

Sermon – How to Fish for the Kingdom, Parable of the Net

Preached 2/4/2024

Matthew 13:47-51

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

⁵¹ Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.”

So, remembering a parable is a natural story or event which helps us to understand the Kingdom and spiritual applications, let’s examine what is happening in the natural. Let’s do some quick research of ancient fishing techniques.

Net fishing or dragnet involved the following (the technique is still used today):

- Requires a very large net
- The net is weighted so it can reach the bottom of the water and then is dragged to shore
- This catches every fish in the net as it is dragged to shore
- In some cases, they start from shore and the net is taken out by a boat(s)
 - Men on the shore then drag the net back in toward the shore

There is a process and plan involved. This is an example of the “Kingdom process”.

Now let’s look at the intent of drag fishing. The net is large so the intent is to catch all or as many fish as possible. There is no discrimination as the fish are not separated until the net is brought back to shore. The intent is later to separate the fish and keep the ones you want and discard or reject the other undesirable fish.

This parable sounds very much similar to our previous week’s lessons on the parable of the wheat and tares. Here we see the same process, same results, same purpose, just a different story to further relate and reveal the mystery of the Kingdom.

- This is critical so we understand how the Kingdom works and understand our role as Kingdom kids.

Observation: This type of fishing differs from the kind of fishing I did when I was growing up. We didn’t use a large net, instead we used rod and reel. We selected the bait based upon the kind of fish we wanted to catch. When we caught some, we placed the “keepers” in our nets and we threw back the fish we didn’t want. I felt sorry for the rejected fish if they were caught by my Dad, as he would smack them along the side of the boat to discourage them from hitting his bait anymore.

We considered undesirable fish as a waste of time. We didn't like them. Got mad because we wasted our bait that we paid for. We didn't wait to get rid of bad fish, they were dealt with immediately.

So, while we were selective in our fishing, drag net fishing brings everything in.....for the moment. Now that we have looked at this in the natural, let's see how Jesus explains the spiritual application.

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So according to the interpretation of this parable, there is currently a process and plan at work. There is a large net that has been cast out into the world. The intent is to catch and drag everyone into this net and bring it back to shore or the starting point. When the net reaches the shore, there will be a judgment and separation process where just as in drag net fishing, the desirable fish/people are kept, and the undesirable are cast away.

- Harvest time, just like with the wheat and tares is coming. Things will not stay the same for long. The good fish will not remain with the bad fish much longer.
- Separation time is coming. The angels are the ones that separate the good from the bad.

So, let's see what the items and roles represent. Insert ourselves into this story.

- The Net – Matthew Henry states the casting of the net represents the Gospel. I concur with this since Jesus refers to this idea in Matthew 24:14:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

- The fish are all the people of the world.
- Good people are keepers; bad people are cast away.
- People fishing and pulling the nets to shore – I think this is everyone working for the Lord and the Kingdom by spreading the Gospel.
 - See Matthew 4:19 where Jesus states I will make you fishers of men.
- The Angels – serve as the ones who separate and clean the catch. Note, just as in the parable of the wheat and tares, the job of separating the good from the bad is not our job.....it is a task given to the Angels.

Jesus asked his disciples if they understood all of this. They answered yes. It must be important for them to understand or he wouldn't have asked. Therefore, it must be important, even critical so let me ask the same question....do we as Jesus' disciples today understand all of this?

So, it must have been important for them and for us to have a clear understanding. Instead of entertaining people, we should ensure they have an understanding. We should be asking the same question of our students. If we truly understand the meaning and understanding of this parable, then we have a role in the Kingdom right now and work to do.



The application:

I can't just fish for the people I like. This isn't like fishing with my dad; I'm fishing for the Father.

- There is no discrimination, the Gospel will be preached to all regardless so there will be diversity in the net and in the kingdom. Both Jews and Gentiles are in the net. Good folks and bad.

Before my dad and I could start fishing, we always went by the bait shop to get supplies. We can go out but without supplies, we are not going to be very successful.

- If you don't want to go out in the world to fish in the boat, at least invest and support those who do. They can't be as successful without you. Everyone has a role in the Kingdom in supporting spreading the net across the world.
- Additionally, they should support the spread of the net across the world.
- We should not pick and choose who we share the Gospel with. Additionally, we should not be separating the fish out before the net gets to shore.

Other commentary observations:

- The world will remain divided to the end, the church will not reform the world
- Believers and non-believers will be caught in the net
- Drag net is a tool for catching fish, like the Gospel is a tool for catching men's souls; fishermen are those who use the tool to catch fish/men (McCray)
- False doctrine can draw souls into the net who will later be rejected (McCray)
- Judgment is coming. All of us will go through it. When the nets are full, judgment will be around the corner; the net today is continuing to fill up as the Gospel net is being spread across the world.

The net continues to draw closer to shore. Cloverdale, it is time to suit up, get some supplies, and spread this net of the Gospel into the deep and invite them to come without discrimination.

Some fish that typically would have been rejected (unbelievers) can be converted before the net reaches shore. Some fish that would have been accepted, can be defiled before the net reaches shore. I noticed when I went fishing with my dad, some fish we used to reject, we started to keep because other friends we knew saw value in them.

- Years later I recall my dad telling me not to throw those sun fish and jack perch back. We knew some folks who liked and appreciated them, so we started bringing them back to shore.

