

Will You Stand The Final Test?

Text: Mat 13:44-52

Suggested Hymns:

487, 492, 525, 491, 489

1) The Dragnet

2) The Precious Pearl

3) The Hidden Treasure

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 13:44-52, ⁴⁴ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.* ⁴⁵ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶ “who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ “which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ “and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” ⁵¹ Jesus said to them, “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.”*

⁵² *Then He said to them, “Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text says, *“Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”* The Lord Jesus expects His pastors to be like that.

Jesus Himself did that. In simple parables, story sermons which everyone could understand, He led people to see the great truths of His kingdom. Here in Matthew chapter 13 are recorded seven such parables.

In the first one, of “The Sower,” Jesus sets forth the causes of failure and success which the Word of the Gospel meets. In the story of the “Tares among the Wheat” He shows us who is the true author of obstacles to the development of the Kingdom of Christ in this world. The “Mustard Seed” and the “Yeast” illustrate the victorious march of the Kingdom of Christ, its inward might and its outward development.

Finally, in the last three parables Jesus speaks of the great test which is made to decide who is to be a part of the everlasting kingdom and who is to be cast out forever.

With the help of the Holy Spirit let us imitate Christ and from the things new and old which He has offered in the parables of the Hidden Treasure, the precious Pearl, and the Dragnet, draw forth the treasures for eternal life that are found there for you and for me.

Looking with Jesus to the end of the World and the final Judgment, of which He here speaks, let me put to you very seriously the question which our text can answer for you and which you must be able to answer affirmatively at this present time for the sake of your immortal soul, *Will You Stand the Final Test?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Will You Stand the Final Test?

The Dragnet

A Future Separation

Jesus makes it very clear that there will be a future separation when the Church in this world has completed its task and becomes the Church Triumphant in complete fellowship with God in glory. This emphasis is found in the parable of the dragnet ⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ “which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ “So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ “and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”*

This means that at the Last Day, when the angels come as messengers of the Lord, some will be taken into eternal blessedness, others will be left for eternal destruction away from the presence of God.

The Gospel Net Beaches Out

But let us take a look at the whole parable to understand this emphasis as it applies to us. Jesus speaks of a great net, a dragnet. That sort of net was very familiar to these fishermen whom He was addressing. This net was usually, as the word indicates, of immense length, reaching out far to both sides and down to the very bottom of the sea, over which it was being dragged.

Modern types of this dragnet have been described as hundreds of metres in length. Leaded down that it may sweep the bottom of the sea and supported with corks above, it is carried out so it may enclose a large area of the sea.

So is the Kingdom of God, so is the outreach of the Gospel of Christ and its operation on people. The fishers of men go out with that Gospel into all parts of the sea of humanity, to people with souls to be brought to Christ, in order to bring them into the Church. It makes no difference who these people are. What makes them good or bad has nothing to do with their nationality or colour or outward condition at birth or the place they come from. The Gospel net reaches out for all kinds of people.

This net has reached out for you and for me. Everyone here today has been baptised into fellowship with the Triune God. That is part of the work of the Gospel net, to bring people into communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through Baptism.

Christ has commanded that all nations should be baptised, excluding none. He has declared that unless a man is born again of the water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

Most of you have been instructed in the truths of God's Word in such a thorough manner that you could and did make a decided confession of your faith before the congregation at your confirmation. You were then accepted into communicant membership with the congregation and began to make use of Holy Communion, through which the Holy Spirit works to strengthen your faith and keep you as God's children in closer fellowship with Himself.

Those of you who did not have the benefit of this instruction and experience can readily be given that privilege. By means of confirmation classes the Gospel net is being cast out to win and to strengthen your faith.

By means of Sunday school we seek to bring in many others. All of our activities are geared to the program of soul winning, of bringing others to Jesus. So the Gospel net is out, and fishermen are pulling away at the net, and the net is filling up, here and everywhere in the world where pastors and people tell men of Christ.

The Good Fish Are Gathered Into The Vessel

The point that Jesus makes and the one we want to note particularly is this: How many in this net are good fish? How many are bad fish? Where do I belong?

Not everyone in the net is going to be a fish that is gathered into the vessels. These vessels mean what is meant with the barns¹ into which the wheat is gathered, the many mansions of which Jesus speaks as rooms prepared for the children of God in eternity, and the everlasting habitations mentioned in the Parable of the Unjust Steward.

These vessels are what the Apostle calls "*the city which has foundations,*" for which Abraham looked.² We are looking forward to that destination. We want to have our fellowship here, the fellowship of faith and love so imperfect on our part now, to issue into a complete fellowship with God in perfect love when this ailing body of ours is ready to be laid to rest. We want to share in that great event when our corruptible body shall put on incorruption and this mortal body shall put on immortality. We want to experience for ourselves death being swallowed up in victory.

Hell Is Real

Not all the fish drawn into the Gospel net are going to be gathered in these vessels. There are bad fish, and they are going to be cast away. These are the wicked, distinguished from the just, and these wicked are going to be severed from the just and cast into the furnace of fire; where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

From times immemorial people have not taken well to this teaching of Jesus. They say they are offended with a God that will do that to anyone. *“There is no hell,”* they say, *“there cannot be a hell where there is eternal suffering. A good God could not and would not do that to people.”* But Jesus is the good God. He was so good that His love drove Him from heaven to taste the terrible fires of hell — for you and for me.

Certainly Jesus would not lie to us. Most assuredly Jesus knows what He is talking about. He experienced the terrors of hell when on the Cross He was forsaken by God. This good God tells us that there will be bad fish in the net that must be cast into hell.

Before you reject what Jesus says, why not ask yourself: Why will I not accept His Word in this matter? Isn't sin real, also in my life? Aren't hatred and selfishness things that plague me? Haven't I ever been afflicted by the desires that were completely impure and lustful? That, too, is sin.

And pride! Remember the man who said, *‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men.’*³ Have we ever had similar thoughts when comparing ourselves with others? That is sin!

A radio commentator once declared that no one comes into the world with any evil in his heart? If we do evil, it is because someone else is to blame. That is also pride. It closes its eyes to the fact that *“out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies”* as we read in Matt. 15:19.

Anthony the Hermit and others of his group, who isolated themselves from society better to battle against sin, can tell you of temptations that came not merely from without, but from within, of hearts urging to do that which is evil.

The Bad Fish Are Cast Out

Here, then, is a terrible and horrible fact to deal with, a separation from God in hell, which is eternal. It was such a terrible fact that God's Son, not wanting a single human being to end up in hell, left His throne of glory to bear the full brunt of hell, with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death to pay the full price of sin for mankind, so that the soul of every person might be redeemed from hell.

That thought ought to sober us and bring us up short. A woman is reported to have given as one of her reasons for joining a certain prominent Lutheran church that this church and its pastors spoke plainly and without apology of hell as being a real threat to every human being's eternal future. That had brought her up short and turned her thoughts to eternity.

Anyone here today could be a bad fish finally to be cast into hell, not because God wanted him there, not because Jesus had not redeemed him from hell, but because down deep in his heart he denied the Lord that bought him.

Is that possible? Unless we watch and pray, you and I can fall in love with money to such a degree that we will be ready to throw Jesus overboard because of money. Judas, one of Christ's own disciples, did that.

Unless we examine ourselves daily whether we are in faith, we can put on a front of being outstanding church members and but have not one single bit of true faith and love for Christ in our heart. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and tried to make people believe they loved Jesus when they did not. Both were cast out by God. That could happen to us if we are not on our guard.

An Important Question And Jesus' Answer

We know there is going to be a decisive test made on the Last Day, a test that will decide whether we are good fish or bad. That is what Jesus tells us in this Parable of the Dragnet. *Will I be able to stand that test?* Right now that seems to us an extremely important question, doesn't it? Today, while we still have time to do something about it, we would like to know what we can do to be fit to be gathered into the vessels on that day of the great separation of the good and evil.

Jesus gives us the answer in the two other parables of our text, in the Parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the precious Pearl. There he tells us who the good are and how we can become and remain good fish.

2. The Precious Pearl

The Kingdom Of God Is A Personal Matter

Both parables speak about the same thing. They want to emphasise for us that the Kingdom of God is a personal thing. Each person must have it for himself, and it must be his very own.

This Kingdom is not merely yeast working or a tree spreading out, it is something that must be personally appropriated. Many people live under the shadow of a great tree that grew from a mustard seed and partake of many of its blessings.

Christianity has brought protection for millions of people in the way of outward benefits, of a better way of living. Where the Gospel is active and working, Christianity has leavened society with the leaven of truth so that man as an individual began to be recognised as having rights he never had been given before. It has brought hospitals into existence and homes for the underprivileged.

But the Kingdom must mean more than that to us, if we are to be good fish taken out of the net to be with God forever. It must mean more than general blessings brought to all, if we are not to be bad fish cast away into everlasting destruction from the presence of God.

Both these parables, the one of the Hidden Treasure and the other of the precious Pearl, tell us that. Both have the same lesson to teach, but one lays stress on being found, the other upon seeking.

In the case of the hidden treasure we have a man that worked a field and, without intending to do so, turned up a treasure. In the case of the precious pearl we have the story of a man who believed there was such a pearl and who was not satisfied with life until he had found it. In both parables we have men who, having found their treasure or pearl, are willing to let everything else go to get and have and keep only the treasure or the pearl.

A Pearl Seeker

Consider some of these pearl seekers. These may be people who are not satisfied with life as they know it. They have money or goods, they have the benefit of an education, or of friendship and home and family. Or they may be people that have never had much of these things and, suffering often and long, want to believe that there is something better to life than just what they have had.

All they have had never really has stilled their longings and never has made them truly happy. To them it seems that life has no real aim or purpose. For a while they may have thought so, when they found fleeting enjoyment in the joy they had or the man or woman they met and loved and married; but that didn't do away with the desire for something to still the longing of their souls.

So they seek and look. They try the wisdom of men. It may intrigue them for a time, but in the end they say: All is vanity. It does not last. It does not still the voice of a conscience that accuses. It leaves the soul restless. Like the man who had once had faith in Christ and then had given it up, as he thought he must, at the altar of learning, once said of a simple devout Christian, *“I would give all I had if I had an assurance and peace like yours.”*

And then, one day, he picks up his Bible and reads, ¹ *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ... “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*⁴ Here is something different. And he reads on of Christ’s love for men, and how He calls those “friends” that are His, of the life that He gives, of the ransom that He brings for sin, of the assurance that brings peace to the soul. He reads, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*⁵

The Christ of the cross and the empty tomb becomes real in his life. Now he is sure that he has found the precious pearl. It is not lopsided, but perfectly round. It is not yellow or of a dusky tinge, it is of a perfect colour. This is it, he says, and now he is ready to sell all he has and buy that pearl and seek no more, for God’s Spirit in the Word has led him to the pearl that was truly good.

He Sells All That He Has

What does such a man do when he sells all he has? He says, My learning is good, but it is not enough. I will no longer trust in that. My wealth buys certain things, but I will no longer live for that. My friends and family mean much to me, but this Jesus is the truest Friend. I will put wisdom and wealth and home and friends in His service, but I will never, never, never let them come between me and this Jesus. If it is Jesus or any of these things, Jesus comes first. He is the one thing needful.

3. The Hidden Treasure

Finding A Hidden Treasure

Let us take a look at the man who was not even looking for a treasure and found one inadvertently. Consider such a finder. One day a woman, as was her

custom, went to the well outside her home village to get some water. There a Man asked her to give Him a drink. She wondered why this Man of another nation should ask her, a woman of a despised race, for a drink of water.

Then the conversation took an unusual turn. This Man spoke about living water, of never thirsting, of her sin, of the many husbands she had had, of her life with a man that was not her husband, of the true worship of salvation. Her conscience was awakened. The terrors of sin gripped her. She mentioned the coming Messiah in her conversation with the Stranger.

The Stranger revealed Himself as Christ, the Messiah, and so the Samaritan woman, mired deep in her way of life and apparently unconcerned about anything better, found a treasure in Christ. At once she was ready to sell all she had and buy the land on which this treasure was found. She was ready to throw her sin overboard, give up what she had considered so worth while and hold only to Jesus.

Christ Must Be Real To You

Has something like that ever happened to you? Sin must become real. The need for something better than man or men or anything in this life can offer you must become real in your living and thinking and striving. The God of your salvation, the Christ who redeems, the God who forgives, the Holy Spirit who comforts and strengthens, must have become real in your life, so that you are ready to give up anything and everything and hold only to Jesus.

Everything else can be used if it is not sinful in itself and should be put into His service: time, talent, treasure, your very life and home and love; but nothing dare ever become or remain more important in your life than Jesus.

Then you will in the end enter into the everlasting habitations. Daily repentance, daily loving of, daily walking with, Jesus must be a real part of your life. That is the test that Jesus sets. Do you measure up? Let us be sure we do not merely walk out of here having heard just another sermon. Let us do something very definite about Christ in our life — before it is too late. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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- ¹ Matthew 13:30
 - ² Hebrews 11:10
 - ³ Luke 18:11
 - ⁴ John 14:1-6
 - ⁵ Romans 8:31-32