

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 1 September 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Fish and Scribes for the Kingdom

Matthew 13:47-52

One of the greatest maritime tragedies in modern history was the sinking of the *Titanic* on the morning of 14 April 1912, when 1,517 souls perished in the freezing waters of the Atlantic. Why did this tragedy happen? Was it because of Captain Smith's decision to rush forward at a speed of 21 knots, through a field of icebergs, in an attempt to make record time to New York? Was it because of the crew's failure to sound the alarm clearly, and early? Was it because of the people's vain confidence that the *Titanic* was "unsinkable"? It was probably because of all these factors, and many more (especially because of the fact that the *Titanic* was furnished with only half the number of lifeboats needed). The discussion as to *why* the *Titanic* sank will probably never end; but the real question is, "What was the *spiritual* condition of the passengers and crew of the *Titanic*?" I do know of *some* who were prepared for eternity—for example, a Scottish pastor named John Harper, and his six-year-old daughter, Nana, and his niece, Jessica Leitch, who was travelling with them. Undoubtedly, there were some others, as well; but tragically, most of the people on that ship—the rich, the middle class, and the poor alike, of many nationalities—slipped into an eternity of torment, without Christ, and without hope. The testimonies of most of the survivors reveals that God was *not* in their thoughts, because He was not in their hearts.

Now, anyone who has ever read the accounts of the *Titanic* survivors is struck by two terrible things about that night. First, one is struck by the fact that most of the lifeboats were only *half* filled, at best; and the reason why they were so sparsely filled is that for a shockingly long time, *few people wanted to get into the lifeboats*. Most people flat-out didn't believe that the "unsinkable" *Titanic* could sink. They had heard it said that "God Himself cannot sink this ship." One passenger, Edith Rosenbaum, admitted that she and other passengers had made snowballs out of the ice shavings that were falling onto the deck as the iceberg was grazing the ship; and they had a snowball fight right there under the shadow of the iceberg, which towered 100 feet above their heads!¹ At the time, they thought it was a joke. Others, though fearful that they *might* be in danger, didn't believe it enough to step into the lifeboats. It was only as the last lifeboats were being launched, and the ship was clearly sinking, that many people began to panic, and tried furiously to get into the last remaining boats—but couldn't.

However, perhaps the most awful part of the *Titanic* story are the accounts of the hopeless screams and wails of the people as the ship was going down. As the ship slipped into an upright position, and began to go straight down into the sea, hundreds of people either slipped off the deck and fell into the water, or were forced to jump into the water; and their screams were heart-wrenching. One of the survivors in lifeboat 1, named Lucy Duff-Gordon, said, "The stern of the great ship shot upwards out of the water. For a few seconds she stayed motionless, while agonised cries from her decks grew in intensity, and then, with one downward rush, she plunged to her grave, and the air was rent with those awful shrieks."² Another survivor, Edith Graham, said, "Those shrieks and cries! I'll never forget them."³

My friends, there are a couple *spiritual* parallels to this earthly tragedy, which we cannot afford to miss. First, most people are blissfully ignorant of the danger that their *souls* are in, on account of their sin. All seems to be well and comfortable in this life; and they don't believe that an eternity in the Lake of Fire awaits them just on the other side of death. Though they may have heard that they need to get into the "lifeboat" of the Lord Jesus Christ, they don't really believe it—at least, not enough to part company with their friends (who, they know, would laugh at them). Secondly, there is a part of this story which reminds us of the warning of Christ Himself, in regard to the end of this age: and that is the shrieks and wailing. Jesus says that after He returns to earth one day, the angels will "***sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire,***" where there will be "***wailing and gnashing of teeth.***" It is my prayer that if you are not prepared to enter the Kingdom, you will place your faith in Jesus Christ this morning: and that if you *are* a citizen of the Kingdom, you will have a greater urgency to gather *others* into the Kingdom! The title of this message is ***Fish and Scribes for the Kingdom.***

Read Matthew 13:47-52.

I. The sorting of "fish" for the Kingdom (vv. 47-50)

In **verses 47-50**, we come to the last of Jesus' seven "Kingdom Mystery" parables. Now, this parable is a lot like the parable of the **wheat and the tares**, which Jesus had preached earlier that day. How are these two parables similar? Well, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, the wheat and the tares were allowed to grow side-by-side *until* the time of harvest; and then, at harvest time, the farmer's servants went out into the field and separated the wheat from the tares. The tares (which, of course, were useless) were then burned, and the wheat was stored in the barn. Likewise, in this parable of the dragnet, the "good" fish (the ones that were worth eating or selling) swam side-by-side with the "bad" fish (the ones that were useless to the fishermen); but on the day when they were all gathered into the dragnet, they were separated from each other. The good fish were then put into vessels, and the bad fish were cast away.

What does all this mean? It means that a day is coming, just after Christ returns to this earth, when all the "fish" (or "souls") from the "sea" of humanity will be gathered by God's angels, from every corner of the world. Every soul that survived through the Tribulation period will be gathered and brought to a place of judgment, where they will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ; and the saved will be separated from the lost. Those who placed their faith in Jesus will then enter into the glorious 1,000-year Kingdom; but those who rejected Christ will be cast into the "***furnace of fire,***" which the Bible calls "hell."

Read Matthew 24:27-31 and 25:31-32.

My friends, just as people joked about the iceberg, and didn't believe that the *Titanic* would really sink, so many people think that the Bible's warnings about sin and hell are a joke, and

that there will never be a judgment. However, God's Word is extremely clear: judgment *is* coming at the end of this age! Just after the seven-year Tribulation period, Christ *will* literally, visibly descend from Heaven with all His saints and angels, and will destroy all the armies of the world, which will be gathered together in the land of Israel, to try to make war against Him. In **Revelation 19**, John reveals that in a vision he saw *“heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”*

This event, which the Bible calls the **Battle of Armageddon**, was foretold by God's prophets since shortly after the Creation of the world. **Enoch** (who lived only seven generations after Adam) was the first prophet in history to be given revelation about this Battle of Armageddon; and as the centuries rolled by, God gave more and more pieces of the puzzle to His prophets. Many astounding, earth-shattering events will unfold either *right at* the time of the Battle of Armageddon, or shortly thereafter.

First, as Christ is descending to earth with His saints and angels, He will send forth His angels to gather the *“elect”* (those who were saved during the Tribulation, and who are still alive) from every corner of the earth. These believers will be gathered to **Jerusalem**, where they will meet the Lord Jesus Christ, just after He has touched down on the Mount of Olives. (In fact, the Mount of Olives will crack in half when He lights upon it; and a new river valley will flow from the top of Mount Zion, down to the Dead Sea.)

Secondly, these Tribulation saints, who have just been gathered from every corner of the world, will then join all the angels, *and* all the saints that just descended down from Heaven (that includes us church-age saints!); and we will all follow our Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ, as He leads us in battle against His enemies. All the armies of the world will be utterly annihilated in this battle; and after the battle is over, the Antichrist and the false prophet (who had deceived the world during the Tribulation) will get the distinction of being the first ones to be cast into hell. (In fact, they will be cast *alive* into hell!) At this point, Satan and his demons will also be chained, and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years. These events are described in **Zechariah 14, Revelation 19 and 20**, and other Scriptures.

Thirdly, as Christ is descending to earth with His saints, all those saints who died during *Old Testament times*, and during the seven-year Tribulation period, will receive their resurrected bodies. As they are in mid-flight in their descent down to earth, their spirits will be united with their new, glorified, resurrected bodies. (All of us saints from this *church age* will have already received our resurrected bodies seven years earlier, in the Rapture.) This resurrection of the Old Testament saints, and of the martyred Tribulation saints, is described in **Isaiah 26**, **Daniel 12**, **Revelation 20**, and other places.

Fourthly, *all the unbelievers* who are still living on earth will be gathered by the angels from every corner of the world, and will be brought to a valley, just outside the border of Israel. *All* the survivors of the Tribulation, both saved and unsaved, will be gathered together in this valley, to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment; but they will quickly be separated from each other. Those who trusted in Jesus as Saviour will enter into the 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ here on earth; and all who rejected Him will be cast into hell.

Read Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46. [This passage describes the Judgment of the *Nations*.]

Read Ezekiel 20:33-38. [This passage describes the judgment of the nation of *Israel*, in particular. Those Jews who survived through the Tribulation, but never trusted in Jesus as their Messiah, will be destroyed, and cast into hell, and will *not* be allowed to enter the Kingdom.]

In **Joel chapter 3**, the LORD, speaking through the prophet Joel, said, ***“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat.”*** (“Jehoshaphat” means “Jehovah judges.”) Later in that same chapter, the LORD said, ***“Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”*** An extremely weighty, momentous decision will, truly be made in that valley—the decision of who enters the Kingdom, and who doesn’t; and it will all depend on what one did with the Lord Jesus Christ. At the judgment bar, the ***“sheep”*** (the saved) will be separated from the ***“goats”*** (the unsaved) by the administration of God’s angels. After the judgment, the ***“sheep”*** will enter into the land of Israel, and into the Kingdom age; but the ***“goats”*** will be cast into hell, where they will await the final judgment at the Great White Throne, at the end of the world.

Now, how *long* will this Judgment of the Nations be? This Bible seems to indicate that it will extend over a period of **75 days**. Let’s see what the LORD told Daniel about this.

Read Daniel 12:4-13.

From this Scripture (and from **Revelation 11**, as well), we know that there will be **1,260** days (3 ½ years) from the **mid-point** of the Tribulation until the **end** of the Tribulation, when the Battle of Armageddon will take place. However, Daniel also prophesied that there will be **1,335** days from the **mid-point** of the Tribulation to beginning of **the time of “blessedness”** (in other words, the actual beginning of the Kingdom age). What will happen, then, in the 75 days *between* the Battle of Armageddon and the beginning of the Kingdom? The **Judgment of the Nations**, which we just read about a few minutes ago! Apparently, Israel will be judged within the first *thirty* days after Christ returns (up to day 1,290); and the rest of the nations of the world will be judged within the next *forty-five* days (up to day 1,335). After the total 75 days of judgment is over, and all the wicked have been removed, the only people left on the face of the earth will be *believers*. The resurrected saints from the Old Testament age, from the church age, and from the Tribulation period, as well as all the saved *survivors* of the Tribulation, will then enter into the blessed Kingdom that Christ promised!

As Jesus concluded this last “Kingdom Mystery” parable, He used a mental picture that His disciples could latch onto—the image of fish being drawn into a dragnet, and then separated. As the disciples thought about the Sea of Galilee, and the incoming waves, they probably wondered how long it will be until the fish from the “sea” of humanity are gathered together, and separated. It’s been 2,000 years since then; and we are *still* pondering that question. However, we *do* know that one day (perhaps much sooner than we think), the King *will* return to set up His Kingdom; and until then, we who know Christ have a job to do. The King is looking for citizens to enter His Kingdom; and He has commissioned us who are saved to go out into the “*highways and hedges*,” and to bid people come to the Marriage Supper of the King.

Read Matthew 22:1-14.

As we wrap up the Kingdom Mystery parables this morning, I would ask a couple questions. First, I would put forth a challenge to believers. Christian, how serious are you about gathering souls for the Kingdom? God has placed you right where you are, for the express purpose of reaching lost souls to Himself. You know, whenever I think of the *Titanic*, the first people I think of are **John Harper**, and his daughter, **Nana**. John Harper was a Scottish Baptist pastor who died on the *Titanic*. He grew up in a Christian family; and at age 13, he personally placed his trust in Christ. However, at the age of 18, the Holy Spirit began to work mightily in his life; and as the years unfolded, he became a powerful witness for Christ. It was said that every street corner was his pulpit. Everywhere he went, he shared the Gospel with power and conviction. Drunkards, gamblers, and prize-fighters were snatched from Satan’s kingdom. He was known, on occasion, to spend all night in his church building, where he

prayed for every one of the hundreds of members of his church. In 1905 he fell ill, and was incapacitated for six months; and from that point onward, his health was never the same. Also, his wife passed away in 1906, shortly after Nana's birth. However, John Harper continued to serve the Lord zealously, as he pastored a Baptist church in London.

In 1912, at the Seaman's Centre Mission in Glasgow, John Harper stood up and announced to the men at the meeting that his schedule had changed, and that instead of sailing on the *Lusitania* to America, he would be sailing on the *Titanic*. (He was scheduled to preach at Moody Church in Chicago.) A brother named Robert English stood up in the meeting, and told Harper that he had been praying for him; however, in his prayers, he had had a very strong, ominous impression that Harper would meet with disaster if he sailed on the *Titanic*. English offered to pay for his ticket if he would take another ship. A number of other people at the meeting said the same thing, and begged Harper to change his schedule. However, Harper was determined to go to Chicago, just as the Apostle Paul was determined to go up to Jerusalem, even though the Holy Spirit had told him that he would be arrested there. Like Paul, Harper knew that danger was coming; but he was determined to do God's will.

We don't know much about what Harper did or said on that voyage. **Nana**, who was only six years old, remembered little, except being on her cousin Jessie's lap in the lifeboat, and hearing the screams; and Jessie didn't talk much about that awful night. However, we may be sure that Pastor Harper used every opportunity to tell people about the Lord. Everyone who knew Harper knew that he was a relentless witness for Christ! God obviously sent him on that boat so that lost people onboard would have one last chance to hear the Gospel. Christian, follow Harper's example, and be a soul-winner! This age is drawing to a close, and the angels are preparing the dragnet. Do everything in your power to gather souls into the Kingdom!

As I close we finish the Kingdom parables, I would also ask: Will *you* be admitted into the Marriage Supper of the King? In other words, have you received God's gift of salvation? One day, the "door" to the Feast will be shut; and those who did not receive Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour will be shut out of the Kingdom, and cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. The only way to enter into that wonderful supper is to have on the "**wedding garment**" of Christ's imputed righteousness. If you haven't repented of your sin and believed on Jesus, please do so today!

II. The "scribes" of the Kingdom mysteries (vv. 51-52)

(Read Matthew 13:51-52 again.) After Jesus had finished teaching the seven parables of the Kingdom, He made a statement that was probably quite shocking to His disciples. He described them as “*scribes*” who have been “*instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*”!

Can you imagine what must have been going through the disciples’ minds when He called them “*scribes*”? Scribes were highly educated men, who worked for kings and nobles! In contrast, *they* were nothing but poorly-educated fishermen. Did Jesus really mean to call *them* “*scribes*”? Yes! You see, Jesus isn’t interested in our I.Q.; He is interested in our *hearts*. Jesus rejected the schools of the highly educated scribes and Pharisees, because those men were proud, unteachable, and spiritually dead. They didn’t understand the way of salvation; so how could they rightly understand anything else? They had a great *show* of knowledge, but they were actually in spiritual darkness; and thus, most of their teaching was grievously flawed. Jesus rejected the schools of the scribes, the Pharisees, and Sadducees; and instead, He entrusted His “Kingdom truths” to a band of lowly, poorly-educated fishermen! Everyone who came in contact with *these* lowly men knew that they had been with Jesus, because He had changed them from the inside out, and made them into new creations.

Now, let’s look at **verse 52** again. **(Read verse 52.)** Jesus had just spent a large portion of the day instructing His disciples in new, heretofore hidden truths about the Kingdom. Yet, not everything that Jesus taught them about the Kingdom was new. These Kingdom parables contained *some* truths which were “*old*” (truths which had already been revealed in the Old Testament); yet, they also contained many truths that were entirely “*new*” revelations. Through these parables, Jesus was showing His disciples that this present age will have to run its course before the Kingdom can finally be set up. During the interval between Christ’s first and second coming, good and evil will continue to exist side-by-side; and wickedness and apostasy will increase exponentially, until the day when the righteous are finally gathered into God’s “granary,” and the wicked are cast into the fire, like tares, or chaff.

Now, the disciples certainly did *not* understand all these things yet. They might have *thought* that they understood; but they didn’t have the full picture yet. (They *especially* didn’t understand that Jesus first had to die on the cross for our sins, and rise again, before He could return to set up the Kingdom.) Yet, even though their understanding was still far from perfect, Jesus entrusted these truths to them, because they were humble and teachable men. Jesus knew that after His death and resurrection, and after more revelation had been given to them, they *would* understand “*all these things*.” Jesus also knew that the disciples would faithfully proclaim these truths to the world. Guess what, though? The same that was true of the Apostles is true of Christians today. We, too, have been entrusted with these truths of the coming Kingdom; and we have the responsibility to guard them, study them, hide them in our hearts, and proclaim them to the world. We, too, are “*scribes*” of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now, maybe you're having a hard time seeing yourself as a "scribe," since you're not highly educated. If so, join the club! Jesus' disciples weren't highly educated, either; yet, Jesus used them. Simple, ordinary believers are able to understand what highly educated *unbelievers* cannot understand. Remember what God said to the prophet Daniel? He said, "***Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.***" Those who don't know Christ as Saviour (educated and intelligent though they may be) are in *spiritual* darkness, and cannot discern spiritual things. In contrast, those who are saved are indwelt by the Spirit of God; and the Spirit of God teaches them "***all things,***" even the "***deep things of God.***"

Read 1 John 2:18-20, 26-27.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16.

Many Christians, when they read **1 Corinthians 2:9**, assume that Paul must be speaking about the wonderful things that we will experience in Heaven—things that our eyes have not seen, nor our ears heard. Now, it certainly is true that Heaven will be filled with wonders which defy our comprehension; yet, that is not what this passage is about. Paul isn't talking about the things that have *not* yet been revealed to us: he's talking about the things that *have* been revealed to us "***by his Spirit.***" God has given us His written Word, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and He has given us the Spirit Himself to help us to *understand* the things that are written in His Word—even the "***deep things of God.***" Basically, Paul is saying that the things of God cannot be understood by the *natural senses*, or by the perception and wisdom of man. The things of God can be revealed to us *only* by the Spirit of God, through His Word. Man cannot sit down and, by his own reason or philosophy, "figure out" who God is, or how He operates. God's plan cannot be figured out through any amount of human observation. Everything we need to know about God, about His working in human history, and about His plan for the future, has been revealed to us in His Word, through His Spirit.

For example, who, by his own wisdom, could have figured out God's plan of redemption? Paul says that if the "***princes of this world***" (in other words, Satan and his angels) had known God's hidden wisdom, they would not have "***crucified the Lord of glory.***" God had given hundreds of prophecies about Christ's life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection; yet, as plainly as these things were written, it was still a "***mystery***" to Satan and his angels. If they had understood God's plan of redemption, they would not have incited the mob to crucify Jesus! As for the human "***princes of this world,***" their eyes were blinded, too. Because their eyes were blinded, and their hearts hardened, they crucified the Son of God—and thereby played their very part in carrying out God's plan of salvation for mankind!

God's plan of salvation is foolishness to a lost person, because the "*natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*" Christians, on the other hand, *are* able to receive these things. That is why Jesus said, "*I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*" The *world* views born-again Christians as ignoramuses, who don't know how to cope with the "real world," and who therefore cling to outdated myths. They condescendingly look down on us, as though we were little children clinging to foolish bed-time stories. But that isn't how God sees us. In God's eyes, those who believe on His Son are "scribes," whom He has entrusted with the truth of His Word. However, we must not be lazy in our scribal duties. God commands us to study His Word, hide it in our hearts, obey it, and to proclaim it to others.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would add one more thought about the *Titanic*. When the crowds in Europe and America gathered outside the offices of the White Star Line in the days after the sinking of the *Titanic*, to find out whether their relatives had survived the wreck, they found a large bulletin with all the names of the passengers of *Titanic* posted on it; and the names were listed in two categories: "Saved," or "Lost." My friends, I am here to tell you that there are only two kinds of people in this world: the "saved," and the "lost." Which are *you*? If you have not repented of your sin and placed your faith in Jesus, I urge you to do so today, and get your name on the "saved" list, so that you may be granted entry into the Kingdom of Heaven one day! I would also end this message with a challenge to Christians. Christian, you are a scribe of God's Word, and His truth. Take that responsibility seriously! "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" Fill your mind and heart with God's Word; and from the treasury of your heart, draw out the truths of God's Word, both "old" and "new," and teach them to others! Do everything you can to gather souls into the Kingdom of God!

¹ Edith L. Russell, A Pig and a Promise Saved Me from the Titanic, <http://www.paullee.com/titanic/ERussell.php>

² Hannah Holman, *Titanic Voices* (Gloucestershire: Amberly Publishing, 2013), p. 64.

³ *Ibid*, p. 49.