

The Parables of Jesus Lesson 8

The Final Kingdom Parables: The Net, New and Old Treasures, and The Growing Seed

Here we come to the final two parables of the Parables of the Kingdom found together in Matthew 13 and a third kingdom parable which is found unique to the gospel of Mark.

The Parable of the Net

Matthew 13:47-50 NIV Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸When 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. ⁴⁹This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This parable echoes the principles that we saw in the previous parables of the Wheat and the Tares and the parables of 'separation'. To reiterate, the general consensus among Bible teachers is that the parables of separation speak of judgment solely related to the idea of the final judgment at the end of human history (Revelation 20:11-15). However, we looked at the parables of separation in the context of what Jesus was doing 'covenantally' in his ministry in Israel with the Jews (God's Covenant People) as he was bringing about a separation between the true believers in Israel (who would receive Christ), and the apostate Jews (who would reject him). The righteous Jews would receive salvation and come into the Kingdom of God and the unrighteous Jews would be cast outside of the covenant and would face the coming national judgement on Israel in AD 70, when the Old Covenant system was finally destroyed and the New Covenant era was fully established.

However, while I believe this is the main and original meaning of these parables from Jesus to the first century Jews, I do believe the general principles of these parables still speak today and have future implications related to the general judgment of all people in the future.

Explaining the Parable

The Net = The Kingdom of Heaven: The "net" represents the message of the Kingdom, which was cast broadly over Israel through the ministry of Jesus and His disciples.

The Lake = The World: In biblical imagery, the sea often represents the nations (Daniel 7:3, Revelation 13:1). The lake in a general sense can represent the place wherever the message of the Kingdom is being preached. it

The Fish = People Drawn into the Kingdom Message: The net captures both good and bad fish, which suggests that Jesus' kingdom message was heard by a mixed audience of all kinds of people—faithful Jews, unfaithful Jews, and even Gentile converts who heard Jesus' message.

The Sorting of the Fish = The Judgment upon Israel: The fishermen separating the good from the bad represent the sorting before a coming judgment, where the faithful would be distinguished from unfaithful. The bad fish being thrown away corresponds to those who would experience judgment, not the blessings of the kingdom.

The End of the Age = The End of the Old Covenant Era: While often seen as the end of the physical world, the word 'age' better refers to a specific historical period. In Jesus' context, this was the Old Covenant age. This aligns with Matthew 24:3, where the disciples asked about "the end of the age", and Jesus responded with signs that would culminate in the fall of Jerusalem.

The Blazing Furnace = The Judgment of AD 70: The "blazing furnace" is symbolic of judgment, echoing Old Testament descriptions of divine wrath Isaiah 9:19, Deut. 32:22. Judgment can sometimes involve literal fire or at other times just a description of 'total' destruction.

Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth = The Agony of Israel's Fall: This phrase does not necessarily refer to eternal torment in hell but rather to the great suffering, loss, and lamentation that a nation/people under judgment would experience.

Application for Today

1. **The Kingdom Is Made Up of All Kinds of People:** Just as Jesus' ministry attracted both genuine disciples and religious hypocrites, today the church continues to contain both sincere believers and false professors. Paul warned of false brethren and false teachers who infiltrate the church (Galatians 2:4, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). The final separation will ultimately take place at the final judgment.
2. **The Church Must Remain Faithful to the Gospel:** The faithful remnant of Jesus' time embraced the New Covenant, while many others clung to the old, corrupt system. The church today must resist the temptation to compromise the gospel for cultural or religious traditions.
3. **God Will Separate the True from False:** It's not up to us in every case to determine 'who is saved, and who is lost', while we can certainly view the fruit from a person's life their ultimate destiny is not up to us.
4. **A Future Judgment Still Awaits:** Viewing the parable covenantally affirms that while this parable's primary fulfillment occurred in the first century, it foreshadows the eternal destiny of all people.

The Parable of the Old and New Treasures

Matthew 13: 51-52 NIV "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked. "Yes," they replied. ⁵² He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

1. **"Every Teacher Who is a Disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven":** The term teacher is 'scribe' which traditionally refers to a teacher of the Law in Jewish society. In the Old Testament, scribes were responsible for copying, interpreting, and teaching the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6, Nehemiah 8:1-3). Jesus is redefining what it means to be a "scribe"—not someone merely devoted to the Old Covenant law but someone who is now trained in the ways of the kingdom of God. In other words, His disciples, and later the apostles, would become the new scribes who interpret the Scriptures through the lens of Jesus and the New Covenant.
2. **"A Owner of a House":** The owner or head of a house has the authority to distribute wealth. This suggests that those trained in the kingdom have been entrusted with spiritual riches and are responsible for sharing them. The household represents God's people, and the owner symbolizes those called to steward both Old Testament revelation and the new kingdom realities in Christ.
3. **"Brings Out of His Storeroom What is New and What is Old":** The treasures represent spiritual truths, and the fact that the scribe brings out both new and old shows that both are valuable. The Old refers to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), which point to Christ. The New refers to the revelation of the kingdom through Jesus, which brings fulfillment and transformation. Rather than abolishing the old, Jesus fulfills it (Matthew 5:17), and His disciples must learn how to rightly handle both.

The Parable in Context

From a covenantal perspective, this parable is significant because it highlights the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, a theme central to the Gospels. Jesus was training His disciples to understand that the Old Testament was fulfilled in Him. The new treasures represent the New Covenant realities—grace, the indwelling Holy Spirit, the expansion of the kingdom beyond Israel to the nations. This aligns with Jesus' mission of bringing Israel into a new era where the law and prophets find their completion in Him.

Application for Today

1. **We Must Value Both Old and New Covenants:** Many Christians neglect the Old Testament, viewing it as irrelevant. Others cling to the Old Testament law without properly interpreting it through Christ. Jesus affirms that both the Old and New are treasures—but must be understood in their proper relationship.
2. **Faithful Teaching Requires Biblical Understanding:** Jesus calls us to be trained scribes, meaning we must be students of Scripture, not just casual readers. Pastors, teachers, and believers must be able to connect Old Testament truths with the fulfillment in Christ. Paul does this masterfully in his epistles.
3. **The New Covenant Changes How We Read the Bible** The disciples were still learning to interpret Scripture correctly. After Jesus' resurrection, He had to open their minds to understand how the Old Testament pointed to Him (Luke 24:27, 44-45). In the same way, we must approach Scripture with a kingdom mindset—not just looking for rules or historical accounts but seeing how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.
4. **Discipleship Means Passing on Both Old and New Treasures** The image of a master of a house distributing treasures reminds us that knowledge of the kingdom is meant to be shared. Every believer is called to teach, encourage, and disciple others in both biblical foundations (Old) and kingdom realities in Christ (New).

The Parable of the Growing Seed

Mark 4:26-29 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

This parable is unique to the Gospel of Mark and follows Jesus' well-known Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20) and the Parable of the Lamp (Mark 4:21-25). It appears just before the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32), which also emphasizes the kingdom's unexpected growth (along with the Parable of Leaven in Matthew)

Explaining the Parable

1. **"A Man Should Scatter Seed on the Ground":** Reminiscent of the Parable of the Sower, the seed represents the message of the kingdom. The ground represents the world and the act of scattering seed implies preaching, teaching, and sharing the gospel, but there is no mention of plowing or preparing the soil, suggesting that the growth is ultimately beyond human effort.
2. **"Night and Day Whether He Sleeps or Gets Up":** The sower does not actively interfere with the seed's growth—he simply trusts the process. This suggests that God's kingdom grows independently of human effort, in God's own time and power. This mirrors the way the early church grew not by force, but by the Spirit of God.
3. **"The Seed Sprouts and Grows; He Does Not Know How":** This emphasizes the mystery of the kingdom—the farmer does not understand how the seed grows, but he trusts that it will. In the same way, we cannot fully comprehend how God transforms hearts, spreads His kingdom, and fulfills His plans.
4. **"All by Itself the Soil Produces":** The words "by itself" indicates that the growth happens naturally, without direct human control. This reinforces the idea that God's kingdom grows according to divine power and timing. Just as a seed follows a process (blade → ear → full grain), the kingdom of God unfolds in stages.
5. **"When the Grain is Ripe, He Puts in the Sickle, Because the Harvest Has Come":** The harvest is often used in Scripture as a symbol of judgment (Joel 3:13; Rev. 14:14-16). The Pharisees were warned to 'repent and bring forth fruit' and that the time for harvest had come (Matthew 3). Covenantally, this could indicate that after Israel had had a chance to hear and respond to the message of the kingdom, a harvest judgement would come.

Application for Today

1. **Trust the Process – God is Growing His Kingdom:** Just as the farmer cannot force the seed to grow, we cannot control the work of God. Our job is to faithfully scatter the seed (share the gospel), but we must trust that God will bring the growth in His time.
2. **Spiritual Growth is Often Gradual, Not Instantaneous:** Many expect instant transformation, but God's work often unfolds slowly and steadily. Like a plant growing, spiritual maturity happens in stages.
3. **The Kingdom Grows Beyond Human Effort:** The church should not rely solely on strategies, marketing, or programs—though these are helpful, they are not the source of kingdom growth. The Spirit of God is what brings lasting fruit.
4. **A Time of Harvest Will Come:** Whether referring to personal accountability or historical events, this parable reminds us that a harvest is coming. Those who reject the message will face judgment, while those who receive it will be gathered into the kingdom.