

The Kingdom Parables

📖 Matthew 13:47-52

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Tonight in the Matt 13 discourse we're going to work through the last two parables; the dragnet and the householder. Then we are going to have some time for Q&A in order to review all the parables in the discourse. I have given you a handout to help with that. When we finish we will have come to the conclusion of the third major division of Matthew's Gospel.

If you take a look at 13:47 you see the parable of the dragnet. This is a kingdom parable as indicated by the expression **...the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind.** Since a parable is something well-known to life and true to life for the immediate audience then we need to know what **a dragnet** was in the eyes of 1st century Jews. The reference to **the sea** is a reference to the Sea of Galilee which is a freshwater lake. According to verse 2 earlier in the chapter Jesus had been sitting in a boat on this lake for the first four parables to the crowds but according to verse 36 He retreated into a house for the last four parables with His disciples. We may imagine that they were at Capernaum at Peter's house. This overlooks the Lake of Galilee. Three kinds of fishing nets were used on the Lake of Galilee. First, the cast net. The cast net was "a circular net about 20 feet in diameter with weights attached to the bottom edge."¹ It could be cast from the shore or from a boat. It was used near shore to capture schools of fish. A skillful fisherman could cast it so that it landed completely open and then descended to the bottom capturing the portion of the school of fish that happened to be beneath it. The fisherman would then jump into the water and swim to the bottom in order to pull the bottom of the net together before returning to the surface. It was this net that is referred to in Mark 1:16 where it says "As Jesus was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen." And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him." Because the fisherman dove into the water with this net he was usually naked so as not to get his clothes wet. That is the cast net. Second, the trammel net. This net was actually three nets in one. The outer and inner net were larger mesh with a finer mesh sandwiched in between. It was used from a boat in deeper water and let out of the back of the boat as it trolled in a circle. They often attached a collar above the surface to catch any jumping fish like *tilapia*. If the fish escaped the inner net, they would be trapped by the finer mesh net and brought into the boat. It was the trammel net

that is referred to in Luke 5:4 where Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break, so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink." Third, the dragnet. This net was the largest and heaviest of fishing nets. It was about 100 feet long and 12 feet tall with weights on the bottom to sink to the bottom. Both ends were attached to ropes. It had to be operated by two teams. One team stood on the shore with one end of the ropes while the other team set out in a boat to take the net out into the sea and back to the shore. The two teams then dragged the net to the shore capturing any fish in the area. This was the most indiscriminate way of fishing. This net caught all kinds of fish. That is why this net is used in the imagery of the parable. The net was not specific for catching schools of fish like the cast net or jumping fish like the trammel net but any kind of fish. That is why verse 47 says of this net, **gathering fish of every kind**. That is the most important point of the entire parable. Once the net was dragged up on shore the two teams of fishermen would go through the fish gathering and cleaning the good fish and throwing the bad fish away.

This is what we read in 13:48, **and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away**. This was well-known to life and true to life, especially for eleven of His disciples who were from the Galilee. Many of them were fishermen and they knew which foods were good and which were bad. How did they know which were good and which were bad? They had dietary laws under the Torah. Tilapia was a good fish, it was considered clean; catfish was a bad fish, it was considered unclean. There are catfish in the Lake of Galilee. I have seen them. I wanted to eat them. I could have had a feast! In any case, it was this net that caught all kinds of fish and necessitated the separation of the good from the bad.

In 13:49 we see the spiritual truth being cast alongside of this well-known situation. **So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. The focus of the parable is **the end of the age**. To the Jews there were two ages: the age leading up to the age of the Messiah and the age of the Messiah. It is revealed here that at the end of the age leading up to the age of the Messiah there would be a separation of the good from the bad fish. **The angels** are the agents who will make the separation. The book of Revelation refers to angels more than 80 times as the agents of Christ in cleansing the earth of wickedness at the end of the age leading up to the age of the Messiah. The text says they **will come forth**, obviously from heaven, **and take out the wicked from among the righteous**. **The righteous are the good fish**, those that are clean. The **wicked** are the **bad fish**, they are unclean. The **wicked** are then **thrown into the furnace of fire**. The expression **furnace of fire** was used earlier in verse 42 of the place where the tares are thrown and burned. It is also used in Rev 9:2 of the place from which demons come up to torment men when the fifth trumpet sounds. Here it says **in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. Repeatedly

the **furnace of fire** is referred to as a real **place**. The wicked will be thrown into a real **place**, not an idea. Apart from its literal uses for a kiln or oven it is always used of a place of punishment for unbelievers. It is never used of a place where genuine believers are cast. **in that place** Jesus says **there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**. The expression **weeping and gnashing of teeth** refers to "extreme anguish and grinding of the teeth." Most, if not all commentators agree that the expression is used here of the extreme anguish unbelievers will face.² Some commentators think that the expression is used in other contexts of Christians who do not live faithful Christian lives and consequently will suffer extreme anguish by not being allowed to attend the wedding banquet during the millennial kingdom. I disagree with this view. That sums up the parable of the dragnet.

What other parable does this sound similar too? The parable of the tares. In Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the tares in verse 38 the good seed are the sons of the kingdom and the tares are the sons of the evil one. In verse 39 the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. In verse 41 the angels will gather the sons of the evil one and in verse 42 cast them into the furnace of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In verse 43 the sons of the kingdom will be brought into the kingdom. By comparison both parables deal with the end of the age, both have only two groups, both mention angels as the reapers and both mention the wicked as enduring weeping and gnashing of teeth. Hence the two are teaching basically the same thing. Mike Stallard says, "At the least, one can say that the parable of the dragnet repeats the core message of the parable of the tares concerning a judgment to come as seen by its appeal to the "end of the age," the angels who reap, the fiery furnace, and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 49-50). The good fish and bad fish are separated in the same way that the wheat is to be separated from the tares."³

In 13:51 Jesus then asks His disciples, **Have you understood all these things?** His intent with the parables from the beginning was that they **understand**. When He asked if they understand **They said to Him, "Yes."** It is probably safe to say that their answer is a little above their pay grade. They probably did understand the parables on a basic level, and in particular that there would be a postponement of the kingdom's arrival and a judgment preceding the kingdom. But as far as the details they probably did not understand. For example, they probably did not understand that the postponement would be very long and we must grant that it is not clear from the parables how long the postponement would be. But we are certain that they never dreamed that the postponement would last two thousand years. This is evidenced by the fact that in Acts 1 they are asking right after the resurrection whether it was at this time He was restoring the kingdom. Jesus' answer that it was not for them to know again leaves open the length of the postponement. Another thing they probably did not understand is that the commission would now extend beyond the house of Israel to the whole world including Gentiles. If they had understood that they would not have been so reticent in the Book of Acts to go out to the whole world. So we know that they did not understand everything but they answer that they did understand and that is important for the meaning of the next verse.

In 13:52 we come to the last parable. This is not a kingdom parable because it does not use the expression, “the kingdom of heaven is like or may be compared to.” It is like the first parable, the parable of the sower. The first parable was introductory to and preparatory for the kingdom parables. The last parable is a conclusion to and anticipatory of their responsibility for the teachings of the kingdom parables. **And Jesus said to them, “Therefore, every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”** The word **scribe** is *γραμματεὺς* and usually refers to one who is “an expert in the law.” The NT is very negative toward the scribes. They were associated with the Pharisees and rejected the Messiahship of Jesus. However, here the word **scribe** is looked upon positively as one **who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven**. What Jesus is doing is effectively denying that the group of scribes well-known in Israel are really scribes. They may pride themselves in being experts of the law but the true experts are those who have **become disciples of the kingdom of heaven**. Toussaint says, “It is also interesting to note that in this verse the Lord refers to His disciples as scribes. By doing so the Messiah rejected the ministry of the common scribes and appointed His own.”⁴ So the new scribes and the true scribes are His **disciples**. The word **disciples** is the verb *μαθευτεω* and means “a student, a learner.” In this case a student **of the kingdom of heaven**. It is remarkable to me that Jesus did not say that they had become students of the church or students of Christ or students of the Holy Spirit but students **of the kingdom of heaven**. This means that being a student **of the kingdom of heaven** is of utmost importance in understanding things to come. Dr Pentecost wrote a book called *Things to Come*. In order to understand the things to come one has to understand the kingdom of heaven. By way of review the expression kingdom of heaven is exclusively used by Matthew. The other gospel writers use the expression kingdom of God. Matthew only uses kingdom of God a couple of times. We think that Matthew may have chosen to use kingdom of heaven instead of kingdom of God because his gospel has a distinctly Jewish flavor and Jews who read it would be sensitive to the overuse of God’s name. However, that Matthew means by kingdom of heaven the same thing that other authors meant by kingdom of God is clear from the fact that when Matthew uses kingdom of heaven the parallel passages in the other gospels use kingdom of God. Also Matthew in one passage uses both kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God in synonymous parallelism. So contrary to past dispensationalists which saw a difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God I see them as the same. The expression kingdom of God means that the kingdom is sourced in God. The expression kingdom of heaven means that the kingdom is sourced in heaven. This is really saying the same thing since God dwells in heaven. Heaven is being used as an epithet for God since that is where God dwells. This would be understood by Jews since in the Book of Daniel the expression “God of heaven” is used many times (e.g. Dan 2:18, 37, 44). So the first point is that the expression kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven refer to one and the same kingdom. The next point is that the expression kingdom of heaven is not a reference to a kingdom in heaven. Matthew could very easily have used a dative case to say kingdom in heaven but repeatedly he used a genitive. The point of the expression is to say the kingdom that is sourced in heaven or comes from heaven. It will come from heaven to earth. This is how Jesus taught them to pray when He said, “Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be

done, On earth as it is in heaven." This prayer for the kingdom to come is a prayer that God's rule will come from heaven to earth. Another point about the kingdom of heaven is that it is a restoration of the Davidic kingdom that was on earth prior to the exile to Babylon. It was David's house that God promised an eternal king, an eternal kingdom and an eternal throne. A final point to make about the kingdom of heaven is that it will clearly be here when the Shechinah Glory is here. Shechinah Glory is a visible manifestation of God that usually takes the form of a fire or a cloud or a bright light. This manifestation in the OT was related to the presence of the kingdom of God on earth. Since there is no Shechinah Glory today there is no kingdom of heaven on earth today. But when the King returns the Shechinah Glory will also return. This again proves that the kingdom of God is entirely future and does not have a present form.

What the disciples are being told here is that as far as He is concerned now that they understand they are the true **scribes** and as students of the kingdom they should anticipate being **like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old**. The word **treasure** is "storeroom" or "repository." As the master of the house might bring out all sorts of treasures, both new and old out of his storeroom so the disciples would **bring out** of their storehouse of understanding **things new and old**. The key here is their understanding. They said they had understood these things. These things were **new** things. They also had understood **old** things. Both the new things and the old things were the things of the kingdom. They had understood the old teachings regarding the kingdom that was to come. Now they understood the new teachings regarding the kingdom, namely that its arrival would be postponed. It is crucial to understand what they understood. They understood that the kingdom was still coming, just not at that time. That is what opens up one's understanding of the present age. Toussaint says, "The disciples, instructed in the new truths of the kingdom as well as the old, were now responsible to minister these truths."⁵ That is the meaning of the parable of the householder. It concludes the parables and is anticipatory of their responsibility to communicate these truths to others. Mike Stallard goes a little further when he says, "What is old in the context of Matthew's narrative is the traditional understanding of the kingdom relative to its Jewishness in light of the nation's expectations...what is the new understanding concerning the kingdom is that...kingdom citizens are going to be produced which the Jewish leaders of Christ's day did not anticipate as part of the kingdom."⁶ But I think we need to add that it is through the disciples' communication of the old and new truths about the kingdom that these new kingdom citizens will come into existence by faith.

In 13:53, "When Jesus had finished these things" marks the end of this narrative followed by discourse. Next week we will start to work on the new narrative. Now I've given you a handout, you can toss the old one.

Parable	Reference	Meaning
Sower	Matt 13:3-9; 18-23	Only those who understood the significance of His Person and Work would receive new revelation about the kingdom
Tares	Matt 13:24-30; 36-43	Sons of the kingdom would grow up alongside sons of the devil during this age before the Son of Man returns in judgment to establish kingdom
Mustard Seed	Matt 13:31-32	The sons of the kingdom began very small in number but grew to be a great kingdom for all the nations
Leaven	Matt 13:33-35	The sons of the devil would grow up during this age prior to the kingdom's arrival
Treasure	Matt 13:44	The incomparable value of the kingdom to one who stumbles upon it (a Gentile?)
Merchant	Matt 13:45-46	The incomparable value of the kingdom to one who is seeking it (a Jew?)
Dragnet	Matt 13:47-50	Sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one would exist at the end of the age before the kingdom
Householder	Matt 13:52	The new scribes would be students of the kingdom in order to communicate these truths to others

We'll use it to give a summary of all the parables and then you can ask your questions. There are eight parables in Matt 13. The first four parables are given to the crowds. The last four parables are given to the disciples only. The first parable is the parable of the sower. It is not a kingdom parable but is introductory to and preparatory for the kingdom parables. Jesus explains that the seed is the kingdom message and that that generation of Israel had four responses to the kingdom message. The first three responses indicate failure to truly understand the

significance of the message and so the world, the flesh and the devil led them to fall away from following the King. Only the fourth response indicates success in truly understanding the significance of the message and their following after the King. Thus, only they would get further understanding of the kingdom. The second parable is the parable of the tares and it teaches that during the interadvent age the sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one will grow alongside of one another until the end of the age when Christ will come in His kingdom with His angels to gather up and cast the sons of the evil one into a furnace of fire while the sons of the kingdom will be taken into the kingdom. The third parable is the parable of the mustard seed and it teaches that the sons of the kingdom will have a small beginning but will grow immensely such that when the kingdom comes it will be a place of rest and relaxation for all nations. The fourth parable is the parable of the leaven and it teaches that the sons of the evil one will grow in the world to dominate before the kingdom comes. At this point Jesus went into the house and explained the parables of the sower and tares to His disciples and gave four more parables. The first of which is the fifth parable, the parable of the treasure and it teaches the incomparable value of the kingdom to someone who stumbled upon it (a Gentile?). The sixth parable is the parable of the merchant and it teaches the incomparable value of the kingdom to someone who was looking for it (a Jew?). The seventh parable is the parable of the dragnet and it teaches that at the end of the age there will be two kinds of people, sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one and the angels will gather out the sons of the evil one and cast them into a furnace of fire and the sons of the kingdom will enter into the kingdom, just like the wheat and tares. The eighth parable is the parable of the householder. Like the first parable it is not a kingdom parable but a conclusion to and anticipatory of the new scribe's responsibility. It teaches that they, having understood the new truths of the kingdom's postponement in history, would now have the responsibility to join old truths of the kingdom to the new ones in their coming mission to the world.

Alright...questions? There is a lot I have not told you so there is plenty of material we can discuss. There is also a wide range of interpretations and I am willing to discuss any of the parables and different views of the parables if that might interest you. I would say that this is a crux passage. When you go to seminary this always comes up because the way you go here affects your overall theology greatly.

Example Questions

- What are your thoughts about the parable of the sower? What have you heard taught?
- What are your thoughts on the parable of the tares?
- What are you thinking or what have you heard about the mustard seed?
- What are you thinking about the leaven? What have you heard about that?
- What are your thoughts about the treasure? The pearl? (This one gets a lot of attention.)
- What about the dragnet? How do you think about that? Do you see the connections with the tares?
- What about the householder?

- How do I seek the kingdom?
- What is the great treasure? Kingdom or church? Which is greater?

¹ Miriam Feinberg Vamosh, *Daily Life at the Time of Jesus*, p 62.

² Joseph Dillow does hold that this reference to weeping and gnashing of teeth refers to unbelievers because the expression furnace of fire in the context indicates the reference is to unbelievers. However, in other passages like Matt 8:12 he says that those sons of the kingdom who are cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth refers to Christians who did not live faithful lives and hence will miss out on the wedding banquet in the kingdom. I disagree with his assessment of Matt 8:12. I think the sons of the kingdom there are merely a reference to those who were the natural heirs of the kingdom but did not have faith like the Gentile centurion and so are unbelievers.

³ Mike Stallard, *Hermeneutics and Matthew 3: Part II Exegetical Conclusions*, paper delivered at the Conservative Theological Society, August, 2001, p 20.

⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 185.

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