

**PARABLE OF THE FISHING NET**  
**MATTHEW 13:47–51**  
**LESSON 9**



**WELCOME**

When sorting through a bag of jellybeans, which ones do you keep and which ones do you reject? What do you do with the ones you don't like?

**BACKGROUND**

In the parable of the fishing net, Jesus once again drew on examples from the life of the local community. Fishing practices used on the Sea of Galilee provided a helpful illustration of the important spiritual truth Jesus was trying to communicate. Not only were fishing examples familiar because of the surrounding community, they were especially meaningful to Jesus' closest disciples. The first four of Jesus' 12 disciples were fishermen by trade,<sup>1</sup> and they knew every step of the process of bringing in and sorting fish for eating, selling or discarding.



**WORD**

*As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you.*

**Context:** The parable of the fishing net was part of the continuing conversation Jesus had with His disciples after they left the crowds for a private house (**Matthew 13:36**). Jesus had explained to His disciples the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds,<sup>2</sup> ending with a warning about final judgment. He followed that up with two more parables pointing out the great value of the Kingdom of Heaven and the cost associated with it.<sup>3</sup> The warning in the parable of the fishing net reinforced to Jesus' disciples the urgency of the preceding parables.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Matthew 4:18–22**

<sup>2</sup> Lesson 5, **Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**

<sup>3</sup> Lesson 8, **Matthew 13:44–46**

<sup>4</sup> *Illustrated Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishing, Inc., 2015. 1711

## Matthew 13:47–51

<sup>47</sup> *“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that was thrown into the water and caught fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup> When the net was full, they dragged it up onto the shore, sat down, and sorted the good fish into crates, but threw the bad ones away. <sup>49</sup> That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the righteous, <sup>50</sup> throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup> Do you understand all these things?”*

*“Yes,” they said, “we do.”*

1. To what did Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven in this parable? **(Matthew 13:47)**<sup>5</sup>

Taking into consideration the information in footnote 5, why do you think Jesus used this specific type of net in this parable?

---

<sup>5</sup> There were different types of nets used for fishing in the Sea of Galilee at this time. And the specific type of net Jesus referred to is important to understanding this metaphor. There were small, handheld casting nets with beads around the edge to make them sink down and capture whatever they were tossed over. This type of fishing required the fisherman to wait patiently for his intended prey, then skillfully toss the net to capture a particular fish. However, the type of fishing net Jesus described in this parable was entirely different. The net He referred to was a huge net, often dropped down between two boats. There were ropes at the top and weights at the bottom of the net that allowed the net to sit vertically in the water. As the boats began to move, the net would form into a giant cone capturing everything in its path. The fishermen would pull everything to shore then carefully sort through all the net had captured. Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Matthew Vol. 2*. Westminster Press, 1975. 88-89; Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. W.B. Eerdmans, 2000. 361

2. The Sea of Galilee held many kinds of fish, and fishermen would sort out those that were not fit for eating, whether simply because they didn't taste very good or because of Jewish laws, which prohibited eating certain kinds of fish.<sup>6</sup> In **Matthew 13:48**, what happened to the good fish?

What happened to the bad fish—the ones that were inedible or unacceptable? (**13:48**)

3. Who did the good and bad fish represent in Jesus' explanation of the parable? (**13:49**)

- a. What did Jesus describe as the fate of the wicked? (**13:50**)

- b. Jesus did not specify the fate of the righteous in this passage, but given the example of the good fish, what could be presumed about the fate of the righteous?<sup>7</sup> (**13:48**)

4. How do you think most of your friends, family or coworkers would describe or define a wicked person? How is your perspective different or the same as their perspective?

---

<sup>6</sup> Jewish law allowed only fish with scales and fins to be eaten. Any fish that did not meet this criteria would have been considered bad, or unclean, to a Jewish fisherman. Snodgrass, Klyne. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. W.B. Eerdmans, 2018. 486; **Deuteronomy 14:9–10**

<sup>7</sup> **Matthew 13:42–43; Matthew 25:45–46**

- a. What perspectives do you commonly see among your friends, family or coworkers about what makes a person good or righteous?

- b. The apostle Paul wrote about God’s perspective on human righteousness (or rightness with God): *We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins ... and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.*<sup>8</sup>

Based on this passage, how would you describe God’s perspective on what makes a person righteous?

5. After sharing this parable, what did Jesus ask His disciples? (**13:51**)

---

<sup>8</sup> Romans 3:22–26

Jesus' question referred to the whole series of parables He had just shared with His disciples.<sup>9</sup> Why do you think it was important to Jesus that His disciples understood all of these parables and this one in particular?

## **ALLEGIANCE**

***Relinquishing and surrendering our lives to the King with loyalty to Him alone.***

6. Much like the parable of the weeds and the wheat,<sup>10</sup> in the parable of the fishing net there is a gathering and sorting described—one that will happen when this temporary world comes to an end. These two parables both describe angels doing the sorting,<sup>11</sup> but ultimately Jesus Christ is the one who has been given authority to judge what is in the heart of each person.<sup>12</sup> Part of relinquishing control of our lives to King Jesus is choosing to trust that His judgment is, and will remain, perfect and true. As you read these verses, note what stands out to you that is challenging and/or encouraging.

a. **James 5:8–9**

*Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door!*

---

<sup>9</sup> This series of parables included the parable of the wheat and weeds (Lesson 5), the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl (Lesson 8), and the parable we are studying in this lesson—the parable of the net.

<sup>10</sup> **Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**

<sup>11</sup> **Matthew 13:41–42, 49**

<sup>12</sup> **John 5:22, 27, 30**

**b. Acts 17:30–31**

*But now [God] commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed [Jesus], and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.*

**c. Romans 2:16**

*The day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life.*

**d. Romans 14:10, 12–13**

*So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God ... Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall.*

**e. 2 Timothy 4:7–8**

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing.*

## **INTEGRATION**

***Putting our intellectual understanding of the Kingdom into practice in every aspect of our lives.***

7. Take a moment to reflect on the verses in the Allegiance section. Where do you sense Holy Spirit has drawn your attention, challenged you and/or reassured you?

What is one action you can take this week to respond to those promptings?

## **MISSION**

***Living out the Gospel and Kingdom values through faith-filled proclamation and demonstration.***

8. The reality is there are many people we know who don't know Jesus. This means they will experience separation and suffering at the end of the world. Our response should be compassion and deep distress at the thought of those who will be lost. Jesus' heart and desire is that everyone would come to know Him.<sup>13</sup> Who are some of the people important to you that don't know Jesus yet or are currently rejecting Him?

---

<sup>13</sup> 2 Peter 3:9

How can you remind yourself to routinely pray for them? Ask Holy Spirit to reveal opportunities and ways to share Jesus with them.





## WORSHIP

***Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.***

A person who is facing a judge in a courtroom may find themselves fearful or hopeful, but ultimately the verdict is out of their hands. By His own innocence and sinless life, our Judge, Jesus, has already provided what is needed for a good verdict to be found when we face final judgment. If you have decided to trust Jesus' saving work, this good verdict is already yours. Use this prayer of proclamation as a way to express your deep gratitude.

Jesus,  
Your judgments are perfect.  
Your authority is trustworthy.  
Your justice is comprehensive.  
Your righteousness is unequalled.  
Your warnings are loving.  
Your words are truthful.  
Your mercy is incomparable.  
Your invitation is all-encompassing.  
Your help is reliable.  
Your safety is sure.  
Your rewards are beyond generous.  
I celebrate Your reign, King Jesus.

## CONVERSATION PROMPTS

***Consider using one of the conversation prompts this week to begin having a spiritual conversation with someone in your life.***

- Can a person be a good person? What makes them so?
- How do you decide if people are good or bad?
- Who do you think should get to decide if a person is good or bad?

## TAKE-AWAY SUMMARY

As you have worked through this lesson and listened to Holy Spirit, what is your one significant take-away?

Write a brief summary of your take-away on page 117.

# SERMON NOTES

## Lesson 9

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for the user to write their sermon notes for Lesson 9.

