

The purpose of this leader's guide is to be a tool for ABF and Life Group leaders to follow the sermon series with their group. Our hope is that this guide will give you a head start for your study and will allow your group to respond to what they've heard and apply it for life.*

Why Parables?. In Definition the word parable comes the Greek word 'parabole,' which means "a placing beside" and therefore is a comparison or an illustration. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke contain about 30 of these stories while John's gospel contains no parables but does use figures of speech. A parable is a story taken from real life (or real life situation) from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. They are not fables (talking animals/walking trees). They are not allegories where every detail has hidden meaning. They are basically an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

When Jesus began to teach in parables, it represented a new direction in His ministry. We are told that from when they were introduced, from this point forward, Jesus typically taught the multitudes in this form. He continued to teach his disciples in a plain manner, but the crowds primarily got parables (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11). A common misunderstanding is that parables were given so that all people could easily understand, but upon further study this may not be the case. Although parables were more relatable because they were stories about real life situations, they often had hidden meanings needing further explanation. These hidden meanings challenged the sincerely interested to further inquiry, and taught truths that Jesus concealed from various groups/people (Matthew 11:25, Luke 8:10). The parables teach us about the Sovereignty of God (11-12), the responsibility of man (14-15), and the grace of the gospel (16-17).

Parable of the Net

Context of Matthew 13:47-50. Again Jesus begins this parable with 'the kingdom of heaven is like.' This parable is also referred to as the parable of the 'dragnet.' Remember that Jesus' audience appears to be the disciples away from the crowds as noted back in verse 36. Jesus spoke the Parable of the Net immediately after the parables of the Hidden Treasure and Pearl of Great Price for a reason. One follows naturally upon the other. The Parable of the Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl shows us the great value of the Kingdom of God and shows us both the great cost in redeeming us from our sins and for those who follow Christ. The Parable of the Net shows the separation between those who are redeemed and those who are not. It is a pretty straightforward parable, and, yet, perhaps not quite as simple as some think. This is one of a few parables where Jesus gives us the explanation of the parable (v. 49).

Read Matthew 13:47-50 - Symbols, Explanation, and Lesson

- 1) The Net:** The greek word for 'net' in this parable is found nowhere else in the bible (sagene). It refers to a net that is dragged over the bottom with the ends then drawn together trapping fish. At least four of Jesus' disciples were fishermen who fished using nets. Jesus called them in Matthew 4 from fishing for fish, to fishing for people with the Gospel. The Gospel and the unavoidable judgement of hearing it is the net (Mark 16:15-16). There are only two types of people in response to hearing the gospel: those who believe and are saved and those who do not believe and are damned. No one who hears the gospel escapes the drawing in of the net.
- 2) The Sea:** Is represented as the world or all of humanity. The net of the gospel is cast into the sea gathering all types of fish. This is similar to the field in the parable of the wheat and the tares

where both the righteous and the unrighteous are gathered from, but different in the context of the a portion of the sea where the net (or gospel) is cast.

3) Good fish and bad: It is clear from Jesus' own explanation in verses 49 and 50 that the fish are people. The good fish are "the righteous," those who have been justified by faith in Christ alone and the bad fish are "the wicked," those who do not put their trust in Christ alone.

4) Baskets/Vessels: The fishermen separate the good and bad fish and put the good in baskets or vessels. We do not get an explanation in this parable of what the baskets mean or what happens to the 'good fish' or righteous, but only the wicked. Based on the parable of the wheat and tares and other areas of scripture, we can be confident that the "baskets" have to do with being kept safe and secure in God's kingdom. The parable of the wheat and tares tells us that the wheat which is gathered in the 'owner's' barn represents the righteous who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. We should therefore conclude that the 'good fish' or righteous will be gathered into the fishermen's 'baskets' and will be included in God's kingdom.

Interpretation of this parable: In the Parable of the net, Jesus is telling us that the Gospel is proclaimed like a dragnet that captures all kinds of people. It captures people of all races and nationalities which include both the good and the bad. Although the parable of the wheat and tares is similar, this parable focuses on those that hear the gospel (fishermen casting their nets). Some hear and are good fish (those who believe the Gospel and have their sins forgiven), others hear the gospel and are bad fish (those who do not believe the Gospel and are thus condemned). Simply put, this parable tells us that all who hear or read the Gospel, believers and unbelievers, are caught by it. In the end, those who believe will enter the kingdom, those who do not believe are thrown into the fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. No one who hears the gospel can escape final judgement and their responsibility for their response to the good news of Jesus.

Lesson of this parable: The lesson is clear. The Gospel is preached to the mass of humanity. It is a net drawn tight. There is no escape. You either truly believe or you do not. The Gospel message of Jesus' atonement on the cross "is foolishness to those that are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18)." "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)." God is casting the net of the Gospel through His fishermen (the church). He will be long-suffering and show His grace and mercy allowing time for people everywhere to repent and believe. For the church, the truth about the final destination of the 'bad fish' should compel us to faithfully and with urgency cast the net of the gospel to those who have not yet believed. Our motivation comes from the fact that we also deserve God's final judgement and separation in the fiery furnace, but by God's grace we have been shown mercy because of what Jesus has done for those who believe. For those who have not believed the Gospel, God is showing his patience toward you and has not yet 'pulled in the nets' for final judgement. He is calling you to repent and believe the good news of Jesus. Trust in Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins and to be made righteous based on what Jesus' accomplished on the cross (Colossians 2:14). Simply put, the lesson in this parable is that judgement is certain for all who have heard the gospel. The outcome will be awful for some. Judgment is determined by Christ and his angels. There is still time for people to believe. He is showing His patience and His grace. Judgment however, is imminent so there is no time to waste.

General Reflection:

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

Personal Reflection/Application

- 4) What is the kingdom of God likened to in this passage?
- 5) How is this parable similar to the wheat and the tares? How is it different?
- 6) The audience for this parable appears to be Jesus' disciples, we can be confident of this based on Jesus' personal question in verse 51. Why do you think Jesus told this parable to the disciples and not also to the crowds?
- 7) Knowing the truth that God will gather both good and bad fish for a future, final judgement, how should we apply this truth to the following situations:
 - a) People who do not know Jesus.
 - b) Our role vs. God's role in people becoming good or bad 'fish.'
 - c) 'Bad' people who seem to always cut corners and get ahead.
 - d) 'Good' people who seem to always come up short or go through hard times.
 - e) Assurance or doubt about whether we are good or bad 'fish?'
- 8) What other personal applications can we make from this parable?

Prayer

With a future judgement coming, Jesus show me the urgency for those who do not know you as Savior and as Lord. Help me to see that your Kingdom is 'unlike' how this present world works or is like. I pray that my heart and life will line up with the principles and truth of your kingdom.