

**INTRO:**

In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer said this/listen, “*What comes into (your) mind when (you) think about God is the most important thing about (you)!...After which, he says, “There’s scarcely an error or failure in (our lives) that cannot be traced to imperfect thoughts about God.”* And of course, what he’s saying is, your beliefs about God will, for better or worse, determine your behavior in life!...What we’re trying to do with our **Upside Down** series is essentially correct false, mental intuitions we have about God and His heart toward us. In other words, not just get a feel for WHAT Jesus’s done, but WHO Jesus is TO you. What His rule and reign/His power and presence...His “kingdom” is actually like!...And there may not be a better parable than ours today, for seeing how **“Indiscriminately Gracious”** Jesus is toward us!...So let’s follow along as we hear the reading of God’s word from **Matthew 13:47-50**: **Gregg** reads...(PAUSE RECORDING)

**TEXT:<sup>1</sup>**

Hey, can we thank BOTH **Gregg** AND God for the reading of His Word?...**(START RECORDING)**...So as you can see, we’re talking about...fishing! As Jesus says, “*the KINGDOM of HEAVEN...is like a fishing net.*” Fishing, you might know, was a big part of the local economy in Jesus’ day. A number of Jesus’ own Disciples were of course fisherman. So Jesus ever-having the ability to “read the room” gives an analogy here that would’ve definitely connected. I imagine Him teaching this here in Southie saying, “*The kingdom of heaven is like... a pub next to a nail salon.*” Now, kind of fishing net Jesus is describing here is what’s called a “dragnet” - think commercial fishing/remember Jesus is speaking in universal terms with these parables. So a commercial fishing net that would’ve been weighted so as to be able to be dropped between two boats. So not some little cast net you might use at a pond. No, this is a trolling net/ and I don’t mean that in the Twitter kind of way. I mean a net that scraped the sea floor and would grab EVERYTHING in it’s wake. As Jesus says, gathered, not only “*every kind of fish,*” but “*good and bad*” contents as well. So this is not a charter boat on a fishing expedition ya know looking for something specific like marlin or mackerel and then throwing out everything else. No, this is gathering everything in it’s wake: snapper and silt; bass AND beer bottles. Because **THIS net rejects nothing/rejects nothing.** Very similar, right, to what we’ve seen with wheat and weeds in the same field; or seed scattered on every soil; leaven in whole lumps of dough; and of course as we saw last week, treasure buried in a nasty, dirty fields! The kingdom, Jesus says, is like a net that can’t NOT catch everything! **It’s completely indiscriminate!**

Now obviously, we can’t stop there, cuz in any good fishing enterprise, the net has to come ashore and the contents be separated right? Likewise in the kingdom. Understand, we don’t live in some karmic, constant loop. There’s a beginning and an end with God. As one person said, “the arrow will reach the target.” So there WILL be, Jesus tells us, a day when God separates every single one of us in this room...every single person in our families, neighborhood, city and world into two categories: what He calls “*the good*” and “*the bad,*” or the “*righteous*” and the “*evil,*” which taking into account the whole breadth of Scripture means, NOT those who DO

<sup>1</sup> A large portion of this message adapted from various thoughts and insights provided by “8. Caught In The Net (Parables #5)” - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000521578061>

good stuff vs those who DON'T/like if you eat clean, recycle and rescue puppies you're good. But rather, those who've embraced Jesus as King/remember it's His Kingdom we're talking about, FROM those who continue to live as their OWN king/OWN authority in life. There WILL come a day when that separating happens. Heaven vs Hell. And as Jesus reminds us, for those who DON'T have Him as King/have rejected His Kingdom, it's not gonna be good. They'll be *"thrown into a fiery furnace, He says, where there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* There WILL come a day when that separating happens, BECAUSE as a God of justice, which we want and hope Jesus will be, He can't ultimately let evil and injustice stand.

But notice something VERY important here: According to Jesus, ***Who does that separating?*** *"Angels"* right? So NOT us! We don't DO the separating. We're the stuff GETTING separated... Which is important, because unfortunately we love/don't we to talk about "who's in" and "who's out," and who's a part of it and who's not...when frankly, not only is that NOT our role, but it doesn't further the purposes of the fisherman. Imagine everything in the net going, *"you shouldn't be in here. I should be in here. No you shouldn't. Yes I should!"* This isn't Finding Nemo/that's not the role of the stuff in the net; it's the role of the fisherman/of God. Because ONLY God/like we've seen prior when represented by the farmer observing the mustard seed, or baker knowing which part of the dough's been leavened/only God is qualified to know which contents are ultimately good and which are bad...Cuz be honest, at best, you and I are limited in our perspective right? And at worst we can be jaded/can call "bad," what's actually good, and "good," what's actually bad. Take fishing for something specific like snapper: If you're set on looking for a specific type of "fish," cuz you've determined that's the type that's "good;" maybe cuz it looks like you, or has your values, or is concerned with the things you think are worth being concerned about, then you'll likely throw out a perfectly good, say, "oyster," which who knows just might have within it...*"a pearl of great value."* ***You see?*** WE aren't the fisherman! We aren't God! This isn't our net. It's His. This is HIS kingdom operation not ours!

You say, *"Fine. But you can't just let bad things in the world stand right?/we have to do something about evil and injustice."* Perhaps. But as I told you a couple weeks ago, Jesus is in no way saying we shouldn't acknowledge or even resist evil. After all, HE'S the one who calls evil *"evil"* here right? AND promises to deal with it in the end. So He's not minimizing evil or saying we shouldn't point-out and at-times resist it; He's just sayin, *"remember, your resistance, no matter how passionate or important you think it is, won't ultimately SOLVE evil!"* Might restrain it for a time or re-direct it, but won't ultimately solve it! SOLVING it is something HE does in the end!...And thank goodness right? Cuz if you wanna get technical; don't we all know that things can start out looking bad, but not always end that way? I mean thank goodness someone didn't separate me out during the first 21 years of MY life before Jesus saved me. You start looking at the "net"/the world and saying, *"there's no good in that,"* be careful, cuz ya might, not only get it wrong and cause a lot of hurt; ya might separate out yourself!...***So ya see?*** This whole parable is essentially an invitation to humility and trust: To take God at His word as you remember that HIS Kingdom/the Gospel is NOT, as C. Baxter Kruger said, *"the news that you can be involved with Jesus if only you get (things) right...No! It's news of what is because of someone else."* And what IS right now, is the **indiscriminate grace** of God catching the whole

world/good and bad, in the net of His kingdom. And that net WILL reach shore and be sorted out, but until it is, it's mysteriously operating as an **indiscriminate** catch-all, so that no matter how good or bad you've been/ARE, He's inviting you to be caught UP in His kingdom!

### **APPLICATION:**

That's the parable! So...what can we glean from it. Two things I think: One, for YOU and One for US as a church. **First for You:** Among the many things that make this parable SO beautiful is the fact that God's Kingdom/His rule and reign really is **indiscriminate**. And by that I mean, it includes you even if you don't know it! I think a lot of times, we assume that the way life with God works is: If there's a God, we all start out separated from Him right? But then through reading your Bible, going to church, maybe getting connected to a Missional Family, you come to see your need for God and you trust Him so as to get connected TO Him. In other words, it's like God is the Sun and we as planets are orbiting around Him, such that if we do or receive these certain things about Him then we're able to tap into Him. And to be sure those things are really good things. You should absolutely read your Bible, absolutely be here on Sundays, absolutely be committed to a Missional Family Meeting, among other things. It's just that...those things don't CONNECT you to God/they don't MAKE you included in God's kingdom/in the "net" as it were. They simply help you understand and enjoy the inclusion that's already yours. In other words, they help you - here's a phrase for you - **Accept Your Acceptance!** So it's not us as planets orbiting around God and on our best days tapping into Him. It's more like us existing WITHIN God, like say the sun exists within the Milky Way.

I've shared this illustration with you before, but it's like how Charley Grace used to place hide-n-go-seek when she was little. She'd say, "*Daddy, you count/I go hide.*" So I'd count to 10 and she'd go "hide," which really meant she'd just go to a corner of the room and...cover her eyes... usually while saying, "*Ok I'm ready.*" Super fun! **But what was she doing?** She was assuming that by covering her eyes, she'd be able to separate herself FROM me! But of course the reality is, she's obviously still very much within my presence EVEN IF she thinks otherwise...The same is true with the Kingdom. Even if you wanna deny Jesus as King, Lord, Savior, run from Him, outright reject Him or just persist in some disobedience TO Him, you're still IN His presence and under His rule...still IN the net. I love the way **Acts 17** says it: "*We live and move and have our being in Him.*" **You hear that?** It's NOT, we live and move and have our being and then occasionally tap INTO Him, you know if we're spiritual or religious. No! It's we have no being APART from Him. Our very being exists WITHIN the realm of His Kingship and Kingdom. Being a Christian then is simply awakening to that by faith! It's, as I heard one person say, "realizing that the Christian life is one of Inclusion TO Revelation" NOT "Revelation to Inclusion." **What do I mean?** I mean you don't become a Christ-follower BECAUSE the Gospel somehow got revealed to you, and you, by accepting it, then get included in the life of Christ. No! It's that you ARE included/are already in the net, and then through different means; most notably as **Romans 10** says, the preaching of the Gospel - the reality of your inclusion becomes REAL to you and you're able to accept your acceptance, while there's still time! **You see?**

Now let me be clear here: We're NOT talking Universalism, which says, in the end, ya know everyone goes to heaven/everyone's ok and it's just about finding your path and being on your journey. No! This is NOT Universalism. It's not Unitarianism. **Act 4:12** clearly says, "*there is salvation in NO one else (but Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" Not to mention and as Jesus has already said, there WILL come a time in which people ARE excluded from heaven IF they have not repented. It's just that those who end-up excluded do-so because THEY exclude themselves...Friends, the heart of God here is to have DONE everything necessary in Christ to ensure that you, me, everyone BE included in the Kingdom. As **John 3:16** famously says, "*God so loved the world - that's everyone - that he gave his only Son, that WHOEVER believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Eternal life included for you/you included in eternal life if ONLY you believe and awaken to it!

It's like the story of a man I read about years ago. Was sadly found to've passed away in this little remote/dilapidated shack. Had lived there and ultimately died in utter poverty. But here's why this was a story: when his body was found/being that it was found in this shack that needed to be torn down, those who found him began going through the home in preparation TO tear it down. And so they start demo'ing walls and pulling up floor-boards. And to their amazement, you know what they found in the walls and under the floor-boards?...Droves of cash...literally hundreds of thousands/even millions of dollars. Apparently, this man had saved and saved all his life, but for one reason or another was afraid to do anything with the money. And so he, quite literally, just sat on it until he died in poverty! Riches, wealth/it was all his, except that for one reason or another, He simply refused to believe and appropriate it. And as a result, died excluded FROM it!...**Friend**, you understand: In and by Christ, you are loved with a love...that's already yours/Included in a kingdom that's already moving to shore. The only thing that can keep you from enjoying that is if you, by your unbelief, choose to be excluded from that! **Have you accepted your acceptance?** Cuz as you do/the more you do - I speak from experience here - life with God begins to move from duty to delight, and from seeking or just being saved...to savoring. Awaken to His **indiscriminate grace!**

But then **Finally**, for **Us as a Church**: Ya know we talk a lot about mission, discipleship, sharing the Gospel right? I mean, it's kinda IN our mission statement (POINT TO A-FRAME)...But I get the sense/have wrestled with this enough on my own, that no matter how much we talk about it, or teach on it/even celebrate it, we all still all reservations right?... "*My friends and neighbors aren't receptive. They're gonna think I'm weird. I can't do that, I'm introverted; I don't know enough; I'll say something stupid; I don't wanna be hypocritical,*" and so-on right? **And ya know what?** I get it! I've said plenty of stupid stuff in my time. And the reality is: Sharing your faith, living on mission, committing your life to being a disciple who discipled others; that's always gonna be met with those objections and more, AS LONG AS you believe that sharing the Gospel is about anything MORE than simply loving and leading people to a love that's already theirs in Christ...Cuz think about it: If you gotta CONVINCe people to receive the Gospel, well then yeah, you better not say anything dumb/you better get your theology perfect and your "missional math" together...Or if you gotta make sure you don't come off weird, then yeah, ya better only talk with people who like you and are like you. You certainly can't interact with the "boots and

beer cans” in the net/ya welcome the “unwelcome.”...And if you don’t know enough, well then sure, I mean you gotta go to seminary right?...It all makes sense!...UNLESS...mission/discipleship/sharing the Gospel is just enjoying your inclusion and helping others see that they’re included too if only they’ll accept it. If THAT’S what it is then NOW it’s more like having the greatest VIP Pass, to the greatest concert, and being able to invite all your friends back-stage. Like who of us wouldn’t wanna do that?...It’s like my neighbors. Abby and I have great neighbors/neighbors who haven’t yet awakened to the Kingdom and Jesus as their King yet, but boy do they sometimes look more like Jesus than me. Cuz just this week, my girls are on February Break from school, which means: Home all day UNLESS we figure out something to do. And so Abby’s talking to our neighbor and our neighbor says to her, “*well we have a Science Museum pass, why don’t I just add you and the family to our membership.*” NOT “*why don’t you USE our membership today,*” but “*why don’t I pay the EXTRA money so that YOU can be included IN the membership whenever ya want.*” Like crazy gracious! ***But what’s she saying?*** She’s saying, “*We LOVE being included in the ‘Kingdom’ that is the Science Museum. AND we think you’ll love it to. So not only are we telling you about it; we’ll do whatever we need-to to help you enjoy it!*” THAT my friends is what it looks like to share your faith/live on mission/be a disciple who makes disciples. Even more so knowing that we aren’t sharing a Science Museum pass; we’re sharing THE Kingdom! And THAT is what we as a church are wonderfully entrusted with doing/it’s why we exist! Precisely because the **indiscriminate Kingdom** of God - like a net which’ll one day reach shore and be sorted out - is in the meantime mysteriously operating as an **indiscriminate** catch-all, so that no matter how good or bad you or anyone is, we’re invited to be caught-up in the wonderful rule and reign of King Jesus! ***Are you committed to that? Will you be committed to that with us here?*** Because that’s WHY we’re here!...***Let’s Pray...Amen!***