

Matthew 13: 47-50; “The Sea, The Fish & The Gospel”, Session # 2 on the Parable of the Dagnet, Presented by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 16th, 2023, in the Adult Sunday School.

Matthew 13: 47-51 – “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.” “So it will be at the end of the age.” “The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire.” “There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” “Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” “They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.”

Today’s Lesson

1. What is the Sea?

If the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of Christ’s grace is like a dragnet, and the dragnet is the gospel and the word of God; particularly the word concerning that kingdom of Christ and how sinners are brought into it, then the sea into which the dragnet is cast must be the whole world in which sinful men live. All mankind needs Christ. As all of the word pictures presented in Christ’s parables must be understood in the context of how they are presented in the Old Testament Scriptures, it will be good to look at some verses to establish this truth.

Isaiah 57: 20 and 21 – “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.”

Now, notice that it says here that the wicked are like the troubled sea. The wicked are not the troubled sea. They are like it, in that, they are in it like fish live in water. Because of this environment which is in their souls and bodies, mankind without Christ’s grace are like the troubled sea. In their souls they are troubled by sin in their nature and sin, in their environment, the world. And they know nothing different unless they are caught in the net of the gospel. They cannot find rest for their souls because they live in this sea. The waters of the sea of sin in their hearts casts up mire and dirt of the filth and pollution of sin. The remedy for this troubling and defiled state of every person’s heart cannot be found in themselves. For there is no peace says God for the wicked. But the remedy is found in verses 18 & 19. It is finding peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 57: 18 & 19 – “I have seen his way, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.” “I create the fruit of lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near, says the Lord, and I will heal him.”

These verses are set in the context of a backsliding believer in this chapter, but they can very definitely be being spoken of concerning someone who our God would have come to saving faith in Him as well. Every sinner needs to be saved. Every sinner must be healed of their wounds of sin, and yes even their death in trespasses and sins. They must find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And the offer of the gospel is put out to all men promiscuously, so that according to God’s purpose in mercy and grace, they might be saved.

John Calvin says – “Most appropriately, therefore, has the Prophet compared them (the wicked) to a stormy and troubled sea. Whoever then wishes to avoid these alarms and this frightful agony of heart, let him not reject that peace which the Lord offers to him. There can be no middle course between them; for,

if you do not lay aside sinful desires and accept of this peace, you must unavoidably be miserably distressed and tormented.”

So, the sea of sin is the realm in which all men find themselves in by nature, and we live and move in that realm until by faith in Jesus Christ, by believing the gospel, we are brought into the Lord’s dragnet of the gospel, and “caught” by someone preaching the gospel to us and we believing it. This is brought about by our being given life, in connection with our hearing the truth of the gospel, and then we are brought into a new realm and we die to sin, and begin to live to God.

Romans 6: 1-8 – “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”

2. How Fish (or Men) are actually caught. (Or saved from their sins)

Luke 5: 1-11 – “So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets.” “Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land.” “And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.” “When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’” “But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’” “And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.” “So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.” “And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.” “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” “For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch that they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.” “And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid.’” “From now on you will catch men.”

What is so very beautiful about these verses is that they show us something very amazing about fishing for men with the gospel dragnet. It is only the Lord who can guarantee that there will be results. The apostles here had fished all night and they caught nothing. But when the Lord directed them to launch out into the deep and let down their nets for a catch, Peter questioned this statement. Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing. Nevertheless at your word I will let down the net. They caught way more than they could handle in their one boat. Their boat was sinking.

Here all ministers of the gospel and all Christians who want to see people come to know the Lord, need to think about this. We keep preaching and sharing the gospel at the Lord’s word, and as we do so, we know that we will have results for our preaching when He chooses to give them to us. And so let us not fall into unbelief, thinking that just because we have labored hard before, and caught nothing, that it necessarily means that we cannot be successful now. Let us believe in the power of Christ for the fish to be brought into our net.

C.H. Spurgeon says on verse 5 – “The lesson to you and me is this: Let us do as Peter did, and let down the net *personally*, for the apostle said, “I will let down the net.” Cannot you do something yourself—with your own heart, lips, hands?”

3. The Sea and the Waters of Life. (How God makes saints of sinners)

Ezekiel 47: 1-11 – “Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side. And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. Then he said to me: “This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea.” When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.”

A. The temple in this Old Testament Predictive Parable represents the New Testament Church. And You will notice that there was water flowing out from under the threshold of the temple, and that the waters were increasing over time, in their depth. The waters increased in depth from the man’s ankles to his knees, to his waist, and finally too deep to stand in. And so, one has to swim around in the river of living waters. All of this represents the preaching of the gospel and its progress during this Church age according to the Holy Spirit’s working and men responding to that working. It represents the progress of the truth of the gospel among the nations of the world, even as the Church goes about to fulfill the Great Commission. The greater depth of these waters comes about the Spirit’s working in conjunction with the Man who is measuring these waters. The man in this Parabolic Picture is Christ. He is the Man who is measuring the depth of these waters and directing where they would go. Eastward and Southward in the early centuries of Church History. Then North and West into Europe, and the Northern countries, in centuries after that. And eventually now, the gospel is going forth to all the ends of the earth.

B. In verse 8, the Man explains to Ezekiel about these living waters. The water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley or the desert, and enters the sea. The sea that is being spoken of here is the Dead Sea, or the sea of Sodom, where nothing is said to live. John Gill says that – “It is an emblem of dead sinners and may represent the worst of sinners, as the Sodomites were; and to such the Gospel was sent, and became effectual to salvation: or it may rather design the great ocean, and may signify the whole world, and all the nations of it, to which the Gospel, by the commission of Christ, was to be preached.” (Daniel 7: 2 and Zechariah 14: 8) He says – The sense of the whole is, that the Gospel should be first preached in Judea and Galilee; then among the Gentiles throughout the Roman empire; and in the latter day especially throughout the world, when it shall be covered with it as the waters cover the sea.”

C. When these living waters of life of the gospel reach the sea, that is the hearts of sinners whom the Lord intends to save, the waters of the sea are healed by the grace of Christ. Every living thing that moves, wherever these rivers of living water will go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish who will be caught in the Gospel Dragnet, because these waters will come to them where they are as sinners. And they will be healed. That is – They will be saved. And everyone will live wherever the river of the water of life goes and wherever grace effectually works in their heart.

D. The fishermen of verse 10 are the apostles and all gospel ministers and preachers who will be fishing for men with the gospel net, and it says that they will stand by it from Engedi to Englain; (that is both the northern and southern sides of the Dead Sea.) This is where they will spread their nets. This means that all who gospel ministers will preach to are dead in their trespasses and sins, and they by the power of the Lord's working through the living waters in relation to the efforts of those preaching, there will be a great multitude of fish, that is, people saved. There will be exceedingly many caught from all tribes, tongues, peoples and nations, as the fish of the Great Sea.

E. But the swamps and marshes will not be healed. They will be given over to salt. We should understand the swamps and marshes as those persons who have had the gospel preached to them, but they will not repent and turn away from their sins. They may profess to know Christ, but by their deeds they deny Him. And as it says in Romans 1: 18 – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...”

Being given over to salt means those people who will not receive these waters of the gospel will be given over to barrenness and uselessness.

Matthew 5: 13 – “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” “It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.”

Conclusion – Success in Fishing is due to God's working in conjunction with our labors as Christians and churches in helping cast the Net. Christ, the God-Man who has overcome and sat down at the right hand of the Father, is also the One who measures the depth of the waters of life flowing to the souls of all people, and to all nations. He knows the purposes of God perfectly because He is One with the Father in His purpose, and the Spirit in His working. Therefore, this whole section is speaking of the progress of the gospel from its inception, beginning at Jerusalem, as it was preached by the apostles. They were the fishermen at the beginning of the Church Age. And then in all successive generations of the Church Age, the responsibility for fishing has been given to pastor-teachers, and to all those who preach and share the gospel with others. Gospel fishermen are all those who speak the truth concerning Christ to everyone around them and in all places that they go. Their labors are in connection with the Gospel Dragnet.

4. A Further Word on “The Sea”. The grace of Christ which brings salvation is the water of life.

Revelation 22: 17 – “And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ “And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come.” “Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

Lastly – We should look forward to the time when there will be no more sea.

Revelation chapter 21, verse 1 – “Now I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” “Also, there was no more sea.” That is, after Christ comes back and destroys the present heavens and earth with refining fire. He will then recreate it anew, and there will be no more sea there. That is, there will be no more sin there, at any time, forever.

