

Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 13:47-50

The Kingdom's Outcome - the Dragnet

In 1989, Donald Trump was asked about what horizons were left for him to conquer. His response was, "Right now, I'm genuinely enjoying myself. I work and I don't worry." "But what about death," the writer asked? "Don't you worry about dying?" Trump answered, "No, I'm fatalistic and I protect myself as well as anybody can. I prepare for things." He started walking up the stairs to have dinner, but then he hesitated and said, "No, I don't believe in reincarnation, heaven or hell, but we go someplace." He paused then added, "But you know, I can't for the life of me figure out where."

What Mr. Trump does not realize is that there IS a heaven and a hell – in fact, those are the only two options for him! This particular parable of Jesus focuses on the option of hell. It is an unpopular topic in today's culture, but it is a topic often discussed in Scripture. I have never counted the references, but I have read that Jesus referred to hell more than He referred to heaven. In this parable we learn of a coming time of separation between good and evil. So, let us notice three truths about this separation.

First of all we notice the **truth of separation**. That this parable teaches there will be a separation between the righteous and wicked is obvious. In that way it is similar to the parable of the tares, which is recorded earlier in the thirteenth chapter. In fact, an overall look at the parables of Jesus is interesting in this regard. There are many today who want to deny the doctrine of hell. It is too difficult or harsh for them to swallow. It is often perceived as something developed by the church to "scare" people. But it was Jesus who spoke of the truth of separation. In fact, in His teaching while on earth He told seven parables of separation: this parable here, the dragnet (about good and bad fish being separated); the parable of the tares (told earlier in the chapter about wheat and tares being separated); the parable of the marriage feast (in Matthew 22:1-14 about those with and those without a wedding garment being separated); the parable of the household (in Matthew 24:45-51 about good and evil servants being separated); the parable of ten virgins (in Matthew 25:1-13 about wise and foolish virgins being separated); the parable of the talents (in Matthew 25:14-30 about profitable and unprofitable servants being separated); and the parable of the sheep and goats (in Matthew 25:31-46 about sheep and goats being separated).

I don't think it is coincidental that he told seven of these parables! In scripture seven is the number of completion. God created the world in seven days. In Revelation we see a whole series of sevens (seven letters to seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, etc.). And all in between in scripture we see the prominence of the number seven; in fact, there are 338 references to seven in all.

The fact that Jesus told seven parables of separation speaks of the completeness of separation. As dreadful as the reality of hell may be, as little as it is preached on, as much as we seek to avoid it, NOTHING changes the fact of its reality! Still, people want to deny it; to say that God is too loving; to say how can good people be separated as evil; how can somebody who is in church end up in hell. Let me remind you there was a Ham in the Ark. Remember also there was a Judas among the twelve. And today, Jacob and Esau still struggle together in the womb of the visible church. People can be religious but not regenerated; baptized but not

bathed in the blood; professors yet not possessors of faith. In spite of religious affiliations and desires, if the heart is devoid of God's grace, the soul is lost. The truth of this parable is the truth of separation. There will come a day when evil and good no longer intermingle. But when will that be? Jesus takes this up next.

Notice then the **time of separation**. The parable is pretty specific here. The King James translation says "end of the world." This is really a bad translation for the word for world is not used at all. Instead it is the Greek *aion* which means age. Plus the Greek word used for end is not *telos* which means limit or final state; rather it is *sunteleia* which signifies a bringing to completion the various parts of a scheme. The translation "consummation of the age" is perhaps more clear. This phrase signifies the events coming to the appointed climax.

The great truth we learn here is that the time of separation will be the climactic event of world history! It is what all history has been going towards and it is how history will be consummated. This is specifically why it is important for us to share the gospel of grace now. As Paul says, ". . . at the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you; behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

I think it is interesting that Jesus does not mention who the fishermen are. He simply refers to them as "they." They play an important role, but they are NOT the focus. How we often get that out of balance today. So many look to the messenger rather than the message. Even among conservative evangelicals the temptation is often to worship the preacher. That temptation even existed in Paul's day: "when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:4). But the reality is, "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7). The instrument is nothing - God is everything. His treasure is in earthen vessels that all the glory might be His. The best illustration of this is John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Oh how vital that while there is still time we must point people to Jesus. The time of separation will be too late - we must share now!

It is tempting to even see this message in the parable, but although it is true, I do not think that is what Jesus intended to communicate. The temptation is to see the net cast into sea as our role in drawing men and women into the gospel net. But note that Jesus compares the fishermen to angels, not earthly messengers. Plus the setting is NOT the time in which the church carries the gospel message. Rather it is the consummation of the ages. Where is the church then? It has been raptured! Also notice carefully Jesus' words: the kingdom of heaven is like a net that WAS cast into sea - it is past tense. He did not say it was like a net being cast into the sea. Stated simply, NOW is the time that net is being cast. The time this parable describes will be the time of harvest - the time of separation. The POINT of the parable is simply that there WILL be a time of separation. And what will happen then? That is the final thing Jesus describes.

Notice finally then the **trauma of separation**. What a graphic phrase our Lord uses: wailing and gnashing of teeth. In fact, of the seven parables of separation mentioned earlier, five use this phrase. One other does not use that phrase but speaks of eternal punishment. The only one that does not use such language is the parable of ten virgins. Jesus also uses the phrase "furnace of fire." People often ask, is hell a literal fire? They can only hope that is all it is for in generally accepted laws of language, a figure of speech is always LESS intense than the reality. If "furnace of fire" is only figurative, then this phrase, taken together with "wailing and gnashing of teeth" describes a horror beyond imagination!

When this parable is put alongside others that picture hell (most notably the rich man and Lazarus), three important truths emerge about this separation. First, it is absolute! Currently, we have a mixture in God's kingdom as we experience it (i.e. in the Church). That is what the parable of the tares was all about. But when separation occurs there will be no more mixture. No one will be partly in one camp and partly in the other. There will be no shades of gray - it will be black and white in that day. Either you are in or you are out. As Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30).

Another truth is that this separation is previously determined. By that I do not mean pre-determined, or predestined. I do mean, however, that your fate will have been pre-determined based on what you did with Jesus. The Scripture says, "as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God. So each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:11-12). For many on that day, however, it will be too late, for their fate will have been pre-determined.

Finally, notice the truth that this separation is permanent. In that day the opportunity for repentance will be over. The day of salvation will be past. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). There is a great gulf fixed between those who are separated. Friends, it is a permanent separation.

How often have you heard somebody anticipate going to hell? "I'm gonna party with my friends," is the attitude of many. Maybe, you have never heard people speak that way. Unfortunately, I have. Friends, it is NO party. The trauma of this separation is more than you can imagine. Please, please, please, I plead with you - make sure you are prepared for that day!

The church father, Chrysostom, spoke of the parable of the dragnet as "a terrible parable." Gregory the Great said it is "rather to be trembled at than expounded." If only this terrible prospect were as vivid to us as it was to our Lord! Perhaps then, we would have a more urgent desire to warn others to flee from the wrath to come! I honestly wish I could say the reality was different. Probably like many of you, I know people whose eternal destination will be hell. I do not want that for my worst enemy! I can not tell you hell is not true because Jesus does not say it is not true. He says it real, so we must say the same. The devil will tell you it is not real. But do not listen to his lies, friend. He cares nothing for you. He knows his eternal destiny and his sole delight is to take others with him.

Instead, listen to the Lord Jesus who speaks truth in this parable. He speaks it so you might know judgment is real. So you might know separation is coming. So you would know that the time for repentance is now. If you will but hear Him, believe Him, and turn to Him, throwing yourself upon Him and His work upon the cross, He will save you from such an awful fate!