

A Note on the Parables of the Treasure and the Net

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of accurate interpretation of Scripture and the need to understand the distinction between the parable and its explanation in order to grasp the true meaning of the parables of the treasure and the net.

Scripture: Matthew 13:24

Topics: "Kingdom Of Heaven", "Understanding Parables"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the interpretation of the parables of the Treasure and the Net in Matthew 13, emphasizing the importance of understanding the kingdom of heaven as a singular concept viewed from different perspectives. He critiques interpretations that conflate the parables with new dispensations or mix the roles of Christ and the angels in judgment. Darby highlights the distinction between the outward effects of the gospel and God's intentions, noting that the parables illustrate both man's responsibility and divine purpose. He asserts that the gathering of good and bad fish in the net represents the work of fishermen, while the final judgment is the role of angels, underscoring the need for clarity in understanding these spiritual truths.

Transcript

Will you allow me to call in question some details of your explanation of the parables of Matt. 13. No matter of faith is in question, or indeed of doctrine in any way, for I suppose on this we are quite agreed, but merely the interpretation of certain passages; but we lose by any mistake in this, and Scripture is too precious to allow of it, when in a form that acts on souls, for we are sanctified by the truth.

I suppose that the kingdom of heaven, in the six parables in which it is here spoken of, means the same thing. It is the subject of comparison. It may be, and is, viewed in various aspects, but the thing compared is the same. Your interpretation of the last makes of it an entirely new dispensation, when Christ has taken to Him His great power and is reigning and judging; or at least you mix these two together as one. I am not aware that, though "the heavens rule," the term "kingdom of heaven" is applied to the earthly dominion of the Son of Man. The Son of Man gathers out of His kingdom all things that offend and them that do iniquity, and the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

It has been long ago noticed that the first three of these parables present the outward apparent effects of the gospel in the world, the three last the thoughts of God in it; one, the result in man's responsibility; the other, the intention of God. We get the manifested effect on earth in the three first. The crop spoiled in the world, and to be left so till the harvest; the spread of a common doctrine in place of individual conversion; and that doctrine corrupt, a great power in the earth. Hence, in the parable, the tares are only gathered together in bundles on the earth, and the wheat gathered into the garner. The scene has ceased on earth, save that the tares are gathered in bundles for judgment. The wheat has disappeared there. Then God's actual judgment in power explains what now is known only spiritually.

Hence the explanation of symbolical prophecy and parables always goes further than the parable or prophecy, because these give the facts in their enigmatic form, which the spiritual mind alone can explain. In actual judgment all is manifest. In the explanation, the tares are cast into the fire, which they were not in the parable, and the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The parable chases with the closing of the public state of things in the world, - the closing of the present state of things. The explanation, (not the parable), gives the judgment of God on the wicked, and the shining forth in glory of the saints. The Son of Man in judgment gathers out of His kingdom all things that offend.

In the last three parables we have the mind of the Lord in what took place; and first, it seems to me, in contrast with Judaism. Judaism, and Israel itself, was no hidden treasure, no mystery of the kingdom. The Lord gave up nothing to have it. They were His known people and inheritance in the world. He came to His own, though His own received Him not. When He comes again, He will take them to have the world, not the world to have them. In no case has the Lord, it seems to me, taken the world to have the Jews.

To come more directly to what drew my attention to these statements, or (to speak more exactly) to which my attention was drawn, the net cast into the sea. I cannot receive the thought, that it refers to the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, after the church is gone. As to the facts of that day, and that the preaching will take place, we are agreed. It is to the parable and its explanation that I refer. In the tares you have the position of the kingdom in the world. It is not the work of Christ and the Spirit for His own objects. Simply the facts and the result till the close of all here.

They are found as such in the world, and dealt with. In the parable of the net, the net is cast into the masses of population, the sea, and gathers out, the object being good fishes, though the net enclosed all; but they are taken out of the sea, and brought to be handled by the fishermen who drew the net. In the parable of the tares there is no gathering a company into one net-full, with which the fishermen are occupied. The whole in the case of the net is their work. In the tares it is the Lord's, and Satan's, who spoils it in its effects on earth, though he cannot injure the wheat or hinder its being put into the garner. It is the effect in the world till harvest, with the fact that the wheat is hid in the garner.

Further, in the gospel of the kingdom, when the church is gone, there is no gathering a net-full of good and bad. All is individual, and in the judgment all the world is brought together without exception; not a net-full gathered and the separation made between those only who are in it, the mass of fishes being left in the sea. The kingdom of heaven, the subject of all these parables, never embraces all the world, but is a partial thing, save buying the field to have the treasure hidden in it, which makes the special object more distinct, but the operation of the Lord is partial. The field is the world, but the operation is sowing, and tares, and a treasure which is there; but in the parable of the sheep and goats it is expressly all the Gentiles who are gathered, and no partial collective operation at all. Nor am I, indeed, aware that the throne of judgment set up on earth is ever called the kingdom. The parable of Matt. 25:31, seems to me to

make a clear distinction.

Beside this, the comparison of the use made of the sea does not seem to me to seize the true use of these figures. In Isaiah, the wicked are like the troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt. This is a special action of the surf, and the wicked are viewed in this character, and compared to it. That is another idea from the vast sea of nations, out of which a net-full of fishes is taken, good as well as bad. The sea and the fishes of the sea are distinct things, and it is a different thing to bring up all the nations - everybody - for judgment, and to gather of every kind, and leave the mass of the rest where they were. There is no bringing to shore in the judgment of the nations, before the judgment, but a gathering of all together. The fish are brought out of the sea into a net: that is the fishing work. I do not enter on the analogies of the days of creation as not necessary to my object; but I think in the remark, that this subject occupies 13 out of 22 chapters of Revelation, there is confusion between the beast and the Gentiles outside.

I have only one more remark to make, already alluded to as a principle. The statement of the parable is overlooked and confounded with the explanation. In the parable of the net, as in the tares and wheat, the explanation is, and is meant to be, different from the parable. In the parable, it is carefully stated that the persons who separate are the persons who have drawn the net: "which when they had drawn to shore, they sat down, and put the good into vessels." They are occupied with the good, and simply reject the bad. In the explanation the angels, certainly not the fishermen, separate the wicked from among the just, - another kind of act, - and cast them into the fire. In the parable, we have the fishermen's work carried out to the end of the fishermen's part in it. The two previous parables give the thought and purpose of God in the kingdom of heaven; this, the part His servants take in it. In the tares, further, you have no action of men but of Christ, and Satan, and then judgment in this world, providential and actual the wheat being gone out of the way into the garner. The gathering into the net, and out of it into vessels is a distinct part of the parabolic action and done by the fishermen. In the parables of tares and wheat, the servants are forbidden to meddle with what is to be done, and the work of judgment which is all, save the Lord's and Satan's, committed to others.

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