

# Matthew (Quality: Average)

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Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

[ 0 : 00 ] As the Lord may help me, I will speak his word from the Gospel according to Matthew, the 13th chapter, reading again the 47th and 48th verses.

The Gospel according to Matthew, the 13th chapter, the 47th and 48th verses. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind, which when it was full they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels but cast the bad away.

Perhaps we will read the remainder of the parable with the explanation. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just and shall cast them into the furnaces of fire.

There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Very solemn words. And it is not for me or for anyone else to soften them down.

It may be remembered by some of our friends that last Lord's Day afternoon I took this subject of the net and made some remarks upon it without going through the parable entirely.

[ 2 : 04 ] And it still remains on my mind to continue the exposition this morning. And I would like to say this as I commence.

But I do feel that we should give very careful and solemn consideration to the parables. Perhaps we rather neglect to do that.

Because for one thing of course they constitute the personal teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And if it was true and it was that never man states like that man's.

Then I feel surely we should give very solemn and careful consideration to the things that he said. I know that with regard to the whole of the Bible we regard all parts as of equal inspiration.

[ 3 : 13 ] But the Lord Jesus Christ had an authority that pertained to him alone. No one else could speak or did speak with the same personal authority nor with the same depth and clarity of understanding that the Lord Jesus Christ did.

I know of course that it might be felt that he did not set forth the deeper doctrines of the gospel so much as the apostles did in their ministry and more especially in the epistles.

But the Lord Jesus Christ explained why that would be and was. And one reason of course was that the disciples at that time were not able to enter into those deeper doctrines of the gospel.

He said to them, I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now. That is, you are not in that present ability and state of mind to receive and appreciate those deeper truths.

He said, the Holy Spirit will teach you those things in due course. And when he has come, even the Spirit of truth, he shall guide you into all truth.

[ 4 : 47 ] And so, of course, it came to pass. When the Holy Spirit came, he led the apostles and others into those deeper truths that they could not enter into under the personal ministry of Jesus Christ.

But for all that, the personal teaching of Jesus Christ does stand on its own divine authority.

In general, the Lord Jesus Christ taught the people the general principles of the kingdom of heaven. That is, as I explained, of the dispensation of the gospel which was about to be established in the earth until he should come again.

And I feel also that the parables are very helpful in this way, that the truth is set before us in this parabolic form in which there is much to engage the mind, and there is a variety of illustration and demonstration in setting forth the same gospel principles.

And so, I'm bringing this parable before you again this morning. And before I attempt to continue the exposition, I would point out that there are three things very necessary to a spiritual prophet, profitable reading and hearing of the parables.

[ 6 : 34 ] And first, we do need, as Jesus said, over and over, we do need an ear to hear.

He that hath ears to hear, Jesus said, let him hear. As though he would say, here is something that is worth hearing, if you have an ear to hear it.

For if one has not an ear to hear, what can they profit by what is set forth? That is the very first essential, to have an ear to hear.

And, what did the Lord mean by having an ear to hear? He certainly didn't mean, of course, just a literal ability to hear, naturally speaking.

What he meant was simply this. He that hath a mind to listen to these things and consider them, let him hear them and consider them.

[ 7 : 43 ] If he has a mind to, for a mind to listen is an ear to hear. And where there's no mind to listen, there's no ear to hear.

That is the first thing. May the Lord give us a mind for these things, that we may hear them.

The next essential thing is to understand what we hear. And here again, the Lord Jesus Christ emphasized that.

Have you understood all these things? And what might be said, well, it's difficult to understand them.

Well, my friends, if that is so, then it is the responsibility of our ministers to explain them.

[ 8 : 45 ] To see that you do understand them. And I judge that to be one of the most needful and one of the most profitable purposes of preaching.

To expound the word so that it should be understood. I know, of course, that we cannot give spiritual understanding to the mind or to the heart.

That is the Holy Spirit's work. Only he can so enlighten us that we may understand spiritual things in a spiritual and profitable way.

But if it is the work of the Holy Spirit to give understanding to the mind, it's the work of the minister to explain the truth. And in that sense is this word, Pricaboth, with which the Lord Jesus Christ closed the parables in this chapter.

Therefore said he unto them, then said he unto them, therefore every scribe which is instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

[ 10 : 08 ] The minister needs to be instructed in the kingdom of heaven so that he may bring forth from the sacred scriptures those things that pertain to the kingdom of heaven and expound them.

My friends, if there's a mind for these things and a truthful and spiritual exposition of them, I'm sure the Lord's blessing will come to us.

But still, there is a third consideration and perhaps this is the most difficult of all. And yet it should seem to be the most easy, but it is the most difficult.

And that is, it is not enough to have a mind to listen. It is not enough to our understanding of what we hear. we need to lay it to heart ourselves and especially with regard to our own standing and our own condition that is set before us in these parables.

That is the most difficult of all. And, I noticed with response in the prayer this morning that a petition was offered that we might lay to heart what we hear.

[ 11 : 43 ] Oh, my friends, how much we do not lay to heart. These things are set forth, I hope. May the Lord help me to set them forth. And you might agree with, with what you hear.

But, what comes of it all? if I enable this morning scripturally and affectionately to describe the characters inside in this parable that are gathered into the net and yet at the last solemnly separated the good into vessels and the bad cast away, who is going to lay it to heart to which of these categories and conditions they belong?

Who is going to lay it to heart this morning? Now, this is the important consideration then. What the Lord Jesus Christ said surely to goodness you would think it is worth laying to heart.

You may think, well, if he were to come before us, we would lay to heart what he said. But if you don't lay to heart his words as they're recorded in the scriptures, you wouldn't lay them to heart if you heard them from his lips either.

The condition in the mind is the trouble, the prevailing condition in the mind. If only that is dealt with, then the word of God has free course and is glorified in the faith and obedience of the heart.

[ 13 : 25 ] and what is more, it brings eternal life into the soul itself. Now, I want to repeat what I said on this palatable last Sunday afternoon.

It's got to give some connection to our meditation this morning. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a nest. The kingdom of heaven is the gospel dispensation as it is now established in the world.

The net represents the doctrines, truths, warnings, invitations, and promises of the gospel.

They're like the meshes of the net. The letting of the net down into the sea is the preaching of the gospel in the world.

That's perfectly clear. And it is by the preaching of these things in the world that men are drawn into the net of the gospel.

[ 14 : 39 ] And not everyone is drawn into it. Comparatively few. I suppose we might carry this parable to the extent of thinking that comparatively few of the fishes in the sea of Galilee were ever gathered into the net.

But some were. And now so, without going into those points again this morning, I will point out to you now little concerning the casting of the net and the gathering of every kind into it.

For the gathering for the casting of the net is a preaching of these solemn things. people gathered into it. And there are various reasons why some of every kind are gathered into this net.

And it is, of course, very evident that there are great differences with regards to the numbers of people that are gathered into the net of the gospel.

And perhaps I might just offer a mark on that. For one thing, of course, some degree depends upon the way in which the principles of the gospel are preached and perhaps to some extent even with regard to the personality of the preacher himself.

[ 16 : 26 ] I have heard it said that the ministry is a proclamation of truth through the personality of men. And I think there's something in it.

And certainly the Lord does give different degrees of ability to those that he calls to this work of preaching the gospel.

All have not the same ability of others and perhaps all have not the same personality. And no doubt that does enter into it to great extent and probably where the gospel is preached with most ability and attraction you'll get a greater mixture of those that are drawn into the net because the popularity and ability of the preacher attracts people as well as the truth that he proclaims.

That accounts for some of them. Why? Some gather so many more than others. And another consideration I of thought enters into this and that is the spirit of the age and generation.

For the spirit of the generation differ with regards to spiritual things. There have been periods when there's been general desire and regard for the worship of God, the keeping of the Lord's day, and the preaching of the gospel.

[ 18 : 02 ] It has been, as one might quite rightly say, it has been the common thing. And when that has been so, and in that particular generation and age, when there was a more general interest and regard for spiritual things, gospel ministers have gathered much larger congregations together and many more into the net.

But the general prevailing spirit changes very greatly from one generation to another. And we've come into a generation and an age in which there's very little regard at all for the things of God, or the preaching of the gospel, or the truths of it.

There's very little regard today, even externally with regard to attendance on what the worship of God, let alone a spiritual concern with regard to the truth.

So this is a hard day for the Lord's servants to labor in. It's a hard day for them to labor in. Much fishing, few caught, much labor, little result.

But still we have to leave that with the law. But it is surprising the change that has come, and one gets sidelined sometimes onto the conditions which prevail, we'll say, a little over a hundred years ago.

[ 19 : 49 ] When large numbers of people gather together, they are the worst. I've got a book at home with sermons in it, preached by a man of truth in a church in Camden Street, London, at six o'clock on Sunday morning, before the ordinary services of the day.

Very good sermons too. And in one of these sermons, there's a break in the course of the preaching, and the preacher paused to ask the people standing in the aisle to move up closer to the pulpit so that more could get in at the door.

That was six o'clock on a Sunday morning. And where's the minister? Where's the congregation that would come up to that? You see, we come into an entirely different age, entirely different spirit, and that enters very much into the apparent result of the preaching of the gospel.

There were times when men were like shoals of fish. They swam into the net, to where they threw away from it. But mind you this, although this is a sad consideration to those who live in these days, and feel the sadness of them, there's this consideration.

the Lord's purpose of grace in the calling and quickening of all that he has chosen to salvation, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, that is not affected by the general spirit of any age or generation.

[ 21 : 36 ] Let it be his name for that. And then, there's another consideration, and perhaps it's more than anything that I've said this morning on this matter of casting the net into the sea.

And that is that there are times when the Holy Spirit seems in a special way to be abroad in the earth, as distinct from his indwelling personally in the hearts of believers.

I'm sure of that. I know the ways of the Holy Spirit can be very mysterious, especially because of course they're invisible, but there are times when the Holy Spirit seems abroad in the earth, and at such times, ministers of the gospel will meet with much success in their labours.

There will be an invisible working of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to the gospel. There are times when that is not so, and that the power and influences of the Holy Spirit are more restricted.

Why it should be so, of course, it's not for us to inquire. It unquestionably is so. That when we read of the remarkable success of gospel ministers in former days, the large congregations that gather together, and the numbers would appear to be, as far as one can say, drawn into the net of the gospel, I feel it's very largely owing, not so much to the skill and ability of the preachers, but that the power of the Holy Spirit is more extensive amongst men.

[ 23 : 38 ] Now, what we need more than anything else today, is a powerful participation of the Holy Spirit in the earth itself. That will revive the church, that will make it that the preaching of the word will be, will more response in the hearts of those who hear it.

For while ministers preach, the Holy Spirit must work. And when the Holy Spirit graciously works, then men are drawn into the net of the gospel.

Now, let us take the next consideration. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net which was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind.

That is to say, every kind of people. I think I did explain this. Every kind is not limited to any one particular kind of people.

For instance, it gathers of every kind with regard to the different standing and conditions that obtain amongst men.

[ 25 : 04 ] A very considerable difference is to obtain sons. Some have much more eminent abilities of mind. They're wise. They're prudent.

They rise in life. They're kings as well as poor people, rulers as well as subjects. Now, the gospel next gathers of every kind of men.

It is true, of course, of course, as the apostle says, not many mighty, not many nobles, not many wise are called, not many, but some are, some are, and some are very poor in life, and insignificant, and perhaps lacking to some degree, even, in natural intelligence.

But the net gathers some, such into itself. Neither the wisdom of the wise, nor the lack of it, where the simple enters into this matter.

of every kind, with regard to moral conditions, as well as social conditions. Some, who are moral in life, upright, honest, it gathers them.

[ 26 : 32 ] Some, but just the opposite of that, thieves, dishonest, adulterers, fornicators, gather some of them. As the apostle writing to the Corinthians puts it, very much to the point, when he gives a very black list of certain vices that are obtained, very much at Corinth, because Corinth, you know, was a very wicked city, with regard to vice and evil, almost every kind of evil was practiced in Corinth.

vice and them, it treats like water. Mary Apostle writing to the Church of God at Corinth mentions those conditions, adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, and so on, and he said, and such were some of you, such were some of you, didn't gather all the fornicators and adulterers and so on, and abusers of themselves with mankind, didn't gather them all, gathered some, but then there would be more people in Corinth, people who would have abhorred such disgraceful and dishonorable sin, to gather some of them, good and bad.

men. But now, I must pass on this morning. The net then cast into the sea and gathered of every kind of people, which when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

Now, here we come to the solemn point of the parable. There's a description, good and bad. There's a separation, they gather the good into vessels and cast the bad away.

And there's a termination. Now, how am I going to describe to you this morning, the good and the bad? Now, first of all, this is to be understood that no parable relating as it does to earthly practices can possibly in every particular set forth heavenly truth.

[ 29 : 13 ] Not in every particular. The point is to understand the point of instruction that the parable sets forth and not force an improper meaning upon it.

And what I mean is this, the good were good when they were gathered into the net, and the bad were bad when they were gathered into the net, and when they drew the net to shore, the good was still good, the bad were still bad.

There'd be no alteration at all in their condition. The point is simply this, being gathered into the net didn't in the least degree alter or change the condition and nature of the fish themselves.

bad they came out of the net in exactly the same condition as they were gathered into it. Now, when you try this spiritually, that doesn't apply.

That doesn't apply. Because there's that in the gospel, in the truth, and blessings of it, that can change the bad into good, which the net in the parable couldn't do.

[ 30 : 47 ] the gospel can change the bad into the good, so that when they're gathered into the net, in that state and condition described as bad, that when the net is drawn to shore and there's a gathering of one kind into the heavenly state and of the other into that despair and dreadful condition that awaits them, those that were bad would be found to be good.

There's been a change wrought in them, and the change wrought in them by their being gathered into the net. So that, as I say, we mustn't say that when the net gathers of every kind, both bad and good, in the issue, it's the same, the bad and the good are in the same condition because they are not.

Some are because some are still bad, and some are good. Now, for a minute or two this morning, I feel that I just can't get through this this morning, and perhaps I've said enough for our morning meditation, enough to lay it to heart, if we are minded to lay it to heart.

Now, we'll take then, so there's one consideration before I leave it this morning, with regard to the doctrines of the gospel.

Now, I said that the doctrines of the gospel constitute an essential part of the net, text. And when the doctrines of the gospel are faithfully preached, there's a gathering of people into the net, in a sense, they come to understand and believe that those doctrines are the doctrines of truth, scriptural doctrines, and if their minds are not biased by prejudice against them, and dislike of them, they're drawn into believing them.

[ 33 : 15 ] When anyone believes the doctrines of the gospel sincerely, they're in the net. The doctrines have gathered them in. Now, to result far from that, if the doctrines of the gospel exercised by the blessing of God, a renewing, sanctifying effect upon their hearts that made them good, but if believing the doctrine hasn't led to any spiritual change in themselves, and no sanctifying effect of truth upon their hearts, they're still bad.

Because, look, my friends, you mustn't think of good and bad just on moral grounds. The Lord Jesus Christ said to Nicodemus, he must be born again.

Now, unless a person is born again, they've got their original nature, haven't they? The nature they were born with. Now, their original nature is simple.

It is fallen. It is in that sense bad, by reason of sin. Now, if they're not born again, and thereby, through the word of God, receive a new spiritual nature, they're not changed, are they?

By whatever they believe. They're not really changed. They're in the same condition, in the size of God, as they were before.

[ 35 : 03 ] Only they come to believe doctrinal truth and teaching. Now, we know from the scriptures, not only the necessity of a new birth, but the means of it, and that it is, by the word of truth itself, as Peter says, being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

Now, when that Holy Spirit is wrought in the heart, through the incorruptible seed of sound gospel truth, the soul is born again, they come out of the net good, because they're regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

See? there's a difference. It is good that we should understand and believe the doctrines of the gospel, but that may be we must be born again.

The gospel must have a renewing effect upon our spirit. And, to refer my closing this morning, upon that passage in the Corinthians, which bears out all I'm saying, when the apostles spoke of what they've been in their licentious and immoral life, such as some of you, but you're washed, but you're sanctified, justified, see, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were not what they were before.

They came out of the net good, they went into it filthy, they came out washed, they went into it unholy, but the truth sanctified their hearts, you're sanctified, they went into it condemned because of sin, they came out of it justified in the name of Jesus Christ, that's the first description of the good, and that that had become good, so the net is continually being cast into the sea, in one generation, multitude, swim into net, another generation comparatively few, but the net isn't full yet, the preaching of the gospel isn't finished, all that God has appointed to salvation, not yet in the net, but when the net is full, they drew it to land, no more fishing, no more gathering into the net, no more changing, of that into good, then comes the separation, they gather the good into vessels, and it counts the bad away, now I leave you into consideration this morning,

[ 38 : 25 ] I hope I have set before you the mind of Jesus Christ in this parable, I ask you to consider it, to understand it, and to lay it to heart, the ■