

The Dragnet

Matthew 13:47-58

The Dragnet. What in the world is a dragnet? When I here that word I immediately think of the old television show. And as I thought about that I remembered several phrases that were often repeated on that show. One famous phrase from Dragnet is, "The stories you are about to see are true." And I can tell you this about what Jesus teaches us today, "the parable you are about to see is true." In this parable Jesus portrays a principle of the kingdom of heaven that is absolutely true and worthy of our attention.

Another famous phrase that Sergeant Friday would often says is, "Just the facts, ma'am." Today we are going to look at "just the facts" from someone who knows the facts, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Today we come to the last two of the eight parables in Matthew 13. Jesus has been teaching us about "**the Kingdom of heaven.**" We remember that the Kingdom is defined as the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus over His people. For now that is an invisible, internal kingdom. Jesus rules over our hearts. In an age to come, it will be a visible, physical kingdom too.

In these last two parables of this section, Jesus shares some truths concerning the judgment of men and the proclamation of the gospel.

I. The Parable of the Dragnet (vv. 47-50).

A. The Parable Portrays a Picture of the Judgment (vv. 47-48).

1. Again Jesus uses a parable, a common story with a spiritual truth. This particular parable was indeed common to the disciples. After all, at least four of them had been professional fishermen and many of the others had grown up around the fishing industry in Galilee.
2. In Galilee there were three common types of fishing.
 - a. First was the simple hook and line. Peter used this method in Mt.17:24-27 to catch a fish with a coin in his mouth that was used to pay taxes.
 - b. Second was the one-man casting net. A man would wade out into the shallow water and hand cast this net over schools of small fish.
 - c. Third was the large "**dragnet**" or seine that was pulled between two boats. Some of these nets were several hundred yards wide and would drift for hours catching all manner of fish.
3. We can only image what types of things would be caught in a large "**dragnet.**" Weeds, refuse, small fish, large fish, good fish, trash fish... "**some of every kind...**" anything in the path of the net would eventually be caught and "**gathered**" by the fishermen.
4. When this net was "**full**" it would be drawn "**to shore**" and the fishermen there "**sat down**" to go through their catch. They would put the "**good**" catch into "**vessels**" or containers to be sold and the "**bad**" would be "**thrown... away.**"

B. The Parable Explains the Principle of the Judgment (v. 49).

1. Jesus doesn't leave us wondering what this parable means, he explains it clearly. Jesus compares the "**dragnet**" to the judgment by saying "**so it will be at the end of the age.**" There is coming a time "**at the end of the age**" when all men, like all the fish in the sea will be divided.

2. Earlier in this chapter, the *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares* symbolized believers and unbelievers living alongside each other in the world. However, this parable pictures their division in the judgment.

3. As in the *Parable of the Wheat and the Tares*, the "**angels**" God's agents of justice "**will come forth.**" Their task will be to "**separate the wicked from among the just.**"

Listen to John MacArthur's words as he describes the judgment using Jesus' metaphor of the "**dragnet**:" "**Men move about within that net as if they were forever free. It may touch them from time to time, as it were startling them. But they swim quickly away, thinking they have escaped, not realizing that they are completely and inescapably encompassed in God's sovereign plan. The Invisible web of God's judgment encroaches on every human being just as that of the dragnet encroaches on the fish. Most men do not perceive the kingdom, and they do not see God working in the world. They may be briefly moved by the grace of the gospel or frightened by the treat of judgment; but they soon return to their old ways of thinking and living, oblivious to the things of eternity. But when man's day is over and Christ returns to set up His glorious kingdom, then judgment will come**" (p.395)

4. Jesus is speaking of judgment in a general sense, with a specific application to the great white throne judgment described in Rev. 20.

5. The Lord has no pleasure in the destruction of wicked people. In Ez.18:23, the Lord asks, "**Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die and not that he should turn from his ways and live?**" 2 Pet.3:9 says, "**The Lord is... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" Luke 19:41 records how Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the people would not repent. In fact, Mt.25:41 tells us hell was not created for men but was "**prepared for the devil and his angels.**"

C. This Parable describes the **Peril** of the Judgment (v. 50).

1. Jesus say that the "**wicked**" will be "**cast into the furnace of fire**" a synonym for hell. There, the only sounds will be "**wailing and gnashing of teeth.**"

2. The biblical doctrine of hell is hard for many people to accept. However, if we are to be true to the Word, we must accept its reality.

3. Jesus spoke more about hell than any other prophet or apostle. He constantly emphasized the reality of eternal punishment. In fact, He said more about hell than about love!

4. When people die, they do not go out into nothingness or cease to exist. God will "**separate**" everyone and those who have not personally accepted Christ will be "**cast into the furnace of fire.**"

5. Have you ever heard unbelievers say that they want to go to hell because they think it will be a party? People who say that have no understanding of the real torment of hell. Think of it this way: In the same way that we can scarcely

conceive the glories of heaven in the presence of Almighty God and His angels, it must also be that we can scarcely conceive the horrors of hell in the presence of Satan and his demonic hordes.

D. The Bible tells us several Facts about Hell.

Hell is a real place. Someone said, "Hell, about which our fathers spoke so fervently, seems to have cooled off so much that it would make a fairly good summer resort."

The Greek word is "geenna" {gheh'-en-nah}, which in Hebrew "Ge-Hinnom"

B. W. Johnson comments that, the term Gehenna arose from the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the Canaanites burned human sacrifices to Moloch. After the return of the Jews from the Captivity they made it a place of defilement, where the refuse of the city was thrown and burned. The valley of Hinnom was the city dump. It was always burning. Smoke went up from it continually. The smoldering fire never went out. So the name gehenna came to mean the place of future punishment. The person in the Bible that used the word "hell" most often was Jesus. And it always meant a place of future punishment.

1. Hell is a place of constant torment. In Mt.22:13, Jesus described it as "**outer darkness.**" This refers to absolute chaos, confusion, hopelessness, and futility. The morning never comes. Light never shines because people have been separated from God. There is never any light there, only eternal blindness. In hell, there is no music, no comforting sound but only "**wailing and gnashing of teeth.**" There the fire will never be extinguished and the damned will never find relief.

2. Hell will torment both body and soul.

a. When a lost person dies, his body is buried or burned, but his soul goes on to be tormented in hell. But that is not the end. The Bible speaks of the resurrection of both the saved and the lost.

b. Believers will be fitted with bodies that enable them to enjoy the glories of heaven forever. Unbelievers will be fitted with bodies that enable them to endure the horrors of hell.

Jesus gives a picture of that physical torment in Luke 16. What kind of physical anguish? Luke 16 tells us about fire, flames, and torment. It is so bad that the rich man begs Lazarus for just a single drop of water to cool his tongue. The rich man doesn't ask for a barrel of water or a jar or a thermos or a cup or a gulp. He just says a drop or two would be precious beyond description. The Bible says that that type of unrelieved physical pain will go on day and night forever.

c. Listen to what Jesus said in **John 5:28-29**, "**Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.**"

d. In Mark 9:44 Jesus describes hell as a place "**where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.**" If a body is buried in an unsealed casket, worms will destroy it. However in the resurrected bodies of the damned the worms of hell will never stop eating. The misery of the fire will never stop burning.

3. Hell will have varying degrees of torment. Some will experience a greater degree of torment than others will. Listen to what Jesus said in **Matthew 11:22-24**,

22 **"But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."**

John Gerstner wrote, *"Hell will have such severe degrees that a sinner, were he able, would give the whole world if his sins could be one less."*

4. Hell will never end.

a. By far the worst torment of hell is its endlessness. Jesus said in Mat.25:46 that some **"will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**

Listen to how one preacher described what Hell might feel like: "The bottomless pit...conjures up dreamlike feelings of falling away -- falling, falling, falling. You've all had dreams like that; where when you woke your heart was beating because you were falling. Picture in your mind hanging over a precipice --- and God is hanging onto you --- and you're hanging onto him. "And you decide you don't need him anymore. So you let go. But the moment you let go you know you made a mistake. You're falling, and every moment you fall further and further away from the only source of help and truth and love --- and you realize you made a mistake and you can't get back up --- and you fall further and faster and further and faster into spiritual oblivion --- and you know you're going the wrong direction --- and you'd give anything to go back, but you can't. And you fall, and you fall, and you fall, and you fall ... How long? Forever."

II. The Parable of the Householder (vv. 51-52).

A. JESUS ASKED THE DISCIPLES IF THEY UNDERSTOOD (v. 51).

1. Jesus said, **"Have you understood all these things?"** The word **"understand"** means "put together". He's asking, "Have you put all this together yet?"
2. That's a good question for us. Do we have an understanding, have we put together these vital truths of the kingdom and the judgment. Do we really believe that even though we live alongside unbelievers like wheat and tares in a field, like good and bad fish in a net that there is a time coming when we shall be separated?
3. Do we **"understand"** the reality of the judgment? Do we believe the torments of hell?
4. Our biblical understanding of the judgment should be a primary motivating force for ministry.

5. We don't reach out to people to build a big church. We don't witness in order to push our views on others. We should pray, witness minister, preach, invite, and compel because we "**understand**" the judgment!

6. The disciples answered, "**Yes, Lord.**" Though their understanding was far from perfect they understood what they were able to understand at the time.

B. BELIEVERS ARE TO BE LIKE GOOD HOUSEHOLDERS (v.52).

1. The word "**scribe**" comes from *grammateus* and means "one who writes." In those days the term referred to a student and teacher of the law.

2. Under Jesus' tutelage, the disciples were becoming scribes, students and teachers of the truths of God's Word.

3. Such a "**scribe**" was to be like a "**householder.**" This means the head of a house, the person responsible for the welfare of a family. He would maintain supplies of food and clothing and use them wisely.

4. The "**householder**" or head of the house would "**bring out of his treasure** [storehouse] **things old and new.**" He would not waste his supplies so food that was uneaten and clothing that could be reused were used again. Only when the "**old**" was consumed would he bring out the "**new.**"

5. The disciples, later, as they became apostles would dispense both "**new and old**" revelation. They were to "bring forth" the truth, which means to "scatter."

6. In a similar sense, we as believers are to "**bring forth**" or scatter the truth of God's word. We must be careful to give all truth, not just what is popular or easily received.

7. People don't want to hear about hell or about judgment. They want to hear about love and grace. However, if we give only a diet of love and grace and waste the truth of the judgment many will not be saved.

I'd like to close with three implications.

Unbelievers

I want to say this with all the concern and compassion I can. This world is filled with nice people who are, in fact, kind and moral and considerate of others. But never forget this—nobody's nice enough to be righteous in God's eyes. Do you know why? It's because all the niceness in the world can't remove the stain of our sin. The nicest person on earth is still a sinner. And without Jesus even nice sinners can't be saved.

But you say, "I don't like labels—especially labels that put people in categories like 'wicked' and 'righteous'." This may hurt your feelings, but the truth is what we like or don't like really doesn't matter. We aren't God. Jesus is. Jesus isn't here to tell us what we want to hear. Jesus is here to tell us the truth. And Jesus says that at the end of the age God will separate us. There will be only one of two ways—righteous or wicked, redeemed or condemned, saved or unsaved, believer or unbeliever, disciple of Christ or rebel against Christ. There are no other categories. There is no middle ground. "Nice without Jesus" is not an option. So what will it be for you?

I plead with you to consider this morning's message. Drop to your knees. You need a Savior. You're cruising toward a Christ-less grave. You're going to be in the afterlife a whole lot longer than this life. Ask Jesus Christ to be your own Savior. Trust him for forgiveness of your sins. Trust him.

Believers

Rejoice over what you have been spared from. In your lowest moments here on this earth, thank God, worship Him for sparing you from hell.

Church

Another phrase from the show, *Dragnet*, is "We were working the day watch."

There's a whole mass of humanity all over the world moving toward the afterlife. God has placed this church here to be a lighthouse, a rescue operation to get the word out about eternity, about heaven and hell, but most importantly to get the word out about the Savior, Jesus Christ. Are you working the day watch?

We are not a country club where you come to socialize, pay a few dues, and leave. We are not a performing arts center where talented people do their thing up on stage and the congregation applauds and nods approvingly and leaves unaffected. We're the body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit and commissioned to proclaim to our world that Jesus saves.

Sometimes we lose perspective as a church, don't we? Sometimes we wonder why we serve, why we teach classes, why we give, why we study so hard to present messages and music and all that stuff. Because, friends, it's high-stake living. It's not just life and death, it's eternal life and eternal death that hangs in the balance. Let's pray.