

A final reality check

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Date: 20 October 2019

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[0:00] So isn't it interesting that the parable of the sower and the seed is given in three Gospels.! It's quite a large parable, but it's given in three Gospels. There's repetition.

There's not much differentiation between the parable of the sower and the three Gospels, but it's the repetition that strengthens the significance. It's like God is saying to us, well, listen in, listen in, listen in.

Listen very carefully. But there are some differences worth noting, and especially in the tone and how this parable relates to the previous ones.

It's not to be read, I believe, in isolation. Indeed, the whole of the Bible can't be read in isolation. There's a context, and we'll come on to that. This is the final parable of a series of seven in this section, and it has a very solemn closing.

Jesus wants the disciples to have this closing statement ringing in their ears. It's a kind of manifesto of the kingdom. And as we shall notice, there's enormous contrasts that are presented in a very stark way in these final parables.

[1:22] So let's think about the context. And I said, look carefully at verse 36. He left the crowd and went into the house. So here's the crowd.

He's speaking to a large number of people. The previous parables have been given to a large number. But he now goes into the house. It was time for a one-to-one with his own disciples. Now, we've seen in the previous passages that Jesus' parable speaking had a very definite purpose for the crowds. It was encouraging and drawing true seekers and exposing and deepening the hardness of heart of those who did not want to draw near to the true God and his kingdom.

It's an awesome thing, isn't it, to be hearing the word of God and to be recognising that, whether it was a parable or not, there's a process taking place.

When the word of God is spoken, that it either in God's hands has a way of drawing people closer to Jesus Christ, or in fact, putting us into the dangerous position of our hearts being even harder.

[2:31] But it's interesting to note that in these final four sections of parables, Jesus deliberately chose not only to explain the parable of the weeds, but also to speak the final three parables only to his disciples.

It's an intimate occasion. There are just 12 of them plus Jesus in the house. He even chooses a parable about fish.

I don't think there are any other parables about fish in the Bible, but he chooses this one, which would, of course, be readily identifiable to at least four of the 12 disciples, because they were fishermen.

And three of these were, as it turned out, the most vocal and prominent of the 12, Peter, James and John.

They appear prominently throughout the Gospel record. And they have been called to be fishers of men. So there's something about this intimate occasion which is to encourage these disciples to say something particular to them.

[3:49] He's giving them, as the coming devolved truth carriers and message bearers, careful instruction, so that they will not only be very clear of the marks of the kingdom, but faithfully convey it.

To misunderstand and offer a corrupt message would be absolutely disastrous. And verses 51 and 52 make the point.

Have you understood all these things? Jesus asked. Yes, they replied to a man. Although future events show that, in fact, their understanding was limited and quite fragile.

Nevertheless, Jesus is taking these men, with all their fragility, and the dangers of misunderstanding, and he's going to be making them the fishers of men. He's going to make them the conveyors of the message.

And he's preparing them for the responsibilities and privileges of what we might call a verse 52 ministry. Therefore, every teacher of the law who's been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his store room new treasures as well as old.

[5:10] They are going to be skilled by Jesus' teaching and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to be true conveyors of the word of God because these disciples are apostles.

And it is upon the foundation of the apostles that the church of Jesus Christ is built. So it's an extraordinary thing how Jesus equips these men for that ministry.

Jesus is preparing them for message giving. Please notice that there is, in fact, a balanced picture. These four parables, as they are explained and given to the disciples, the weeds, the hidden treasure, and the pearl, and the net, are clustered together and provide us with a balanced picture. And the reason why I say that is because central to this cluster are the seekers and the finders who are presented in the middle two parables.

[6:21] So there's no mistaking their disciple-hearted commitment. They have all the marks of true followers. These are the ones who are the good seed of the parable of the weeds and the good fish of the parable of the net.

And we're not left in any doubt about the character of the good seed and the good fish people. They're 100% sold out for the kingdom of God.

They're joyful in it. They count it as priceless treasure. They count the cost and they pay it. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

They're also sons of the kingdom, verse 38. And they will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. It's a great character reference which is painted here, isn't it?

And I think we notice particularly the fervour, the zeal, the ambition, the wholeheartedness of these true followers of Jesus Christ.

[7:39] These are the true seekers and finders and it's clearly portrayed there. In the kingdom of heaven, this is the character of the true followers. On the other hand, we are also given a portrait of the not true seekers and finders.

And this is very sad and it's very dark and it's difficult. They may be alongside and amongst the true seekers and finders but are fundamentally different. They are called, in verse 38, the weeds are the sons of the evil one.

And they're powerless under his thumb. The enemy who sews them is the devil. Isn't that a terrible picture? Isn't that an awful picture?

People who are under his thumb in a way and his playthings in one sense. They're also the bad fish of the net parable.

If we were to just expand that illustration and these fishermen whose living depends upon the fish. Wouldn't they want to sort of smuggle every sort of fish in and get the weight of the fish to get a good price, as it were.

[9:05] But they know that there are some fish that just cannot be sold. There is no worth in them. There is no value. They are inedible. They're possibly poisonous. Or to change a metaphor, they're fruitless.

John, the disciple who became an apostle, learned well of Jesus when he presents the stark contrast in his own letter, 1 John 3, verse 10, where he says this, this is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are.

There is a way. There is a way. There is a test that can be applied. There is also a very severe warning.

You cannot call yourself a true seeker just by living close to one. You cannot call yourself a true disciple just by living amongst true disciples. And this is such a such a risk, such a danger.

We should consider that quite carefully. Both the weeds and the net parables speak of the closeness of good seed and weeds mingled together in the same field.

[10:28] of good and bad fish found together in the one net. Even the gospel net.

For the Jews to whom Jesus was speaking, whether as crowds of thousands or just 12 men, the unique specialness and privileges of their calling gave them a fierce sense of solidarity and otherness.

They were not like other people. They were God's special people. And they had a nation shared history to be remembered. Please turn to 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10. This is a chapter which provides warnings from Israel's history.

Let's read verses 1 to 4. I don't want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

[11:52] They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them and that rock was Christ.

Do you notice the repetition of the word all? All. Not only did they have these experiences all together and much more over many years from cradle to grave as it happens but there was spiritual content.

The water they drank was spiritual. That's what the word says. And the rock it came from was spiritual because the rock was Christ. who was with them every step of the way.

That's an extraordinary thought. The Son of God was present amongst his people there and this vast number and we could be talking of a million people were all experiencing in the same way the cloud the water the crossing of the sea the drinking they drank the water they all drank the water coming out of the rock and seeing the miracles of God being performed amongst them.

But 1 Corinthians 10 verse 5 says this nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them their bodies were scattered over the desert most of them well in fact we know it was a vast number with whom God was not pleased we're told why in the following verses they set their hearts on evil things they were idolaters they committed sexual immorality they tested the Lord they grumbled and complained well they had the characteristics of the evil one about them and this echoes the warnings of Revelation 22 where it says there is no place in the kingdom of Jesus Christ for the sexually immoral for murderers and please remember

[14:36] Jesus definition of murderer from the Sermon on the Mount idolaters and falsehood practices these are the examples and warnings given to us so that we should not and never be like them be on your guard be warned if you think you're standing take heed lest you fall that was the warning given to the Corinthians the Corinthian church was a gathering like ourselves they were gathered together they were all hearing the same word of God they were singing the praises of God they were praying the prayers together and so forth but he's saying to them be warned take this very seriously indeed if you think you're standing take heed lest you fall physical mental and emotional closeness to spiritual realities does not make you a child of the kingdom let's repeat that physical mental and emotional closeness to spiritual realities does not make you a child of the kingdom attending a church for 50 years does not make you a child of the kingdom singing at the top of your voice does not make you a child of the kingdom enthusiasm even emotional experiences does not make you a child of the kingdom it is what's in your heart expressed in your life that shows whether you are a random disciple or not and we are not immune from this warning we mustn't be immune from this warning we are meant to hear this warning it's in the word of God that we should receive this warning that's why 1

Corinthians 10 has been written for us given to us this was the constant failure of the Jews wasn't it we are the children of Abraham that's our tradition that's our background we are the chosen people ethnicity does not make you a child of the kingdom and there's a severe end the parable of the weeds and the parable of the nets speak of a severe end for those who do not pay attention to God's severe warning and keep rejecting the free grace offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ it's an almost unspeakable end with a desperate finality it does not appear now but it will certainly happen

when

King Jesus returns in stupendous glory and power to judge the living and the dead on that day all secrets will be blown away all ambiguity all fogginess it will be clear to all who can stand before the judge and survive his piercing holy perfect gaze who sees and knows all his verdict is clear decisive and final we each tonight face one of two destinies to be welcomed into Christ's kingdom or to be rejected and thrown into the fiery furnace thrown away into a place of deep and never ending never ending weeping and frustration it is an awful thing isn't it which is in part the reason why people who believe much of the bible struggle at this point but we cannot deny the words of Jesus

Christ repeated for us in these parables of the weeds and the net we can't deny the words of Jesus Christ these are his words they're not interpretations they're not scribal editions they're firmly and securely in the word of God and repeated so frequently that we wince almost with the power and significance of them what an amazing thing it is that Jesus Christ the son of God become man standing in that little house with twelve of his disciples he speaks of these realities knowing knowing that one day he will be exalted and be the judge of all men and the decision will be taken there is a teaching of universalism universalism that says that somehow or other that it will be possible for all people to evade the judgment to somehow get through this final piercing glance of Jesus and to somehow find themselves saved and this concept pops up in all kinds of versions of Christianity but we can't find that to hear in this word can we there's a teaching that says most clearly here there will be those who are welcomed into the kingdom of the father and there will be those who are banished into this never ending weeping and darkness and if that was not the case why would there be the warning but the warning is given to us the warning is given to all of us tonight none of us exclude ourselves from that warning we need to search ourselves to see whether we be in the faith we're commanded to make our calling and election sure to demonstrate that we do have the character of those who belong to the kingdom of Jesus

[21:32] Christ and not to those who have the character of the kingdom of the evil one there's also a call here to be faithful in our message there's also a call for the disciples of Jesus to be faithful in our messaging whether it is warning or welcome I have to say it's relatively easy for me to stand here and to give warning though it does it does bring my heart but how to do that on Monday in a workplace how to do that sincerely on London Road how to relate to the people on the bus stop how to speak to our children and our families who are not yet

Christ's how to say these things for the words to come out something to be said which is truthful and appropriate because this is part of the message this is part of the message it is indeed part of the gospel message the gospel message is not just bright sunshine but it's making people aware that they face an awful destiny as we reminded last week if they just carry on as they are there is nothing that any person born in this world today has to do that makes the destiny of hell an absolute reality for them they just have to carry on as they are they just have to carry on as they are because we're born sinful we're dead in our trespasses and sins we are under the judgment of God and that is the frightening thought as it were so we have to warn people because that's their inevitable destiny inevitable destiny unless a fundamental Christ empowering change takes place in their lives Jesus was telling the truth to his disciples that they might faithfully pass this truth on but whilst the God given teachers have particular responsibilities we all surely have a responsibility to bring the message and we have no other message than the one Jesus gives us we have no other message than the one Jesus gives us even if we find it difficult to receive and convey and if I read this correctly in verse 52 of the

Matthew passage Matthew 13 verse 52 it's all treasure it's all treasure the treasure just isn't the nice stuff it's also the warning stuff it's the difficult stuff because it's extremely precious and important that people should know that this is their destiny and we are depriving people of treasure if they do not hear that and if they do not hear that what will compel them to come to Jesus Christ as a saviour for their sin what will persuade them unless they know there is a day of judgement when their destinies their eventual everlasting eternal destinies will be decided unless that's part of the message part of the treasure message that we give to people now that's hard isn't it that's hard for us but it's part of our faithfulness and the calling that we've received and exactly what Jesus was preparing his disciples for so that we find on and after the day of

Pentecost empowered preaching of the whole council of God they're not ashamed they don't hold back they're bold they're straightforward because God will honour that message and he will use that for the salvation of people and you know if we do not bring that aspect of the message we are going to deprive people of a whole gospel message so we cannot be concerned without being politically correct or the other because we only have one message and it comes from the lips of Jesus Christ and his apostles and it's entrusted to us we're entrusted to be these message bearers so we need to count it as treasure and bring it to our families and friends and neighbours work colleagues strangers with faithfulness clarity and freshness speaking appropriately in a timely manner that suits each occasion and we will need the help of the

[27:29] Holy Spirit to do that won't we we will need to have a close walk with the Lord ourselves so that we feel the intensity of these two realities of heaven and hell and we're not just speaking from a script but we're saying the things that are so clearly to us extreme and definite truth we are thoroughly persuaded on this point and we will not depart from it we will not water it down we will speak as faithfully as God gives us grace may each one of us be empowered to do that today if you hear his voice that's a quote from many parts of the Bible in fact but it comes again in Hebrews in the light of these parables it's highly appropriate that we should all hear this warning tonight we are in a gathering of God's people we're close to the word of God we're in a place where

God has met with his people a place where God has heard prayers and performed many miracles is this place so we're not too far away from the folk in the desert who saw the miracles of God we're not too far away from that picture we're not far away from the Corinthians who needed to have that warning we're having that warning again tonight because being here doesn't make you a disciple doesn't make me a disciple being here does not make you a disciple but Christ is here and he's calling you now to be a follower tonight to be reconciled to God by the free gift of repentance and faith because he and he alone has paid the penalty for sins of every kind and I can say with utter confidence to you tonight whatever sinful and judged condition you may be in this night there is power in the blood of

Jesus Christ that he has shed upon the cross to deliver you from all of that all of that whatever it might be the judge of all is also the saviour who can welcome us to himself on judgment day on judgment day covered in his perfect righteousness completely forgiven because of his shed blood how amazing that the Lord Jesus Christ who searches the hearts of all men and knows exactly everything about us from our birth to our dying that he could look upon us and he could say with admiration welcome welcome welcome how could he be consistent with his holiness to say that welcome it's only because his righteousness has been accepted by his father the price has been paid we're clothed we're covered we're protected we're sheltered and not only that we're welcomed we're welcomed today is the day for receiving all of this whether this is the first or the hundredth time you've heard this call and we cannot delay because the only time we have before judgment day is right now there's nobody here in this place you don't have any more moments with any certainty before judgment day apart from right now today if you hear his voice come to him come to him only come to

Jesus who is the only one who will be your protector and your saviour come to him we're going to sing number 511 we'll sing this unaccompanied we will not sing verse 2 we will say verse 2