

The Parable of the Dragnet

Matthew 13:47-52

Halifax: 30 October 2005

Introduction:

For several weeks now we have been looking at Jesus' Parables of the Kingdom that Matthew presents to us in Matthew 13.

- Today we come to the last of these, *The Parable of the Dragnet*.

I have explained to you that a parable is a stories that uses familiar things to explain something that is not so familiar.

- Jesus had told His disciples that these parables were especially for them...
 - That the multitude would not be given to understand,
 - but that to them it had been given.
 - How this must have motivated them to try to understand!
 - Surely, they did not want to miss out on this unique privilege!
 - They would be all the more eager to figure out what Jesus meant.

And so it was that after Jesus told *The Parable of the Wheat and Tares*,

- the disciples asked Him to explain it to them as soon as they were alone with Him.
 - This parable in particular had puzzled them.
 - They shared the common notion of their day that as soon as the Messiah came,
 - all Israel would rush to welcome and embrace Him.
- In *The Parable of the Sower*, Jesus had already explained to them that this would not be so.
 - In that parable He had explained that many who heard the gospel of the kingdom would not continue in it.
 - This was troubling to the disciples, but clear enough.
- But now, in *The Parable of the Tares*,
 - He was showing them that there would be many who would ostensibly come into his kingdom...
 - who would not be true sons.
 - They would profess Him outwardly, but they would not really believe.
 - He further explained that many of these would not be separated out until the Day of judgement.

- It was troubling for the disciples to hear of many that would enter the kingdom in this false manner...
 - How could it be that they would come so close,
 - yet not delight in their Messiah?
 - Was there something wrong with His kingdom?
- Jesus comforts them with two parables that show the great value of the kingdom to all who truly discover it...
 - He compares it to a hidden treasure that is discovered and to a precious pearl that is recognised for what it is...
 - Those who have eyes to see will count the kingdom above all else!
 - They will sell all that they have to obtain it!
- But having told these comforting parables, there was danger that the disciples might again assume that everyone in the kingdom would surely understand its value.
 - This is certainly what you would expect!
 - This is certainly how it should be!
 - Surely everyone in the kingdom would true!

But Jesus will not leave his disciples under such delusions.

- He wants them to know that not everyone—
 - not even everyone who professes His name and enters the kingdom outwardly—
 - will truly value the kingdom.
- He wants to be sure that they understand that the kingdom will always be mixed!
 - There will always be a mixture of wheat and tares,
 - of true disciples and false disciples,
 - of the righteous and the wicked.
- And so to make sure that this is clear,
 - Jesus tells another parable that is very much like *The Parable of the Tares*:
 - *The Parable of the Dragnet*.
 - In this parable, Jesus illustrates the gathering of disciples into His church with a dragnet—
 - A dragnet was a huge net that was dragged through the waters either between two ships or between a ship and a point on land to which one end was tied.
 - This net would scoop up everything in its path without discrimination,

- and then would be dragged up on shore where the contents could be sorted out.
- Everything that could be eaten...
 - (remember, the Jews had dietary prohibitions that excluded many sea creatures)
 - was put into baskets for near markets and vessels of water to be preserved for far away markets.
- Jesus is showing by this that His kingdom will draw in all kinds of persons—some good and true disciples, but some false and unbelieving disciples.
 - As with the Parable of the Tares, these will not be sorted out until the end, on the Day of Judgement.
- If there is any difference between *The Parable of the Dragnet*, and *The Parable of the Tares*, it is this...
 - In the *Parable of the Tares*,
 - the servants are troubled by the presence of the tares—
 - They ask, “Where did these tares come from?”
 - They can see them and they wonder why God doesn’t deal with them.
 - But in the *Parable of the Dragnet*,
 - the bad fish remain completely hidden until the end.
 - The emphasis is on the fact that false sons are in the kingdom even though we may not discern them at all until the judgement day.
 - They are like Judas whose hypocrisy was a complete surprise to his closest associates when it came to light.
 - You need to realise that there will be some who are highly esteemed in the church today that will not be exposed as false sons until the judgement day.

TRANS> And so on the basis of this parable,

- I would urge you first of all to

I. Never presume that everyone in the Church is saved.

A. This is a **very** common error in many branches of the church!

1. It is perhaps best known in Roman Catholicism.
 - a. In Roman Catholicism, it is a received doctrine that everyone who receives the sacraments is in a sense savingly joined to Jesus Christ.

- They may have to spend a great deal of time of in Purgatory, but they will eventually make it to heaven.
 - The great error in this doctrine is that persons can be justified without personal faith in Jesus Christ crucified...
 - that they have saving union with Him through the sacraments even when they are not resting upon Him for salvation.
 - a. Tomorrow is the 488th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation when Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church door at Wittenberg.
 - In the Reformation, these grievous errors were exposed, and many who had trusted in the Church instead of the Lord of the Church were brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.
2. But we should not suppose that presumption is the exclusive property of the Roman Catholic Church!
- a. I have seen it in many evangelicals!
 - How many times have I met persons who tell me:
 - “I was saved at such and such a time,” who have absolutely no fruit to back up their profession!
 - They say, “But I prayed to receive Christ when I was twelve years old,”
 - or “I went forward when the evangelist came to town.”
 - And too often it is assumed by these persons and by the churches they have attended that just because that person prayed and asked Jesus to save him, he is saved...
 - There is never any question as to what this person may have wanted to be saved from!
 - Do you remember how McDonalds used to have a sign telling how many hamburgers they had served?
 - Well, there used to be a church in Maine that had a sign on the roof that told how many souls had been saved at that church.
 - It was a small church, but the sign said thousands had been saved!
 - The count was taken by the number of persons that had prayed this certain sinner’s prayer!
 - This is not much different than Roman Catholicism!
 - b. Then there are other Protestants that have other forms of presumption...

- There are those in certain Pentecostal churches who presume that a person is surely saved if he has spoken in tongues...
 - There are those in some of the mainline protestant churches who suppose that everyone without exception (whether they profess Christ or not) will end up in heaven...
- c. And there are also so-called Reformed Churches that are highly presumptuous...
- There are those who misunderstand and misuse the promise to covenant children in such a way that they assume that they are all saved...
 - The dear covenant child can be twenty-five years old and out riding with the Hell's Angels, but he was baptised!
 - I spoke to the widow of Presbyterian minister whose son had not been to church for years,
 - but she assured me that deep down inside he was a Christian.
 - Such persons are reformed in name only...
 - One of the very marks of the reformation was justification by faith, and it was understood that wherever true faith was, there would also be perseverance in grace.

B. Presumption is one of the most destructive forces to the souls of men!

- It is destructive because it makes the many warnings in the Bible that are addressed to church members of no effect!

1. Consider that the Bible is full of warnings to church members!

a. How frequently do you find them in our Lord's teaching!

1) He is giving a warning right here in our text!

- He is saying, just because you are in the kingdom does not mean you are truly saved.

2) He gave a similar warning at the end of the Sermon on the Mount when He said:

- Matt 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

3) Again, in Matthew 8:11-12, He warned that

- Many of “the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness.”
- And that “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

TRANS> It would take us the rest of the day to speak of all the places...

b. The Apostles continued the same kind of instruction:

- In Hebrews 3:12, the warning is given:
 - Heb 3:12: Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;
 - The clear teaching here is that there are church members—
 - those we call brethren—
 - who have a heart of unbelief.

c. Warnings to church members are not exclusive to the New Testament either.

- Moses tells the people that he knows they will go astray.
- Jeremiah preached to a people who could not believe that God’s judgement could ever fall on them.
 - They presumed that they were immune to judgement because they were God’s people and the temple was in their land...
 - Judgement did fall.

2. Please understand that the warnings are there for your good!

a. When there is presumption,

- it is assumed that the warnings cannot apply to you!

1) You are like a fool going down the highway who comes to a sign that says “bridge out.”

- You just came from a meeting where your favourite politician was just assuring you that he was stepping up efforts to make our roads safer.
- You see the warning and the barricade, but you say,
 - “That warning can’t apply because politician Bill has this new commission out there to make sure the roads are safe...”
 - So with that, you plough through the barricade at full speed and fall to destruction!
- With paralysis from the neck down, you go to politician Bill to find out what went wrong!
 - “Where was your highway safety commission?” you ask.

- “What do you mean?” politician Bill says, “My safety commission is the one who put the barricade up to make sure no one went off that bridge. Didn’t you see it?”

2) Brothers and sisters, don’t you see?

- The warnings in the Bible about false sons in the kingdom are there for you...
- They are there to keep you from being a false son who departs from God!

TRANS> Presumption is very destructive because it makes warnings to be of no effect!

b. Understand that the Lord is pleased to use warnings to preserve His elect!

- He makes the warnings effectual in the elect to keep them in the faith.
- When it comes to warnings, the difference in the elect church member and the non-elect church member is just this...
 - The elect church member heeds the warnings against departing from the Lord and falling into unbelief...
 - If he is starting to drift away, he hears a warning and the warning calls him back to the Lord.
 - This is how the Lord keeps him!
 - He doesn’t keep us in pickle jar, He surrounds us with warnings that we hear.
 - The non-elect ignore the warnings...
 - They have that evil heart of unbelief...
 - The warning comes to them, but they do not take heed.
 - If they are presumptuous, they think the warning does not apply to them!

TRANS> Jesus wants all His disciples to know that there will be many false sons in the church.

- Never presume that everyone in the church is saved.
 - There are many in the net of the church that are not truly converted.
 - That is the first thing I would urge upon you from our Lord’s instruction here.
 - Secondly, I would urge you to...

II. Always keep before you the reality of the final judgement.

- A. The Bible teaches us that there is a day appointed when God will judge every person.
- Jesus brings the reality of that day before our eyes in this parable.
1. With His words, He paints a picture for us of a very definitive, irreversible separation of the ungodly from His kingdom at last day.
 - a. The disciples were so very familiar with this seen...
 - 1) There are the men, bringing a net full of all sorts of clean and unclean creatures of the sea.
 - The net was drawn in order to catch eatable fish,
 - but in doing its work, it has pulled in all sorts of other creatures...
 - Just as the gospel is designed to draw in God's elect,
 - but pulls in all sorts of others accidentally.
 - 2) There are the men, sitting on the beach with all these fish, sorting through them.
 - There is a jelly fish—throw that one away...
 - There is a nice tuna—put that one in the basket for market.

TRANS> Jesus intends to etch an indelible picture in our minds of the separation of the wicked that will occur on the last day.

- This story is meant to lodge in your memory.
- b. Jesus says,
 - “So shall it be at the end of the age! The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just.”
 - 1) Yes, my friends, they have been together for a long long time!
 - a) There have been false sons in the kingdom since the beginning...
 - But it will not always be so!
 - They will not always be together!
 - It may seem like it will always be so,
 - but a day is coming when there will be a separation.
 - b) It will be clear and decided!
 - “Keep this one,” “Throw this one out!”
 - What has been together for so long will be separated for all eternity, never to be joined again!

- 2) The good will be shown to be what they professed to be:
 - Sinners who are trusting in the Lord Jesus crucified to save them...
 - those who put no confidence in the flesh, but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ...
 - those who have been given a new heart that delights in the Lord and wants to walk in His ways.
 - They will be given what they desire.

- 3) The bad will be shown to be unknown to Christ...
 - a) They will be shown to have come to Him under the pretence that they are good and righteous...
 - Their hearts were not broken before God for their sin...
 - They did not receive and rest upon the Lord Jesus for their salvation, but either:
 - did not really want to be saved from their sins...
 - or thought they could save themselves in some other way.

 - b) On this day, all pretending will be over.
 - They will be exposed unmistakably and separated forever.

TRANS> The difference between these and the sons of the kingdom that may not be so clear now will be abundantly clear.

- That a day of separation is coming is the first thing our Lord makes clear here.
2. The second thing that our Lord brings vividly before us is the punishment of the wicked.
 - a. He says that they will be “cast into the furnace of fire,”
 - and that “There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”
 - Let it never be forgotten, these are those who were members of the visible church that were drawn up in the net!

 - b. How vivid is our Lord’s description!
 - 1) He calls it a furnace of fire! A place of misery and anguish!
 - We are told that the smoke of their torments will ascend forever!
 - This is a place of unbearable suffering where no relief will be found.

 - 2) You can almost hear the wailing and gnashing of teeth...

- The shrieks of abject terror and the howls of pain.
- It is clear that Jesus is speaking of something unspeakably horrible, something absolutely real!

B. This final judgement is something that you ought to frequently meditate on!

1. I am convinced that we do not meditate on it enough!

a. To our Lord, these dreadful torments were as real as the earth on which He stood.

1) He knew the glory, majesty, and perfection of His Father.

- He knew the unsullied beauty of His perfect justice and wisdom.
- He knew the power and terror of His wrath.

2) This terrible punishment was never fuzzy or uncertain in His mind...

- How often He speaks about these things!
 - It is something that is always on His mind—it is a reality to Him!
 - You can hardly read a discourse of His that does not say something about God's judgement and curse upon sinners.
 - Consider that His whole mission on earth was to deliver His people from this dreadful end...
 - He did not leave the glories of heaven and go to the cross because the judgement of God was fuzzy and uncertain in His mind...
 - He came because it was real and certain.

3) He also knew that this very judgement was going to fall on Him for the sake of His elect.

- He Himself would bear the eternal wrath of God for them so that they might escape it forever!
- In His great love for the elect, He had promised that He would take upon Himself what was theirs!

b. And I say, what wickedness it is to ignore what our Saviour has done!

1) What wickedness to falsely comfort yourself that there will be no such judgement as our Lord here describes!

- What wickedness to assume that there is no God in heaven that is so holy and so pure that He will deal with sinners like this!
- to assume that the words of our Lord must be toned down or ignored—
 - that they are an embarrassment to us in the twentieth century!

- that surely He did not mean what He says!
- 2) What wickedness for those who assume that our Lord's suffering these torments was not necessary—
 - that there are other ways of dealing with sin...
 - or that they have made themselves good and do not deserve these things—
 - that they have been members of church and have given their money to the poor and done good to their neighbours!
- c. And those of you who do believe...
- 1) You do not meditate on these things as you should.
 - They are not so real to you as they are to Jesus!
 - If they were,
 - How much greater your gratitude to Him would be!
 - How much more earnest your prayers would be!
 - How much more earnest your pleas with others would be!
 - 2) You do not meditate on these things because they are not pleasant to you.
 - There is a huge resistance to singing the psalms today in the church...
 - And the reason is because we feel we cannot relate to them...
 - They say too much about God's judgement...
 - We sing watered down versions of them or write our own songs that we are more comfortable with.
 - We like to pretend that it is because we are so Christian and that these Old Testament songs are about the old days before Jesus came...
 - But I am here to tell you that when Jesus came He spoke more severely about God's judgement than ever...
 - He also spoke more highly and marvellously of God's mercy than ever.
 - He raised our understanding of both mercy and judgement,
 - but the modern church only wants to talk of mercy.
 - We are just like the people in Jeremiah's day.
2. Now I am not saying that you should meditate on God's judgement in sinister way.
 - a. It is not something you should gloat about...

- You must never rejoice in the destruction of the wicked, for it is a horrible thing.
- b. But I am saying that if this doctrine is emphasised in scripture again and again, we must not censure the Lord's Word and suppose that it is not good for us to meditate on!
- We need to look at God's judgement that we might see His holiness as a God who cannot look with favour upon sin...
 - We need to look at God's judgement that we might see His power and majesty, that we might know that He is the Lord of all.
 - We need to look at God's judgement that we might be warned to flee from the wrath to come—that we might not be found hypocrites!
 - We need to look at the reality of God's judgement that we might see what our blessed Lord Jesus has done for us in saving us from our sins!
 - We need to consider God's judgement that we might all the more urge others to repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus.
- c. God is not real to us and Jesus is not real to us unless His judgement is real to us.
- Jesus presents these things to His disciples in this vivid way because He wants His disciples to know that it is real!
 - The separation of the wicked and the casting of them into the furnace of fire is not something you can safely ignore.
 - It is something you must seek to understand.
 - I know it is not a popular topic today—
 - not in the church and not in the world...
 - but it is important to our Lord and He wants us to understand it.

TRANS> You see what He says to His disciples?

- "Do you understand all these things?"
 - He has repeated this doctrine a second time because He wants them to understand!
- And this brings me to the last thing I want to urge upon you from this passage...
 - 1) The first was "Never presume that everyone in the church is saved."
 - 2) The second was, "Always keep before you the reality of the final judgement."
 - 3) And the third is:

III. Be sure you are a scribe who understands Christ's kingdom.

- A. Now I know that Jesus is speaking here to those that were called to be apostles...
1. He is telling them that as the authorised teachers of the church,
 - it was essential for them to understand that the kingdom was composed of believers and unbelievers...
 - and that at the end there would be this great judgement when the wicked are separated out and cast into the furnace of fire...
 2. It was essential for them to understand this because He wanted them to continue teaching as He had taught... in His name!
 - a. He wanted them to preach under the impression that many of their hearers were headed for this judgement if they did not repent!
 - He wanted them to be always earnestly urging all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.
 - He wanted them to continue to urge repentance and faith upon those who had entered the church as well as those that were still outside...
 - He wanted them to warn everyone night and day with tears, the way Paul did.
 - b. Yes, they were to accept the profession of all who made a credible profession,
 - and yes, they were to treat them as believers and encourage them as such...
 - but in their preaching they were to keep pressing upon them the reality of the coming judgement and the need to rest upon Jesus alone for salvation...
 - and to warn them about unbelief and about turning away!
 - They were to bring forth things new and old...
 - As these things were on their minds, they would be ever about their work—
 - like a householder adding new things to their treasury to bring to the people of God...
 - and bringing forward the old things that they knew so well.
 - There would be an urgency about what they were doing.
 - c. If you read the New Testament, you will find that this is just what they did.
 - Paul says,
 - “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”
 - John says,
 - “Little children, keep yourselves from idols”

- Peter says,
 - “There will be false teachers among you,” and that “many will follow their destructive ways,” and “that their judgement does not slumber.”
- James says,
 - “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

TRANS> They all taught in the reality that many who professed faith among them did not really know the Lord, and that these would come to a horrible end.

- But how does this apply to you?
 - You are not apostles.
 - In what way are you to be a scribe who understands?

B. You must be a scribe who understands the kingdom in accordance with your calling.

- Each one of us has a calling from God on some level to be a scribe.
 1. Certainly, you can see how this pertains to all ministers of the gospel.
 - a. Every minister must faithfully understand what our Lord is saying here!
 - He must never cease to urge upon the congregation their need to rest on the Lord Jesus alone for salvation and to repent of their sins.
 - He must not grow weary of this doctrine and move on to talk only about sanctification—
 - about how to live the Christian life and not about the gospel.
 - This is what too often happens in churches—
 - it is just assumed that the gospel does not need to be preached to those who are inside.
 - Children grow up in the church and are never called to repent, and old people forget the gospel because they never hear it.
 - But Jesus is showing that it does need to be preached!
 - The scribe must be like a householder continually adding to his provisions for his family by fresh study,
 - and continually drawing from the old things in his storehouse to meet the needs of his family.
 - b. And it is your part as a church members to insist that this is done!
 - 1) I hear of Christians all the time that choose churches because they are comfortable there—

- because they like the people even though the doctrine is not that great...
 - or because their children like it—even though the preaching is weak.
 - And in this way, they cast in their lot with scribes that do not understand Christ’s kingdom.
 - They do what they can to put to silence those who preach in the way Jesus has appointed.
- 2) And you who are ruling elders, you are not to tolerate a watered down gospel...
- You are to insist that the scribes in the pulpit you oversee preach in the light of the reality that not all are saved in the church and that the judgement day is real!

TRANS> It is clear that ministers are to be scribes who understand the needs of the people under their care—

- but we can extend this also to fathers and husbands...

2. You fathers and husbands, you are to be a faithful scribe to your families!

a. You have a little church in your house!

- It is your duty to call them apart for daily family worship and to urge Christ upon them!
- It is for you “to know the terror of the Lord and to persuade them” to believe!
 - Do not presume that they do not need to hear warnings just because they are in your home and have been taught from their youth!
 - or because they have made a profession of faith...
 - That is the fastest way to destroy a church—including the church in your house!
 - You are not a scribe who understands what Jesus is teaching here if you do not urge them to look continually to Christ—to abide in Him—to continue in faith and repentance—to continue in the grace of God.

b. And how the terror of the Lord will affect you in the overall administration of your home!

1) It will affect the way you discipline them.

- You will not be lax to call them to repentance and to use the rod and rebuke to drive foolishness from them and to save their souls from Hell.
 - You will urge them to repent and get to Christ when they have sinned and to live in reconciliation with Him.
- 2) It will affect the example you set for them.
- You will not drive them away by a cantankerous spirit,
 - but will seek to draw them with kindness.
 - You will display to them a reverence and fear of the Lord,
 - not a cold indifference.
- 3) It will affect your prayers for them.
- When you see them going astray, you will not presume that its no big deal—you will drop to your knees and plead with the Lord!
 - You will stay awake at night about it!
- 4) It will affect the church you take them to and how you interact with the church.
- Is the preaching of the word important?
 - Do you attend regularly the stated services?
 - Do you prepare your heart beforehand, or do you drag in late with a bad attitude?
 - Do you pray for the ministry of the word and review the sermons with your family?
 - Do the members of your house see you changing and acting differently under the influence of the word?

TRANS> Fathers, be sure that you are a scribe who understands and who therefore brings forth things new and old for your household.

3. And now all of you—all of you are in some since to be scribes who understand!
- a. You all have an influence on the people around you...
- On your fellow church members,
 - On your siblings and your parents and your friends...
 - You need to realise that some of them—even if they profess—may not be believers.
 - And you need to realise that if they are not, they are going to be cast into the furnace of fire.

- If this is a reality to you, it will affect the way you live around them!
 - You will be a better example, more patient and more kind to them...
 - You will take opportunity to speak of your saviour and what He has shown you and what He has done in your life...
 - And you will pray with great earnestness for them.

TRANS> And not only should you be a scribe that understands who brings forth things new and old for others...

b. You must also be a scribe that understands to yourself.

- You are a householder who supplies food to your own soul.
 - Do you meditate on God's word (think about how it applies to you)?
 - Do you apply it as you go along?
 - Do you take opportunity to feed upon it?
- If there really is to be great separation such as our Lord speaks about here and there really is to be casting away of every unbeliever at the end...
 - you just can't be cavalier, apathetic, indifferent, unresponsive, lethargic, dispassionate, unconcerned, inattentive, careless, slack, untroubled, and cool about all this!
 - The net will soon be drawn to shore and the true character of your religion will be exposed.
 - You must see to it that God's word is getting to your soul!

Conclusion

- What a faithful scribe our Lord Jesus is!
 - He never loses sight of where we were headed apart from Him!
 - That is why He went to the cross for us and that is why He sends His ministers to urge the gospel upon us.
 - And that is why He gives the Holy Spirit to all His elect to turn their hearts to Him and His gracious promise.
- What He says is real!
 - Just as truly as He hung on the cross there will come this final judgement!
 - And when it comes, it will be too late.
 - And now let me put His question to you:
 - Have you understood these things?