

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part seventeen**

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**THE FINAL DAY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT AND THE MEANING OF THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES**

**Matthew 13:47-50** - "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net [literally, a *drag 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."

**Matthew 13** is a marvelous chapter to walk through. It gives one of the clearest overviews, from Jesus Himself, as to *how the kingdom of God works and how it is possessed*. This chapter is not just a *random* collection of parables. These parables are grouped together because they *thread key truths together* in a pattern and sequence that we need to remember and proclaim.

These parables answer the *questions* we have about the Kingdom of God. Why does God often look so silent and absent in the face of sin and rebellion? Is it easy, or is it hard to follow Jesus in this world? Why do so many people *ignore* the truths we hold dear and precious? And finally, when all human opinion is stripped aside, what really happens when God brings judgment at the end of this age?

I want to do a quick fly over the parables of thirteenth chapter of Matthew just to prepare our minds for the unique point of our opening text. These parables, taken together, give the most complete statement of the Kingdom of God in the mind and teaching of Jesus Christ, God the Son.

First, there is a cluster of three parables making basically the same point:

- a) **Matthew 13:24-33** - "He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, [25] but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. [26] So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. [27] And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' [28] He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' [29] But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. [30] *Let both grow together* until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, *Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.*' [31] He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. [32] *It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown* it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. [33] He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

In a nutshell, all three of these parables teach that the Kingdom of God doesn't *burst on the scene full blown*. It has very small, silent, humble beginnings. It works its way through history *gradually, mixed with people and seasons of wickedness and rebellion*. It doesn't come on the scene bulldozing all its enemies out of the way. *For now, it can, and will be, resisted and rejected*.

The fact is, the Kingdom requires great faith on the part of its members - faith that this little grain of mustard seed will ever conquer the world. It requires faith because, in this world, the Kingdom doesn't always seem to win. If the Kingdom *did* always win, and win *immediately* in this present age, it would require no faith on the part of its members. And God delights in faith. He loves to be trusted.

- b) **Matthew 13:44-46** - "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. [45] Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, [46] who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Just because the Kingdom isn't yet manifested in its fully consummated phase, it is still something of *immeasurable value*.

These two parables teach the most needed message of the day. Not everyone *appreciates* the immense value of the Kingdom of God. Not everyone *pursues* the Kingdom first, above all else in life. That's where these two little parables carry a big message. *The Kingdom of God will not be entered by those who exert only nominal effort*. Like the pearl and the treasure, the Kingdom won't be possessed by the common interest of the crowd. It must be the object of *exceptional desire*. You won't get in by living and thinking and planning like everybody else. You can't drift in because of family, friends, church, or creed.

Please understand - these two parables do not just teach that the *Kingdom of God is worth every sacrifice*. They teach that, true enough. But they also teach that the Kingdom of God *requires every sacrifice!*

Notice, upon discovering that pearl of great price, *a decision has to be made before it can be purchased*. It can't be purchased *until* the huge cost is paid. Of course, it is worth far more than anything given up. There is no joy like the joy of possessing the

pearl of great price. But if the joy is *rich* it is also very *costly*. You must - I must - we *all* must leave everything to possess the Kingdom. It will never be had by the faint hearted or the lazy.

In fact, on another occasion, in one of His many statements that never gets put on Christian bookstore plaques, Jesus said these words - **Luke 16:16** - "**The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.**"

Isn't that interesting? "**Forcing his way into it**" But the force isn't because there's something wrong. It's the only logical response from anyone who sees just how *good* the kingdom is. It's like the way people push to the front of the ticket line at a really great performance. People aren't hesitant when they're pursuing something they know is absolutely better than anything else available - "**...since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone forces his way into it!**"

Apathetic people obviously don't *get* the kingdom of God. *Jesus calls us to press into the Kingdom*. Timidity won't do. The half-hearted and hesitant will have a hard time. The *double-minded* and the *procrastinator* will never make it.

That's the message being imported by these parables of the pearl and the buried treasure. The kingdom *is* all about *joy*. But it is *never* about *convenience*. The deepest joy of the kingdom will always be hard won. It comes at a price. Everything else must be sold to purchase it, and not everyone wants to pay that high a price. But the Kingdom never goes on sale.

All of this should raise a question in our minds. How can a Kingdom of *grace* be so *costly*? How can something so repeatedly described as a *gift* require so much *sacrifice*? But these parables *aren't* about *earning* salvation. Salvation is free and cannot be bought at any price.

But free grace is always Christ exalting and self effacing. Grace is always about establishing Christ as Lord. And the price of Christ's Lordship is always the end of self-rule and self-fulfillment, and the world's acceptance. True grace, when received and treasured, always *empties the bank of self*.

Some people *refuse to prioritize their lives around entering the Kingdom*. That's what these parables about the pearl and the treasure are all about. Some people *procrastinate, thinking that they'll respond to God at a later date*. Some people *think they are in the Kingdom but are still trying to serve two masters*. They will never make it.

What happens to people like that? That's where the *next* parable comes in - the parable of our opening text. The other parables set the stage for this parable's unique emphasis.

- c) **Matthew 13:47-50** - In many Bibles there is actually a little heading calling this the *parable of the dragnet*. It is the text I read at the beginning of the message because it's our primary focus of attention as we wrap up this series on the doctrine of divine judgment.

**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.**"

Of course, people are free to choose how they will order their lives in this present age. They can do what they want with the pearl of great price. I link this parable with the previous one about the pearl because I think we are *meant* to link them together. That's why this parable of the dragnet doesn't just begin ice cold, like a brand new entity, but with that little word, "*again*" - "**Again, the kingdom of heaven is like....**"

Those parables about the buried treasure and the pearl of great price highlight the *value* of the Kingdom and the *cost* of possessing it. But not *everyone* is that discerning and willing and adventurous. What about them? What about lazy people? What about the people who waste their time, who ignore the kingdom of God, who are disengaged from paying close attention to the will and rule of Jesus? That's where this *parable of the dragnet* comes in.

Remember, this parable is different from all the others. This parable is about the people who choose *not* to cherish kingdom rule, who don't sell all they have for the treasure in the field, who don't "*force their way*" against the crowd into Christ's Lordship.

This little parable teaches that *something is unalterably happening as God's day of grace draws to a close*. Dragnet fishing is a form of fishing that most of us would know nothing about. But the people who had lived around the Sea of Galilee would have often seen the dragnet in action. They knew what Jesus was getting at.

Every day they would see the long narrow net, weighted at the bottom, with floats on the top edge. Usually two men would be fishing. One at each end, or one man on the shore and the other in a small boat *drawing the other end of the net into shore*.

And here's the most important interpretive element in Jesus' parable; ***the fish are constantly being moved in only one direction - towards the shore.*** The ends of the net are slowly being drawn together, on the shore. The fish are pulled in and separated.

Please notice - the net seems to present ***no immediate threat.*** As it presses and bumps the fish they can simply swim away - ***but only in one direction.*** Only at the very end of the gradual process do the fish feel the confining pressure of the net - the crowding of space - the vain scramble for freedom - ***the flopping up on the beach.***

This parable has some very important lessons:

i) ***We're not to be deceived by the apparent freedom we have to reject God in this life.***

I say "***we***" are not to be deceived because I am convinced that this parable carries its message right into the walls of our church sanctuary. And I believe that conclusion is rooted, not just in some preacher's desire to apply a text to a congregation, but right from the words of the text itself. Look very carefully at **verse 49** - "***So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous.***"

The wicked will be taken "***from the righteous.***" If this judgment were made among the wicked of the world, then the ***righteous*** would be taken from among the ***wicked.*** But such is not the case in this clear statement from Jesus. The ***wicked*** are taken from among the ***righteous.***

In other words, the ***venue*** for this time of judgment is the arena of the righteous. This is ***where*** the judgment takes place. And the wicked are ***removed*** from ***among*** the righteous. They were ***among*** the righteous, but not ***of*** the righteous.

All sorts of people flock together in churches all over this land. As far as the authority of God over your life and your eternal destiny, there don't appear to be any outward deadlines or bylaws. You can do whatever you want. There are no obvious penalties for choosing your way instead of God's. In fact, sometimes, in this present age, it is far more ***convenient*** to ignore God than to listen to Him.

This freedom is deceiving for many people. If you don't go to work, you won't get paid. If you don't get such and such a grade, you won't pass the class. If you don't obey the traffic laws, sooner or later you will have to pay a fine. But if, at some particular point - some very ***personal*** and ***private*** point in your heart - you don't want to make Jesus Lord, who cares? You don't have to.

If you don't want to go to church, you can just stay home. If you're looking for excitement and don't want to stay disciplined and pure, then go ahead and establish your own morals and your own terms for relationships. Just don't get aids and you can have "safe sex".

And if you ***do*** hear Him dealing with your heart, maybe in a service like this, you can easily tune Him out. Go home for lunch, or go to Burger King, turn on the hockey game and forget all about it.

***And you can do just that. Just block it all out again and again and walk away from God.*** No one else will ever be the wiser. But never forget this sharp-edged parable from Jesus. Never forget about the dragnet of God's final judgment. Never forget that, whenever you freely swim away from the pressure of the net, you can only move toward the beach. ***You and I only have freedom in one direction.***

ii) ***There comes a time of final reckoning and eternal separation*** - That's what verses **49 and 50** are all about: "***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.***"

Now, in those words, Jesus ***isn't*** speaking in parables. The parable is finished and He's ***explaining the literal meaning of the parable: "This is how it will be at the end of the age...."***

Think about that. "***This is how it will be.***" Listen, Jesus is an expert on this subject. The Bible says ***Jesus Himself*** will be the One pronouncing judgment:

**Acts 17:31** - "***....because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.***"

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that, one by one, we're all heading for eternity. We are all heading toward the beach. We are all heading toward a critical moment of devastating and eternal separation.

Remember, there is coming a trip to the beach that you won't miss. No one else will have one word to say in your defense. God, in His mercy, has **announced** this coming day. There is simply no excuse to miss its approach.

True enough, you and I can't save the whole world. But we close this series on judgment looking at ourselves. Remember the precious parable of the dragnet. Judgment comes as the result of **avoiding** the present pull of God on your heart. The only life you can be sure to change is your own.