

The Parable of the Dragnet
A Series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom: Part 8

1. What do you observe about the simile found in the first half of the Parable of the Dragnet (Matt 13:47-48)? What is being compared?

The parable begins with “again”, which connects the parable with the preceding ones. Of the three immediately preceding parables, the Parable of the Dragnet is most closely related to the Parable of the Tares.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a dragnet which is designed to catch “all kinds” of fish in its path; the kingdom is vast and superior to all others. However, the point of comparison is the separation of the good and bad fish. The use of the terms “good” and “bad” lack moral overtones and instead is in the context of fish suitable for eating. “Bad” fish are “worthless” for eating.

2. What is known about fishing practices in the first century?

Made of loosely woven mesh of twine, dragnets were much larger than typical fishing nets. Floats made of wood or papyrus bundles and sinkers comprised of rocks were employed to keep the head of the net at the surface while its foot was dragged along the lake's bottom. One method was to anchor one end of the net on shore, and the boat takes the other end and makes a semicircle back to shore. Another method has the dragnet cast and drawn into the boat or dragged behind the boat to the shore.

3. What was Jesus' interpretation of the parable (Matt 13:49-50)?

In Jesus' interpretation, the fishermen represent unfallen angels. The fish represent human beings, and while the parable places no moral context to the fishes, Jesus' interpretation does make a moral judgment; human beings are either wicked or righteous.

Yet the separation of the wicked from the righteous is only part of the whole point about the parable. Jesus is intent on teaching that the kingdom of heaven involves the evaluation of every human being. At the end of the age, there will be consequences of the wicked.

The wicked will be thrown into the “fiery furnace” which symbolizes divine punishment (Matt 13:42) and the phrase “gnashing of teeth” is associated with the place of future punishment (Matt 8:12; 13:42).

Jesus' interpretation is painting a picture of final Judgment. Together with the Parable of the Tares, Jesus ascribes to Himself the role of Judge. He directs His angels to remove the wicked. The righteous left behind enter the kingdom of heaven.

4. How is the Parable from the Net (Matt 13:47-50) similar and different from the Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43)?

The Parable of the Net shares these similarities:

- 1) The interpretation of the parables is given only to the disciples.
- 2) Both wicked and righteous will coexist until they are gathered and separated.
- 3) Unfallen angels will separate the wicked from the righteous.
- 4) The wicked will be divinely judged and sent to the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

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The Parable of the Net has these differences:

- 1) The Parable of the Net and its interpretation is told only to the disciples. The Parable of the Tares is told to the public but its interpretation is given only to the disciples.
- 2) In the interpretation of the Parable of the Tares, Jesus speaks of two types of people – the wicked and the righteous. In the interpretation of the Parable of the Net, Jesus speaks of two types of people but in an inclusive manner “gathering fish of every kind.”
- 3) The Parable of the Sower is the first parable in the series about the kingdom of heaven, and its interpretation, shared with only the disciples, focuses on the blessings of the righteous; the Parable of the Net is the last parable in the series, and its interpretation emphasizes the consequences of the wicked.

References:

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