Matthew 13:47-50 (NIV)
47“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48When 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. 49This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Setting
The Parable of the Net is the last parable in Matthew’s 13th chapter. This parable is located only in the canonical gospel of Matthew with one other similar appearance in the Gospel of Thomas 8.

The parable in the Gospel of Thomas reads,

And He said to them: “The man is like a wise fisherman who has cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of small fish. Among them the wise fisherman found a fine large fish. He threw all the small fish back into the sea and chose the large fish without difficulty. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear.”

This exact parable does not exist in any other gospels, but it is somewhat parallel to the parable of the weeds portraying similar meaning (Carson 330). The parable of the weeds focuses mainly on the rule of God during which weeds and wheat grew together and the enemy had great power (Carson 330). The parable of the net differs because it describes what will happen when the Last Judgment takes place. The final sweep of the net is what sorts the “good” fish from the “bad” fish at judgment time.

Exegetical Analysis
Just as the other parables in Matthew chapter 13 begin, the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is like” is also used for an opening to the parable of the net. What is essential to take note of is that the Kingdom of Heaven is not being compared to the net itself, but to the sorting of the “good” and “bad” fish that have been caught in the net (Hultgren 304).
The net that is being referred to in this parable can be translated to the term “dragnet,” which is used only in this parable in the New Testament (Hultgren 305). This large net was one that fishermen would cast out over boats on the Sea of Galilee to catch many different species of fish. The gathering of sea creatures by nets is an eschatological symbol (Hultgren 305).

In this parable, the fish caught by the net are referred to as either “good” fish or “bad” fish, with different meaning for each. The “good” fish are the ones considered to be clean, edible, and marketable. The “bad” fish are the ones with missing fins and scales, therefore, inedible. The good fish were placed into containers to sell at the market, and the bad fish were thrown away in a pile of waste. (Hultgren 305-306)

In verses 49-50 is when the interpretation of the parable begins. The wicked and the righteous are being separated by the angels, with the focus being placed on the destruction of the wicked. This destruction begins with throwing the wicked into the fiery furnace, where there will then be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The term “weeping and gnashing of teeth” can be regarded as a “Matthean refrain that concludes solemn declarations of judgment on the part of Jesus,” and it is used six times in Matthew (Hultgren 306). This judgment creates a conclusion to the discourse of the chapter 13 parables (Scott 314).

Message

The message of this parable is clearly stated in the interpretation verses 49-50. At the time of judgment, angels will come to separate the righteous from the wicked. Every person has a choice to both be a righteous person, and enter the Kingdom of Heaven, or to be a wicked person, who will be thrown into the fiery furnace at judgment time. Every person that claims to be a disciple of Jesus has a mission to remain faithful to God’s will. The ones that have not remained faithful in fellowship to Jesus will be separated and thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Application

The parable of the net does not only speak to those who are followers of Christ, but also to those who have chosen to not follow Christ. This parable places a great deal of emphasis and detail on judgment day and focuses more on what will happen to those who do not follow Christ, rather than those who do. The only thing it says about the righteous (followers of Christ) is that they will be separated from the wicked (not followers of Christ). Then it goes on to describe specifically what will happen to the wicked once they have been separated from the righteous. It is possible that the message in this parable is more aimed at those who are not following Christ.

This parable is a fair warning of what will happen on judgment day when the angels come. It is not a pleasant thought to hold on to, but it is a good reminder that the “good” will be separated from the “bad” when judgment is upon us.
Bibliography


Grade: B