

What Will You Do?

Matthew 13:47-52

Introduction

Last in the Series: This is the last sermon in our “Jesus the Storyteller” series looking at the parables of Jesus. Or, might I say, “the last, for now” (more later in Matthew to illustrate other points).

Now You Know: *G.I. Joe* (“now you know and knowing is half the battle”). Have you ever known something special or interesting or funny? I’m that way with a good (“bad”) joke, an obscure fact (e.g., “prune juice” rant), an amazing band or television show no one else has seen, etc. Especially when you find something that works or solves a problem (Abby’s medicine for her eczema). If you love something you want *everyone* to hear (e.g., pregnancy announcements, kids, Crossfit, etc.)

The Question: Whatcha gonna do? If you’ve heard the teaching of Jesus, seen the beauty of his kingly reign and rule, understood the value of the gospel message, then “**what’re you gonna do about it?**” If you know Jesus and understand the gospel, what are you going to do?

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” 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.”¹

1. A Great Catch (vv. 47-48)

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.

Purpose of Parables: Every parable we’ve looked at has been trying to do the same thing: **explain the nature and value of the Kingdom of heaven** (i.e., the rule and reign of King

¹ ⁴⁷ Πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν σαγήνην βληθεῖσιν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ ἐκ παντὸς γένους συναγαγούσῃ· ⁴⁸ ἦν ὅτε ἐπληρώθη ἀναβιβάσαντες ἐπὶ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν καὶ καθίσαντες συνέλεξαν τὰ κατὰ εἰς ἄγγη, τὰ δὲ σαπρὰ ἔξω ἔβαλον. ⁴⁹ οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος· ἐξελεύσονται οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ ἀφοριοῦσιν τοὺς πονηροὺς ἐκ μέσου τῶν δικαίων ⁵⁰ καὶ βαλοῦσιν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων. ⁵¹ Συνήκατε ταῦτα πάντα; λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ναί. ⁵² ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Διὰ τοῦτο πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὁμοίος ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδεσπότῃ, ὅστις ἐκβάλλει ἐκ τοῦ θησαυροῦ αὐτοῦ καινὰ καὶ παλαιά.

Jesus). Here Jesus uses a fishing analogy of a dragnet (not the famous media franchise following Joe Friday and *especially* not Dan Aykroyd/Tom Hanks film homage). The term in policing comes from the fishing method seen in the text. You cast a net between boats and drag it through the water capturing any fish in the way. You close in around the fish (different than line fishing, etc.). The result is *more fish* per toss but a mixed collection of edible and inedible (or desirable and undesirable fish) so that you have to sort your catch.

The Invitation to the Kingdom is for All: Notice some things about the nature of God's call and kingdom. First, the net goes out. You don't sort the fish before you catch them. The invitation to enter the Kingdom of God goes out to all.

- "Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matt 22:9-10).
- The Kingdom is not just for Israel (in fact, that's what the rest of the wedding feast story makes clear).

Good and Bad: The result of the dragnet is a mixed catch of both "good and bad." It's at points like this that we have to be careful not to push the metaphor too far but there is an ominous truth within. Because every kind of fish was caught up in the dragnet they had to be sorted, good from bad. There were many kinds of fish in the Sea of Galilee, but only some were eaten. The net would also bring up dead fish, plants, and any rubbish that might have been there. Not only will everyone be caught in the net of the Kingdom, but everyone will be sorted, just like the fish.

Though it sometimes seems like the evil get away with their sin, there is no escape from the accounting to come.

- It's essentially the same point as the parable a few verses before about the "wheat and the tares."
- On the earth now, it is often hard to distinguish the good from the bad, the righteous from the unrighteous. We live in a world that is a mixed bag. Some very nice people do things we think are wicked or believe things that are wrong. And some people who seemingly believe the same things as us do terrible things.
- But the *end* of the KoG is not here and now, it is in "at the end of the age." At the last day, the King of kings will reign over all people, all nations. And, in that moment, he will separate the good from the bad. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left" (Matt 25:31-33) (poor goats).

Goats in the Church: So maybe it's easy for you to believe that there are righteous and unrighteous people in the world, good and bad. **But what about in the church?** This might be helpful and convicting.

- This might *help* because we've all experienced people who claim the name of Christ believing in things contrary to the gospel or, more likely, living in ways opposed to the

character of Christ. Or, as a pastoral mentor once said to me, “the light also attracts bugs” (Ewart).

- We should not be surprised that there are tares among the wheat (that are sometimes hard to distinguish) or goats among the sheep.
 - We’ve seen countless examples of Christian leaders, celebrities, and people of influence not only “fall into sin” but often rush headfirst into it. Maybe this is because we’ve often built “Christian platforms” and ministries by the principles of the world rather than the values of the Kingdom. But, also, we can’t see someone’s heart, only hear their words and see their fruit.
 - This is **nominal** Christianity (in name only, not in deed): “to refer to Celtic monks and fundamentalist picketers, St. Jerome and Jerry Falwell Jr., Augustine and Steven Furtick, Dante and Tammy Faye, St. Francis and the TV “Prosperity Gospel” preachers, Martin Luther and Jimmy Swaggart, John Calvin and George W. Bush, all as “Christian” stretches the word so thin its meaning [almost] vanishes. The term “carbon-based life-form” is [about] as informative” (David James Duncan).

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Matt 7:21-23).

- Don’t confuse mighty works, a dynamic ministry, or professed faith for genuine salvation.
- God sees whether one’s faith is real or fake and, if we look with patience and wisdom, we often can see whether faith is legitimate by where it is placed and whether it grows in the soil of grace to produce genuine, long-lasting gospel fruit. Regardless, **you can’t fool God.**

And we can spend a lot of time trying to figure out who’s in and who’s out (e.g., the fundamentalist way, discernment blogging). The point of this passage is not to send you on a rabbit trail of figuring out who’s good and who’s bad (e.g., politics, morality, etc.). In fact, this passage reassures us that **God** will do the sorting (e.g., funeral: don’t preach ‘em in, don’t preach ‘em out). But more than **reassurance** it provides a **warning**, a warning to us!

Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-30): One servant is given five talents and made five more; another two talents and made two more; the final servant received one talent and buried it in the ground to return to the master: So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matt 25). Notice the similarity to Matt 13:12: For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. a

- The servant with one talent feels that burying the money in the ground is the safest proposition. There is no chance for failure. However, there is no chance for success either. He simply did nothing. **Apathy and inaction were his sin.** Laziness and

discipleship are incompatible. He pursued the minimum possible effort. The safest and easiest path was to bury the money in the ground. But following Christ is not safe, nor can it be. **Safety-guaranteed Christianity is a false and faithless route.** The path of Christ involves great cost (i.e., James' sermon last week). That is why every disciple is told to count the cost. Safety is not guaranteed but joy is.

Warning: All through the message of Jesus we see the scary truth that “not everyone who considers themselves a Christian will go to heaven” (Greear). And this isn't a bunch of people who are antagonistic to Christianity and opposed to faith. Some of them, it appears, even seem to recognize Jesus as Lord (e.g., not Buddhists, Muslims, agnostics, etc.). Through the gospels we see folks who consider themselves friends and servants of God but are excluded from the Kingdom. **What gets you in the Kingdom? Complete faith in Jesus** (e.g., not just great works or prophesy) which results in real fruit (e.g., water, shelter, etc. for the “least of these”).

- There is no middle ground: you're either righteous or unrighteous, you're either in or you're out, you're a sheep or a goat. You are either committed to the Kingdom, all-in for Jesus, advancing the mission, or you are not. That puts the lukewarm Christian in a very precarious position (in fact, **carnal Christian** and **lukewarm Christian** are oxymorons).
- As Don Carson puts it, “The NT does not offer a lot of encouragement for people who just want enough Christianity to be saved.”
 - The language of a “**lukewarm Christian**” comes from Revelation 3 to the church of Laodicea: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:15-16). “Generally ineffective in their faith, innocuous witness, consistently compromised” (Beale). A unique feature of their geography was distance from good water (hot medicinal or cold refreshing; give me hot or iced coffee not lukewarm).

Profile of a Lukewarm Christian:²

1. **Lukewarm Christians don't really want to be saved from their sin. They want only to be saved from the *penalty* of their sin.** God is a useful fire escape they employ, not a God they worship.
2. **Lukewarm Christians are moved by stories about people who do radical things for Christ, yet they do not do radical things themselves.** They call “radical” what Jesus expects of all his followers.
3. **Lukewarm Christians equate partially sanitized lives with holiness.** But Jesus didn't call us to sanitation; he called us to discipleship. If you are his follower, your life will not be defined only by avoiding sin but also by entering into his suffering.
4. **Lukewarm Christians rarely share their faith with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends.** Like Charles Spurgeon said, “You are either a missionary or an impostor!”
5. **Lukewarm Christians think about life on earth much more often than eternity in heaven.**

² Chan (*Crazy Love*) via Greear (<https://jdgreear.com/8-signs-lukewarm-christian/>).

6. **Lukewarm Christians are not generous.** Sacrifice is measured by the priority you place on another. What are you willing to give up? How much of your time, reputation, finances are you willing to sacrifice for another. Jeff Bezos, who by many estimates gives a lot of money away, including \$2 billion one year (1% of his worthy). At the start of the coronavirus he gave \$100 million to foodbanks to help with food insecurity (which is good and helpful). His gift was the largest ever to feeding America. It was .057% of his wealth (maybe equivalent to a middle-aged, middle-class person giving a \$100 gift).
7. **Lukewarm Christians do not live by faith; their lives are structured so they never have to.** David Platt says, “If you’re not in a place where you feel desperate for the Spirit of God, then there’s no way you are on the front lines of the mission. When we are on the front lines, we feel desperately our need for God’s help.”
8. **Lukewarm Christians give God their leftovers—not their first and best.** Stop calling your complacency and apathy “a busy schedule” or “forgetfulness” when, in reality, it is sinful, it is robbing God (cf. Mal 1:8).

God is inviting everyone into his kingdom, he is inviting everyone to follow him and be his disciple. If you’ve heard that call, take it seriously. *No one is sneaking into the Kingdom of God*, you only get in by receiving the invitation of the King and submitting to his rule and reign in every area of your life.

2. A Final Separation (vv. 49-50)

⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A Time is Coming: There is a day coming when the “fish will be sorted.” God’s plan culminates in his ultimate rule and reign over all people and places. He is the King on the throne of his kingdom that extends to all of creation. On that day, there will be no more pretending.

- You might fool everyone today but you won’t fool God (e.g., PhD entrance exam translating in an empty room, or maybe a surgeon in surgical suite).

The End of the Age: The end of the age is coming. There is a deadline to your response to Jesus’ gracious invitation. The reign of God will come for all. Everyone will be caught up in his net. Will you be put with the good fish (i.e., righteous) or bad fish (i.e., evil).

What Makes Something Good or Bad?: Don’t think of “good” or “bad” with moral overtones but “useful” and “useless.” What makes something good or bad? Evil or righteous? If you look at these passages (e.g., mustard seed, sower, etc.) it is someone who has **faith** and **fruit**. But these are really **two sides of the same coin: faith and fruit**. Righteousness is a gift from God that we receive. As we receive by faith the word of God he grows the fruit of righteousness in our lives. *But our goodness comes from God*. Our usefulness comes from God. Our perseverance comes from the fact that God never gives up on us.

- But this is a simple metric: faith and fruit. Where is your faith? What are you trusting in? Where is your fruit? What is your faith producing? What is God growing in your life (e.g., character, choices, rhythms, habits, etc.).

The Consequences are Dire: Where would those inedible, dead, or unusable fish end up? The trash heap. There was absolutely no use for these fish and they were thrown out. The picture Jesus paints of this “great separation” is eternally more grim. The angels will remove the wicked, and cast them into the great furnace, and their experience will be one of suffering (i.e., weeping and gnashing of teeth). “For the hard, superficial, divided hearts who did not embrace Christ as King, coming wrath is unimaginable.” This is an inescapable warning from these parables (i.e., v. 50 is repeat of v. 42).

In the End, Love Wins: There is a truth to the common statement, “Love Wins” (e.g., 1 Cor 13, “Love never fails”). E.g., Michael Brueseke (“I don’t have it all figured out, but I know God’s word says that in the end, love is what counts, love is what matters, love wins”). “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8) so, *ipso facto*, love wins because God wins. But love without justice is not love.

God is Just: A lot of us bristle at this thought. We don’t like the idea of God sending people to hell. But without hell, we don’t serve a God of true justice. If sin isn’t punished then God is weak and unjust. If hell doesn’t exist, then evil isn’t wrong it “just is.”

- If God lets sinners into heaven (and what is more sinful than rejecting God, refusing to receive his Word, failing to submit to him) then he is not holy and perfect.
- And if God leaves sin unpunished, then he is not just. The reason we care so much about justice in our world is because we serve a just God.
- Grace (as James reminded us via Dietrich Bonhoeffer last week) is costly because it cost Jesus his life. True grace and forgiveness always require *someone* to bear the cost of sin. Every time you choose to forgive someone for the wrong they did to you, you are taking that weight on yourself. When Jesus forgives you, he does it at the cost of his life. Your sin does *not* go unpunished, rather he takes the punishment on himself. Your account is cleared, it is paid in full, because **he paid it** (what a glorious gift!).
- But, if you reject that payment, if you refuse that gift, you cannot enjoy fellowship with the giver. **You cannot have the benefits of the King without allegiance to the kingdom.** You cannot have the gifts of the King without submitting yourself to his rule and reign.
- “You can’t enter the Kingdom of heaven if you’re trying to be king of your own kingdom” (Jon Tyson, adapted).

A Friendly Warning: But remember, this warning is not for your harm but for your good. Jesus wants what’s best for you. As long as you pursue your idols and your sins, you are pursuing death not life. And it might seem like everything is fine (for now) but the truth will be revealed. As believers we know that delusion will be removed, reality will shine through.

- In this warning, Jesus is offering you true grace. He is not saying try harder, he’s saying, “come to him all who are weary.” “The kings of the earth will fail us, the King of kings never will” (Paul Tripp).

- Jesus doesn't want you to experience death separated from him, but life in his kingdom. He loves to save. He loves to restore. He loves to heal (like a doctor who gives medicine).

3. An Important Opportunity (vv. 51-52)

⁵¹ "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." 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."

Have You Understood?: Are you blessed to understand? Remember the parable about parables? If you see the promises of God in the Old and New Covenant, it is a blessing (e.g., Sermon on Mount = new information, Hebrew Scriptures = old information).

- Consider the privilege of seeing the value of the KoG, the worth of the King.
- Notice the word "trained" really is "discipled." "Every scribe (or teacher) is discipled for the kingdom of heaven." The discipled one understands the true value of the Kingdom (discipleship precedes understanding).
- By following the path of Jesus, your heart learns to treasure what is really valuable. You learn to see the character and plan of God, to trust the heart of God, to treasure the presence of God. You glory in the grace and forgiveness of God. You learn to desire Jesus and him alone as King of your life.

All of Us Have a Gracious Opportunity (and responsibility) to the Message of the Kingdom of God:

(1) Treasure it.

When our eyes are opened to the inestimable worth of the gospel and the Savior of whom it testifies we esteem him completely. His pricelessness sets the standard against which we value all other things. His commands set the marching orders for our lives. It's very hard to persevere in the call of Christ amidst suffering if we don't really value it. We won't "sell all we have" for the treasure in the field if we don't think it's really treasure. And we won't declare it's value to others if we don't think it's valuable.

- Do you treasure Jesus and his gospel?

(2) Proclaim it.

If you treasure him, then you'll proclaim him. Look what it says, the scribe "brings forth" the treasure for the purpose of displaying it. When we treasure Christ we can't help but display him as valuable to all who will see it.

- Worship and mission are inextricably linked. The reason (as Piper reminds us) that missions exist is because worship does not. There are those that do not know the value

of Jesus so we go and tell them. His value propels us to go. The disciples' task is to proclaim the kingdom to everyone.

- What compels me to go and spread the gospel? What compels me to sacrifice so that others might know? What keeps me going in the midst of exhaustion or discouragement? The surpassing value of Jesus and the desire for all to experience it.
 - What we love and value determines the amount of our perseverance. The more you love and value something, the more you're willing to sacrifice for it (e.g., parenthood, cost of tuition, lack of sleep, etc.).

Conclusion:

What Are You Going to do with It?: What are you going to do with the message of the gospel, the message of the kingdom? Joyfully receive and urgently spread the message of the kingdom.

- Are you joyfully receiving the gospel? Are you cultivating a life that gladly receives the message of the kingdom? Are you submitting your life to the kindly rule of the king?
- Are you joyfully spreading the message of the gospel? Are you displaying the value of the gospel by the way you live and talk? Who do you know that needs to hear of the gracious king who came to die so they could live?