To Tell a Tale: The Net Scripture Reading: Luke 5:1-11

Aug. 25, 2024 Memory Verse: Luke 5:10b

**SLIDE 1**

At this point we have considered six different parables from Matthew 13 all about the kingdom of heaven. Turn with me if you would to Matthew 13 so we can get a view of the scope of this whole chapter. The first two parables; the Sower, starting in verse 3 and the Weeds in the Field, which is down in verse 24, Matthew includes an explanation from Jesus that clarifies what he meant by these parables. The Sower we see is explained in verse 18 and Jesus talks about the weeds a little later in verse 36. Then followed the Mustard Seed, verse 31, the Yeast in the Dough, verse 33 then two tightly related stories about a field with treasure in it and a merchant hunting down a fine pearl in 44 and 45. There are two left in the chapter and today’s story is the parable of the Net.

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But we can see for this little survey how tightly knit this parables are. Now one of the things I have tried to do with all of these parables is to make sure that we are reading them together. Meaning, we want to let the parables that have already been shared inform our interpretation of the parables that come after. When we do that, I think it is clear that Jesus is making a cumulative case. These stories are building on one another and we cannot treat them like they are disconnected.

 We know how this works. We live in a world full of sequels and spin-offs. Do you know who these guys are?

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They are called minions. They literally speak gibberish and run around looking silly. These characters have become the backbone of DreamWorks studios, the company that created them. There are now five movies featuring the minions and a least two more on the way. And collectively, these animated features have grossed over 5 billion dollars. That’s a lot of money for gibberish. Now, I have seen one of these movies…I am not sure which…I am sure I have seen parts of some of the other movies…again, not sure. But I wonder if you have ever had this experience: has anyone ever recommended that you go see a movie sequel and then assured you that you need not see the first one? When I hear that, it tends to cast some doubt about the quality of said film. How good could it be if I can skip around and miss a few? How strongly developed could these characters be if I can forego some of their story. Of course, Minions are not the deepest of characters. We can skip around in their movies…we can get the gist of what they offer pretty quickly. It’s pretty much a one-note type of humor. But not so with these parables of Jesus. Remember, he is trying to communicate to us the deepest truths, truth about the nature of the kingdom of heaven. So while Minions are light and fluffy entertainment, we don’t really need to worry about following their storyline too closely, Jesus and his parables are different. He is communicating heavy truth through these stories, and he has told us to pay attention, to listen closely. He says this throughout the chapter in verse 9, in 16 and in 43. He also makes clear in verse 14-15 that he is echoing the message of Isaiah who made it known that not everyone who hears will understand. And so, for our part, we don’t want to miss an episode.

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 So, as we address the story of the Net, I just want to recap some of the main themes that Jesus has iterated thus far. The kingdom of heaven is everywhere. The seeds of God’s word are sown everywhere. The kingdom is a mix of good and bad. The wheat and the weeds grow up together. The birds of the evil one nest in its branches. The yeast of false teaching and hypocrisy are spread throughout this kingdom. Jesus has referenced how much he loves the Church. We are his treasure, we are his pearl. He gave up all the power and privilege of heaven itself just so he could have us as his own prized possession. And now we come to a net.

**SLIDE 5** (Matthew 13:47-50)

Here finally in this parable we are given a role, a job to do. The CEB reads, “The kingdom of heaven is like a net that people threw into a lake.” The original Greek is slightly different in that it does not say that people threw the net…it simply says that the net was thrown. However, in the next verse, the Greek does say that men collected the good fish and cast aside the bad fish. So here in this seventh parable, Jesus meets his disciples directly at the heart of where they live: the fishing boat.

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Of course, not all the disciples were fishermen, but a good percentage of them were. And these men knew their trade well. We have understood Jesus’ stories to be, in large part, autobiographical so far. He himself was the Sower planting seeds of God’s word, he was himself the seed of God’s word that was planted like a mustard seed for three days in the grave only to rise again, he is our pure, unleavened dough that makes up the Bread of Life at our communion table, he is the finder of treasure and the pearl merchant who gave up everything in order to purchase what was found….his precious church. But here in this story he turns to his disciples and says, “You. This one is about you. Remember when I called you.” And I’m sure they remember well that fateful day when they met Jesus after a full night of fishing failure. We read the story earlier from Luke’s gospel. Jesus asked these fisherman to row out a little further and drop their nets in one more time. They groaned about it, but they obeyed. And sure enough, they needed to bring around a second boat just keep from sinking under the weight of that miraculous catch. He told them after that, “You will be fishers of men.” Here now, in this parable, they are the main actors and, by extension of course, so are we.

 The kingdom of heaven is like a net. The net in question here is most likely a dragnet or a seine (sen) …

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as it is sometimes called. It a large net with floaters on the top and sinkers on the bottom and it is used to literally drag through the water and catch whatever it comes across. One of the main things to know about this net is that it does not discriminate. It is designed to drag it all back into the boat. So once the fisherman have brought in their haul, their work is only half done. Now, they must get to the sorting. They must find a place to sit and go through the contents of the net one item at a time. If you have ever seen the TV show “Deadliest Catch” you know that each and every crab that goes into the ship’s holding tank must be a minimum size.

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The deckhands have a tool the they hold up to each crab to ensure their catch is completely legal. Any crabs that are too small are thrown back into the sea. Once in a while you might see a captain bring in a full catch only to realize that they have hit upon a school of crab that are too small and after sorting out a huge haul, the crew might come away with very few keepers.

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So the net does not discriminate. It is cast out and drags in whatever. It drags in anything and everything. This point echoes what we had said about the story of the Sower. We concluded that, when it comes to sowing seeds, that is, share the Word of God, we are not to judge the soil that surrounds us. Whether we deem to people we meet to be ready to hear the gospel or not, we are to be sowers. Judging the readiness of someone else’s heart is above our paygrade. We simply sow. And the net simply drags and what get pulled into the boat is a mixed bag of keepers and refuse. Jesus tells us that the fishermen sit and sort. The good fish are placed in containers while the bad fish are thrown away.

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 The word in the Greek here is *sapros* meaning “corrupt/useless/decayed”. And those judged to be bad will be thrown into a burning furnace. It’s the same fate mentioned in the parable about the wheat and the weeds. And Jesus gives the same time frame: the end of the age. That is the end of time when Jesus returns to this earth in final judgement. It’s quite a sobering story. This is not a feel-good summer blockbuster here. There are no silly minions involved. In fact, one of the early church fathers, John Chrystostom said that this story was a “terrible parable.” And Gregory the Great wrote the it is “rather to be trembled at than expounded.” Jesus is telling a story about ultimate things…eternal things. Heaven and hell. And Jesus is not being nice here…but he is being honest. He is telling us the state of reality and what is to come. And though his words are initially harsh, hopefully you can see that there is great mercy involved with telling the truth. Jesus says outright in verse 49,

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“The angels will go out and separate the evil people from the righteous people, and will throw the evil ones into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.” Terrible indeed. I agree with Gregory – this ought to cause us to tremble!

All of this coming from the mouth of Jesus should be enough deterrent for anybody. For the Son of God who loves the world to speak like this should set off alarm bells for those who have ears to hear. That is a bunch of bad news that Jesus just said. And it highlights a truth about the gospel…the bad news always comes first. It must come first. The good news of the salvation that Jesus offers each of us is only good once we first are made aware of the problem. I often like to sum up the gospel by saying,

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“We are all in the same boat, and that boat is sinking!” Our only way to escape from drowning is for someone to come and save us. That is exactly what Jesus has done! He comes to each of us offering his hand, and if we are willing to grab ahold, he will pull us to safety. The problem is that some of us are unaware that the boat is sinking in the first place. Some people have gotten rather used to having wet shoes and can’t understand what all the fuss is about when it comes to Christianity and church and faith. And if we are feeling like everything is fine, well then, no news is good news, right?

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When it comes to the gospel, the bad news must always come first and here is the headline….”We’re Sinking!” But thankfully Christ has come and he has done something about it.

Now, I also want to mention that there is some confusion here when it comes to the characters in the story. Who is doing the action?

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Let me read it one more time…So is it the fishermen doing the separating…yes, but yet it seems like it is also the angels who will come at the end of time to bring about the separation of judgement. Do you see how these roles kind of overlap? There may be a few interpretive options available to us, but I tend to think that we are to understand as a both/and statement. Meaning our work as disciples, as fishers of men works in tandem with the final work of the angels. We cast a wide net and bring in all kinds of people…people who are genuine and some who just say what you want to hear. Kind people and irritable people. Jovial people and cranky people. Rich and poor, educated and not, people who have it all together and people who are picking up the pieces. Sinner, saints and everything in-between. As disciples, we gather them all in and we sit down with them and minister to them and with them. As disciples, we make disciples. We teach them what the bible says, we pray with them and for them. We laugh with them and cry with them. We make some determinations like “This person would be a great small group leader. This person has a gift for teaching kids. This person is a fell fledged prayer warrior.” And we try to speak out about those gifts that God has placed in them. But we also conclude things like, “This person is really struggling. This person is not ready for leadership. This person still has some misunderstandings about who Jesus is.” So in that sense, as disciples and members of Christ’s body, the church, we form relationships with people and as we get to know them, we get to better understand the state of their faith. And with that understanding, we can, with the Holy Spirit’s leading guide specific people in specific ways. But the final call, that is out of our hands. No human can ever condemn another human to hell just as no human can save another from their sins. This is the work of Christ alone and it is work that will be done at the end of the age. Our job in the meantime is to spread our net wide; to invite all people everywhere to repent and believe; to work hard as fishers of men and to fully entrust the final judgement to the one true King Jesus. So we never get to pretend that we possess the power of the bench and walk through this world in a black robe carrying a gavel playing the role of a judge. But, as Herbert Lockyer puts it,

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Christ “uses the saved to save more.” We are the Church, the hands and feet of Jesus, we do his work for him not because he needs us but because he has chosen to use us. All of us who have been forgiven should become fishers of people casting our nets out to all.

Next month, we will be diving into season two of the Chosen and as I close this morning, I want to share a clip with from season one. I think the filmmakers nailed it with this scene in two ways: it correctly identifies our calling as fishers of people, and it stands theologically strong as it keeps God in God’s role. Take a look.

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