaros*, utterly evil) in verse 49.

The destination of the good fish were vessels. Similarly, the destination of the righteous is the eternal kingdom.

On the other hand, the bad fish were cast away. This describes the destiny of the wicked in the “furnace of fire”, the eternal Lake of Fire.

E. Application of the Parable

1. Although men may appear to be free, they are being inexorably drawn to a point of future judgment. When they strike the net in one direction, they may swim the other way, but they will eventually hit the net again until caught.
2. Just as the dragnet catches all the fish in its path, so God's judgment will catch all men. No one will escape.