

## The Parable of the Net and its Explanation (13:47–52)

The parable of the net is virtually identical to the parable of the tares. Why tell this parable twice? Repetition is the primary way to drive home a critical point. If that critical point is threatening to current Judaism, probably the best place to discuss it would be in private. There is a lesson here in the tares, treasure, pearl and net; the foolish man says everything he knows to anyone, Jesus here teaches us to note the audience and the possible effect of the message and then speak to the circumstance of that moment.

*“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.”* (Proverbs 23:9, ESV)

*“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.”* (Proverbs 9:7, ESV)

The parables of the treasure and the pearl remind us that **we are confronted with a decision regarding the kingdom of God**. **We are reminded that those who passed on the decision to embrace the kingdom, will face a God who will not pass on the decision to judge those for this choice.**

***Matthew 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.***

***Again....*** This is the last of three parables that included the treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great price. “This linkage implies that **failure to give up everything for the sake of the kingdom** [which was the emphasized point of the Gem Parables] **characterizes false disciples” who are thrown out in this Parable....**<sup>1</sup>

***net<sup>2</sup>....*** “...the actual form of the net is not so important. What is significant is that the net was sufficiently large to catch a large number of different kinds of fish.”<sup>3</sup> This illustrates the variety of people that identify themselves with the kingdom/church.

***Matthew 13:48 When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.***

***When it was full....*** There will come a time when God’s purpose is completed in his kingdom/church. Then comes the end.

*“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.”* (1 Corinthians 15:24, ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 51.

<sup>2</sup> *net σαγήνη....* “A σαγήνη was a large fishing net that was dragged between two boats or dropped offshore by boat and then dragged to shore with ropes. With floats at the top and weights at the bottom, it blocked the passage of anything larger than the gauge of the netting.” Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 568). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 54.

“The only sensible time for sorting comes after the net has been dragged to the shore.”<sup>4</sup> The sorting cannot take place while the net is in the sea. Compare this to the wheat and the weeds.

*“Let both grow together until the harvest, and **at harvest time I will tell the reapers**, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” (Matthew 13:30, ESV)*

**bad**.... The believing hearer of this parable will fear. For even though a person is now in the church, “in the net,” that does not mean that in the end that person will be “in the kingdom.” If we are **bad** we will be separated out, but we are good we will be kept in. In God’s world and in his Church, there are saved and lost; such a condition will not last forever. Do not confuse this goodness as something that is innate or earned, it is the righteousness laid to our account because of the merit of Jesus.

**Matthew 13:49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous**

**at the end of the age....** This phrase is used five times in the New Testament all by Matthew, four addressing the end of the world, Matthew 13:39, 40, 49, 28:20, and one possibly addressing the end of the Jewish age Matthew 24:3. It is always helpful to ask “which age” when confronted with a statement like this.

Jesus skips to the end of the parable and begins his explanation. The good and bad in the net are identified as **evil** and **righteous**. Again, the ones who do the separation are the **angels**. “...the parable of the net simply describes the situation that exists when the Last Judgment takes place: the kingdom embraces “good” fish and “bad” fish, and only the final sweep of the net sorts them out.”<sup>6</sup>

**Matthew 13:50 and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

This verse repeats exactly the wording of v. 42 concerning the weeds and tares.

*“and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:42, ESV)*

“The focus here is on the state of the kingdom when the Judgment occurs. Though it includes both the righteous and the wicked, a thorough sorting out will certainly take place.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 568). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>5</sup> ① lit. of such poor quality as to be of little or no value, *bad, not good*, ② bad or unwholesome to the extent of being harmful, *bad, evil, unwholesome*, in a moral sense fig....” William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 913.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 330). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 331). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

“Serious faith in Christ always leads disciples to seek to be righteous, not in order to earn heaven but in order to be faithful. While the first half of discipleship (as the first half of the Beatitudes taught) means to go down on our knees and confess our poverty in both spirit and righteousness, the second half of discipleship (and of the Beatitudes), sometimes neglected in our churches **from a fear of works-righteousness**, is to **get to our feet and seek to keep Jesus’ Commands.**”<sup>8</sup>

### **Concluding Parable: The Householder (13:51–52)**

**Matthew 13:51 “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.”**

“Having understood Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of heaven, the disciples can function like scribes and instruct others.”<sup>9</sup>

**understood**<sup>10</sup>.... We have seen this word in verses 13, 14, 15, 19 and 23. It’s used often and that indicates its importance. While others failed to “get it together,” the disciples did not fail, they did understand—at least to some degree.

**Matthew 13:52 And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”**

“If Jesus’ disciples have truly understood his teaching (13:51), they are prepared to teach others the value of the kingdom (13:52).”<sup>11</sup>

**scribe**<sup>12</sup> or **teacher**.... It is interesting that Jesus now addresses these fishermen, tax collectors, and others of common vocation, as scribes. Is this term limited to disciples and pastors? Or are these disciples representative of all believers? In some sense, all believers, as some teach 1<sup>st</sup> grade, some 12<sup>th</sup> grade, some college level, and some graduate school, so all believers are teachers at some level—or should be. The point is this, becoming followers of Jesus, they are simultaneously to become scribes and teachers in the kingdom. Those that delight in ignorance and complain that “church is too cerebral” deny the very role that God has called them to fill, scribes in the kingdom. They find contentment in the mindless pablum found in much of Christianity and find the role of scribe distasteful. The Church suffers because of such people.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary: The Churchbook, Matthew 13–28* (vol. 2, Revised and Expanded Edition.; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 52.

<sup>9</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 570). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>10</sup> *understood* συνίημι “To comprehend, understand, perceive. The comprehending activity of the mind denoted by *sunīēmi* entails the assembling of individual facts into an organized whole, as collecting the pieces of a puzzle and putting them together. The mind grasps concepts and sees the proper relationship between them. Such understanding includes the moral and religious awareness of man’s heart....” Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 393.

<sup>12</sup> *scribe* γραμματεὺς “...a person who has acquired a high level of education in a certain body of literature or discipline—‘scholar, teacher.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

“In Matthew’s story the disciples are being established as repositories of Jesus’ teaching in order to prepare them for the teaching role of 28:19.”<sup>13</sup>

**trained [discipled]<sup>14</sup>.... Or has become a pupil or a student.**

“Go therefore and make disciples [trained ones, pupils, students] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthew 28:19, ESV)

We are told to go and make “trained ones” not simply win souls and move on. As a follower of Jesus, we are ceaseless students and teachers of the kingdom.

**for the kingdom<sup>15</sup>....** We become a disciple, pupil or student “for the kingdom.” The purpose of our training is found in the reality of a kingdom that God has created and that we are a part of. We might understand this as “for the purpose of advancing the kingdom.” This corresponds to the phrase in the Lord’s Prayer, “Your kingdom come.” First, we pray the prayer, then, we are discipled by God for the purpose of being a part of the answer of that prayer, advancing the kingdom.

**brings out<sup>16</sup>....** Our discipling or training equips us to do what? It is to bring out treasure, the same treasure found in the field and in the pearl of great price. We bring it out to share this treasure with others. “This scribe is a discipling disciple: the treasure he has gained is a treasure he passes out to others.”<sup>17</sup>

“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:35, ESV)

**a master of a house<sup>18</sup>....** The manager of a household or an estate. We are managers in God’s house.

**brings out of his treasure<sup>19</sup>....** When we “bring out” the treasure entrusted to us, we act like the master of the house who did the same thing with us. We have been reading about treasure in a field and in a pearl of great worth. Now we are told what to do with it, we are to bring it out and share this great wealth with others.

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<sup>13</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (pp. 570–571). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>14</sup> *trained μαθητεύω* “...to be a follower or a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader—‘to follow, to be a disciple of.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>15</sup> *kingdom βασιλεία* “...the fact of being king, or the king’s position/power/office, or his active rule....” Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 475.

<sup>16</sup> *brings out ἐκβάλλω* “...to cast, throw, drive. To cast, throw out.” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>17</sup> Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: a commentary on the Greek text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (p. 571). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>18</sup> *a master of a house οἰκοδεσπότης* “...one who owns and manages a household, including family, servants, and slaves—‘master of the household.’” Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>19</sup> *treasure θησαυρός* “Treasure, anything laid up in store, wealth.... Metaphorically, of spiritual treasures pertaining to the mind or to eternal life....” Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44, ESV)*

*“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:35, ESV)*

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19–21, ESV)*

**what is new and what is old....** We read earlier on this subject about the “good person” and the “evil person.” Each bringing out something.

*“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” (Matthew 12:35, ESV)*

And earlier still we read,

*“Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:17, ESV)*

Scribes, believers, possess the new and the old; we are to share both. This describes the depository of God’s good treasure, the Old and New Testament.

These Twelve, having been trained by Jesus for the kingdom of heaven, have the responsibility to teach the new revelations of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the old revelations found in what we call the Old Testament. Theirs is not a “New Testament Church” but one that fully understands both the old and the new and brings both to their audience. “Jesus expects his disciples to build on both the biblical teachings that had come before him and on his gospel of the kingdom....”<sup>20</sup>

I use the term “New Testament Church” as a reference to dispensationalists who find little or no authority in the Old Testament but instead use it simply as a source of illustrations for their sermons and Bible stories for their children. Jesus here takes issue with that attitude toward the Old Testament. “The message of the kingdom of heaven does not wipe the slate clean, but rather brings fulfillment to what has gone before....”<sup>21</sup> To the old treasure is added the new treasure, the result is the complete message of God.

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<sup>20</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 393.

<sup>21</sup> France, R. T. (2007). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 547). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.