

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

Matthew 13:47-50

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Do you as a Christian sometimes wonder if God is really on the throne and ruling over this world? When you see sin, graft, corruption, immorality, perversion, injustice, prejudice, hatred, war and a multitude of other inequities, do you sometimes question whether God has everything under control. These kinds of thoughts in a Christian come from his frail humanity and most certainly show a lack of faith in God's Word. God tells us that He is sovereignly ruling over all things and His plans and purposes are coming to pass. God's plan for this world as we know it will be consummated at the end of this present age at the second advent of Christ (Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 46:9, 10; Proverbs 21:1). NOTE: It is normal to question whether God is providentially reigning over all but this is really a lapse in faith. God assures us that He is ruling and reigning and that there is a future judgment coming for all men without exception.

Daniel 4:35: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What does thou?

Isaiah 46:9, 10: Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

Proverbs 21:1: The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

B. You remember how these parables in Matthew 13 speak of the development of the kingdom program when Christ and His kingdom are absent from the earth. These parables tell us what God is doing behind the scenes of history and in the age in which we live. This age began at the first advent of Christ and will close at the second advent. The parables of Matthew 13 give us the mystery of history and we can see this present age as God sees it. God has seen fit, through parables, to allow us to understand something about His plans and purposes. NOTE: The Parable of the Dragnet tells us that God is ruling over evil in this present age and that He will judge all evil at the second advent.

C. This particular parable was spoken onto to Christ's disciples and not to the unsaved multitudes. We conclude, therefore, that this parable was directed to men of faith, and faith we must have if we are going to get a divine viewpoint of life. NOTE: Every Christian has said to himself, "How long, Lord, must injustice reign, sin corrupt, your holy name be blasphemed and your Son, Jesus Christ, be spurned and mocked among men?" The Parable of the Dragnet is designed to tell Christians to relax. God has it all under control and will judge all sin and sinful men at God's appointed hour.

II. THE PARABLE 13:47, 48

A. The Lord uses an illustration that would be very familiar to His disciples, most of whom were fishermen. He speaks of a mammoth net or seine that was cast into the sea and the net is no respecter of fish. Every conceivable kind of fish could get caught in this

kind of a dragnet. When the net was full, and only when it was full, it was dragged to shore where the good fish and the bad fish were separated. The good fish were put into a special vessel and the bad fish were thrown away.

B. The symbols in this parable are fairly easy to understand because our Lord chose to give us a divine interpretation. (1) The “dragnet” is the proclamation of the gospel as it is watered by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:8). When the gospel is declared, the Holy Spirit begins to bring conviction to the human heart. (2) The “sea” is symbolic of the mass of humanity (Rev. 13:1), for the sea is used symbolically of the nations or the human race. The net of the gospel somehow affects the whole of humanity in this present age. (3) The “fish” which are not specifically mentioned refers to all types and kinds of people in the world who are confronted with the gospel and convicted by the Holy Spirit. (4) The “good fish” represent those who respond to Jesus Christ by faith, receiving Christ’s righteousness so as to be declared righteous or just before God who is holy and righteous (Romans 3:24). Men are declared righteous only because of their relationship to Jesus Christ. No man has any natural righteousness that is acceptable to God (Isaiah 64:6). Righteousness is found only in Christ (Romans 1:16, 17). (5) The “bad fish” represent those who do not have Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. They have rejected Christ and therefore have no righteousness that makes them acceptable to God. NOTE: People are not born good but all men are born bad because the whole human race is a fallen race. We are all born into lost humanity. We all have evil at work within us and that evil will create in our character a resistance to truth. All of humanity is in a hopeless and helpless condition spiritually unless God intervenes to change a person’s position and character before God.

John 16:8: And when he (H.S.) Is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness and judgment.

Romans 3:24: Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah 64:6: But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags . . .

Romans 1:16, 17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

C. The difference between bad and good people in this parable is that one group see their need of salvation and respond to Christ by faith. The other group see no need to be saved and spurn the person of Jesus Christ. NOTE: The gospel of Christ makes men face up to reality. The gospel is the final truth, the ultimate reality and the fundamental secret to life. The “good” are those who deal honestly with Christ, who when they learn what is real and genuine about Him, they respond by faith to Him. The “bad” are those who run from the reality of Christ, who have no real desire to put themselves under the Lordship of Christ. They wilfully choose the world of unbelief, to the world of faith, thy physical realm rather than the spiritual, self rather than Christ, and unreality rather than reality. NOTE: When a person is confronted with the gospel of Christ, it reveals what kind of person he is. It tells whether a person will deal honestly with the truth or whether he will reject it and turn from it. The gospel isolates a man and causes him to make a decision about Christ. His final decision makes a separation, for he either follows Christ or turns from Him. NOTE: The gospel of Christ drives men one way or the other. If a person

believes and acts upon the truth, he will never be the same again. It will change everything about his life, not all at once and never completely in a lifetime, but gradually, little by little every area of one's life becomes affected by the truth of Jesus Christ. But the same is true if a person rejects the gospel of Christ. If he spurns the truth, then he will never be the same again. He will become more and more hardened to spiritual truth.

NOTE: The gospel hardens or softens, depending upon one's response to it (II Cor. 2:14-16). The gospel is like a net which captures people and eventually exposes what they are and lays bare the true motives of the heart.

II Cor. 2:14-16 (NAS): But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life . . .

III. THE INTERPRETATION 13:49, 50

A. Our Lord tells us that this separating of the good from the bad will occur "at the end of the world." Literally this means "at the end of the age" which will close with the second advent of Jesus Christ when He will come as a judge. The dragnet of the gospel has been exposing men to the truth of Christ and separating them into believers and unbelievers throughout this present age, but at the end of this age there will be a massive, public demonstration before every one of this division among men. NOTE: As we move on down toward the end of the age, this division among believers and unbelievers is going to become more acute and obvious. It is going to become increasingly more difficult to be a neutral towards the true gospel of Christ. True believers will be forced to take their stands for Christ. Unbelief will be rampant towards the end of the age and it will become more and more difficult to play the hypocrite. It is going to be harder to pretend to be a Christian. Persecution and the darkness of unbelief will cause the genuine believers to stick out like a beautiful diamond in a sea of darkness. NOTE: We believe that right at the end of the age there will be a period of tribulation which will occur seven years before the second advent (Matthew 24:21, 22). True believers will be severely persecuted but God will stop this Great Tribulation to preserve His living elect.

Matthew 24:21, 22: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

B. Our Lord says that the angels will do the dividing between the good (just) and the bad (wicked) in this present age. Angels will be Christ's servants to separate believers from unbelievers; that is, those who truly follow Christ and those who do not.

C. These angels with God's full authority will cast the unbelievers into the fiery furnace of hell where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Weeping" speaks of great remorse and sorrow. "Gnashing of teeth" speaks of frustration and hateful anger. What is meant by the "burning fire" I am not sure. Hell may be real fire or it may not. Whatever it is not we do know what it is; hell is a place of eternal punishment and total separation from God. NOTE: It is never easy for anyone to preach on judgment and hell, but a faithful minister must do this, for eternal judgment is a reality and an intricate part of the gospel. It is interesting to note that Jesus Christ had more to say about hell than any other person in the Bible. The loving, compassionate Christ who offers salvation to all men is the same Christ who said that unbelievers would be cast into hell at the end of

this age. NOTE: You may say, “Why do we need a hell?” The answer is that hell is the just dessert for a man or woman who is a sinner and a rejecter of Jesus Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: Andrews Jackson. ILLUSTRATION: Ironside.

ILLUSTRATION: President Andrew Jackson, who was a Christian, made a famous reply to a young man who objected to the doctrine of future punishments. “I thank God,” said the youth, “I have too much good sense to believe there is a place as hell.” “Well, sir,” said President Jackson, “I thank God there is such a place.” “Why, Mr President,” asked the young man, “What do you want with such a place of torment as hell?” To which President Jackson replied as quick as lightning, “To put such rascals as you in, that oppose and vilify the Christian religion.” The young man said no more, and soon after found it convenient to leave.

ILLUSTRATION: Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell people a story about hell as it related to his own life. He said, “I remember how, when I was a little boy, my mother would draw me to her knee and speak to me so solemnly of the importance of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. And I would say to her, ‘Mama, I would like to do it, but all the boys would laugh at me.’ ‘Harry,’ my mother would say, ‘they may laugh you into hell, but they can never laugh you out of it.’”

D. While the intent in this parable is to tell men about the terrible consequences of rejecting Christ, the King, we must never forget what the marvelous benefits are for those who receive Him as the King, Lord and Savior. Those who receive Christ become heirs with Christ and they are guaranteed a place in Christ’s kingdom in time and eternity (Romans 8:17). True believers shall be in Christ’s kingdom! As they hymn writer so well stated, “To be with Christ will crown it all!” True believers are placed in a special vessel.

Romans 8:17: And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.

E. We began this sermon by asking, “Is God ruling? Will God bring sin and sinners into judgment? Will God triumph over evil?” The answer is “yes.” God sovereignly reigns over all and His plans and purposes are certain. Fear not, Christian, your God will vindicate Himself at the second advent of Jesus Christ. At that time, Christ will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). God will have the last word. It may appear at times that God is losing the war against sin, but be assured that, while it may appear that some battles are lost to sin and the forces of evil, that God will win the war. One day God will make a public demonstration against all sin and sinners at the second advent of Christ.

Acts 17:31: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Are you a good person or a bad person? Are you a just man or a wicked man? Are you a believer or unbeliever? In God’s eyes you are either one or the other. You are either a believer, good and just or you are an unbeliever, bad and wicked. If you are a believer, rejoice, for yours is the kingdom of Christ. But if you are an unbeliever, you should be shaken to the roots and in a cold sweat, for you will have no part in Christ’s kingdom and will be eternally separated from God.

B. Have you obeyed the gospel and believed in Christ? The scriptures give a warning to all who do not obey the gospel (I Peter 4:17, 18; I Thess. 1:7-9).

I Peter 4:17, 18: For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

I Thess. 1:7-9: And you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.