

Week 6 – The Fishing Net – Matthew 13:47-50

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:13-23

Introduction

A recent survey of 2,200 American adults was conducted where the participants were asked to name the most important issue of the day

The cost of health care was at the top of the list followed by drug abuse and crime rates and terrorism was fourth on the list

And when the Democrat presidential candidates were asked the same question in their first debate last week their number one answer was **climate change**

If we were to pose that question here what do you think would be the number one answer?

Maybe abortion or immigration or the LGBTQ controversies – those have certainly caught a lot of attention in Christian circles lately

I suppose for some of us we might instead focus on some personal issue we're facing like illness, finances, family, work, our too full schedule, or some other immediate, personal pressure we're facing

But let me ask the question in a slightly different way

What do you think will matter the most to you 150 years from today?

Look forward to July 7, 2169 – that will be a Friday by the way so you'll want to factor in weekend plans – and consider what will be most important to you on that day

With utmost confidence I can say that the most important issue on that day for everyone here will be **whether you were truly born-again when you died or the Lord returned** – whichever came first

In fact it will be the *only* thing that matters to you

We don't like to talk much about the fate of the lost these days

It's an unpleasant topic and we prefer to avoid the unpleasant

But as we've looked at six of the seven parables found in Matthew 13 we've seen that Jesus taught that not everything concerning the kingdom of heaven is always pleasant

And as much as we might like to focus on what we consider to be the more positive aspects of life in the kingdom Jesus says that we will be blessed if we understand all the truths he teaches in the parables

In the parable before us this morning, Jesus used an item that would have been very familiar to the people of Galilee – and particularly to his closest disciples as several of them were fishermen by trade – the fishing net

Our passage is **Matthew 13:47-50** and I encourage you to join me in your Bible and follow along as I read the passage in its entirety

Jesus says:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

We readily see that this is one of the parables that Jesus took the time to explain and it appears he explained it without his disciples asking for an explanation

On your note sheets you will see that we will first look at the **message** and **meaning** of the parable

Then we will look at the **viewpoint** of the parable

And then, lastly, we will consider the **effect** the parable should have on us today

I. The Message and Meaning of the Parable

Verses 47 and 48 contain the parable itself and verses 49 and 50 contain the explanation

Message

In the parable Jesus uses the imagery of a fishing net or as some of your Bibles may translate the word a “dragnet”

[dragnet-badger.jpg] – no not that kind of Dragnet!

This kind... [dragnet-sketch.png] – That’s better

A dragnet was a large net that had weights along its bottom edge and floats along its top edge to hold it open vertically. They were typically let out and spread to their full length from the deck of a fishing boat [dragnetdeployed.jpg] and then either hauled back to the boat or pulled to shore by a group of men as we see in this image [fullnet.jpg]

Because of the potential for harm to fish populations and habitat, dragnet fishing is illegal or severely restricted in most places today but in Jesus’ day it was the way that commercial fishing was done

Dragnet fishing was and is an indiscriminate affair meant to catch large numbers of fish because a dragnet was designed to catch everything that was in its path as it was pulled back in

And then the fishermen would simply sort through the fish they had caught keeping the desirable fish and discarding those that were undesirable

We see this kind of fishing mentioned a few times in the Bible

Look with me at **Luke 5** where Jesus commandeered Peter’s fishing boat and used it as a platform for preaching to the people who were gathered on the shore

In **Luke 5:4** Jesus told Peter, *“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”*

And in **John 21:6** we see Jesus after his resurrection telling his disciples to cast their net on the right side of the boat because that’s where the fish were and how they caught so many fish that they couldn’t haul it back into the boat

In both of those cases they were using dragnets of the kind we find in this parable

That’s the imagery that Jesus used to teach his disciples a very important truth about the kingdom of heaven

I can’t help but picture the disciples connecting the dots between this parable and those instances of abundant harvest later on as they labored to share the gospel message and saw all kinds of people coming into the church

Meaning

But Jesus was sharing more than a fish story and he tells them that the kingdom of heaven is like fishing with a dragnet. So we can determine that Jesus meant for the “net” to be understood as the church and the “fish of every kind” to be the people who will be gathered into the church

So then just as we saw when we looked at the parable of the weeds sown among the wheat we see that the kingdom of heaven, at least for the time being, will be a mixture of good and bad

And we see that this will be the condition of the kingdom until some future day when there will be a sorting

Jesus says that this sorting will occur *“at the end of the age”* which means at the end of the church age when Jesus returns

He also reveals that the agents who will be in charge of this future sorting will be the angels and just as fishermen kept the good fish and discarded the bad so the angels will separate the evil from the righteous

In the telling of the parable the bad fish are simply thrown away but in the explanation Jesus goes further and reveals that the evil ones will be thrown into *“the fiery furnace”* where there will be *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*

So what we have is a parable that is much like the parable of the Weeds and the Wheat where the future separation of those in the kingdom is explained

But in this parable there is a greater emphasis is on the punishment of the wicked and there is no mention of the blessing of the righteous as there was in the Weeds and the Wheat parable

That's the message and the meaning of the parable

Jesus told it in a very straight forward way using an analogy that the disciples would have easily related to

But in communications there are often truths sort of hidden between the lines of the surface message

So let's next look at the **viewpoint** or perspective of the parable and we will see three of those buried or hidden truths

II. The Viewpoint of the Parable

A. Elementary

The first thing we want to notice is really rather **elementary** – there will come a day, Jesus says in **verse 49** that it will come “*at the end of the age,*” when the time for deciding will be over and the judgment will commence

The world is currently experiencing the age of grace where all mankind is called upon to repent of their sin and turn to Christ for salvation and we have been in this age for the past 2,000 years – since Pentecost

And as it says in **2Peter 3:9** God is being patient so that all might have the opportunity to be saved

But this parable and the parable of the weeds speak of a still future day when this age will come to an end and with it comes God's righteous judgment

The end of the age is imminent

And no one knows when that day will come except the Father

Turn with me to Matthew 24 – in **Matthew 24:3** we see the disciples ask Jesus to tell them what signs they should expect to see that will signal the end of the age

And Jesus gives them a lengthy answer in what we know as the Olivet Discourse

But look with me at what Jesus says in **verses 36-44** –

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The simple truth is we are not waiting on anything except for the Father's pre-determined time for the end of the age to arrive – there are no prophecies left to be fulfilled and the end of the age has been imminent since Pentecost

But even if the Lord tarries for another 100 years we know that each person's time for repentance and acceptance of Christ comes to an end when they die – and none of us is guaranteed tomorrow – or even an hour from now for that matter

There will come a time when it will be too late to respond to the gospel

That's why Paul writes in **2Corinthians 6:2** “*...now is the day of salvation*”

And the author of Hebrews writes in **Hebrews 4:7**, “*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts*”

Because one never knows when the end of the age will come

But when it does this parable tells us that judgment will also come and each person will be examined and the angels will sort all mankind into two types

And those who believe and are baptized – in other words, those who accept Jesus as their personal Savior *and* Lord will be saved

Those who do not will be thrown into the fiery furnace

B. Eternal

Our world today has a lot of misconceptions when it comes to hell

Of course there are those who believe that there is **no literal hell**

But since we believe that the Bible is God's infallible, special revelation to mankind that speaks the truth about every subject it contains we have to come to the undeniable conclusion that hell exists and what its purpose is

Because Scripture is filled with references to hell as a literal place and Jesus himself spent more time warning people about the danger of hell than he did telling them about the blessings of heaven

But these days people want to believe in heaven while dismissing hell as a bogey-man story meant to scare people into being good

And those who believe in hell have some very wrong ideas about what it's going to be like and they usually fall into the category of thinking **hell won't be all that bad** – after all, people like to think that they've actually experienced "hell on earth" after they've been through a tough experience

So people tend to view hell as **Satan's domain** where he will rule

Not true, in fact **Matthew 25:41** tells us that hell was created for the devil and his fallen angels

Satan will not rule in hell and the demons won't be poking people with pitchforks

And **Revelation 20:10** tells us that they will not be tormenting others but will themselves be suffering God's wrath

So that should put to rest another popular misconception – one shared no doubt by this man I saw in the Delavan Culver's not so long ago [hell-throne.png] – that hell will be a **perpetual party** that will include all the cool people

That poor man in Culver's even seems to think that Satan is going to give him a place of honor in hell

You can probably come up with other fallacies that people believe about hell but those are some of the most common

Frankly, the Bible doesn't give us a whole lot of specifics about hell but it does say that those who are there will experience burning, darkness, and intense grief for all eternity

And that's the message in our parable this morning as the parable speaks of **eternal punishment** for the evil ones

We see that only by reading between the lines a bit when Jesus reveals that they will be thrown into the fiery furnace – which by the way uses the definite article "the" to speak of a specific place – and he says in **verse 50** "*in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*"

The verb "will be" in the Greek denotes an ongoing action so what we see is unending weeping and gnashing of teeth in the place of punishment

Hell doesn't mean annihilation and it won't be party central - it will be a place of intense suffering and despair that never ends

C. Evangelistic

So, we should ask why exactly Jesus told his disciples this parable

What purpose could he have possibly had for telling them about the coming judgment and the fate of the lost?

Let's look back at the calling of Peter and Andrew and see what Jesus told them in **Matthew 4:19** –

He said, *“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

And that has been the case for every true follower of Jesus Christ ever since

The parable of the fishing net is **evangelistic**

Christians are called to be fishers of men – our task is to cast the net far and wide and bring as many as we can into the church

When I was a teen I tried to get interested in fishing and I went fishing quite a bit – it didn't take hold but I tried because it seemed like a thing I should be doing

My pastor at that time was an avid fisherman who always fished for Bass and occasionally he would let me tag along and fish with him at his secret lakes and ponds – he always took a round-about route to them and swore me to secrecy

I remember he had very specific lures that were proven to be attractive to Bass – he had this special way of rigging a rubber worm so that it moved just so as he reeled it back in - and he was usually successful in catching Bass with them

I also remember the time a group of fathers and sons from church went on a camping weekend to fish for trout

And how when fishing for trout we used totally different types of bait and different methods than were used for Bass

When I fished with my dad we often fished for catfish and that was an endeavor that was unlike the other two kinds of fishing where we just put the smelliest bait we could find on a hook, cast it out, and let it lay on the bottom and waited

And that's the way sport fishermen are – they are typically after a specific kind of fish and are very particular in their methods so they only attract that specific kind of fish

That's probably because most sport fishermen are just fishing for fun and recreation and they likely aren't going to starve if they don't catch a fish – many of them just release the fish after they've caught them anyway

But a commercial fisherman back in Jesus' day didn't have that luxury so they threw out the dragnet and swept up everything in its path and sorted things out later

The church as a dragnet

And Jesus says that's the way the church is to be in this age

We aren't supposed to be particular with our “fishing” and only look for a certain kind of people

The church is to be like a dragnet that draws all manner of people into it

And Jesus says that means that there will be unsaved people in the church just like in the parable of the weeds

But in this case it won't be because Satan sowed his weeds among God's wheat but because God's people, God's dragnet, brought them in evangelistically

Many people will be attracted to the church and for all kinds of reasons

Some will come because they are believers and they want to be among other believers where they can fellowship, learn, and serve together

Others will come because they think they should or because they want to be seen at church or because they think it's their moral obligation or for any number of reasons but they won't actually be a part of the capital “C” Church

Oh, they might be members of a local church they may even be faithfully attending and serving and some of them may even be church leaders and even pastors – but they aren't actually saved

We know this because Jesus said that for now the kingdom of heaven, the church in this age, will be made up of two kinds of people who he labeled as “good” and “bad”

Good and bad defined

Now, when Jesus said the people were “good” he wasn’t referring to some inner goodness or worthiness or any outward display of morality that made them good

In **Mark 10:18** Jesus told the rich young man *“No one is good except God alone.”*

And Paul reiterates that truth in **Romans 3:10-18** that no one is righteous and all have turned aside and become worthless

When Jesus says that some will be “good” he is referring to those who have the righteousness of Christ imputed to them so that God the Father looks at them as sees them as if he were looking at his Son

The only factor that determines whether anyone is a good fish or a bad fish is whether or not the blood of Christ has been applied to their life for the forgiveness of sins

And the “bad” or “evil” people aren’t necessarily those who show it outwardly

There is every indication from the parable that they would not be those who would be readily seen as morally bad

They are simply those who have not accepted Christ

They may have come into the church for any number of reasons and even may have become faithful participants in the life of the church

In all likelihood they look like everyone else in the church but they have never connected with Jesus and so they have never been saved

But Jesus makes clear that merely being in the church is not enough to save because in the end, the angels will sort out the bad from the good and the bad will be thrown into the fiery furnace where they will receive the just punishment for their unbelief

With the truths in mind let’s consider what effect the parable should have on us as true followers of Jesus Christ

I see two that I want to mention...

III. Two Effects of the Parable

A. Increase our efforts in evangelism

First, the reality of the fate of those who remain apart from Christ should cause us to **increase our efforts in evangelism**

How can we consider the eternal fate of our fellow man and not be encouraged to try to see as many saved as we possibly can?

Church was never meant to be simply a place for the members to be comfortable

It's not a social club where one pays their dues in the form of tithes and offerings, agrees to serve on a committee or two, and then gets to have everything the way they want it while they sit back comfortably with people like them

The church is a lifeboat of sorts to rescue the perishing

And our passion should be to bring as many people as we possibly can into the boat even as we recognize that not all of them will ultimately decide to accept Christ as the Savior of their soul and Lord of their life

The reality is no one will be harmed and they may actually be helped by bringing them into contact with God's people

So, we need to be about doing all that we can to draw people into our midst where they can be introduced to our Lord and influenced by the truth of God's Word as it is preached and taught and lived out before them

But to do that we need to be out in the world – after all, no one ever caught fish without going fishing!

And we need to be casting our net widely – that's the first message of the parable for us

The reality of the fate of the lost must propel us to greater evangelistic efforts

B. Examine our hearts

Second, we need to examine our own hearts

The reality that the church contains both those who are saved and those who are lost means there are some questions we should answer about ourselves

Because being around and among God's people can cause us to forget that we aren't one of God's people

So we need to ask:

Have I actually accepted Jesus for myself as my Savior?

Am I depending on nothing else to reconcile me to the Father?

Or do I think that my own moral goodness plays a part in where I will spend eternity?

In other words, have I been fundamentally changed as a result of my contact with Jesus?

And, am I still changing as I seek to live my life according to his commands?

Is Jesus also my Lord with all the rights of a King over how I conduct my life?

Or, does my version of Christianity consist of being outwardly virtuous and respectable as I blend into the Christian community by doing all the things that are expected while remaining unchanged within?

Galatians 6:7 tells us that God is not mocked – we need to be honest with ourselves no matter how painful it might prove to be because God sees things as they are – not as we want them to appear

The day is coming when the time for deciding is over

Whether that day comes at the end of the age or the end of an individual life, the time for deciding will be past and the sorting will begin

When that day comes God will not be fooled by our pretend piety or bought off by our passionate pleas and everyone will be subject to God's righteous judgment

Conclusion

Talking about hell has fallen out of favor these days and I think that has caused us to have a too casual view of evangelism

After all, if belief or non-belief is simply a life-choice that people make and if we fail to acknowledge the consequences of that choice why would we try to convince anyone of their need to know Jesus?

But the saddest reality of all is that there will be people within the fellowship of the church who will go into eternity without ever truly knowing Jesus

We like good news and the gospel is good news to those who receive it but it also carries bad news for those who do not

As I close this sermon and we come to the Lord's Table, perhaps God has been speaking to you this morning

Perhaps there may be someone here today that no one would ever suspect is not really a believer

If that's you, please don't wait until it's too late

Regardless of how long you've been a part of Brick Church let today be the day of your salvation

Or perhaps God has been knocking on the door of your heart calling you to renew and redouble your efforts as a fisher of men – or perhaps to become a fisher of men for the first time

Fishing in Jesus' day was hard work and it took a great deal of effort to haul in a dragnet

But it was necessary work and if you want to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ you must be a fisherman

The service will end and as we saw in the parable of the soils the message can be lost before it bears fruit if we aren't careful

So let me encourage you to commit to finding ways to reach out to others and invite them into the midst of God's people

And then tell someone of your commitment so that they can help keep you accountable to following through

Make the determination today to live according to the reality of the coming judgment

No matter what else you might think is more important, I guarantee you, 150 years from now nothing else will matter to anyone living today

Let's pray