

## INTRODUCTION

In Matthew 13, there are seven parables Jesus told about the Kingdom of Heaven. We looked at two long parables, the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. Then we looked at four short parables, the mustard seed, yeast, a buried treasure and a pearl of great price. This morning we come to the seventh parable I'm calling God's Dragnet.

One of the earliest police shows on radio and television was Dragnet. The television series starred Jack Webb as Sergeant Joe Friday and his sidekick, Bill Gannon, played by Harry Morgan, before he went on to become Colonel Potter in M.A.S.H. Dragnet had an ominous music theme that still strikes fear in the heart of criminals. Dum-de-dum-dum. Dum-de-dum-dum-dum-dum. The show always began with the same introduction: "Ladies and gentlemen, the story you're about to hear is true. Only the names have been changed to protect the innocent."

Then the case was introduced with the simple facts: "Tuesday, February 12. It was rainy in Los Angeles. We were working the day watch out of robbery division. My partner's Ben Romero. My name's Friday." Actually, on the television series Joe Friday never said, "Just the facts, ma'am." That phrase became famous from the 1987 Dragnet movie starring Dan Akroyd.

Today, we're going to look at a parable called "God's Dragnet." Ladies and gentlemen, the story you're about to hear is true. The names have not been changed. And we're going to look at more than just the facts, ma'am; we're going to look at the truth. Wednesday, April 19, 30 A.D. It was a warm day in Galilee. The crowds were gathered. His name was Jesus and here's His story:

"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Have you understood all these things?' Jesus asked. 'Yes,' they replied. He said to them, 'Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.' When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there." (Matthew 13:47-53)

If this parable sounds familiar it's because it is a twin of the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. The spiritual message is the same; the only difference is Jesus used the analogy of fish instead of plants. Jesus was talking to fishermen as well as farmers. He knew this parable would apply to all the fishermen in his audience. Let's look at the message of the parable in three stages, and then we'll look at some personal applications of this truth.

### **I. THE FISHING: Jesus came seeking to save lost individuals**

In the parable Jesus said the fishermen went out into the lake and let their net down into the water. If you're going to catch fish, you've got to go seek the fish. I grew up fishing a lot with my dad. We would often drive down to Choctawhatchee Bay, which was only about 45 minutes

from my house. This is a salt water bay near Destin, Florida. A couple of times we'd just be sitting in our boat when a school of mullet (that's a fish, not just a redneck haircut) would start jumping around us and a mullet would jump right into our boat. That was easy fishing! But that is extremely rare, because fish don't usually jump into your boat. You have to work hard to catch them.

In this parable, Jesus is the Master fisherman who came to seek people who needed a Savior. When He called His disciples who were fishermen He said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." You've probably heard this verse: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10) But do you recognize the context in which Jesus spoke those words? It was after He sought out a particular individual who was lost. The man's name was Zacchaeus. Jesus was passing through Jericho and Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see this famous rabbi. To his surprise, Jesus looked up into the tree and called his name. He said, "Zacchaeus, I'm coming to your house for lunch today." Jesus knew Zacchaeus was a little man with a big problem: He was a no-good-cheating tax collector, selfish and greedy. But Jesus loved him in spite of his sin. After Zacchaeus spent time with Jesus, he was a changed man.

Jesus didn't just come to seek and to save the crowds of sinners. He came seeking to save individuals—you and me. He is casting His net here today. Will you let Him catch you?

## **II. THE CATCHING: God wants everyone to know Him**

Today, fishermen in Galilee operate the same way they did 2,000 years ago. The only difference is the boats now have engines. A boat sails out into the lake and drops a long seine net. One end of the dragnet stays on shore, and the boat makes a circle to another point on shore. Once the boat makes the circle, then the fishermen start the hard work of dragging the net toward the shore.

In the parable Jesus said the net captured all different kinds of fish. The net never discriminates. The spiritual application of this is that the gospel is offered to everyone without discrimination. And God wants *everyone* to be saved. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) So what is the "promise" He's going to keep? God has promised that ultimately sin and wickedness would be judged. But the reason wicked people still get away with evil now is that God is patiently waiting. He's delaying His judgment because He's giving everyone a chance to hear the gospel and be saved.

Does that mean everyone WILL be saved? No. But God WANTS everyone to be saved. It is God's will for everyone to be saved. When you hear that you may scratch your head and ask, "Well, if it's God's will, then it will happen right?" Not necessarily. God's will just doesn't happen automatically. It does in heaven, but not on earth. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth AS IT IS in heaven." In heaven, all God has to do is to will it and it happens. God wills for you to be saved, but it doesn't happen unless you choose to accept His offer of eternal life. God's love is inclusive of every person on the planet. But there is another part of the parable we must not ignore.

### **III. THE SORTING: Each of us will be judged by how we respond to God's offer of forgiveness**

The fishermen tugged and pulled on the dragnet until it was on the shore. It was full of all different kinds of fish, so they started the important job of sorting the fish. Some were "keepers" and others were "junk fish." According to the Old Testament dietary laws, fish with scales, like bass, were kosher, but catfish, which doesn't have scales, were considered unclean. The fishermen put the keepers into baskets and the junk fish were thrown away. If you fish today, you know there are limits for keepers in Texas. For instance, the Texas Parks and Wildlife regulations requires a bass be at least 14 inches long to be a keeper. So fishermen know what it is to discriminate between keepers and those fish that get tossed back.

God never discriminates in His love, but there will be a final judgment in which there will be a sorting between the keepers and the throw-aways. We don't have to guess what this parable represents because Jesus said plainly in verse 49, "This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is the identical language Jesus used in the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds. He warned that at the end of time, some people would be saved and others would be cast into a place of torment that the Bible calls hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. God doesn't send anyone to hell. People send themselves to hell by rejecting God's offer of forgiveness. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Salvation is a gift. You can't earn a gift. God offers everyone this free gift of eternal life. The only thing you can do with a gift is to choose to accept it or choose to reject it. We're all sinners and the payment, the wage, for our sinfulness is death. This doesn't mean physical death, it means spiritual death. The Bible calls this place hell. Studies have shown most Americans don't believe there really is a hell. But regardless of what Oprah says, there IS a hell and Jesus spoke of it often.

One the morning of the Normandy Invasion 66 years ago this month, a bunch of G.I.s were gathered around a military chaplain. Many of them realized they might not survive the day. One of the G.I.s asked the chaplain if he believed in hell. The chaplain said, "No. I don't believe in hell." The G.I. said, "Then you should resign as a chaplain. Because if there is no hell, we don't need you, and if there is a hell, we don't want to be led astray."

Jesus believed hell is real and it is the destination of everyone who rejects God's offer of eternal life. That's the parable, but here are three personal lessons we can apply to our lives:

#### **A. God loved me and sought me before I ever started seeking Him**

The Lord cast His dragnet to catch me long before I ever thought about coming to Him. Sometimes we try to take a little credit for our salvation by saying something like, "I found the Lord when I was 25 years old." I know what you mean, but the Lord found *you* before you ever found Him. You can't find someone who isn't lost, and the Lord never was lost, but I was, and you were.

If you are a child of God, here's your spiritual biography: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." (Ephesians 1:4-5) Do you remember when you were in grammar school playing kickball and a couple of kids were assigned to choose sides? You always wanted to be picked. You might have stood there holding up your hand saying, "Pick me. Pick me! Pick me!" If you were chosen last, it wasn't very good for your self-esteem. Well God chose you and He chose you FIRST. He said, "I choose you to be my child!" You may wonder, "Why did God choose me to be in His family?" The answer is simple: He loves you. Just as there were all kinds of fish in the net, Jesus loves all kinds of people.

Jesus loves every kind of person, not just the good people. Jesus loves the down-and-out as well as the up-and-out. Jesus loves the man who drank himself into a stupor last night. Jesus loves the junkie who shot up last night. Jesus loves the woman who slept last night with someone who was not her husband. Jesus loves the guy who in secrecy and shame looked at porn on his computer last night. Jesus loves the child who cried herself to sleep last night because her parents were yelling at each other. And He loves those parents, too. Jesus loves that inmate sitting in prison because he did unspeakable things to another person. And Jesus loves the person sitting in church with a better-than-thou attitude thinking "Yeah, but He loves me more."

## **B. God wants everyone to be saved, but He won't force anyone to accept His love**

Sometimes people have a rigid view of God's Will. They think all God has to do is WISH something to happen and it happens. Well, we've already seen that God wants everyone to be saved, but He doesn't make it happen. You aren't some robot pre-wired by God so when He hits the return button on His computer, you fall down on your knees and trust Him. God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. But there is one area of His creation where He has voluntarily chosen to restrict His power, and that is in the area of your will. He will not choose for you. He allows you to make the choice. One of the most powerful promises and warnings in the Bible is found in John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." He offers the invitation to you, but you must accept it.

In his great book entitled, *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn relates the true story that happened to a professional singer named Ruthanna Metzgar. She had been invited to sing at the wedding of a very wealthy man. The reception was to be held at a very exclusive restaurant on the top floor of Seattle's tallest skyscraper. After the wedding, she arrived at the reception with her husband. They were excited as they arrived because they could see the fabulous decorations and the tables loaded with delicious food. Beautiful and famous people were laughing and talking. As they approached the entrance the maitre d' said, "May I have your names please?" She told him her name and her husband's name. The maitre d' looked and said, "I'm sorry, but your name isn't here." She said, "Please check again. I sang at the wedding and then she spelled her name." The maitre d' looked again and said, "It doesn't matter who you say you are and what you said you did, your name is not on the list. Without your name in my book, you can't come to the reception." Then he called over a waiter and said, "Show these people down using the service

elevator." She and her husband were escorted to the dirty service elevator and the waiter pushed G for garage. They arrived at the parking garage next to the garbage bin. After walking in silence toward their car her husband said, "Ruthanna, what happened? We were at the door of the party and we ended up at the garbage bin." She said, "I remember getting the invitation, but I was too busy to RSVP. I just assumed that because I was the singer that I'd get in."

Randy Alcorn wrote that God has invited every person to His wedding feast in heaven. But too many people are too busy to respond to the invitation. It doesn't matter who you think you are or what you think you have done that will get you into heaven. The only people admitted to the party in heaven are those who know the bridegroom and have had their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

### **C. In light of God's judgment I should actively persuade people to trust in Jesus**

So if you know you're saved, what should you do? Can you just hold onto your salvation, thankful that in the end you'll be one of the good fish gathered into God's basket? No! Think about the other fish in the net. Once again, this analogy breaks down. A bass can never become a catfish. But with God's power a sinner can become a saint! So while we're here in the net with all kinds of people, we should be working to convince them to trust Jesus.

What is our motivation to influence others to accept Christ? Our highest motive should be the love of Christ, but our strongest motivation should be the reality that people without Christ will spend in eternity in hell.

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul mentions both of these motives. "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." (In other words, because there is a hell for sinners, I'm motivated to persuade people) But in a few sentences later he wrote, "For Christ's love compels us... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:11, 14, 20) God wants to appeal to lost people to be saved and He wants to make that appeal through us. Let me ask you have you ever *implored* someone to be reconciled to God? Because of hell, are you actively persuading people to trust Christ?

Do you know what Universalism is? It's the belief that one day everyone will ultimately be saved. It is the belief that one day God will say, "I know I said some people will go to heaven and others will go to hell, but I was just kidding. Hell is cruel and unusual punishment, so I'm going to just let everyone come on into heaven." Most towns even have a Unitarian Universalist Fellowship; Tyler has one. But Universalism is a heresy that makes a mockery of the cross. If everyone is going to be saved, why, then did Jesus have to die a torturous death on the cross? Are you a Universalist? Well, if you have never been burdened over a lost person and never once tried to influence someone to accept Christ, then you are a practicing Universalist. Maybe you'd feel more at home attending their weekly gathering.

But if you believe in the reality of heaven and hell, then you aren't a Universalist—and you're in the right place. And Freedom Celebration is the perfect opportunity for you to influence someone to hear the gospel. Ladies, buy a ticket and invite that gal to the Friday night banquet. Men,

teenagers, get a couple of tickets for the Men's Steak Dinner on July 3 and tell them you want them to hear Colt McCoy. Invite someone to Mandisa or I Love America. The main question is not have you invited someone, but do you even CARE that someone you know may be described in this parable as someone who will be cast into the fiery furnace?

Too often we become so selfish with our salvation that we don't want to share it with someone else. It reminds me of a story I heard about a man who was taking a first aid course. At their first aid class meeting they were sharing testimonials about how they had been able to use their training. He said to the class, "I got to use my first aid training just yesterday." I was home and I heard a crash. I looked out in my front yard and a car had slammed into a tree in my front yard and the driver's door was open. The driver was lying on the ground bleeding. But because of my first aid training, I knew exactly what to do. I sat down and put my head between my knees so I wouldn't pass out!" That's how some Christians treat the gospel. They love the gospel, but they only apply it to their lives and they never share it with people who are dying to hear the good news.

Charles Spurgeon once said: "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for."

## CONCLUSION

Many of you know I love religious art. I had an amazing experience a few years ago when I was staring at one of the most famous paintings in the world. I was standing in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican looking at Michelangelo's painting of the Last Judgment. Michelangelo painted it 30 years after he finished the famous ceiling, and completed it just before he died. The Pope's chief of staff, Biagio da Cesena complained constantly to Michelangelo about the fully nude figures (they were later given fig leaves by another artist). Michelangelo retaliated by painting the likeness of Cesena in the bottom right as the prince of the underworld having the ears of a donkey! When you look at the details, it's a pretty frightening scene with Christ in the center of the picture welcoming some to heaven and sending others to the fiery depths of hell.

Some art experts have suggested Michelangelo hid a secret message in the painting by painting a picture within the picture. Instead of the Da Vinci Code, this could be called the Michelangelo Code! But it's not some deep dark secret. It's a simple, powerful message, and the last time I looked at it, I saw it, and suddenly the painting took on an entire new meaning. Can you see it? Some say Michelangelo intentionally painted an outline of Jesus hanging on the cross. Can you see the outline? The Pope instructed Michelangelo to depict the horrors of the final judgment, but Michelangelo intentionally put the image of the cross in the picture as an answer to the horror of judgment? We'll never know until we can ask him in heaven. But whether he intended it or not, when I looked at the Last Judgment, I saw the cross. What is the message?

The idea of the final judgment is pretty scary, but you have an alternative to facing God at the final judgment. You can trust the finished work of Christ on the cross. If you trust Jesus for your salvation, then you don't have to fear the final judgment.

There is a story told of a pioneer family traveling across the western plains in a covered wagon. They watched in horror as a huge prairie fire rushed toward them driven by a strong wind. They were afraid they would be killed by the fire, but the man acted quickly. He jumped down and quickly lit the dry prairie grass around their wagon. As the fire he set burned downwind, he then pulled his wagon onto the burned-out area and his family stood there as the fire swept past them. Of course, the fire didn't burn what had already been burned, so they survived. They found safety where the fire had already burned.

There is one place where the fire of God's judgment against sin has already fallen—at the cross of Jesus Christ. Maybe that was the message Michelangelo was hiding in his painting of the last judgment. You can choose to wait and stand before God at the final, terrible judgment. Or you can choose to stand at the cross where God's wrath against sin has already burned. I don't know about you, but I'm standing at the cross of Jesus!

The story of God's dragnet you've just heard is a true story. Only the names of those who trust Jesus will be written down in the Lamb's Book of Life. And that's more than just the facts, ma'am; that's the truth.

## OUTLINE

### I. THE FISHING: Jesus came seeking to save lost individuals

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." *Luke 19:10*

### II. THE CATCHING: God wants everyone to know Him

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." *2 Peter 3:9*

### III. THE SORTING: Each of us will be judged by how we respond to God's offer of forgiveness

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." *Romans 6:23*

## PERSONAL LESSONS

#### A. God loved me and sought me before I ever started seeking Him

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." *Ephesians 1:4-5*

#### B. God wants everyone to be saved, but He won't force anyone to accept His love

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." *John 3:36*

#### C. In light of God's judgment I should actively persuade people to trust in Jesus

"For Christ's love compels us... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." *2 Corinthians 5:11, 14, 20*

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David O. Dykes  
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church  
Tyler, Texas

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes