

The Distinction and the Treasure

Matthew 13:44-52

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July 30, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Now that we have heard two of our Lord's parables that He decoded for us the Lord now is setting us out on our own to decode the rest of His parables without help. Well, at least without a lot of help. He tells two parables in sequence without comment and then tells a third parable with one final comment. The bad fish are thrown into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is the same thing that our Lord said in the parable of the weeds and the wheat. The people represented by the weeds were people who wound up in the fiery furnace. They wept and gnashed their teeth. So also the people represented by the bad fish are the people who will wind up in the fiery furnace at the completion of the age. They will weep. They will gnash their teeth.

The Lord gave indication in His parable last Sunday as to the nature of the distinction between those who shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father and those who are thrown into the fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In the parable of the net there is no detail on the distinction between the good and the bad fish. It is simply that some are good and some are bad. The good ones are kept. The bad ones are thrown away. Then your Lord points out to you that the completion of the age will be the exact same way. Some people will be kept and some will be thrown away. The ones that get thrown away go into the furnace of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Lord gave us indication in the parable of the weeds and the wheat as to the distinction between the weeds and the wheat. Here He gives no distinction between the two kinds of fish other than to say some are good and some are bad. It is obvious that the ones sorting the fish are the ones who determine which fish is good and which fish is bad. Therefore the Lord who returns in glory at the completion of the age is the One who determines which person is good and which person is bad.

It is again tempting to believe that bad people are the ones who do more bad things than good people. It is again tempting to believe that good people are the ones who do more good things than the bad people do. If this were the case then the Lord would be judging people on the basis of their good deeds. The Scripture is replete with the Word of God that we are saved by grace through faith without works of the Law. Thus the distinction between the good fish and the bad fish must be made on that basis, but the Lord does not discuss that here in this parable. The Lord does not talk about grace or faith. He speaks only of the distinction and that some in the distinction wind up in the furnace of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore the point of the parable is that there is a distinction between the good and the bad or if you cannot help but hear that phrase in a works righteous fashion, let me say it this way: there is a distinction between those people whom the Lord will keep and those people whom the Lord will throw away. And that is the point of the parable.

This is why those who wind up in the fiery furnace gnash their teeth. The reason why they weep is obvious. In spite of whatever righteousness they thought that they had they wound up in the fiery furnace. They weep because they are in torment in the fiery furnace. They weep because there are people whom the Lord kept who are not in torment in the fiery furnace, but are rather shining like the sun in the kingdom of their father. The people in the fiery furnace weep because of where they are at and they weep because there was the possibility that they could have been in the kingdom of their father, but they are in the fiery furnace instead.

That is why they gnash their teeth. We do not often speak of gnashing our teeth, but we do grit our teeth. We grit our teeth in determination. People gnash their teeth in anger. The Jewish ruling council gnashed their teeth at Saint Stephen just before they stoned him to death. The reason that they gnashed their teeth at him was because he had just rebuked them for the sin of refusing to listen to the Word of God. Rather than to repent and listen to the word of God, they gnashed their teeth at the one who brought them the word of God and then stoned him to death. Gnashing of the teeth is an expression of resentment and anger toward the judgments of God. The reason that the people in the fiery furnace gnash their teeth is because they are angry at the judgments of God. It is the judgment of the Son of Man that they should go into the fiery furnace and because of that judgment they are in the fiery furnace and because they despise that judgment because it brings them torment and they deem it unfair, they gnash their teeth at the judge. They gnash them for eternity.

There is more than one reason to resent the judgments of God. You can resent the judgments of God because you think that they are wrong. You can also resent the judgments of God because He judges at all.

There is a notion among us that God should not judge at all. In its most stark form it becomes a lie and says that God will not judge at all. The randomness of the curse of death upon the creation has obscured the judgments of God. Some people live longer and some people live shorter without any apparent reason why one lives longer and another lives shorter. Medical science cannot explain every case. Because of this many view the randomness of the creation as just that: randomness and come to the conclusion that there is no judgment. Then when our Lord tells a parable indicating that there is a judgment and a distinction is made between peoples, they gnash their teeth at the judge. They refuse to accept the Lord's judgment. They will gnash their teeth forever. They will constantly believe that the Lord should not have judged them or that the Lord judged them wrongfully. Such is the eternal conclusion of those who resent the judgments of God.

There are those who do not think that the fiery furnace exists. There are those who think that God is wrong to send anyone into the fiery furnace. They do not believe that God has even made a fiery furnace. They will gnash their teeth against God's judgment for all of eternity in the fiery furnace that they said did not exist.

Such is the nature of those who are in the fiery furnace. They are the ones who either refuse to accept God as judge or refuse to accept His judgments.

But supposing you do accept God's judgments?

Suppose you are a person who does listen to the Word of God. Suppose you are a person who does accept the judgments of God. Then you are a person who is going to call something a sin that God calls a sin. You are not going to call something righteous when God calls it a sin. Nor are you going to call something a sin that God calls righteous. If you accept the judgments of God, you will condemn what He condemns. You will receive what He receives. You will forgive when He forgives.

Well, then upon the examination of your life you are self condemned. What hope is there for you? The parable of the net gives none, but our Lord does not want you to read the parable of the net without first reading the parable of the treasure hidden in the field and the parable of the pearl of great price.

These parables are often misinterpreted. It is held by many that since our Lord says that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, that the kingdom of heaven is the treasure and if we want to obtain the kingdom of heaven then we should sell all that we have to obtain the kingdom. The kingdom is that important that it is worth selling all that we have.

The problem with this interpretation is that it runs counter to every other parable that our Lord tells. In the parable of the sower, the sower was the main character. When our Lord decoded the parable of the sower, who was the sower? It was Himself, the Son of Man! When our Lord told the parable of the weeds and the wheat who was the main character in His parable? The main character was the one who sowed the good seed and then explained the weeds to his servants and rendered judgment on the weeds. The main actor through the parable was the man who sowed good seed in his field. When our Lord decoded the parable once again He is the main character in His own parable. The Son of Man is the one who sowed good seed in His field. Everything else in the parable reacts against Him or in His favor.

Therefore it should be implied that the Son of Man is the one who separates the good fish from the bad fish even though when our Lord tells the parable it is a group of fishermen who making the separation between the good fish and the bad fish and in the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price it should be assumed that the main character who finds the treasure and the pearl is not you, but rather the Son of Man!

He finds the treasure! He finds the pearl! And the merchant goes and sells all that he has to buy that field or to buy that pearl. The Son of Man does exactly that. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. He went and sold all that He had to obtain His treasure. So when our Lord says that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, He means for you to understand that the Kingdom of heaven is like to the whole parable that He tells! In other words He is describing to you the structure of the Kingdom of heaven. The structure of the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sold all that He had to purchase His treasure that He had found. He finds the treasure. He finds the pearl. He sells all that He has to buy them.

Therefore you are His treasure. You are the pearl of great price. He found you and He went and sold all that He had to purchase you.

This is the judgment of God upon you.

If you are in the business of accepting God's judgments, then not only will you accept His judgments upon your sin and wretchedness, you will also accept His judgment that you are His treasure. He declares you to be His treasure just as soon as He goes and sells all that He has, yea, even His own life, to purchase you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.