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Sermon Notes

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The Dragnet: Silently, Constantly Advancing

Matthew 13:47-50

Ways to Mark Time:

Calvin's second birthday... bittersweet

Father-daughter pictures at Atlantic City every year from when she was an infant to when she was in her sixties

Clocks: from sundials to water clocks, pendulum clocks, octagon drop clocks, Swiss movement, quartz vibration

Clock on my wall... nice pendulum but it chimed the Westminster Abbey chime every 15 minutes and I didn't want to be so constantly reminded of the advance of time! Now it sits permanently set at 8:50

Time is constantly advancing... but the real measure of time given in Scripture is not the rising or setting of the sun or the phases of the moon or the starry constellations... but the silent advance of the Kingdom of Heaven

I. The Silent Advance

Romans 13:11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

A. Time Moves On... Judgment Day Approaches

B. Today may be your WAKE-UP CALL... in the Parable of the Silently Advancing Dragnet

II. Understanding the Parable of the Dragnet

A. Appealing Directly to His Audience

1. Parables use simple, daily examples for clarity

2. Perhaps his first audience: His own disciples

Matthew 4:18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

Matthew 4:21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them

3. Goal was to make these matters CLEAR

B. Three Methods of Fishing

1. A line and a hook

a. caught one fish at a time

b. type that Jesus urged Peter to use when they needed money for the temple tax

Matthew 17:27 "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

2. Small one-man casting net (*amphiblēstron*)

a. Peter and Andrew taking turns using it when they first met Jesus

b. Jesus called them to be “fishers of men”

MacArthur: The folded net was carried over the fisherman’s shoulder as he waded in the shallow water looking for a school of fish. When the fish were near enough, he would hold the center cord in one hand and with the other hand throw the net so that it opened into a large circle and came down over the fish. Weights around the perimeter of the net caused it to sink and trap the fish. The fishermen then pulled on the cord, which was attached to the center of the net and drew it around the fish like a sack. When the net had been pulled closed, the fisherman would haul his catch to shore.

3. Large dragnet (*sagēnē*)

MacArthur: [This net] required a team of fishermen to operate and sometimes covered as much as a half square mile. It was pulled into a giant circle around the fish, between two boats out in deep water or by one boat when working from the shore. In the latter case, one end of the net would be firmly moored on shore while the other was attached to the boat, which would make a large circle out into the water and come back to the starting place. Floats were attached to the top of the net and weights to the bottom, forming a wall of net from the surface to the bottom of the lake. Because the net permitted nothing to escape, all sorts of things besides the desirable fish were caught. It swept everything in its path—weeds, objects dropped overboard from boats, all manner of sea life, and fish of every possible kind.

When the net was filled, it would take a large number of fishermen several hours just to drag it up onto the beach. Then they would sit down and separate the useful and edible fish from the worthless, unmarketable fish. Those fish to be sold at distant markets were immediately packed in containers with salt for preservation. Others were merely placed in baskets for immediate sale or use.

C. Central Point: Separation on Judgment Day

1. Very similar to wheat and weeds
2. Mixed condition... good fish, bad fish... ALL KINDS of fish
3. Focal point: separation on the shore
4. "Sit down" = sitting on Judgment Throne

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

D. Promise: Mixed Condition is Temporary... the Kingdom Will Be Purified

1. Repeated promises of separation
 - a. wheat from chaff, Matthew 3:12

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

- b. wheat from weeds, Matthew 13:40-43
- c. sheep from goats, Matthew 25:31-32

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

- d. HERE: good fish from bad
 - e. SUMMARY: wicked from righteous
2. God's history: outbreaks to teach the lessons of holiness

- a. God separated light from darkness, water above from water below, dry land from sea
- b. God also separated His people from all the other nations to be His own holy people

The Laws of Moses contained many regulations designed to underscore the separation of Israel from the nations

The whole book of Leviticus was dedicated to this principle: holiness means separation

Leviticus 19:1-2 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

- c. Jericho: God commanded His people to stay away from the “dedicated things”
- d. Korah, Dathan, Abiram: move away from their tents
- e. principle carried over to New Covenant with the church

2 Corinthians 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

Revelation 18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

Consistent Principle: Holiness Means **SEPARATION!!!**

- 3. God's fiery holiness requires this separation
 - a. holiness means separation
 - b. separation from all creation as God over all
 - c. ALSO separation especially from all evil things

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

- 5. God's **electing love** for His children requires this separation

Deuteronomy 7:6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Election means making a distinction... to choose out from the world a people for Himself

For earth's history, God's elect and the wicked have co-existed

Now, finally, at the end, God's electing love will have its perfect conclusion... a permanent separation of the wicked from His righteous people

6. Finally: God's **protective love** for His children requires this separation
 - a. evil has had its full history
 - b. evil had done all of its damage
 - c. the time has come to remove it forever, for the sake of His children

vs. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

God wants us to live eternally free from all the danger of temptation and the damage of sin. In order to do that, He must weed out all evil from His Kingdom!!

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

E. Warning: Eternal Torment Awaits the Wicked

vs. 49-50 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Passage not merely a promise... but also a grave warning
2. Jesus warned constantly about hell... as a matter of fact, Christ taught more about hell than He did about love

Matthew 5:22 But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

To unbelieving Jews:

Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

To Capernaum:

NASB Matthew 11:23 "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

To Scribes and Pharisees:

Matthew 23:33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

3. American evangelicals squeamish about warning unbelievers about hell

Illus. Campus Crusade for Christ tract: "In the end unbelievers will simply get what they've always wanted—eternal independence from God."

Is that all the hell is? "Eternal independence from God"??? That is part of the devil's lie!!

Mark Twain: "Go to heaven for the climate and hell for the company."

BUT... John Bunyan describes what kind of company people have in hell:

[In hell] you shall have none but a company of damned souls with an innumerable company of devils to keep company with you. While you are in this world, the very thought of the devil's appearing to you makes your flesh to tremble and your hair to stand upright on your head. But oh, what will you do when not only the supposition of the devil's appearing but the real society of all the devils of hell will be with you—howling, roaring and screeching in such a hideous manner that you will be even at your wit's end and ready to run stark mad again for anguish and torment. If after ten thousand years, an end should come, there would be comfort. But here is your misery: here you must be forever. When you see what an innumerable company of howling devils you are amongst, you shall think this again—this is my portion forever. When you have been in hell so many thousand years as there are stars in the firmament or drops in the sea or sands on the seashore, yet you have to lie there forever. Oh this one word—forever—how will it torment your soul.

Jesus Christ was not squeamish about telling us the truth... he did it out of intense love for us, and also because it is all true

III. Six Lessons on the Approaching Day of Judgment

A. Silent Progress: Gradual and Imperceptible Approach

1. The Dragnet makes its progress silently through the water
2. The fish scarcely notice its presence, except that they occasionally may bump into the net and skittishly flee its strange feel

3. Little do they realize that their swimming area is being constantly reduced, little by little... their time is running out

Illus. Partnership for a Drug Free America... effect of sniffing glue on the brain—it deprives the brain of oxygen it needs: picture of a goldfish tank with many goldfish swimming around, but the water is draining out little by little... the goldfish swimming in less and less water until they are almost on top of each other

So it will be at the end of the world... time moves on, silently, advancing to the end when the net will be emptied at last

B. Measured Scope: Number of People, Amount of Time

vs. 48 *When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore.*

1. The net has a certain scope... a certain capacity
2. When it is full, the fishing time must end
3. So it is also with God's sovereign plan for the world... a measured number of people, and measured amount of time
4. Our days were numbered before even one came to be
 - a. the days of the righteous are measured out

Psalm 139:16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

- b. so also the days of the wicked

Genesis 15:16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

5. So also the total population of the earth, and all of its history was measured out

Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Acts 17:31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

6. The progress of the Gospel is also measured out... everything going according to schedule

Romans 11:25 *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.*

God has ordained a certain number of Gentiles from every tribe and language and people and nation to “come in” to the Kingdom... after that God will miraculously remove the partial hardening of Israel, and the fullness of Israel will come in

The Kingdom of God silently advances through world history and all over the surface of the globe... every day is specially ordained by God with its own works to be done. When the full number of days is completed and the full number of persons have been born, the net will be full... then the end will come

C. Total Inclusion: Every Single Human Being

vs. 47-48 *"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. 48 When 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.*

1. “All kinds of fish”: lit. some of every sort

2. The Dagnet catches EVERYTHING in its path

- people from all walks of life, from every nation, culture and language...
- people from America, from Rwanda, from Bosnia, from Argentina
- aborigines from the Australian outback and royalty from the House of Windsor
- people whose mothers sang to them in Navajo, or Finnish, or Mandarin, or Creole
- people who have PhD's and Nobel prizes... people who flunked out of high school
- people who live in mansions in Malibu and people who are squatters in refugee camps in Pakistan
- people whose faces have graced fashion magazines and those whose faces are disfigured and grotesque
- highly skilled technicians at NASA and street urchins in Brazil
- feminists and chauvinists, the popular and the rejected, the famous and the obscure, the generous and the stingy, fitness buffs and overweight chocoholics, the arrogant and the humble...

3. Every single solitary human being is drawn in and will come before Christ for judgment

Revelation 6:15-17 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Matthew 25:31-32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

4. Hell a very “diverse” place

John Piper: The ethnic diversity of hell is a crucial doctrine. Romans 2:9 puts it like this: "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek." God is no respecter of persons in salvation or in damnation. The human race - and every ethnic group in it - are united in this great reality: we are all depraved and condemned. We are all lost in the woods together, sinking on the same boat, dying of the same disease.

D. Angelic Action: Angels Sent Out to Act

vs. 49-50 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1. Once again, the angels are highlighted as the gatherers and separators
2. This is taught in so many places as to be a major feature of end-time teaching

vs. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Each elect person will be scooped up by an angel to be brought into the Kingdom

Each wicked person will be personally “weeded out” of the Kingdom by an angel and cast into the lake of fire

E. Simple Separation: Good from Bad

1. Only two categories on Judgment Day
 - a. here... “wicked” and “righteous”
 - b. other places: believers and unbelievers; wheat and tares; sheep and goats

- c. consistent lesson: ONLY TWO CATEGORIES!!! Not four or fourteen, or thousands
 - d. the net is filled with “all kinds of fish”... as we just mentioned... every conceivable category is significant in life
 - e. BUT IN THE END... only two categories: wicked and righteous!!
2. “Wicked” and “Righteous” terms can be misleading
- a. could trick us into thinking salvation possible by works
 - b. no one naturally righteous... all of us naturally wicked

Romans 3:10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."

3. Must understand whole gospel... salvation in all its dimensions
- a. “righteous” first a position before God... clothed in the righteousness of Christ by faith

Romans 4:3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Romans 3:22-24 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- b. “righteous” second a lifestyle, the result of constant sanctification... a joint effort between the Christian and the indwelling Holy Spirit

Galatians 5:5 But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

2 Timothy 2:22 Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

This is a daily lifestyle righteousness we eagerly await through the spirit... a righteousness we pursue every day by fleeing lusts

Therefore, in the parable of the dragnet, the “righteous” are those who have first, trusted in Christ for His free gift of righteousness... “the asbestos robe” of Christ’s perfect righteousness that alone will stand up to Judgment Day

The righteous are also those who have worked out a lifestyle of righteousness day by day through the power of the Holy Spirit... putting sin to death, obeying God's commands, walking in His ways

The wicked are those who have not trusted in Christ and have not walked in God's ways... who were born in Adam, never converted, lived out their earthly lives apart from God in the lusts of their hearts, and died without hope and without God in the world

F. Eternal Torment: Hell a Terrifying Destiny

vs. 49-50 *This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

1. Hell a place of constant torment, misery and pain

“weeping and gnashing of teeth”

2. Hell will involve torment of both body and soul
 - a. weeping implies the psychological torment of eternal regret at missing heaven and at suffering... it involves a conscious memory and a groaning over wasted opportunities
 - b. gnashing of teeth implies actual physical torments
3. Hell's torments will be experienced in varying degrees
 - a. already established in Matthew 11:

Matthew 11:22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

- b. the more light and revelation we had, and yet refused to repent, the worse it will be

4. Hell's torments will be everlasting... no end, through all eternity

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

Clark Pinnock, 1990: It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins done in the context of a finite life . . . It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment

John Stott: Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain . . . Scripture points in the direction of annihilation.

Piper: There are no more fearful words in the universe than the words, "God is against us." If infinitely powerful wrath is against us, annihilation would be a sweet gift of grace. Which is why those who try to persuade us that annihilation is what judgment means, not hell, are so far from the mark. Annihilation under the wrath of God is not judgment, it is deliverance and relief (see Revelation 6:16). No. There is no annihilation of any human being. We live forever with God against us or with God for us. And all who are in Christ may say with almost (!) unspeakable joy, "God is for us." He is on our side.

Imagine God meeting Adolf Hitler at the judgment day and saying: "For all your arrogance and unbelief and hatred and for all the torture and misery that you brought on millions of people my judgment of you is that from now on you will cease to exist. You will feel nothing."

G. Eternal Blessing: Heaven Free from All Evil, Filled With Perfect Fellowship

1. The reverse is true as well... heaven is eternal blessedness
2. Our text only mentions it indirectly... but to be free forever from all those who do evil and from everything that causes sin is GREAT BLESSEDNESS
3. So also to be gathered together with all the righteous people who have ever lived will be incredible blessedness

IV. Application

A. Overwhelming Urgency of Repentance and Faith

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Paraphrasing Piper (on John 3:16): Perishing means wrath; it means fiery torment; it means separation from God; and it lasts for ever. Now I tell you this plainly as a warning to flee from the wrath of God to the love of God through the door of Jesus Christ. This is an awesome moment for us in this service. Because what this moment means is that any of us who stands before the throne of judgment unbelieving will not be able to say to the Lord, "Nobody ever told me what was at stake." The Lord will say, "On August 3, 2003" at First Baptist Church in Durham I appointed you to be there and I appointed my servant Andy Davis to warn you. You were there and he did warn you.

B. Overwhelming Urgency of Evangelism and Missions

1. This gospel message of repentance and faith in Christ is the only hope for the perishing
2. This church MUST be passionate about evangelism and missions
3. URGENCY!!!

C. Clarity on Hell and Judgment

1. Some say hell is a myth
2. Some make jokes about it

A celebrity recently said he wouldn't want to go to heaven because it's already perfect, and there's nothing for him to improve. He wants to go to hell where he can make a contribution.

Oh, the dangerous levity of such a foolish statement!!

3. Some say eternity in hell is unloving of God

Oh banish the thought forever, for God IS love... and the God who is love poured hell's torments out on His only begotten Son that we would NOT have to weep and gnash our teeth eternally

There's never been any love in history as great as God's love in rescuing the perishing at the cost of His Son

4. Some say hell is a metaphor
 - a. but Jesus likened it to a burning fiery furnace that is never extinguished
 - b. Revelation calls it a like a fire and sulfur

Metaphors put a sensory reality into frail, limited words

If it is LIKE a fiery furnace, what must the reality be like???

D. Sense of the Pressing Need to "Redeem the Time"

1. The Dragnet is making its silent and irresistible progress through time and space
2. Soon, all people will be gathered before Christ and He will make the separation
3. All we have is time... TODAY... which we must redeem

2 Corinthians 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."