

The Parable of the Dragnet

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Jesus spoke the Parable of the Dragnet immediately after the parables of the Hidden Treasure (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par6treasure.htm>) and the Pearl of Great Price (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par7pearl.htm>) for a reason. These three parables are a triplet. One follows naturally upon the other. The Parable of the Treasure shows us Christ's love for us in His buying the world in order to get us so that we could be called out of the world. The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price shows us Christ's love toward us in redeeming us from our sins. The Parable of the Dragnet shows the separation between those who are redeemed and those who are not. It is a pretty straightforward parable, and, yet, perhaps not quite so simple as some think.

The Parable of the Dragnet

Jesus states the Parable of the Dragnet as follows:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:47-50

Symbols and Explanation

Jesus immediately follows this parable, given in verses 47-48, with the partial explanation we read in verses 49-50. But the explanation applies only to the last part of the parable. Let's take a look at the symbols.

I. The Net: The Greek word for net in this parable is found nowhere else in the Bible. It is *sagēnē*. Our English word seine, referring to a seine net, comes, indirectly through Latin, from *sagēnē*. It refers to a

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net that is dragged over the bottom with the ends then drawn together trapping the fish. At least four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen who fished using nets. In Matthew 4:18-20, we read, "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." The way in which they "fished" for men was using the Gospel. The Gospel is the net: "And he [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). In this passage is a significant clue to the meaning of the parable, one that most commentators miss. This parable is not merely about the separation of the good and the bad, or even the separation of true believers from false professors. It is about two groups of people who hear the Gospel: those who believe and are saved and those who do not believe and are damned. But let's continue.

Net=the Gospel

II. The Sea: Most explanations of this parable offhandedly say that the sea is the world. That is close, but not precisely right. The Bible tells us more exactly what the symbol of the sea means: "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters.... And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:1, 15). Ancient Babylon was situated on the Euphrates River, and also had a network of canals. So, in Jeremiah 51:13, it is described as dwelling upon many waters. But bodies of water are sometimes a symbol in the Bible, and Revelation 17:15 interprets that symbol as meaning "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." In other words, people of all races, nationalities, and languages. So, instead of saying that the sea in the Parable of the Dragnet is the world, it is more accurate to say that the sea is humanity. The net is cast into humanity.

Sea=humanity

III. Good and Bad Fish: It is evident from Jesus' own explanation in verses 49 and 50 that the fish (interestingly, the word "fish" is never used but only implied) are people. The good fish are "the just" (verse 49), those who have been justified by faith alone in Christ alone. The

bad fish are "the wicked" (verse 49), those who do not put their trust in Jesus Christ alone and, therefore, do not have their sins forgiven.

Good fish=justified Christians

Bad fish=wicked unbelievers

IV. Vessels: The Greek word for vessels here is simply a general term for receptacles, such as pails. As we have just seen, we know that the fish put into the vessels symbolize those people justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Now, let's combine this information with a couple of other Scriptures. In the Parable of the Tares (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par2tares.htm>), the "wheat" is gathered into the barn. In John 14:2, Jesus says, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places. But if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you!" (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*). Although it is difficult to be conclusive, I believe it is likely that the barn symbol in the Parable of the Tares symbolizes the Father's house and the vessels in the Parable of the Dragnet symbolize the dwelling places we have waiting for us in the Father's house.

Vessels=heavenly dwellings

The Interpretation of the Parable of the Dragnet

In the Parable of the Dragnet, Jesus is telling us that the Gospel is like a dragnet that captures all kinds of people. Not only does it capture people of all races and nationalities, but it also captures the good and the bad. By good, Jesus means those who believe the Gospel and have their sins forgiven and Christ's righteousness imputed to them. By bad, Jesus means those who do not believe the Gospel and are thus condemned by their sins. Many commentators make the mistake of making the Parable of the Dragnet the exact equivalent of the Parable of the Tares. But, while they are similar, they are not exact equivalents. The Parable of the Tares shows the children of the kingdom and the children of Satan living together in this world and then being separated in the end. The Parable of the Dragnet also shows a separation at the end, but this parable is specifically focused on all who hear or read the Gospel.

The Parable of the Dragnet tells us that all who hear or read the Gospel, believers and unbelievers, are caught by it. In the end, the elect are given a heavenly reward. But many other people also hear the Gospel. Some immediately reject it, and others may for a time seem to be believers but they are not. In other words, these

are all of the people in the Parable of the Sower (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par1sower.htm>) who are not the "good ground." These are the same people who in the Parable of the Sower have the Gospel preached to them—pictured by the seed falling on them—but do not have depth of earth and do not bring forth good fruit. They are the people of the "way side," of the "stony places," and "among the thorns." In the Parable of the Dragnet, they hear the Gospel and, by not believing, are trapped to go to their fate of condemnation.

The Lesson of the Parable of the Dragnet

The lesson is clear. The Gospel is preached to the mass of humanity indiscriminately. It is a net that is drawn tight. There is no leeway. You either truly believe or you do not. The very same message of Jesus' atonement on the Cross "is to them that perish foolishness.... But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24). "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). For anyone who does not believe, when his or her life ends, it is too late. In the end, "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The Bible in no way teaches universalism, the idea that everyone will be saved. Nor does it teach post mortem evangelism, the fanciful notion that the unbelievers in this life will have a chance to hear the Gospel and be saved after death. The Bible teaches that in the end, the unbelievers, like chaff, like tares, like trash fish, will be thrown into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Notice this also in Matthew 13:30: "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." And again in Matthew 13:41: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." The time of the end is a time of inescapable division. You are either among the "good" or among the "bad." There is no second chance.

Have ye understood all these things?

Immediately following the Parable of the Dragnet, Jesus asked His disciples, "Have ye understood all these things?" (Matthew 13:51). They answered that they did. "Then said he unto them, Therefore

every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (verse 52). What did He mean by this?

First, let's look at a more literal translation: "And he said to them, On account of this every scribe disciplined into the kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man, a master of a house, who casts out from his treasury new and old" (*Apostolic Bible Polyglot*).

The scribes were Jews who were well-versed in the Scriptures. Jesus was not, of course, speaking only of Jewish scribes who became Christians. What He meant was that those who follow His teachings—His disciples, having been taught about the kingdom of heaven, were also a kind a scribe. They, too, were to be knowledgeable, and in their instruction to others they were to be able to cast out (*ekballei*—literally, "throw out" but in this context meaning to cast into their argumentation) to their hearers support from both old and new knowledge. For example, they were to see the connection between Old Testament history, prophecies, types, and shadows and Jesus' life, teachings, and ministry. This is what Peter did beginning with his first sermon (see Acts 2:14-36). This was also a characteristic of Paul's ministry when he reasoned in the Jewish synagogues (see Acts 13:14-41).

This does not mean, as some have tried to make Matthew 13:52 say, that the Old Covenant is still binding on Christians or that the New Covenant is merely a new administration of the Old Covenant or that Old Covenant law is to be brought into the New Covenant. It doesn't say any of these things, and many other Scriptures contradict these errors. It merely means that, especially when dealing with people familiar with the Old Testament, the Old Testament can validly be used as supporting evidence of truths found in the New Testament. Jesus Christ has fulfilled and ended the Old Covenant, but this does not mean we are to throw the book away. It was still "given by inspiration of God," and, therefore, along with the New Testament, "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Why did Jesus specifically speak Matthew 13:52 to His disciples at the end of giving these parables of the kingdom? I believe it was so that they would understand that in spreading the seeds or casting the net of the Gospel, they were to adjust their message to their audience, using their knowledge of the Old Testament when appropriate.

Concluding Summary of These Parables

The parables Jesus communicated on this occasion were not the only kingdom parables Jesus gave. But I believe they can be seen as a set.

Notice that the parables of the Sower and the Tares taken together show us the world of this kingdom age as a whole. We see the children of the kingdom (those in whom the seed of the Gospel grows to fruition) and the children of Satan (those in whom the seed of the Gospel produces no fruit) living together until the end when they are separated. We next focus on the world more closely. The Parable of the Seed Growing by Itself shows us that the sowing of the Word of God alone results in the children of the kingdom springing up from the seed. The parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven picture the unnatural springing up of false Christianity due to corrupt doctrine. The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price illustrate Christ's great love in His sacrifice for His *ekklēsia*. The Parable of the Dragnet returns to showing us the big picture, teaching us of how the Gospel message nets everyone into an inescapable good or bad classification based on belief or lack of it, and how the two groups will be separated in the end to go to two distinct destinies.

Thus, we have these parables exhibiting a pattern of presenting true and false together (the Sower and the Tares), a focus on true alone (the Seed Growing by Itself), a focus on false alone (the Mustard Seed and the Leaven), a focus on true alone (the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price), and true and false together with an emphasis on the inescapability of the distinction and the separation of the two groups in the end (the Dragnet).

In these parables, Jesus has given us a sweeping look at the work of the Gospel of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ and its effect in this kingdom age in which we live.