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## Kingdom of Heaven

### 4 – The Parables of the Net

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We are continuing in our series, *The Kingdom of Heaven*. As we've hit on a couple of times, the kingdom of heaven is synonymous with kingdom of God, depending on which gospel you're reading. Today, we are covering the Parable of the Net.

Have you ever been to a foreign country, somewhere like Texas or Arkansas, or maybe an actual other country, or even another state, moved to a new town, started a new job, gone to a new school, been in a new environment where you didn't really know how things worked? At some point, maybe someone pulled you aside and said these words, "Let me tell you how things work around here. Because you need to know, right? You don't know either the written or unwritten rules, kind of some details because clearly you are not from here. Let me tell you how things work around here."

This series that we are going through with the parables, teaching us about the kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God, is just that. This is Jesus telling us how things work around here. Again, Kingdom of Heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God. Let's look at that to understand exactly what that is. What is the Kingdom of heaven or the Kingdom of God. Look at the first word, which is kingdom, which simply means a king's domain – that over which the king has domain. And what does God have domain over? Everything. Now, Kingdom of Heaven tells us also that it's not just the created universe and everything that we can see and hear and touch here in our experience. It also includes not just earth but also heaven because God's kingdom includes heaven and earth, like "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." His kingdom includes heaven and earth.

Now, we are going to work through some basic truths today. The basic truths are kind of progressive. Here's what they are. **First of all, there is a god.** Some of you are thinking that should be a capital G. Not yet. That's coming with the next truth, which is **Our God is the one true God.** And then the third point is this. **There will be consequences for rejecting the one true God.**

These are three core tenets of what we call our **Worldview**. Your worldview basically determines what you believe about where everything came from, why things are the way they are, and what is going to happen to everything. That is your worldview.

We believe in a Bible-based, Christian worldview. There are a few things that are very specific to that.

1. The Kingdom of Heaven/Kingdom of God. What is encompassed in the Kingdom of God is heaven and earth. Something distinguishing those two things is that one is temporary, and one is eternal.

This universe is temporary. It's here for moment, just like you and I are here for a moment. Our life is but a mist, a vapor – here and then gone. Heaven is eternal. That's important to understand and believe as it changes our perspective. It gives us eternal perspective. Because while we are occupied with this world, the temporary world, as we focus on the eternal, that's important because focus on the eternal changes the way we think, speak, and act here in the temporary. That is our worldview. It puts things in perspective.

There are a lot of people these day that are deconstructing things about their faith, about their worldview. You may have heard that word, maybe you haven't. It just simply means that throughout our life, there are these beliefs that we have in making up our worldview. Some people are starting to pull things back from that and say, "Does this really fit? Is this really important? Does this really matter?"

I think deconstruction, in some ways, is important and it's a good thing. Some of us maybe grew up in some traditions that don't really follow through on proper interpretation and application of scripture. So, it's important for us to know that, to think about that, and say maybe this is not appropriate, right? But we must be careful. If we pull our faith apart to a degree and we start taking things out, particularly the essentials of our faith like these three points that we are going to talk about today. If we pull any one of those things out, then we no longer have a Bible-based Christian worldview. These are essential to what we believe. So, these three points again – There is a god, our God is the one true God, there will be consequences for rejecting the one true God. This last one is going to be the basis of the parable that we are going to talk about and learn about today.

Now, the thing important to understand is that we have to go through this progression to arrive at this last point – There will be consequences for rejecting the one true God. The reason being if we don't, it would be like taking a story book and opening it to the middle and reading, "Then the villain swept in and ruined a perfectly good situation." That leaves you asking questions like "Who is the villain?" "What was the situation?" "Who is in distress here?" So, therefore, it is important for us to start at the beginning of the book and go through a progression to fully understand this last one.

This played out in the early church in the spreading of the gospel by Peter and Paul. You see, Peter was primarily the one that took the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews. Paul to the Gentiles. They would have a very different message. As Peter is telling the Jews about Jesus, they would simply say the Messiah has come, he is Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. This is the one we have been waiting for. And they would understand. But if Paul went to the gentiles and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away our sins." They would first of all say, "which God?" "And what do you mean by sin?" "And what does a lamb have to do with anything?" You see, the message is very different, depending on where people are coming from. So, it's important that we go through that progression.

Let's, first off, look at the parable out of Matthew 13: 47 – The Parable of the Net. **47 "Once again,** Let's stop there. Again... Have you ever tried to explain something to someone, answered some questions to someone, and they come right back kind of asking you the same question you just answered and you're like *I already answered that, but okay, and answer again.* And then they ask again. Or you are trying to explain something to someone. Young people, have you ever tried to explain their iPhone to your

grandparent? It takes a few times, doesn't it? And what you want to say is *I've shown you how to open and use this app a dozen times*. That's what you want to say, but in your polite tone, you say, "Well, again... which is a way of saying I've told you this before, but I'm going to tell you again. And this is the language Jesus uses here. He used it in the parable just before this, The Parable of the Pearl. He said, again then and now he's saying again, so we get this tone that Jesus is getting a point across and he's has repeated himself, therefore we need to pay attention.

***47 "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. 49 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***

So, in these different parables that we've been reading, we kind of get some different things from different parables. Some are of exhortation, encouragement to take action in some way. Some are giving us knowledge, just understanding. But this parable is a parable of warning. So, if it's a parable of warning, what is it warning against? It's warning against being rejected by God. That sounds pretty strong doesn't it to hear that God will reject. It may even sound cruel. You think how can a loving God reject?

I'm going to jump a little bit to the end of the message and give you a little bit of a spoiler that we will talk in more detail about later to say that God only rejects those who persist in rejecting him. So, we need to understand that as we hear that God will reject some... But the other thing we have to be careful about is not projecting our understanding of a rejection by people onto that of being rejected by God. God rejects differently than people do.

Many of us have been rejected by different people, different people groups, or in any number of ways because of something you said, something you did, maybe it was a spouse, a parent, a child, a coach, a teacher, an employer, an employee, a friend, boyfriend, girlfriend. Maybe it was something you did, something you said. But then even worse I think is that some may reject you just because of who you are, where you come from, the color of your skin, your family of origin, or something else about you. Some of you have been rejected in harsh ways because of things like that. That is not the same rejecting we are talking about. God only rejects those who persist in rejecting him. No matter what you've done, no matter who you are, God will not reject you simply for those things.

So, these are warnings... Sometimes we take warnings and sometimes we don't. How many of you heed the warning of the low fuel warning light in your vehicle? So, we have four drivers in our household. Two of us don't like for the fuel to get below about a quarter of a tank. Two of us do not. The low fuel like warning light comes on. Hey, we should probably be looking for a gas station, right? No, because it says 42 miles to empty. I've got a number here, right? No big deal. I'm starting to get anxious. Then you get to the point where the number goes away. You go from 30 miles to empty to low. And some cars even say, "Get to the nearest gas station." But now it just says low so you don't have any miles. No, it was ten miles ago... I had 30 miles, so I have 20 miles to go. By now, I'm in the backseat in the fetal position because I can't take it.

Some of us ignore certain warnings. And then there are some warnings that I don't understand. How did these come to be. There is one here that we see. It's a sign that says, "Warning, no swimming if you can't swim." Pretty good warning actually. But then there is another one here. "Touching wires causes instant death" But it gets worse. You'll get a \$200.00 fine for it. I think the first consequence is probably going to cover things. And then this last one most appropriate for our church this morning. "Warning, articles of value should not be left on seats whilst receiving Holy Communion." What kind of church are you going to. But then it got me thinking. This is why we stay in our seats for communion. We don't trust...

Some warnings I don't get. Some warnings I do get though. I spent some time on the trauma team as a surgical intern. In that trauma bay, you realize there are warnings in place for a reason. Wearing your seatbelt, wearing helmets, treating every gun as a loaded gun. There are warnings that are very important. And then we get this warning that we are learning about today that is the most important warning of all time for all mankind. As a matter of fact, it is repeated in scripture. Remember, Jesus said "again."

There is another passage in Matthew 25 where he is teaching about final judgment, and he essentially lays out the same warning. He says, **31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.**

**34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**

**41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.**

So, you see the first parable talks about good fish and bad fish. This account of the final judgment talks about sheep and goats. So, instantly, we start to wonder what makes me a good fish? What makes me a bad fish? What makes me a sheep? What makes me a goat? It's just one simple thing – whether you are righteous or unrighteous. And you will be judged based on whether you are righteous or unrighteous and deemed a good fish or a bad fish, a sheep, a goat. So, we will all face judgment at some point in our life, judgment regarding righteousness. Each of us that is alive will encounter one of these two events – death or the return of Christ. And these accounts that we just read about are called the final judgment. We will all be judged at some point. You will be judged either at your death or at the return of Christ. Again, I'm going to give you the punch line. Righteousness depends on what you do with the person of Jesus Christ. Those who place faith in Christ receive righteousness through him... deemed righteous.

This is a hard topic. Again, it sounds very strong being rejected by God and talking about being unrighteous. We don't avoid hard topics around there; we face them head on. Also, as a physician, I have to have some very difficult conversations and talk about some very hard realities. In 20 years now, no one has ever said to me. "Hey, I kind of see where this is going. I want you to kind of sugar coat this a

little bit. I want you to make this easier to talk about because I really don't want to have to face this, so can we just kind of not really talk about the facts and what's really going on."

No. 100% of the time, it's "Doc, I want to know everything that's going on. I want to know what I have to expect. I want to know the reality of it all. That's how we need to approach hard topics because it doesn't make it go away. We will face death or final judgement at some point.

Now, that puts us right to the third point – There will be consequences for rejecting the one true God. Let's back up a little bit to the beginning of the story and let's work through these other truths to help us kind of set that up.

We have a theistic belief, as Bible-based Christian world view is a theistic belief. Theistic means we believe there is a God. You've probably heard the word *atheism* or an atheistic belief that there is no God. And then the cousin to atheism, which is agnosticism. Agnostic means no or not and gnosis is knowledge so we don't know, or we can't know. But we believe we can know and we do know that there is a God. Those that have an atheistic belief default into something called naturalism, meaning that you believe that all there is, is nature, not in heaven and earth or a God, but all of it exists is what we see and can experience in this universe.

Naturalism, at its core, faces a really big problem though. It's this principle called *X nihilo, nihil fit*. Now, I want us all to say that five times really fast. *X nihilo, nihil fit* translate to "From nothing, nothing comes" It simply means you can't get something from nothing. In other words, the universe that exists couldn't just, in nature alone, go from there being nothing to being something. There can't be a jump from nothing to something. That's hard for us to understand. Nothingness. Have you ever tried to think about nothingness? What is nothingness? I think men understand nothing a little bit better than women because sometimes when you ask us what we're thinking, there's nothing. Literally, you can think about nothing. Yes, it's possible.

But here's the thing. Thinking about nothing is still something, isn't it. So, the problem with naturalism is that some may say everything came from a big bang. Most naturalists believe that there was a large explosion, there was this expansive space in which there was this dense matter and there was a large explosion and that's how the universe started. The problem is an expansive space with dense matter is something; it's not nothing. There had to be something. By the way, I wasn't there at creation but I'm guessing when God spoke the universe into existence, it was a pretty explosive experience. It had to come from somewhere.

Then there is something called entropy or the second law of thermodynamics, which says that the universe is in an increasing state of disorder. Things are becoming more chaotic with time. How many of you have experienced in your home that things are becoming more chaotic with time? The more people you add and the more things and more time, things become more chaotic. So, we can kind of identify with that. How many of you have ever been adopted by a cat? There is a cat outside and within a week, it's sleeping in your bed. A cat didn't adopt us, we adopted a cat in 2019 from the vet. It needed a home, so we brought it home, gave it food, water, shelter, and love, and it slept in our bed. So, we adopted it. There were six of us in the household at the time and we weren't really always in the

house at the same time. We have our daily activities and every now and then, a couple hours at a time, we'd all be there. But you know more people, more stuff is chaotic. Then COVID and the lock down and for two straight weeks, we were all there all at the same time. Before then, the cat had a pretty good life. Then enters chaos. That can run away. It said, "You people are crazy; I'm going to take my chances with the coyotes." We weren't adopted by a cat; we were unadopted by a cat because of the chaos. The point is things get chaotic with more people and chaos is increasing. That's the universe. Things are coming unwound so to speak. So, for things to come unwound, something or someone had to wind it up to begin with because it can't go the other direction by the laws that govern nature.

Then there's the moral code that says there is a difference between right and wrong and everyone understands that. Without a moral code giver, there is no moral code. With only nature, there is only survival and no moral code. So, we believe that there is a God.

Now, who is that God? We believe that our God is the one true God. Who is he? Quite simply, he is the God of the Bible. Throughout created human history, which he outlines for us, by the way, he inspired people to write things down, which eventually were canonized into the 66 books of the Bible, the holy scriptures that we believe is our primary source of truth. And the way that the Bible helps us to understand why we believe that our God is the one true God is three-fold. First, it tells us what has taken place. Second, it tells us what is taking place. Third, it tells us what is going to take place.

1. The Bible tells us what has taken place. Creation and the fall and everything that subsequently developed and happened as a result. In this, it tells us very clearly why things are the way they are. No other religious writings, no other books, no other worldview can explain why things are the way they are like the Bible can. But it can also leave us with some questions when we read about what has taken place. It leaves us maybe with a little doubt and some with skepticism, concerns and questions like, "Why did God do this? Why did he do that? Why is there evil in the world? Why is there pain and suffering and trauma? Why is there rejection by mankind?"

These are all questions that can leave us wondering. I believe that these questions are misdirected. You see, while we're trying to find answers in all of that what we often try answer is how God works, instead of answering why things are the way they are. You see, no volume of books, ever, is going to be able to explain how God works because no one has the mind of God. No one ever will have the mind of God. We can't fully understand how God works, but the Bible has very clearly explained to us why things are the way they are and it can really be summed up in one word and that is *sin*. God did not create us in the condition that we are in. He created a perfect situation that a villain swept in and ruined. Sin is why things are the way they are. So, if you are looking for clarity about why this and why that, remember you are never going to understand how God works, but we can fully understand why things are the way they are. In that we can have clarity

2. Then the Bible tells us what is taking place. By that, I mean what is taking place at the time that it took place and throughout created history, as people wrote things down that are canonized into scripture, those things can be compared to other historical writings and now we have archaeological finding that confirmed what was taking place and was written about in scripture is valid. So, we have valid historical value of the Bible.

3. Then, lastly, it tells us what is going to take place. All through the writings of scripture, we get hundreds of prophecies that have been fulfilled. So, what is going to take place was written hundreds and hundreds of years ago and then hundreds of years after that, but hundreds of years ago now was fulfilled so we could read the writing of it and the fulfilling of that account of it taking place hundreds of time, culminating in the person of Jesus Christ. Fulfilled prophecy about a Messiah that came and the prophecy about the circumstances into which he would be born. The family he would be born from, where he would be born, how he would live and how he would die. That he was and is the Messiah. The Bible tells us what is going to take place. And with that, we remember there will be consequences for rejecting the one true God. Remember, he will only reject those who persist in rejecting him.

Back in our parable that we read, it said the angels will come out and separate... Again, this is what is going to take place. ...and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, that place being hell, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Another hard topic, right? Hell. It's hard for us to fully comprehend Hell. We've heard twice that it's going to be pretty hot there. A fiery furnace and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. What's the weeping and gnashing of teeth? As we think about the physical aspect of hell, I think maybe it's more important to understand the spiritual aspect of hell. And what is the essence of hell? Hell is a place, but the essence of hell is the absence of God. The absence of the source of goodness, the source of peace, the source of joy, all that is good. The absence of that is the essence of hell.

2 Thessalonians 1: 9 says, ***9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might***

Matthew 25: 41 that we already read says, ***41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.***

That's pretty tough. Again, a hard topic, but there is always good news. God only rejects those who persist in rejecting him. What I mean by that is that as we stand rejecting God, remember each of us will face either death or final judgment. And if we persist in rejecting God, that is the moment of judgement. That is when God will reject. But until then, there is hope.

Ecclesiastes 9: 4 says, ***Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!***

Who does God hope repents and is saved? 2 Peter 3: 9 – ***The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.***

When we repent, we receive something called Atonement. When Christ created mankind, man brought sin into the world. There was a separation or a gap between God and man because a holy God can't be in the immediate, direct presence of sin. Again, that's hell. Here on earth, we experience both joy and sorrow. We kind of get a taste of heaven and hell. God can't be in the presence therefore there was a divide, a distance between God and man. God then sends Jesus who stands before us with open arms in accepting, not rejecting posture. God stands before us in the form of Jesus in accepting posture.

Those who persist in their rejection of Christ are the ones who will be judged unrighteous. You see, we are born into sin and therefore we default with a rejecting posture. It's at some point that we have to lower our guard and embrace Christ to be deemed righteous. What does that look like. How do we embrace Christ? We confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved. Saved from judgement of being unrighteous. That's what atonement is. Atonement literally means at onement, unity, the embracing of Christ. Once you embrace Christ and you have that atonement, then your judgment is done. whenever you taste death or when final judgement comes, you're deemed righteous. Therefore, you will never be rejected by God.

This last passage we're going to look at is my favorite as Jesus is talking about heaven, the Kingdom of God, which is heaven and earth and how things work around here, and how things work around here being heaven and earth. This last passages talks about this gap, this bridge between heaven and earth. Matthew 10: 32 - **32 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.**

Folks, this is the way things work around here in God's kingdom. If you've never placed faith in Christ, we will have a prayer team down front here at the end of the service. Our prayer would be that you would come forward and at least ask questions if you're not ready to make a commitment to confess and believe. If you have questions, we want those answered and we want to walk through that with you.

If you have placed faith in Christ, I want to kind of call back to the first few messages in this series. The first one Adam talked about was evidences of faith. So, if you are wheat or weeds and there should be evidence in your life. I'm not going to rehash that. He did a great job of that and you can look back on that. If you wonder what should be fulfilled in your life or what should be flowing from my life if I have received that justification. Last week, Ted talked about the treasure of our salvation. Have you experienced the joy, have you taken joy in your salvation or was it just a "Well I hear about this hell place, therefore I'm going to let my guard down, but I'm still pretty guarded." Have you experienced the joy of your salvation? Have you sold everything... Not literally selling everything that you own, but sold out, emotionally, spiritually, mentally for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Have you sold out and bought in to this treasure that you have in your salvation.

1)Understand there is a God. 2) Our God is the one true God. 3)There will be consequences for rejecting the one true God. But thanks be to God who gave us Christ who gives us atonement so that we can be deemed righteous and not be judged unrighteous.

Father, we love you. We are grateful for the gift that you have given us in Christ that you have open arms waiting to embrace those that will come. We pray for those that are considering faith or that have questions that they would understand that we will never clearly know and understand how you work, but we can have perfect clarity as to why things are the way they are and that is, God, because of sin.

I pray for those that have been rejected that they can understand that they will never be rejected by you, Lord, the way that people have rejected them that they would understand once they have placed



faith in Jesus, there is no rejection. There is the embrace of your Son Christ that brings us into eternal life with you in heaven. We love you, we give you praise, and it's Christ's name we pray... and everyone agreed and said... Amen.