

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MYSTERIES

### Part XI

by Thomas Ice

*“Have you understood all these things?” They said to Him, ‘Yes.’  
And He 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 forth out of his treasure things new and old.’”*

—Matthew 13:51–52

We now approach the final two parables relating to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. Some question whether the statement about the householder in verses 51 and 52 is a parable. It is not called a parable directly and does not use the parabolic formula that includes the word “like.” However, it does provide a lesson like the other parables and brings the entire parabolic section to an end. Whether or not it is classified as a parable technically is not as important as the point taught. I tend to think it is a parable since it is clearly part of the section begun in 13:1 which would fit under the statement describing Jesus as speaking to the crowd and the disciples “in parables” (13:3).

It has been observed that the last two parables form a pair; the seventh and eighth. Only Matthew records the last four parables, they are not included in Mark or Luke. Stanley Ellisen believes they deal with personal involvement in the newly revealed kingdom plan of God’s program. “To Jesus’ shaken cadre of disciples He first impressed the wisdom of wholehearted commitment—only those who invest will realize its benefits. That point naturally led to the question about how to invest. How does one get involved, and what role will each play?”<sup>2</sup> It is on this basis the last two parables are linked together as Jesus finishes His teaching on the mysteries of the kingdom.

#### THE DRAGNET

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind” (13:47). One of the first things to observe about this parable is that the Greek word for “dragnet” is only used here in the Greek New Testament. R. C. H. Lenski says of this word, it “is the largest kind of net, weighted below with corks on top, sweeping perhaps a half mile of water, the opposite of the small, or casting net, mentioned in 4:18.”<sup>3</sup> The largest of all fishing nets is used to teach the truth of a global judgment involving all mankind at the end of the age. Since many of Christ’s disciples were involved in the fishing industry, this is an apt illustration they would have easily understood. “This parable sketches the fishing operation of a team of fishermen who used a dragnet from a boat to encircle a large area of shallow water along the shore.”<sup>4</sup> An operation like this would gather “fish of every kind.” Presumably nothing would escape the reach of the net. “The expression “of every kind” is important,” notes Ed Glasscock. “The thrust of this parable is similar to the lesson of the wheat and tares in that good and bad are allowed to be together and then are separated.”<sup>5</sup>

“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” (13:48). This part of the parable notes the separation process that fishermen would engage in after dragging the net full of fish to the shore. Just as in the parable of the tares (13:24–30),

they wait until harvest time, the end of the growing season, to separate the wheat from the tares, the same is true in the parable of the dragnet. The parable does not depict swimmers attempting to remove unwanted fish while collecting them; instead, the separation occurs at the end. This will be the same as the judgment at end of the tribulation.

“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous” (13:49). The parable is given in the two previous verses, while Christ immediately interprets His analogy immediately after voicing it. This verse identifies the agents of judgment that God will use as angelic beings. These elect angels will insure that the separation is righteous, in accordance with God’s righteousness. This is a repeat of verse 41 that says, “they will gather out of His kingdom.” In other words, prevented from entering into the kingdom. No one will slip through the net, so to speak. Notice, it is the wicked who are removed and not allowed to enter God’s Kingdom, the millennium, while the righteous are left to enter into His kingdom. The judgment will take place “at the end of the age,” (i.e., the end of the interadvent age), which is the judgment at the end of the tribulation.

This parable describes what will happen at the second coming, not at the rapture of the church that occurs before the tribulation, it is all believers who are removed and the wicked are left to go through the tribulation. John Walvoord explains the theology taught in this parable.

The fulfillment of the prophetic truth in this parable will occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the world is judged and the kingdom instituted. It is clear from this parable, as those preceding, that the present age does not end in a postmillennial triumph, with the entire world being Christianized; neither does it fulfill the kingdom promises of the Old Testament nor does it describe the period when all nations will serve the Lord. Rather, as in preceding parables, it describes the dual line of good and evil, continuing until the time of the end when both the good and evil are judged according to their true character.<sup>6</sup>

“And will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Clearly “the furnace of fire” is what is popularly known as hell. This verse is generally a repeat of verse 42 which says, “and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Since none but the wicked are removed and cast into the furnace of fire, then it makes sense that those who are left are believers who are invited to “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). The phrase “will cast them into the furnace of fire,” is drawn nearly verbatim from Dan 3:6.” “Weeping and gnashing of teeth” appears to refer to either regret or the effect of overwhelming pain.

#### **THE HOUSEHOLDER**

The final parable asked the disciples if they had understood “all these things” in verse 51. This question is asked the disciples in light of the following at the beginning of chapter 13: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (13:11) and “while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (13:13). There is a major focus by Jesus on the fact the disciples were able to understand (see 13:23), while those who rejected His Messiahship would not understand (see 13:19).

The disciples quickly answer, “Yes.” However, “it is easy to claim to understand, yet such men soon find it to be otherwise if they attempt to explain it to others or to put something into practice. Indeed vv. 10, 36 show that the disciples did not understand a parable until it was explained.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly the passage teaches one must be a believer to understand Christ’s teaching.

In verse 52 Jesus draws out a conclusion from their confession that the disciples have understood His parabolic teachings when he says, “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.” Jesus declares this collection of mostly blue-collar workers as a group of scribes. “A scribe was basically one who copied and taught the Law and was considered an expert in the Old Testament Scripture.”<sup>9</sup> “By so doing the Messiah rejected the ministry of the common scribes and appointed His own,” concludes Stanley Toussaint. “His disciples were now responsible for dispensing the whole truth, for only they possessed it.”<sup>10</sup>

The “head of a household” in this context would be the disciples with their new responsibility as scribes is to teach the things concerning the kingdom of heaven already understood from the Old Testament along with the new things Jesus has just instructed them in relation to the mysteries or secrets concerning the kingdom. “The analogy is to indicate their responsibility in this new position. A house owner was responsible to use his resources to provide for his household.”<sup>11</sup> Now “the King charges His disciples with their responsibility in dispensing the truths of the kingdom.”<sup>12</sup> Arno Gaebelein says, “The things old are the things revealed in the Old Testament and the new things those of the new dispensation, which are given in these parables in a nutshell.”<sup>13</sup> Louis Barbieri summarizes the lessons from the parable of Matthew 13:

They knew about a kingdom over which Messiah would rule and reign, but they did not know it would be rejected at the time it was offered. They knew the kingdom would include righteousness, but they did not know it would also include evil. Jesus pointed up a new truth that the period between His rejection and His second coming would be characterized by professing followers, both good and evil. This era would have a small beginning, but it would grow into a great “kingdom” of professors. Once this process began, it could not be stopped, and within it God is maintaining His people Israel and creating His church. This interadvent period will end with a time of judgment in which God will separate the wicked from the righteous and the righteous will then enter the earthly kingdom to rule and reign with Christ. Through these parables Jesus answered the question, What happened to the kingdom? The answer: God’s kingdom will be established on earth at Jesus’ second coming; meanwhile good and evil coexist.<sup>14</sup>

Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stanley A. Ellisen, *Parables in the Eye of the Storm* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Ellisen, *Parables*, p. 115.

- 
- <sup>3</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 547.
- <sup>4</sup> Ellisen, *Parables*, p. 116.
- <sup>5</sup> Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 297.
- <sup>6</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), pp. 106–07.
- <sup>7</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 1–13* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 394.
- <sup>8</sup> John Heading, *Matthew: What the Bible Teaches* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie, LTD, 1984), p. 198.
- <sup>9</sup> Glasscock, *Matthew*, p. 298.
- <sup>10</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold The King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 185.
- <sup>11</sup> Glasscock, *Matthew*, p. 298.
- <sup>12</sup> Toussaint, *Behold The King*, p. 185.
- <sup>13</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), p. 303.
- <sup>14</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew" in John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985) pp. 52–53.