

LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 9
Sunday, September 26th, 2021, 6:30 p.m. - Teaching # 2130
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WHEN GOD'S KINGDOM CLOSES IN ON YOUR LIFE

Matthew 13:47-50 - "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. [48] When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. [49] So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This simple parable is one of my favorites. It contains one point of application that is unique. This parable of the ***dragnet*** marks the conclusion of a series of seven parables in Matthew 13 dealing with the entrance and operation of the Kingdom of God in our lives in this fallen world. None of these parables gives ***exhaustive*** teaching on the kingdom. Rather, each one picks and highlights one aspect - one main feature - of what we need to know about the saving reign and rule of Jesus Christ in our lives.

The ***parable of the seed and the soils (13:1-9)*** focuses on the necessity of ***hearing the Word with a ready and willing heart***. How we hear determines the fruitfulness of the Word in our lives. Most, three out of four, don't hear deeply and sincerely enough.

The ***parable of the wheat and the tares (13:24-30)*** highlights the need for patience and endurance while the enemy opposes the Kingdom of God in this world. It also underscores the church's mandate to keep spreading the gospel rather than deceive herself that it is her responsibility to pull up and root out the forces of wickedness in this present world. Jesus says we mustn't do that. He will do that when He comes again.

There are also two little parables about the ***power of the mustard seed and the expanding life of yeast in bread (13:31-35)***. While we didn't study these yet in this series, the idea is that God's kingdom, while coming in small beginnings, is absolutely unstoppable. This is designed to give hope and courage against the previous parable about the tares growing among the wheat. True, Jesus will not root out opposition to His Kingdom until He comes again. But we are to rest assured that His kingdom will grow and increase and eventually dominate and fill the whole earth.

Then we studied the parables of ***the treasure buried in a field and the pearl of great price (13:44-46)***. The central idea in these two parables is clear. The kingdom is easy to ***find***. But it is costly to ***possess***. If one is to discover the thrill of the treasure of Christ in his life, he must, first of all, recognize that Christ can't be ***one of many*** or ***one of several*** treasures in the heart. Both the farmer and the pearl merchant were forced to ***part with all other possessions*** before they could find their heart's desire. The decision to salvation must be a ***huge, radical decision*** or it really hasn't been made at all. Kingdom talk and kingdom ideas won't purchase the kingdom.

So now we come to the parable of the ***dragnet***. We aren't very familiar with the central picture of this fishing concept. Yet it is central to understanding the main idea in the story. The dragnet was typically operated by at least two men. The net was a long rectangle, weighted on the bottom, with floats attached to the top. One man would stand with the net firmly in hand on the shore. The other would slowly let his end of the net down into the water from a boat farther out in the water. From that position the boat would move in a semi circle, letting the net down and sweeping around to the shore father down the beach. Finally, both men would be on the beach, putting the net, irreversibly toward the shore.

This is key to understanding the point of the parable. The fish have only one direction in which to move. They can freely and easily swim away from the net, but only by moving closer to the beach.

The people of Jesus' day would have seen this operation acted out, over and over again, as they walked along the sea shore. They saw the fishermen, sifting through the shining, flopping fish on the shore, keeping the worth while, throwing the useless catch away. What are the lessons Jesus is driving home in this parable?

1) **THIS PARABLE IS DESIGNED TO TIE UP THE LOOSE ENDS OF THE PREVIOUS PARABLE OF THE BURIED TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE**

Those parables both teach the ***preciousness*** of the saving kingdom of Jesus Christ. Jesus really is like the greatest treasure you can ever find. He really is like a rare gem - a pearl of unbelievable beauty and value.

Those parables also teach the ***cost*** of the kingdom. In Jesus' story, both the farmer and the merchant were willing to part with everything else to obtain the joy of knowing Christ.

But if you only had those two parables, you would almost think the decision to make Christ the central passion of life was **optional**. Some people would sell all to buy the treasure and some, perhaps, would not. Those who chose not to would certainly miss out on life's greatest joy and blessing.

But is that all there is to it? What about those who choose **not** to sacrifice all for the possession of Christ? What about those who are unwilling to pay such a high price? ***What is their future?***

This final parable of Jesus in this chapter underscores the **urgency** of not missing out spiritually. People can choose to sacrifice all for Christ or choose not to do so. ***But the fruit of either decision won't be properly evaluated right here in this earthly life.***

We need to be very careful in our witnessing that we don't **change the content of the message**. We must never present a message that is merely **earthly** in its emphasis. We must never offer a redemption that is framed in only **present, earthly terms**, giving only peace, joy, fulfillment, purpose or blessing. The message of Jesus always emphasizes **eternity**.

Those who choose **not** to possess Christ - those who **lighten and lessen the call - the demands of the kingdom - ultimately pay an eternal price for their refusal**. What seems **convenient** now will seem **disastrous** later. What seems to help **get ahead** right now will be **wiped out** later. Here's why:

2) **THERE IS COMING AN INEVITABLE DAY OF SEPARATION AND JUDGEMENT**

Matthew 13:49-50 - "So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous [50] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Once in a while I get the feeling most Christians wouldn't like listening to Jesus preach in their church. Most people wouldn't like the way He ended His teaching sessions. He was **relentlessly persistent** on some subjects. **Two thirds** of His parables close with outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth. **He was constantly calling people to think about this time of judgement and punishment**. Nothing else would be done properly in life if it wasn't done with this **eternal accounting** in mind.

This is quite a different concept for much of the church. We aim everything we do at **personal fulfillment**. Jesus aimed everything at **eternal glory**. And there is all the difference in the world in those two goals. There are many things in life that, at least on the surface, seem **personally fulfilling** that, in fact, will turn out to be **eternally damning**.

Conversely, there are many things in this world that seem to be **personally confining and difficult and costly** that, in fact, turn out to be **glorifying to God and eternally rewarding**. This is what Jesus meant when He said that all true disciples must **lose** their lives to find them in His Kingdom. Which, in modern slang means, run through life clamoring for self fulfillment and you'll screw things up eternally.

Then how can I keep my life properly aimed and focused? **Jesus taught we needed to think about judgment day**. Paul constantly used the mental picture of a **race**. This may be the most fitting picture of the Christian life. That person perched on the starting line is already bracing and pruning his mind for only one thing - **the finish line!** Remember the end of the race. That will help in the daily process of laying aside everything that will hinder and slow you down.

Remembering the goal of judgement day will streamline the rest of life. At least it should. Here's how the saints fixed their attention of this theme in the Scriptures:

1 John 3:2-3 - “Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

1 Peter 1:13-16 - “Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 - “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

These are such important texts. Because we live most of our days in a world where we don't outwardly see **anyone** experiencing the direct judgement of God, we are all prone to adopt worldly lifestyles so those around us don't get the upper hand. **They're** not being judged for their sins, so why should **we**?

Jesus says this is thinking that is seriously defective and blind. If someone could take us - transport us - right from where we are now, up to judgement day and just give us a glimpse of what will happen then, and then bring us back to live the rest of our lives, ***we would probably do very few things exactly the way we did before.***

No wonder Jesus closes this judgement parable with the words, ***“Have you understood all these things?” (13:51).*** If this isn't understood, nothing else will be right in the life. We will be ***earthbound, short-sighted, and blind to our own dangerous condition.***

Find me that person who cheated on his wife one afternoon in some hotel. Find me those supposed Christians who just went away for a pleasure trip and parted with more than just their money. Find me anyone who professed Christ at one time, but has now gone farther down the road of rebellion and self-deception than he ever would have dreamed. ***I'll tell you what all those people share in common. They all got up one morning, on a day that was going to shape their destiny more than they realized, and they didn't think about judgement day. They forgot about where they were heading. They forgot that actions matter far beyond the scope of this present age.*** Never forget about judgement day.

3) **THE CONSUMMATION OF GOD'S KINGDOM CLOSES IN ON EVERY LIFE IN A WAY THAT IS USUALLY UNPERCEIVED**

These words from Jesus give such a wise and fitting picture of this point. The kingdom comes and confronts our lives. It comes like seed, like a message that speaks to our hearts. But many don't receive it. That's the message of the ***parable of the four soils***. Not everyone rebels outwardly. Some simply refuse to budge. Other lives are like gardens that pretend to embrace the seed, but receive it with so little interest that the thorns and weeds choke out any hope for spiritual fruit.

Then comes the ***parable of the dragnet***. You don't ***have*** to make a wise, positive response to God in this world if you don't want to. Like these fish, who first feel the brush of the net, people can just swim away. ***But only in one direction***. You never get ***around*** the voice of God. You never ***escape***. You only ***delay***. Everything is moving irrevocably toward the beach. That's the only place these fish are heading for eventually - even if they don't think about it.

There is an ***unescapable part*** of God's Kingdom. You have to face Him one day. The apparent freedom to ignore God is only ***apparent*** freedom. It isn't ***real***. Those fish swim away from the dragnet ***thinking*** they have avoided it. But they're only fish and they're only deceived. They're all heading for the same beach.

So the Lord, by His Word, talks to you today about some point of ***stubborn rebellion***, some area where you are ***avoiding dealing with Him***. And then the service ends. You go out with your friends. You soon forget that your conscience has been violated once more.

Or, the Lord shows you the idols on the inside of your heart. He shows you where you're living for the wrong ends and trying to please the wrong crowd. But you choose not to yield and tomorrow things are back to normal.

Or, there's some part of your life that is a lie. You're two-faced. You're one thing with certain people and something else with others. There seems to be such freedom to continue on like that for as long as you can pull off the con. But that freedom isn't real.

Look at **verse 47** - "**The kingdom of heaven is *like this...***" Like the opening words to all the parables in this chapter, it ***guarantees*** - it ***promises*** - how the kingdom of God works in this world. And in this present parable, the key to remember is this: the kingdom encloses people ***invisibly*** in this world. We will all soon be caught up in God's sovereign plan. God will not be mocked or ignored or avoided. He is too great and His rule is too unstoppable.

We are so programmed by the course of this age to work only with **visible** deadlines. If it's not on my calendar I don't worry about it. We plan our lives around **known** appointments. We work around **paydays**. We schedule **appointments**. We work toward a certain **bottom line**. We know when the **exams** are coming. We know what grade is needed to pass.

But the kingdom of God doesn't hit us over the head with its presence. It comes into this world like a mustard seed. It grows and unfolds on God's schedule, not ours. There is such apparent freedom to postpone and put off and ignore its demands. If you don't want to acknowledge Jesus' Lordship in some costly area, you don't have to. If you never want to study your Bible, you don't have to. If you are too busy to go to church, you don't have to go.

But none of those responses will change what Jesus said about the dragnet. It will never be turned back or lifted. That's the unstoppable truth Jesus is pressing into our hearts in this parable.

Verse 51 - "**Have you *understood* all these things?**" That's the important question indeed.