

Dear Friends,

In all His parables, Jesus always taught that He is wholly competent to manage His kingdom wisely and righteously. The parable of the net serves as an ideal example of this truth. I can't recall the many times in my ministry when I observed what appeared to me to be an impossible situation. From my perspective, there simply was no viable solution. That dilemma always presents us with the ideal occasion for prayer. Over time the Lord resolved that situation in a way that I could not have imagined when I first observed the problem. Based on Scripture and confirmed by almost sixty seven years of pastoral experience, the most common cause of dissension and eroding love in a church is members who decide they must "Take matters into my own hands" or otherwise think they know better what or how to do things than the Lord or His collective church body. We are far too inclined to follow our carnality and think the future and healthy soundness of our church depends on us alone, that we are the Lord's personal "...pillar and ground of the truth," rather than His church as affirmed in Scripture. (1 Timothy 3:15 KJV) No individual believer, regardless his/her motives or desires, can ever supplant the Lord's design for His church.

In the end, we serve in the Lord's kingdom, and His church, as stewards, not as lords over our private fiefdom. He is Lord over His church, to put the point in Biblical language, He is "...the head over all things to the church." (Ephesians 1:22 KJV) If we honor our divine assignment as stewards, we shall look, always, first and foremost, to Him for His will and directions to guide us in our stewardship in His church. Whatever your personal opinion, the COVID shock to our culture has prompted many believers to move dramatically away from caring for other believers, respecting other believers above self, and more into "Me and my opinion first." Lord convict and chasten us back to living our lives with You and Your people regarded as more important in our lives than ourselves. If we fail to repent and make this change, I fear the future of the Lord's church and kingdom in our country. I have no doubt whatever, Scripture affirms that the Lord will find a faithful remnant in His church when He returns. However, nothing in Scripture guarantees that that remnant will be in our country or our local church. It was the faithful, doctrinally sound Ephesian Church that received one of the sternest warnings from the Lord in Revelation 2 because she, including her members, had left her "...first love." "First" in this context could mean first in order of time, but I suspect it refers to "First" as most important, and our most important love must be the Lord. If we truly make the Lord our most important love, we must equally regard His people as likewise more important than ourselves. (Philippians 2:3 KJV) If the Lord threatened to remove the Ephesian Church's "candlestick," her essential identity as a church, because she had neglected this "God love" and this "Other love," we cannot exempt ourselves or our church from similar judgment.

What is our personal future as members of Jesus' personal "Kingdom" and church? What is the future of our home church? The Ephesian Church doesn't exist today. Will our church exist a hundred or more years from now? The answer to these questions lies with us and our choice, our choice today, to either submit to the Lord as His stewards or continue our path of "Me and my way first." What shall it be? Faithful stewardship is a demanding and serious matter.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## **Parable of the Net**

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:47-50 KJV 1900)*

Many commentaries interpret this parable as the final judgment and eternal separation of the saved from the unsaved. I struggle with this idea. Jesus compared His kingdom to the net, not to the angels or the judgment. The "Kingdom net" gathers all kinds of sea life into its snare. The fishermen who cast the net draw the net to shore and separate the edible from the undesirable. One problem I have with the eternal judgment view of the parable relates to this function. However we interpret the Lord's "Kingdom of heaven," it does not attract all humanity into its "Net." Thus, the logic of the parable does not match the literal Biblical teaching regarding the Second Coming and God's universal judgment. His judgment at that day shall be far broader than His kingdom's inhabitants. Secondly, the separation of the good from the bad in the parable is performed by the workers, or in Jesus' interpretation, by "the angels," not by God alone.

I try to be cautious regarding Bible interpretations that limit a passage to 70 AD and the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman siege. Some passages do refer to that event, quite clearly and specifically. However, all too often it seems that folks who favor this idea become too involved and try to interpret too many passages in that way. Therefore, with due caution I offer a possible thought related to this lesson.

Jesus didn't teach that His kingdom would be like the net at some future time, but that it was presently like the net. He then applied the logic to a future time which He interpreted as "...*the end of the world.*" "World" can refer to the whole natural world, or it can refer to an age or culture. For example, we refer to the "Political world." This idea has nothing to do with all existence, but with the subculture of political activity within our broader culture.

If we follow Jesus' language in the parable, the kingdom presently, at the time He spoke the parable, was like the net gathering all kinds of people into its influence. At a later time which He called "the end of the world," He taught that that same kingdom's "Workers," "angels," would filter the people caught in His kingdom net and separate them.

During Jesus' personal ministry, He rebuked some people for their low motives toward Him.

*Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. (John 6:26 KJV)*

Effectively, the broad appeal of miracles attracted people who were far more enticed toward the Lord and His kingdom by His miracles than by His teachings. However, as the transition from Old Testament worship to the New advanced, the message and reality of Jesus' spiritual kingdom became

more evident. As a result, those who were motivated by carnal self-interest were exposed and rejected. Consider another example, Simon the sorcerer. (Acts 8:7-24 KJV) He appeared to be truly converted, but the gospel exposed his self-serving motives, and he was rejected.

Thus, I regard this parable as likely a prophetic description of the dynamics of the “kingdom of heaven” during and immediately following Jesus’ teachings. However, I also believe much of the logical truth that Jesus taught in the parable is a timeless reality of the gospel and its power to expose secret motives in people. I have witnessed the gospel performing this principle many times in my lifetime. If I had carnal motives for my Christian life, I’d be fearful of the reality Jesus taught in this parable. The power that distinguishes and separates is the Lord’s, not finite human discernment. And Paul affirms, “**God is not mocked.**” (Galatians 6:7 KJV) A deceitful person may deceive other believers, but they cannot deceive the Lord, and He remains the final authority and Judge in His kingdom.

Often the preaching of a full gospel message itself will “Filter” people over time, exposing those with bad or carnal motives and eliminating them by its basic message and function. If we rely on the Lord to guide our preaching, He will direct the right message for the occasion, both to edify His faithful followers and to expose and reject those who operate on false motives.

Many years ago I complained loudly to a dear friend about a former mutual friend who had clearly demonstrated false and self-serving motives to both of us, but he appeared at the time to be succeeding in his selfish pursuits. My friend listened to my complaint patiently before replying, “Joe, we must remember. We serve in the Lord’s kingdom. In His time and His way, he will protect His kingdom.” I accepted the kind rebuke and thanked him. Over time we both witnessed the Lord’s quiet, but obvious judgment. The man who appeared to succeed in his malicious motives slowly slipped out of sight and mind in the Lord’s “Kingdom.”

Often when we think we must intervene for the Lord in His kingdom government, He may sit back and wait till we come to understand the wise message of my friend. When we stop interfering in the Lord’s government of His kingdom and trust Him to do what He teaches us in Scripture that He is more than competent to do, govern His kingdom, then He acts to protect the health of His kingdom without our interference.

Years ago I was told about a situation in which a pastor discovered one of the members of the church he served in a disgraceful sin. When he confronted this member, the member arrogantly reminded the pastor, “It is your word against mine. If you say anything to the church, I will deny everything.” The pastor was heartbroken at the callous disposition of this member, but he had no witness to the sin. He resolved to pray and to trust the Lord to deal with the problem. In less than a year, the sinning member abandoned his faith and the church, so the pastor witnessed the Lord dealing with His kingdom in His way. I haven’t personally had such a direct experience, but I’ve witnessed many occasions in which no human could resolve the sinful situation. In every case, over time the Lord quietly judged and disposed of the problem so as to protect His beloved church and faithful followers.

*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. (1 Corinthians 4:5 KJV)*

Paul wrote this counsel to the Corinthian Church in the context of a broader lesson on stewardship. He affirmed the precise advice my friend gave me. We are stewards in the Lord's kingdom. We do not own a private little slice of it. It is all His. When we function in our service to Him as stewards, seeking His guiding wisdom to direct our path, and trusting Him both to guide us and to *"bring to light the hidden things of darkness,"* He alone is fully competent to *"make manifest the counsels of the hearts"* of wicked stewards who fail their stewardship and endanger His treasured "Kingdom."

This passage also warns us to avoid hasty judgment. How often we observe very sincere people in church failing to exercise godly long suffering. For some odd reason, they think "Something has to be done right now." In their haste they often create more problems than the person whose sinful conduct concerned them. If you think your church should do a certain thing, but all the members are not presently agreed, don't try to force the issue. Pray and give it to the Lord. Trust Him to intervene in His time and His way. Paul assures us. In His time, the Lord will come, make His appearance in the situation, and *"...will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."* Often when the Lord makes His presence and judgment known, those same folks who were so reluctant will recognize the Lord's judgment and faithfully obey. Often over the years, when the church I serve was not agreed on an issue, I've urged them to wait, do nothing while they are not in agreement. In so many of those occasions, with just a little time, almost as if by the Lord's intervention (I believe it was), they all agreed. If we trust the Lord to fulfill His "Kingdom character" in the parable, we witness His wise and gracious providence revealing sinful motives and protecting His faithful followers and His church.

At the heart of such matters, none of us can know what motivates another believer. Are they motivated to think and do foolish things by sincere but misguided motives, or occasionally even willful ignorance of Scripture's teaching? What truly motivates them in this foolish contradiction of Scripture's teaching? We can't know. Claiming that we know puts us in contradiction with Scripture.

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jeremiah 17:9-10 KJV)*

**"...who can know it?"** Sometimes you don't even know your own heart, much less another person's heart. Underscore Verse 10, memorize it. When you witness another believer acting in a less-than-godly, a less-than-Biblical manner, don't try to know what you cannot know. Repeat Verse 10 to yourself as many times as necessary to stop your tendency to judge that person based on your finite mind. Trust the Lord to deal with His child in His time and way. Rest assured. He shall do so if appropriate.

**"...to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."** We may rationalize our sinful ways to ourselves or to other believers, but we cannot deceive the Lord. He has the last and decisive word in our judgment. And in the judgment of that other believer whose sinful ways you oppose. That person is the Lord's child. Trust the Lord to deal with His own family as the wise and loving

Father that He is. He knows what (Who) is caught in the “Kingdom” net, and He will direct His workers rightly, if we trust Him and avoid taking impossible judgment into our hands.

Elder Joe Holder