

Parable of the Dragnet

Matthew 13:47-52 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, (48) which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. (49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, (50) and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (51) Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” (52) Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

Questions On The Text

What is this parable about?

Verse 47: This is another parable about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. Again, it is important to remember that a kingdom is where someone rules, so the Kingdom of God is the place where God rules and is not to be limited to a physical location, but should also include the hearts of human beings.

What is the kingdom of heaven likened to?

Verse 47: The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet. The dragnet was a net set up between two boats, or between just one boat and the shore. Weighted down and dragged along, it formed a cone so that when they dragged it through the water, the fish got trapped in it and were brought to land.

Other Scriptures interpret the significance of the sea. Isaiah 57:20: But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

Revelation 17:15: Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”

These Scriptures show us that the sea represents people which fits in with when Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 4:19 that He would make them fishers of men.

Therefore, the sea represents the whole of humanity, whereas the fish represent the individual souls of men.

What did they do with the fish?

Verse 48: The net dragged in two kinds of fish, good and bad. The good fish were placed into vessels. Such vessels were filled with water to keep the fish alive and fresh to be taken to market. On the other hand, the bad fish in this parable were just thrown away since they were of no use.

This refers back to Deuteronomy 14:9-10 where the Law laid down the difference between clean and unclean creatures that live in the water. Similarly, there are good and there are bad people.

What do the angels do at the end of the age?

Verses 49-50: The angels separate the wicked from the just; the wicked are then cast into the furnace of fire. this ties in with Rev 20:14-15: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (15) And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Jesus describes the experience of being cast into the furnace of fire as being a time of “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” He uses this phrase (or similar) six times in Matthew’s gospel. Interestingly, Jesus does not say in

this parable what happens to the good fish as the focus here is what happens to the wicked, not the good. This may be one of the reasons some have said that Jesus spoke more about hell than about heaven.

Did the disciples understand the parable?

Verse 51: Jesus obviously wanted to know that His disciples had a clear understanding of the meaning of the parable, but not only this one since it comes at the end of a passage including a number of parables. Since these parables explain important truths about God's kingdom, it is vitally important that those who follow Christ and are therefore part of His kingdom understand their meaning.

How did Jesus refer to His disciples?

Verse 52: Since Jesus began His sentence with the word "therefore," it is obvious that this statement is linked to the disciples' understanding of the parables. And since they understood the meaning of the parables, Jesus referred to His disciples as scribes. A scribe was a teacher of the Law. In other words, a teacher of the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

The word translated "instructed" literally means disciplined and this sentence could also be translated as "disciplined into the kingdom of heaven." The disciples were being disciplined into God's kingdom.

What did Jesus liken His disciples to?

Verse 52: The disciples were likened to householders. The householder was the master of the house.

What did the householder bring out of his treasure?

Verse 52: The householder brought out new things and old things from his treasure. In Matthew 12:35, Jesus says, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things."

So the treasure that the householder draws from is the treasure of his own heart. Notice that the new comes first; the new takes precedence over the old. Even though the early disciples only had the Old Testament Scriptures, they were to live under the New Covenant. The New Covenant now took precedence over the Old Covenant. This is why the Old Testament Scriptures must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament Scriptures and not *vice versa*.

Further Questions For Discussion:

What is the meaning of the phrase "kingdom of heaven?"

How do you reconcile the reality of God's judgment and the existence of hell with the fact that God is love?

What happens to those who follow Christ at the end of the age?

In what way are you being disciplined into the Kingdom of God?

When did Jesus interpret the Old Testament in the light of New Covenant truths? (See Matthew 5 for examples.)

Can you think of instances when failing to interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament will cause problems?