

## The Parables Of Matthew 13 (Part Eight): The Parable Of The Dragnet

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In the fourth pair of the parables of Matthew 13, Jesus continues to instruct His disciples apart from the general multitude to which He had spoken earlier. The seventh parable in the chapter, the Parable of the Dragnet (verse 47) teaches that in the professing church, the good and evil who intermingle on earth will be completely separated "at the end of the age." This set time of separation will be, for the good, a time of rejoicing in a bright, eternal future, but for the evil, it will be a time of mourning before eternal oblivion.

In Matthew 4:18-20, Jesus says to Peter and Andrew, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men," providing a partial interpretation of this parable. When Jesus Christ later made the twelve disciples fishers of men, they went out and brought in "catches" of converts. Thus, the church, composed of the "called," are caught in God's net, which His servants draw in.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John had been fishermen prior to their calling, so to them, the idea of the dragnet was a familiar and vivid picture. Their work entailed using a net—a dragnet—of great length, weighted by lead and designed to sweep the bottom of the sea, gathering fish in masses. Two boats would drag this net between them, sweeping a section of the Sea of Galilee, after which the sailors would haul the net to shore. There, the fishermen would go through the entire net, keeping the good fish but burning the substandard ones to avoid catching them again later.

1. What does the sea represent? The fish? Matthew 13:47.

**Comment:** The symbol of "the sea" is similar to that seen in the beasts rising out of the sea and out of the earth (Revelation 13:1, 11). It designates origination, representing the realm of the earth. Christ's origin is the realm of heaven, but the beasts, part of a corrupt system, come from the sea and the earth. The sea, a body of water, symbolizes "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15).

In the parable, when the fish are caught in a net thrown in the sea, Jesus signifies that members of His church are "the called" out of the world (Romans 1:5-6; 8:28). The dragnet gathers some of every kind; God's net catches fish without partiality to age, sex, race, ethnicity, class, wealth, intelligence, language, beauty, and so forth. His interest is in developing our character and whether He can work with us (Romans 2:11; 5:8; 9:18, 21).

2. Is the judgment of the bad fish just? What is this parable's focus? Matthew 13:48-50.

**Comment:** Jesus tells us that the bad fish are thrown into the fire. John the Baptist says this in a slightly different way in Matthew 3:12: "[Jesus] will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." This principle appears somewhat differently in the Parable of the

Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31-46): Christ is Judge, and He sets the sheep on His right hand and the goats on His left. He judges that the sheep can enter eternal life, while the goats receive the destructive judgment of fire.

Although a final judgment is coming for the world, the church is now under God's judgment (I Peter 4:17; Revelation 11:1-2). Not only is the sentence coming, but our conduct and growth are also currently being judged—Christ is evaluating whether we meet His high standards. Ultimately, everyone is judged the same way, according to the same standard, by the same criteria. The "bad fish" among us are not ours to judge, but Jesus, the righteous Judge, has promised to judge with equity (Psalm 98:9).

Matthew 13:50 says they are thrown "into the furnace of fire." A similar thing occurs in the Parable of the Tares: At the end of the age, the tares will be gathered and thrown into the furnace (verses 30, 41-42). The emphasis in the Parable of the Tares is on the wicked and their evil works and their subsequent judgment. However, in the Parable of the Dragnet, instead of highlighting the wickedness, Jesus focuses on *the process of judgment*, not necessarily on condemning evildoers. Some people are condemned for doing wicked things, but others are saved and rewarded for doing the good works assigned to them. God's calling is first impartial, and then His judgment is absolutely fair. The wicked will get only what they deserve.

3. By what standard does Christ judge? Same verses.

**Comment:** God's "catch" is the church, a chosen cross section of the entire world; He casts a wide net. However, once those He calls accept Jesus Christ, God does show Himself partial to the "good fish"—those who love Him, obey Him, serve others, grow, and produce spiritual fruit. In the process of salvation, God judges whether we are good, useable fish or substandard fish fit only for the fire. He judges us according to how we measure up against His standard of righteousness, "the perfect man, . . . the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). God throws His net into the world and drags us in, and if we are unwilling to comply with His holy standard, our eternal judgment will be to be discarded in the fire.

Presently, the church's function is not judicial but declarative. On the one hand, the church is responsible to warn sinners of the dire consequences of sin and of the time of God's judgment coming upon all humanity. On the other hand, we are to witness of God's way of life, as well as to proclaim Christ's return and the establishment of God's wonderful, benevolent government here on earth. That is good news!