

The Parable of the Net

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[0 : 0 0] But I'd like us to turn once again to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 13. Reading again at verse 47. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net, and that was thrown into the sea, and gathered every kind of fish.

And it was full, men drew to shore, and sat down, and sorted the good into containers, but through the bad way. You know, as we read through this Gospel of Matthew, we have to come all the way to chapter 13 before we see the first parable.

And then suddenly, we are faced with seven parables, all gathered together, all saying virtually the same thing. And the Lord repeats himself quite often as he teaches the people and his disciples the meaning of what he is saying.

No doubt he's repeating them in the hope that what he's saying, and what is written here, will get through to their understandings, and get through to our understanding as well.

That we will read, learn, and inwardly digest all that has been written for our benefit. And here the Lord repeats the warning that there is to be a separation.

[1 : 4 1] Very often, we are told, especially by those who don't believe these scriptures in their fullness, that separation is just something that is used as a bogeyman, and we shouldn't really take it as being literal.

But if our Lord Jesus Christ says these things, he is our Lord, he is our Saviour, he is our God, and what he says we believe, not because we can prove what he says is right, but we do so as an act of devotion.

What he says we believe, because we worship him, and we believe what he says. Now, as I said, these parables here are about separation.

We have the separation of the wheat and the tares, and here we have the separation between the good fish and also the bad fish. And both parables describe to us the separation between the wicked and the righteous.

The question is, why are these two parables, and the other parables here in this particular chapter, teaching the same things? There seems to be a continual repetition.

[3 : 0 1] Well, we have the mix of the good and the bad throughout this particular chapter. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, we have also the angel's work in these parables.

We have the separation, the terrible end of the wicked, is all in the previous parables. But the Lord introduces a new element here in this particular parable, and it's the element of warning, a warning to the wicked that their end is going to be a terrible end.

that there's a coming judgment, a separation, and the fate of the terrible, or the fate of the wicked is going to be terrible in that day.

I read that chapter there in Hebrews. It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that, the judgment.

If we cannot believe anything else in the scriptures, you can look at that particular verse, and see it says, it's appointed unto men once to die.

- [4 : 13] All of us are on this journey from birth to death. We are on this journey, and during this journey, we receive much information to sift, and to guide us through our life's journey.
- Children growing up, they have much to read. Parents put various types of books into their hands, and guide them in direction of what knowledge they should understand.
- And amongst all that wide knowledge that is given to them, the one thing needful that they must have is the knowledge of Christ.
- In the books that they read, there must be some knowledge about Christ, about the kingdom to come, and of salvation that is in Christ Jesus. So here is this aspect of a separation that is coming, a judgment, and the fate of the ungodly, and it's all contained here in this particular parable.
- The first thing we notice here is that the separation is to be final. There's no appeal. Separation is final.
- [5 : 42] The Lord speaks here about a separation as in good and bad fish. He speaks of a separation between the wheat and the tares, between the righteous and the unrighteous, between the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, and that, in its essence, is what judgment means.
- It means to divide. It means to separate. It means to take one from the other. In later parables, like the parables of the five wise and the five foolish virgins, the fruitful and the unfruitful or unprofitable servants, the sheep and the goats, and especially the rich man and Lazarus, the point is made that there is a great gulf fixed and no one can bridge it.
- Although we say no one can bridge it, the Lord Jesus Christ can bridge it for those who are in him. In the parable, we're told, no one can bridge it. None can go from us or in the case of the rich man and Lazarus.
- No one can go from Lazarus to the rich man and no one can go from the rich man to Lazarus. The gulf is fixed. It's impenetrable. Now, there are some important facts here about this judgment that we just need to look at briefly.
- It is absolute, as I said, and final. There's no going back, there's no appeal, there's no change.
- [7 : 30] At the moment, as in Augustine's City of God, there is a mixture, an alloy of good and bad throughout all of society.
- In Augustine's book, there is this city in which the believer and the unbeliever are growing up together. But when the time comes, that division is made, that separation is made, the choice of God is made, and the good are taken away from the bad, and the good are taken up into the kingdom of heaven.
- Notice here in this particular chapter, all the parables are about the kingdom of heaven. The first parable is really about the institution, the commencement of the kingdom, and the others here speak about that kingdom as it goes on.
- And so, there is this mixture between the good and the bad, between the redeemed and the lost. But, at the end of the age, as the Lord here says, he sends his angels to separate and to execute judgment.
- Either we will be forever blessed, taken to be forever with the Lord, to know his fellowship, to share his glory, to know all the blessings he can give to his people.
- [9 : 04] Or, we will be forever chastised, forever sent to this place where the Lord calls for weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth or even a fiery furnace.
- No one is going to be partly in one element and partly in the other. Some elements of the Christian church talk of a place called purgatory.

Nowhere in the scripture is such a place defined or even spoken about or mentioned or hinted at. It's a device of man for whatever reason. It's been invented and there is no such place as purgatory.

As the tree falls, so shall it lie. If the tree falls in unrighteousness, it will continue to be unrighteous. Let the evil be evil still.

If it falls in righteousness, let it be good still, forever with the Lord. And so we also have to see here in this particular parable that the separation will be determined by what we've chosen as our focus in this life.

[10 : 31] Or what we've done in this life. Or what we've chosen to pursue in this life. What aims and desires we've fulfilled here while we're still on earth.

And it's a question of whether we've received Christ or not. The question whether we have to ask ourselves what do we think of Christ?

Is he God's son? And if he is God's son, what do we do with him while we are here? Is it made any difference to our lives?

Does it make any difference to the way we live? Or is it the fact that he is God's son has made no impression on us and has made no difference to the way that we live our lives?

If we suddenly discover that the Bible is suddenly true, if we are convinced by the spirit of God that the Bible is true, what difference does that truth make to our lives?

[11 : 38] Do we change the focus of our lives? Do we change the direction of our lives? Or do we go on, having discovered truth, to go on living a lie? And so, we have to ask ourselves whether, having discovered that Jesus Christ is the son of God, whether we've lived wholeheartedly for him, not simply having an interest in him or simply an interest in the Bible, whether we are committed wholeheartedly to him, receiving him and resting upon him alone for our salvation.

No input from ourselves, but only what he has done, only what he has accomplished, that's all we can rest on, that's our only comfort, that's our only hope. One of the words that Paul uses in Philippians about his own situation, he was a very proud Jew, at one time he was very proud of his heritage and the life that he'd lived, he talks about being a Hebrew of the Hebrews of the tribe of Israel, a Pharisee of the Pharisees according to the law blameless.

All these were great boasts to him, but when the Lord Jesus Christ came into his experience, when he met him on the road to Damascus, when he brought him to see the truth as it is in Christ, after the Lord tells him to stop kicking against the goads that were attacking his conscience and his mind, he would then come to see, as you read in that chapter, he counts all things but loss, rubbish, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

And now, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He is the prize, and I'm pressing towards that mark, I'm straining to achieve that goal.

That's what Paul did for the rest of his life. From the moment Christ intercepted his mission to Damascus, Paul is a changed man, and he lives, he is spending and being spent in his pursuit of Christ, and in the work of the gospel.

[14 : 15] So, it's final, the separation is final, the separation is determined by the way we live our lives here in this world, and it's also permanent, as I mentioned earlier on, there's no different place we can go to after we die.

It is appointed unto all men once to die, and after that the judgment. and also we know that the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory, while their bodies still united to Christ do rest in the grave till the resurrection.

These are the truths that we gather from scripture. the death of the unrighteous is like the death of the rich man and Lazarus where the rich man lifts up his eyes in torment in hell and recognizes the situation after a lifetime of luxury and riches, suddenly finds himself with nothing.

So the day of death is the day that prayers have no more use. It's the day when we lose all hope. The day when salvation is past.

We could wish that it might be different. We could wish that there might be some sort of probation after death, some place whereby we can have a second chance, but it won't be. It can't be.

[16 : 02] The Lord says, it can't be. Only one person will tell you it's not permanent.

Only one person will say it's all in the imagination, and that's the devil. he is a liar and he is the father of lies.

He's been telling millions for centuries that the day of reckoning is a long way off. Don't bother about it. It's a long way off. You don't have to think about that yet, or don't have to do anything about it quite yet.

There's plenty of time yet for repentance and reconciliation, and so he loves us into a sense of false security. It's a long way away.

But as we all know, and as we've all known of people in our own day, and our friends, it can happen anytime, at any moment.

[17 : 10] And so believing the devil, we continue to live careless lives, giving no heed to the approaching storm. Something happened just a few days ago that brings this very much home in a practical way.

There were some fishermen out on a sea loch in Fife, and they were fishing quite happily without looking at the weather that was approaching.

The storm came, they were overtaken by the storm, and their lives were lost. And as I was going through this, as I was re-prepared just before I came out tonight, I suddenly thought about C.S.

Lewis and his screw tape letters. I don't know if you've read them or whether you've read them as children, or if not, it's by C.S.

Lewis, the screw tape letters, and the master devil is called screw tape, and his apprentice devil is called wormwood. It's a very insightful book about the excuses people use, and the way C.S.

[18 : 35] Lewis does, he uses the apprentice devil to distract the person and keep him away from the gospel using all sorts of devices so to do. And really, in a way, that's what the devil does to us.

He wants to distract us, he wants to turn us away from the gospel, he wants to give us other interests, things, and so not yet. Not while I'm young, not while I'm middle-aged, I wait until after I've retired, whatever else, these plans I've got to fulfill, I won't be ready yet for the gospel.

If you've not read the screw tape letters, get them, you can actually download them off the net. If you haven't read the Chronicles of Narnia, you can get those.

Also, download as a download on the net. And so, as you read C.S. Lewis, he has much more, but these two are a very good introduction to Christianity, and also an introduction to the work of the gospel, as he displays it there for children and adults.

And so, don't listen to the devil or any of his devices. We're told the devil is as a prowling lion, prowling lion, seeking to devour us, not simply to injure us or to spoil our witness, he wants to destroy us, wants to destroy our very spiritual life, he wants to make us the same as he is.

[20 : 00] He's got no love for us, he's condemned himself and he takes this perverse delight in taking others with him into the condemnation which he now stands.

One of the greatest lies he has fostered upon the world today is that he doesn't exist. Christ. Oh, he exists very much. He existed in the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ in the desert, in the temptation of the desert.

He was in a very real way there at the time of the cross, trying to distract him and trying to get him to come down off the cross using the voices of the scribes and Pharisees.

And so he's always there in the experience of the Lord and the experience of the Lord's people, trying to destroy our witness, trying to destroy our own spirituality, trying to make us as he is.

And so don't listen to the devil, but listen to Christ, the Lord and Bishop of our souls. That now is the accepted time.

[21 : 04] Today, only today, is the day of salvation. And so then, secondly here, judgment is final and it's terrible for the ungodly and the sinners.

Now, each and every one of us here this evening are sinners. Some in here have been saved by grace. If the righteous, by that I mean those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if the righteous are scarcely saved, if they're saved with great difficulty, what shall the end be for the ungodly and the sinner?

Very often we think in terms of those who have lived outrageous, debauched lives. They're the sinners. Those who steal, those who kill, those who are engaged in adultery.

These are the sinners and they deserve help. But everyone who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is ungodly. Because they don't believe the witness of the heavenly father who sent his son into this world to seek and to save the lost.

Now, it's for our eternal good that the Lord warns us in such stark terms as he does here of the latter end of all unbelievers that there be a weeping and a wailing and a gnashing of teeth.

[22 : 42] The Lord, strangely, the one we call the Prince of Peace, the Lord who is a loving saviour, speaks more of hell and a lost eternity than anybody else in the scriptures.

What makes hell so terrible is the unending suffering that the Lord here describes and elsewhere. It's the worm that does not cease to turn.

The conscience that is always there is always accusing us of the opportunities and all that is past our lives have given us. The rich man lifts up his eyes in hell and being in torment.

The parable of the sheep and the goats who hear but do not do. Hearers of the word but not doers.

And who were told depart from me into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and the angels. perhaps someone will ask is does hell contain literal fire?

[24 : 03] And again there's no way that we can know except that the Lord Jesus Christ says there is this place this fiery furnace. And again we cannot prove it but again we believe it because the Lord says that's the way it is.

And so we believe it and understand that's what's being said here. But I do believe also that this intense suffering that the Lord wants to communicate to us can't be described in any other way than the thought of a body burning continually through the unending ages of eternity.

another thing that makes hell unbearable is our memory of this world.

You know I've often thought to try and explain to myself I suppose more than anybody else this mind brain aspect of our being.

There is the mind or the brain which is a storehouse of everything in this world but it's mainly a motor function.

[25 : 35] Our mind or brain tells us to move our arms or walk or we feel pain that sort of thing it's a motor function whereas the memory is something that's me the soul what I am myself and the memory continues it isn't destroyed by death the memory continues unendingly and the memory is something that will continue to bear witness to us and that's what makes hell so unbearable when we think of all the blessings we enjoyed we think of all the opportunities that we had in this life when we think of all the prayers that our parents and our friends offered up for us all the witnessing that we were beneficiaries of of the sermons we heard of the times when people spoke to us about the gospel when we were invited to church and didn't go when we were asked to make our calling and election sure and cast it aside all these will come rushing back into our minds and into our consciences while we are there knowing that it can't be changed here's the story as I mentioned before the story of the rich man and Lazarus both died both were buried one one was simply told buried and in hell he lifted up his eyes and being in torment the other was carried to

Abraham's bosom can we take that as being symbolic of Lazarus being taken to heaven and when the rich man prays to Abraham prays to him that he would send Lazarus to bring even a drop of water put on his lips Abraham says to the rich man son remember and that's an indication that memory is still alive after death remember you had your good things in life that's what you chose that's how you lived when dressed in purple and fine things and fed sumptuously every day all the good things of life was the rich man's while Lazarus laid at his gate seeking for the crumbs that came from the rich man's table and so all these blessings and opportunities are going to keep attacking our memories as I think of the

West today departing more and more from the gospel and from Christ why is the West departing so much soul even in the West Isles is it because that the Lord has given us our heart's desire and brought leanness to our souls is it because that having achieved our ambitions and our aspirations we have no more time for God we think of the time when people have to pray for the next meal upon their table they have to worry about the weather whether the crops could be gathered in not to worry about the cattle and the sheep today we've got supermarkets and we've got deep breezes and we've no need to pray for such things and we're forgetting how to pray why is it I wonder that the gospel is in such a demise as it is not only here but throughout the west and over the world why is it that gospel communities are failing we no longer have time to come to the means of grace we no longer have time to perhaps go to worship services where somebody in the community has died no longer does everything stop in the community when somebody has passed away this fellow feeling of grief among the community it's no longer there and it's all because the gospel is going and the more that the fellowship goes the gospel will go if we lose the fellowship if we lose our gathering together if we lose our community spirit the gospel will depart with it it's already happened throughout

Britain today we still have a vestige some of that still left with us protect it nourish it encourage it and we might know the blessing of God and possibly the hardest part of it all will be to know that perhaps by our example others will have entered a lost eternity again in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus he wants Lazarus to be sent to his brothers so they wouldn't come to this place is that perhaps a warning to parents and grandparents as to how they're raising their children to husband and wives are they witnessing to each other as they should be or even perhaps to godless ministers prayerless ministers who don't pray and who are preaching perhaps wooden sermons to those in front of them with no urgency and no power because god's spirit is not at work and then just finally the lord says have you understood these things he actually said that earlier on in the chapter do you understand this do you understand what i've been saying to you and they say yes they had understood it intellectually but they had they understood it spiritually had they really believed what he was saying we can sit under a stone we can understand what the person is saying but the spiritual import of what's being said really passes over our heads perhaps that's the preacher's fault but perhaps also it's our fault as we sit in the pew we're not really listening we're not really trying to understand it and we're not prepared to act on what we've heard and so the same thing applies to us as we sit here under this gospel not only have we understood it intellectually and the precepts that are being spoken about but do we really believe them and are we prepared to act on what we've heard and to encourage others to do the same the

Bible says the fool says in his heart there is no God but there's a bigger fool the church goer who believes that there is a God and then doesn't take him seriously the parable reminds us that when the judgment comes the Lord will send his angels to separate the wicked from the righteous then where shall we be who shall we be let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord we will have mercy upon him and to his

[34 : 13] God for he will abundantly part may it be if we are still outside of the covenant promises and the covenant safety of those promises that tonight the Lord will have mercy and the Lord will give grace and souls will be saved the Lord then bless these thoughts to us let us then conclude our worship singing to God's praise in Psalm 19 on page 223 at verse 7 God's law is perfect and converts the soul and sin that lies God's testimony is most sure and makes the simple wise once again just down to the end of the verse marked 10 that's four stanzas to God's praise standing to place side and is a

He is more sure and makes the sinful wise.

The statutes of the Lord arise and do rejoice the heart.

The Lord's command is pure and of light to the Isaac Park.

I've spotted it the fear of God and I've endured forever the judgment of the Lord.

[36 : 41] The true and righteous come together. They more than gold ye much kind Lord to be desired of that honey, honey, from the cold that dropped a sweeter heart.

And now may grace, mercy and peace in name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God rest on you and abide in you now and always.

Amen.