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INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Matthew - Lesson 13E

Chapter 13:47-52

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- Today we will finish the Kingdom parables of Matthew 13
 - Jesus is introducing a radical new form of the Kingdom, one that will exist until His return
 - So far we've covered six of the seven parables in this chapter
 - In those earlier weeks, our study of those parables formed a comprehensive overview of how the Kingdom works in this age
 - We learned how the Kingdom will be established: by spreading God's word
 - And who will oppose it: the enemy and unbelievers
 - When it will conclude: at the end of the age with a great separation
 - And ultimately, what our service to Christ during this time should be: to produce fruit in our lives
 - Then last week we studied the 5th and 6th parables, the parable of the treasure in the field and of the pearl of great price
 - Together they revealed the Lord's incentive program to encourage believers to produce fruit in the Kingdom Program
 - Jesus taught we should be motivated by the prospect of earning treasure in Heaven
 - As believers serve Christ and the Kingdom Program, He takes note of our self-sacrifices and perseverance and He will reward us later
 - Those sacrifices include both acts of service as well as personal pursuit of holiness
 - So the more service we offer Christ now and the more godliness we exhibit now, the more eternal gain in a day to come
 - So the six parables moved from general to specific...from explaining the world's response to the Gospel to the believer's response to Christ
 - But we still have one more Kingdom parable to cover
 - And even after that, we have an eighth parable to end the chapter
- First, let's study the final Kingdom parable...

Matt. 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;

Matt. 13:48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.

Matt. 13:49 “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,

Matt. 13:50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

- Notice this parable begins with the term “again” which connects it to the prior parables as part of the chain of seven
 - And this parable is very similar to the second parable of the wheat and the tares

- In the earlier parable wheat represented believers and tares unbelievers
- They would exist together for a time, until the harvest, when a great separation would take place
- This parable also focuses on the moment when Christ returns to judge at the end of the age
 - But this parable differs from the earlier one in emphasis
 - That earlier parable used a farming setting to emphasize patience during the sowing and growing period in this age
 - The landowner in the parable told his servants not to separate the two groups before the harvest
- So the point of the parable was believers must live side-by-side with unbelievers in the field of the world during this age
 - The Kingdom Program *isn't* a time of judgment...it's a time of recruitment
 - This is a time for sowing and growing...and we won't be in a position to judge results before the harvest – both for the unbeliever and for the Church itself
 - So we leave the results to God
- Richard Halverson said it well:

“...we have become bottom-line conscious in the institutional Church and in parachurch organizations. We cannot raise money to support our ministries unless we can quote statistics concerning how successful we are. We have to be able to measure results. We want to evaluate the harvest day after day after day so that we can use the information in our fund-raising endeavors. And we forget that the real impact of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world is immeasurable. We will only know what it is at the harvest, which is the end of the age.”

- But now in the seventh parable the scene has changed entirely and so has the emphasis
 - This parable isn't about sowing and growing in a field...it's about harvesting fish in a net
 - Dragnet fishing on the Galilee involved fishermen tying one end of a huge net to the shore and the other end to their boats
 - Then they sailed parallel to the coast sweeping across a large section of the lake with their net
 - The net would engulf a huge quantity of fish, which were then dragged to shore
 - Dragnet fishing caught many varieties of fish, including some which couldn't be sold
 - So the fishermen gathered around the net on shore to separate the desirable fish from the undesirable
 - One of the consequences of dragnet fishing was that all the fish caught in the net were deprived of oxygen and died

- So the undesirable fish couldn't be returned to the water...they were just thrown away
 - Jesus uses fishermen sending undesirable fish to their death as a picture of the judgment that ends the age
 - After this age has run its course, the Lord will return
 - And at that moment those who are not His by faith are "caught" and condemned to Hades
 - And of course, even before that moment, those who die without faith in Jesus are already confined to Hades
- Jesus ends the Kingdom parables emphasizing the judgement that awaits unbelievers to provide a contrast to the earlier parables about reward
 - While believers should look forward to the end of the age for reward in glory, unbelievers will experience fierce judgment
 - As we said earlier, the world is filled with two kinds of people
 - And therefore there are two very different outcomes awaiting each
 - One kind of person, the believer, is set on a path of reward, while the other person is on a path of destruction
 - One receives mercy, the other receives punishment
 - But the main reason Jesus ends focused on the fate of unbelievers is to give believers another reason to serve Him in the Kingdom
 - For example, I find eternal rewards is a great motivator in situations when I can't see how my service is advancing the Kingdom Program
 - Like when you're cleaning the toilet in the church, stacking chairs, printing bulletins, dropping your check in the offering box...
 - Or when you're struggling to raise godly children that respect and obey you
 - Or when you're fighting to hold your marriage together...
- In those moments, you know you're doing the right things, but still you may feel like nothing you're doing matters for the Kingdom
 - You might feel like you're toiling away in obscurity, unnoticed, unappreciated
 - Meanwhile, you see other believers traveling to distant places to do impressive mission work or building huge ministries
 - And you feel unimportant and unappreciated by comparison
 - And so you may be tempted to give up in those moments, to think that your contribution simply doesn't matter
 - We all can do more as a body to encourage others by telling them how much we do need and appreciate their service
 - But we can also find motivation to persist in service by remembering that the Lord is watching and sees your work
 - Just remember, your Father sees you serving in secret, as Jesus promised

Matt. 6:3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing,

Matt. 6:4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Matt. 6:6 “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

- The prospect of reward is a universal motivator to stick with difficult, tedious, unappreciated and unnoticed work
 - Reward also motivates us to deal with our own sin, to discipline our flesh so we can live a more godly life
 - In fact, Paul himself cited the prospect of eternal reward as his main motivator in pursuing his own sanctification

1Cor. 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.

1Cor. 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

1Cor. 9:26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air;

1Cor. 9:27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

- So rewards is a powerful motivator to serve Christ, but the prospect of personal reward won't always be reason enough
 - There will be days when we come face to face with the heart of the Kingdom program, when serving Christ becomes very personal
 - We're not talking about cleaning toilets or sweeping floors...
 - We're talking about concern for the eternal fate of an unsaved loved one
 - Perhaps you're growing weary and losing hope praying for a wayward child or a hardhearted spouse or friend...
 - Perhaps you're worried about how to talk to them about the Gospel...will they fight back? Will they be offended? Will you lose their friendship?
 - In those moments, the expectation of heavenly rewards probably won't motivate you but a loving concern for a person's eternal fate certainly will
 - Because ultimately, the Kingdom Program isn't about obtaining gain...it's about preventing loss...the loss of souls
 - Jesus wanted to motivate us by the eternal fate of the lost so we would engage in the hard work of winning hearts, as the Lord permits
- So now we have two reasons motivating us to serve Christ: eternal rewards and the reality of a coming judgment

- And biblically speaking, either motivation is good reason to serve
 - The Apostle Paul testified that he was motivated by both eternal reward and by the prospect of saving souls
 - Earlier, we read Paul saying he disciplined his body to ensure he received his prize, but he also said this:

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2Cor. 6:1 And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain —

2Cor. 6:2 for He says,

**“AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,
AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.”**

Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” —

- Clearly, Paul was motivated both by rewards and saving souls, and Jesus knew we needed both sources of motivation
 - And for the same reason, the enemy works hard to blind Christians to these truths
 - Because he knows that if we remain ignorant of eternal rewards or lose sight of the coming judgment, we lose incentive to serve
- I’m sure it won’t surprise you to hear me say many Christians today are completely unaware of the Bible’s teaching on eternal rewards
 - I routinely hear people tell me they’ve never heard of this teaching before
 - And that’s despite the fact that the concept of eternal rewards can be found on virtually every page of the NT
 - And even among those who have heard of eternal rewards, some struggle to accept that truth because it seems selfish
 - But the Bible says that understanding that truth is an essential part of pleasing God

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- In Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith, the writer says that it is impossible to please God without faith
- We all know that verse, but notice the writer says that pleasing Christ involves a faith that recognizes God is a rewarder of those who seek Him
 - That reference to reward is not speaking of our salvation because the Bible never calls our salvation a reward...it’s a free gift

- Our reward is that which awaits us in Heaven, which we receive for serving Christ now sacrificially
- And in Hebrews 11 the writer lists saint after saint who made earthly sacrifices because they expected a heavenly reward
- So serving Christ well in the Kingdom Program depends at least in part on having a biblical appreciation that God is our rewarder
 - Which is why the enemy has worked very hard to remove this truth from your understanding
 - That's one way he chokes off our fruit; causing us to be less motivated to serve Christ
- And have you also noticed how hard the enemy has been working lately to undermine the Bible's teaching on Hell and judgment also?
 - So-called Christian pastors are writing books declaring that Hell isn't a literal place and that God doesn't send people there forever
 - The enemy is raising up those liars specifically to diminish the believers' motivation to seek for the lost
 - Because when we stop caring about the fate of the the lost, the Kingdom Program becomes little more than a vanity project
 - If there is no Hell, then the Church's mission is pointless
 - We're just building a monument to ourselves...pretty buildings with rock climbing walls, coffee bars, and potlucks
 - That's not what Jesus told us in these parables
 - He said that at the end of it all, the Kingdom Program is really about seeking and saving the lost
 - We know that God is the One Who saves, not us, but we also know that He has called us to serve Him in that program
 - So serve Him now knowing you may be rewarded in the Kingdom to come
 - But never forget that the reason He calls for our service is so that we may bring more citizens with us into that Kingdom
- That's the Kingdom Program in a nutshell
 - And it's the mission of the Church, it's our calling, and every believer in Jesus Christ should know these things
 - In fact, this teaching was so important that Jesus felt the need to confirm that His disciples understood it

Matt. 13:51 “Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, “Yes.”

- Jesus asks the twelve did they understand these seven parables, to which the twelve answered “yes”
 - Now there are two possible ways to hear their answer
 - We could take their statement at face value...that is, they totally understood everything Jesus just said

- And if that were so, it would be remarkable because it was probably the only time Jesus' disciples completely understood anything Jesus said
 - Time and time again these guys missed the forest for the trees
 - Do you remember the scene when Jesus tries to explain to His disciples that Lazarus has died?

John 11:11 This He said, and after that He said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.”

John 11:12 The disciples then said to Him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.”

John 11:13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.

John 11:14 So Jesus then said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,

- Given how often they didn't understand Jesus, I find it hard to believe they fully appreciate the meaning of these seven parables
 - So I think they said “yes” without thinking, either because they were too afraid or embarrassed to say otherwise
 - Which is why Jesus followed with an eighth parable in this chapter which they probably didn't understand either
- Jesus explains why it's important that His disciples understand the Kingdom Program teaching

Matt. 13:52 And Jesus said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old.”

- This parable is not part of the earlier group of seven
 - Most of the other seven parables in this chapter began with the phrase “The Kingdom of heaven is like...”
 - But this time Jesus says this parable is about a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven
 - So this parable isn't focused on the nature of the Kingdom itself but on the nature of a certain disciple in the Kingdom: a scribe
 - In Jesus' day a scribe was someone who studied and taught the law of God to others
 - The closest equivalent to a scribe today would be a pastor or Bible teacher or seminary professor
 - Jesus said “scribe” rather than teacher or pastor because that was the term his disciples would understand in their day
 - But Jesus is talking about those in the Church who lead others principally in teaching the word of God
 - And Jesus compares such disciples to a head of a household

- The phrase “head of a household” is a single word in Greek
 - That same Greek word was used in Jesus’ earlier parable of the wheat and the tares, where it was translated “landowner”
- In Jesus’ day, a head of household (or landowner) had tremendous authority in his home
 - He was responsible for the servants in the house
 - And he was responsible for the crops in the field as Jesus’ earlier parable demonstrated
 - And he’s ultimately responsible for making sure that those crops produce a good harvest, which is the source of his wealth
 - So Jesus compares a landowner’s responsibilities to disciples leading the Church during the Kingdom Program
 - Of course, Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He rules over all His Church
 - But He will also raise up men and women – under-shepherds – to guide and feed the sheep in His Church
 - Like a landowner running a household, these men and women have responsibility for watching over the house of God
- And for the disciples who lead as scribes, those who teach the word of God to the Church, in that way we operate like heads of a household
 - We are to care for the servants of God, providing for them spiritually
 - We watch over the field in which the Lord plants and assigns into our care
 - We aren’t responsible for the planting, but we are called to ensure a good crop of seed
 - Pastors, teachers, ministry leaders, small group leaders...everyone who plays a part in guiding and feeding the sheep share in this responsibility
 - Leaders are called by Christ to help everyone produce fruit
 - As Jesus told Peter: if you love Me, feed My sheep
- And when leaders do their part to teach, the wheat produce fruit and both will profit in the end
 - The writer of Hebrews says this:

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you

- To the members of this flock, the writer says make it easy for your leaders to serve you by obeying them
 - Doing otherwise would be unprofitable, the writer says
 - When leaders do their jobs properly, the body grows spiritually
 - And as you grow, you please Christ more, and so you stand to gain more in eternity

- And to ministry leaders, the writer of Hebrews says we must give an account to the Lord for the souls entrusted into our care
 - Knowing that, we should put the needs of those in our care above our own interests
 - We sacrifice our own time, talent and treasure to invest in the spiritual growth of others
 - And as we do so, we will be rewarded too
- So it's a win-win for everyone
 - As the flock obeys the leadership, they will be better prepared to receive reward from Christ
 - And as leaders care for those we serve, we earn opportunity for our own reward
- But the final thing Jesus says in this parable is the key...a scribe must be prepared to bring things out of his treasure both old and new
 - In the parable, a landowner's treasure was material wealth he used to care for those under his authority
 - Some of the landowner's treasure would have been old things, family heirlooms handed down from generation to generation
 - Other wealth would have been acquired more recently, as when he sold the prior year's harvest, for example
 - So as a landowner provided for those under his care, he would bring out treasure both old and new
 - But what treasure does a scribe or teacher have to give out?
 - Clearly, a teacher's treasure is revealing the truths found in God's word
 - It's a treasure that holds the key to godly living
 - And Jesus says His disciples must be prepared to "bring out" both old and new treasure from God's word
 - Old refers to the Kingdom truths revealed in the OT, the things the law and the prophets said about the Kingdom
 - The OT tells us of a literal Kingdom on earth, a real place where we live and Christ rules from Israel in a day to come
 - Jesus says His teachers must bring these truths to His people
 - But a disciple must also teach the new principles of the Kingdom Program that Jesus has revealed in these parables
 - We must understand that the Kingdom Program will exist for a time before the literal place appears
 - And during this time, the work of serving Christ will take the form of recruiting citizens for the coming Kingdom on earth
- Jesus disciples' had to understand the new Kingdom Program so they could teach it properly to the Church
 - But ironically, the church has come to suffer from the opposite program in recent centuries

- In many places, the church moved away from teaching the old things and *only* teaches the new
- Many believers only ever hear teaching from the New Testament, as if the promises of the Old don't matter anymore
- So as a result, many Christians have little or no understanding of the literal Kingdom on earth
 - Some have even concluded that there won't be a literal Kingdom and that our world today is the Kingdom Jesus promised to Israel
 - God forbid this would be the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom, because if so, it's a pretty disappointing Kingdom
- That's why Jesus wanted His disciples to teach the whole counsel of God's word, the old and the new, because it all fits together
 - And that's why I teach the Bible in the way I do...it's in obedience to this command
 - And because I have to give an account for the souls under my care
 - And when I stand before Jesus for my judgment, I want to have a testimony that I fed His sheep
 - And I want you – those under my care – to have testimonies that you were moved to serve Christ and to produce fruit
- As Paul taught us

Eph. 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

Eph. 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Eph. 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.