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Deuteronomy chapter 7

6“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. **7**It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **8**but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. **9**Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

Psalm chapter 125 English Standard Version

1A Song of Ascents. Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. **2**As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore. **3**For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong. **4**Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts! **5**But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel!

Romans chapter 8

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:28

ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

What does Romans 8:28 mean? Here again, we find a verse which is extremely popular, often mis-applied, and even controversial. Despite its incredibly comforting message, some Christians have had an awkward relationship with this verse over the years. That is in no small part due to how easy it is to take this verse out of the context of Romans 8. Stripping these words of their context destroys the essence of what Scripture is saying. It is also possible to interpret the verse correctly, and still misuse it to dismiss the genuine pain and suffering of another person.

Paul has been describing the life of Christians on this side of heaven as one of groaning as we long to escape the suffering of this life and to be with our Father

God in person (Romans 8:18–23). We wait in the sure hope of the day our bodies will be resurrected and we will share in God's glory (Romans 8:24–25).

What about all the hard things that come along while we are waiting? Paul seems to offer the promise of this verse as a comfort for us.

Crucially, though, this promise is limited to "those who love God," and "those who are called according to His purpose." In short, that means the promise is for Christians: for saved believers, who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ (John 3:16–18; 14:6; Romans 3:26). No matter our feelings on a given day, loving God is part of what it means to live in Christ. That's who we are. Each of us is also called to fulfill God's purposes.

In other words, this verse cannot rightly be applied to non-Christians. Those who reject God do not express their love for God by coming to Him through faith in Jesus. For those who die without Christ, things will not have worked out for the better; they will have rejected the opportunity to take advantage of this promise (John 3:36).

What is the promise? That, for those who are saved, all things will indeed work together for good. "All things" should be taken to mean each and every circumstance one might experience, even pain or suffering. "Work," or "work together," must be understood in light of God taking action in the world. He is the one who causes all things to work together or, perhaps, works in and through all circumstances toward a specific end. What is that end? "Good."

The word "good" does not necessarily mean happy or painless or financially successful or our idea of the best possible outcome on any given day. God's ultimate good for us is to glorify us in eternity (Revelation 21:1–4). Beyond that, God works in and through us toward an ultimate good that serves His purpose for the universe.

The comfort of the verse is that nothing in this life of waiting and suffering is wasted. It is all meaningful for those in Christ, even if that doesn't diminish our pain in the moment.

Romans 8:29

ESV

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

What does Romans 8:29 mean? We Christians did not stumble into this relationship with God. Paul means to comfort us in our waiting and suffering as we long to be with God and be glorified by Him. He has just described believers as people who are called according to God's purpose. Now Scripture will talk about what that means. In doing so, this passage begins to introduce one of the most controversial and contentious ideas in all of theology: that of predestination.

Paul begins by saying our calling to serve God's purpose goes all the way back to "before." He writes that God "foreknew" those who are now brothers and sisters of Jesus, because they have become the children of God by faith in Jesus. The word "foreknew" means that God, in some way or sense, knew each Christian before we knew Him.

Based on this sense in which He "foreknew" us, God predestined—determined, appointed, or ordained in advance—those who are saved to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Paul says it even more plainly in Ephesians 1:4, "He chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

Much of the controversy over this passage deals in whether or not God allows human free will to be a part of this choice, or whether God's actions are totally unilateral. So far as it goes for this specific statement, that level of detail is irrelevant. Chapter 9 will further discuss this concept, in ways which are more strongly influenced by how predestination is interpreted.

The bottom line of this particular verse is that we can stand secure. We can know, as those now in Christ, that God's purpose for us has *always* been that we should become like Christ. God had scheduled our entry into His family long before we were ever born. If God knew about us before we were born, and arranged for our salvation, He certainly knows about our trials and sufferings now, and what lies ahead. That should provide us with great comfort as we wait to be with our Father forever.

Romans 8:30

ESV

And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What does Romans 8:30 mean? In the previous verse, Paul wrote that God predestined those who are now in Christ to be conformed to Christ's image. He made this choice about us before the world was formed (Ephesians 1:4). God's purpose for our lives has ever and always been that we will become like Jesus. In some way, God both knew and chose those who would be saved, long before we even existed to make such a choice. The subtle details of what this means, and how God accomplished it, are part of a much larger debate. In the context of this specific passage, however, those debates are beside the point.

Now Paul writes that those God predestined for this purpose, He also called. Stated in reverse, God called every single person he predestined. As Paul uses the word in Romans, being "called" by God is about His breaking into our awareness of Him and drawing us toward Himself.

Next, God justified every single person He called. The first four chapters of Romans deal with the issues of God's justification. To be "justified" by God is to be made right with Him. We can never justify ourselves because of our sin, not even by following the law, since we can't keep the law (Romans 3:10, 23). We can only be justified through faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

Finally, every person God justified, by faith in Christ, He then glorified. Paul writes this in the past tense, indicating that our glorification is as good as completed in God's eyes. However, Paul began this section in verses 18–19 by saying that all of creation is waiting for the children of God to be glorified. We are waiting for that, too, though our sure and confident hope is that it is coming in God's perfect timing.

Romans 8:31

ESV

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

What does Romans 8:31 mean? Paul continues to offer encouragement to Christians on this side of eternity. It's true that we are suffering, as all of creation is, as we wait to be glorified with God forever. The fact that we suffer, though, does not mean that God is not with us or for us. In the previous verses, Paul has shown that God is working to complete a purpose in us that He set out to do before He even formed the world (Ephesians 1:4). That purpose is to make us like Christ, and God is still using "all things" to finish this process (Romans 8:28).

Again, in this passage, Paul speaks from the perspective of saved Christian believers. References here to "us," or "we" are not inclusive of the entire human race, but only those who have accepted Christ in faith (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18).

In light of the fact that God foreknew us, predestined us, called us, justified us, and will glorify us (Romans 8:30), Paul comes to an undeniable conclusion: God must be for us. God must be for all of us who are in Christ by faith. What an amazing and life-changing thought. The one, true God, the creator of all things, is for us. With Him for us, who could ever possibly be against us?

Of course, anyone at all might be against us, in literal terms; any person or group might try to oppose us or afflict us. Paul's question is who of any consequence could ever be against us? What could anyone against us ever hope to accomplish against us, if God Himself is for us? What chance is there that someone can thwart God's intent to save those justified by faith in His son?

The question is whether we believe God is truly for us. Paul offers a definitive answer to that question in the following verse.

Romans 8:32

ESV

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

What does Romans 8:32 mean? In the previous verses, Paul has offered ample evidence of a comforting truth. The subject of this promise is any person who has accepted faith in Christ. As with the rest of this section of Romans, Paul's focus is on the effects of saving faith, according to God's plan (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18).

This profound truth is that the creator of the universe is right now for us—for saved Christians—because we are in Christ. He is working out his ultimate purpose for us which is to make us like Christ. He has predestined, called, justified, and will glorify us.

It's possible that a believer might remain unconvinced that God is for us. This is more likely when facing hard things in life, or our own sinfulness, or just a lack of feeling connected to God. To combat this discouragement, Paul provides the ultimate evidence: God didn't spare His own Son! God the Father sacrificed His sinless, righteous Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty price for our sin. He gave Him

up for us all because of His great love for us (Romans 5:8; John 3:16). Now Paul asks us to be convinced. If God did that for us, how could we ever think He is not for us? More than that, if He would not withhold His Son, how would He not give us all things, along with His Son?

Paul uses the word "graciously" to describe God's giving. Ever and always, what God gives to us is not about what we have given to God. It is not about our sin or lack of sin. The God who is for us, who loves us, gives to us all good things based on His goodness and not on ours. They are truly gifts.

Romans 8:33

ESV

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

What does Romans 8:33 mean? Paul has established decisively in the previous verses that God is for all of us who are in Christ (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18). He has not even withheld His own sinless Son from us. He has graciously given to us all things.

Now Paul asks who could possibly bring a charge against us—in the context of this passage, meaning the elect (Romans 8:29–30). This is Paul's first use of the word "elect" in Romans. In the previous verses, he detailed that God predestined those He foreknew to become like Jesus. In this sense, the elect are the chosen ones of God, all those who are children of God through faith in Christ.

Paul begins to use legal language here; the vocabulary of a courtroom or trial. He seems to imagine someone attempting to manipulate God into casting us out, by bringing an accusation before God about our sin. But who could effectively do such a thing? Scripture provides an immediate possibility: Satan is described in Revelation 12:10 as the accuser who stands before God night and day bringing accusations against "our brothers and sisters." He might very well accuse us of sin in order to convince God of our unworthiness to be in His family.

Perhaps the greatest accusations, though, come from our own hearts. The awareness of our sin taunts us, hinting that God could never forgive such things, could never love one who does them.

Paul is clear that all such accusations will fail. Why? *God* is the one who justifies us. God, the Creator and Ruler of the entire universe. He declares us righteous

because of our faith in Christ, giving us credit for Jesus' righteousness and accepting Jesus' death as payment for our sin.

Paul insists that God will never say, "You've made a good point; I was wrong to justify that person." His decision stands since it is based on Christ's own sacrifice and righteousness, not on our ability to do what is right ourselves.

Romans 8:34

ESV

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

What does Romans 8:34 mean? Who shall bring any charges against God's elect or God's chosen ones? That's the question Paul asked in the previous verse. His answer was simple: God is the one who justifies. By this Paul meant that once God has justified one of His chosen ones—declared that person righteous because of his or her faith in Christ (Romans 3:23–26)—no accusation about any sin could convince God to overrule His own verdict.

If that is God's position, how could anyone condemn us? That's what Paul now asks. His answer can be read in one of two ways. Paul may be implying that nobody can condemn those of us who are in Christ, because He—Jesus—is the one who died. Or, Paul may mean that only Christ can condemn us, but instead He has already taken our condemnation on Himself.

The result is the same in either case. Paul began Romans chapter 8 by writing that, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The statement contained in this verse is why. We are in Christ by faith, so closely associated with Him in God's eyes that His death has already paid the price of our sin. He was resurrected and now stands at the Father's right hand interceding for us. This is available to those who put their faith in Jesus, but only to those who do so (John 3:16–18).

The picture Paul paints is of Jesus standing by to advocate against anyone who would accuse us to God for our sin. He might say, "I died for that sin. The penalty is paid." Now that God has justified us in Christ, and because God is for us, no accusation or condemnation can stand against us in the throne room of God.

Romans 8:35**ESV**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

What does Romans 8:35 mean? This chapter has indicated that those who are in Christ (Romans 3:23–26) can look forward to a future of sharing in God's glory (Romans 8:18). At the same time, we are not there yet. For now, we suffer along with the rest of sin-ravaged creation. We groan in longing for our home with the Father. We patiently wait for the hope to be fulfilled (Romans 8:19–23). Paul urged his readers to understand, however, that though suffering continues, God is still for us. He has been for us since before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and He has proven His love for us by sacrificing His own Son to make it possible to adopt us as His children (John 3:16–18).

Paul now writes that we must never interpret the darkness of earthly life as evidence of God's lack of love for us. Nothing we do can keep Christ from loving us, and nothing that happens to us can mean that Christ no longer loves us. Paul builds a list of some of the worst things that can happen in this life, including trials, hardship, persecution for our faith in Him, hunger, lack of clothing or shelter, physical threats, or death by violence. None of this can separate us from Christ's love. None of this means Christ does not love us. Just the opposite is true. He loves us enough to bring us *through* these things (John 16:33).

Paul would have known this better than almost anyone. He himself experienced most, if not all, of those hardships (2 Corinthians 11:23–29) and remained convinced of Christ's love for him.

Romans 8:36**ESV**

As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

What does Romans 8:36 mean? This verse is a quote from Psalm 44:22. Paul has movingly written that nothing which can happen to us could separate us from Christ's love for us. Struggles in this life are not a sign that God has abandoned us; they are hardships He works to see us through (Hebrews 12:3–

11). By quoting this from the Psalms, Paul is showing that God's people have faced persecution and hardship for generations.

Paul wants the Christians in Rome to have the right perspective on the circumstances of their daily lives. Whether or not they experienced hard times or good times, it does not change whether God loves them or not. Paul has made it clear that God's love is absolute, and God will fulfill His purpose for them: He will succeed in bringing them to glory. Now he seems to want them to be ready for trouble on this side of eternity. They should not be surprised when it comes. In fact, they should be ready to be killed, slaughtered like sheep, for Christ's sake, if that's what it comes to (John 6:1–2; 16:33).

Romans 8:37

ESV

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

What does Romans 8:37 mean? In verse 35, Paul listed several terrible things that might happen to a person in this life. His point was that none of them could separate those of us who are in Christ from His love for us. Nothing so terrible could ever happen to us that would keep us from being in Christ, or to keep Christ from loving us, or to prove that Christ no longer loves us.

Now he writes that in all those things—hardship, trouble, famine, exposure, threats, or violence—we are "more than conquerors through [Christ] who loved us." This description comes from the Greek word *hypernikōmen*, which carries the idea of extraordinary, exceeding victory, in a continual state: to perpetually increase in triumph. Does this mean none of these troubles will ever happen to us, or that we can eliminate them in this life? No, clearly not, based on the context of this passage. Even more, it's important to note that many of them happened to Paul himself (2 Corinthians 11:23–29).

Rather, those who are saved by faith in Christ (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18) conquer those terrible things in the sense that Christ has already won the most important victory for us. That victory, our place in God's family, our share in the inheritance of His glory, cannot be taken from us by any means. We conquer in the sense that none of these things can overcome what God's love has gained for us.

Romans 8:38

ESV

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,

What does Romans 8:38 mean? Paul doesn't want his readers to feel an ounce of insecurity about God's love for them in Christ. He has built the case for why God is for us as Christians. He has already created a list of the worst things that can happen in this life to make the point that none of them demonstrate a loss of Christ's love from us (Romans 8:31–37). Those things may happen, but as he wrote in the previous verse, they cannot conquer us in any way that matters. Those who are saved by faith in Christ (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18) can continually endure, in the power of His Spirit.

Now Paul begins a new list. This covers virtually everything anyone might think of to challenge God's love for His elect (Romans 8:29–30). Paul begins with death, which for the believer in Christ can only bring us into God's glory more quickly (2 Corinthians 5:8). He continues to include life, angels, and rulers. This last concept is from the Greek word *archai*, usually used for a political leader or magistrate, and often applied to certain kinds of demons. In other words, absolutely *nothing*, whether natural on this earth, or supernatural from heaven or hell, could ever cause God to stop loving us.

Paul continues his list with the present and the future. Nothing that could happen now or tomorrow or a thousand years from now could change God's commitment to love us in Christ. Next he lists "powers," referring either to supernatural powers like Satan and his demons or earthly governments like Rome.

As it turned out, Paul himself was eventually killed, so far as we know, by the "powers" of the Roman government. They did not conquer him, though. Nor did they not separate him from God's love for him, in Christ.

Romans 8:39**ESV**

nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What does Romans 8:39 mean? This verse continues to list everything, every realm, and every category which anyone might imagine could loosen God's

commitment or ability to love those of us in Christ (Romans 3:23–26; John 3:16–18). Nothing can. Hardships might test us (Hebrews 12:3–11), and persecution may fall on us (John 16:33). We will sometimes fail to obey (1 John 1:9–10). But Paul's explanation thus far has included everything from our experiences, to powerful forces, and even the natural and supernatural worlds. He has listed the present and future. He has listed powers, meaning perhaps hostile governments.

Now, he lists height and depth, meaning anything that might come down from above or up from below. Finally, he throws in an all-inclusive mention of anything else in all creation. Paul is being an absolutist about this. Nothing will ever be able to separate those of us who are in Christ from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Those who are saved, through faith in Christ, are saved eternally and forever (John 10:28–29). Period.

We are loved by God always. No matter what. Forever.

Matthew chapter 13

44“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, **46**who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. **48**When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. **49**So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous **50**and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” **52**And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Matthew 13:44

ESV

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

What does Matthew 13:44 mean? Jesus is speaking in parables to describe the kingdom of heaven. This time, He compares the kingdom of heaven to treasure found hidden in a field. The man who finds the treasure does not simply take it. Instead, he leaves it there, sells everything he has, and buys the field in order to get the treasure it contains.

It was common in this era to hide money or other belongings in the ground. Banks, as we think of them in the modern world, simply did not exist. Poverty and political turmoil made everyone vulnerable to having their possessions stolen or taken by those in power. It would have been more common then, compared to now, for a stash of valuables to be left in the ground because the previous owner died without letting anyone know they were there. Jesus uses this idea to describe the kingdom of heaven.

By rights, such accidentally discovered treasure would belong to the owner of the land. Local laws and customs seem to suggest that so long as that treasure remained buried, it was considered part of the field. If it was removed from the earth, it was the property of whomever owned the land. In other words, the treasure could not simply be taken—that would be theft. However, if the field's owner sold the land, he would also be selling any buried valuables. The new owner would be legally free to dig up and take such treasure. The point is not detailing of property law, however. Christ's message is that the kingdom of heaven is worth trading for everything a person owns, in order to come into "possession" of it.

This is a difficult principle for humanity to accept. In Matthew chapter 19, Jesus will famously tell a rich young man to sell all he owns and follow Him (Matthew 19:21). This comment is given specifically to that person, in order to prove that he's unwilling to follow Jesus if it means losing his wealth (Matthew 19:22). For this reason, Jesus says rich people enter the kingdom of heaven with great difficulty (Matthew 19:23). Worldly wealth makes us feel secure, despite it having no eternal value. It's easy to become addicted to comforts, and to lose an eternal perspective.

Some commentators read this parable differently, seeing the treasure as the people of Israel and Jesus as the man who sacrificed all He owned—the riches of heaven, His life—to buy the field in order to redeem them. However, this seems to insert meaning into the parable that is not obvious from the text. The man in the parable acts to gain something more valuable than what He sacrifices; Scripture elsewhere makes it clear that God did not choose Israel because of some special worth (Deuteronomy 9:4–6).

The larger idea of the parable is that any sacrifice is worth belonging to the kingdom of heaven. That theme is underscored by the following parable, as Jesus ties the meaning of both together.

Matthew 13:45

ESV

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,

What does Matthew 13:45 mean? This begins another short parable. Jesus begins by saying "again," which directly ties the meaning of this parable to the previous one. In that parable, a man sells everything he owns in order to buy a field. He does this because he has found a treasure in the field that is of enormous value. Jesus' point was that it is worth any sacrifice to belong to the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:44).

This parable likely also fired the imaginations of Jesus' listeners, because it pictures unexpected good fortune. This one features a merchant in search of fine pearls. In ancient times, divers would hunt pearls in the ocean waters that surrounded the middle east. The best pearls could be sold for enormous sums of money. This is not much different from how large, pure gemstones, such as diamonds, can be worth staggering amounts of money in modern contexts.

Jesus will continue to show how the kingdom of heaven is like such a pearl.

Matthew 13:46

ESV

who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

What does Matthew 13:46 mean? Jesus frequently taught in parables. Stories, even short ones like this, are a powerful way to communicate a big idea or answer a big question. Jargon or technical terms might not let an idea sink in for most people. Connecting the larger theme to something more readily understood, however, makes it more accessible. In this case, the question is, "What would it be worth to be included in the kingdom of heaven?"

The parable describes a merchant looking for especially fine pearls (Matthew 13:45). He finds one pearl of enormous value. He recognizes that the pearl is worth more than everything else he owns combined. He sells it all to obtain this extraordinary item.

Again, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of heaven is worth the cost of everything we have in this life. The pearl merchant isn't giving away his possessions for no reason; in fact, he's drastically increasing his wealth. The idea of selling all he has might seem radical, but it makes perfect sense given what he gains in return.

Jesus taught in an earlier chapter that "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). This and the previous parable drive that point home. It is worth the cost of our entire lives to be included in the kingdom of heaven. The value of what we gain in eternity is far above what we can experience in a short earthly life.

Just as some attempt to read extra details "into" the text of the prior parable (Matthew 13:44), some commentators strain to find alternative meanings for this text. A common example is suggesting the pearl represents the church and that Christ sacrifices everything to save those who trust in Him. It's true that Jesus offers a tremendous sacrifice which saves those who trust in Him (John 3:16–17), but that is not the point being made in this specific passage.

Matthew 13:47

ESV

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind.

What does Matthew 13:47 mean? Jesus continues His catalogue of parables meant to describe the kingdom of heaven. He is concluding with a few very brief lessons. Recent examples compared seeking the kingdom of heaven to men selling all they had to obtain an even-more-valuable treasure (Matthew 14:44–46).

In this story, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to another scene which would have been familiar to most Israelites. It would have been especially meaningful to those who lived and worked around the Sea of Galilee. This describes a common process of fishing, which is the use of a net. An especially common form of net fishing is sometimes called *trawling*, which involves sweeping a net through the water. Alternatively, a large net is thrown flat onto

the surface of the water, and sinkers pull it down, trapping everything underneath inside the net. Either method gathers up *everything* it surrounds, including many varieties of fish and animals. Some of these are useful to a fisherman, others are not.

This is the central idea of the parable: the net collects everything, but not everything collected is kept. Jesus will show the fate of the captured creatures in the following verses.

Matthew 13:48

ESV

When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad.

What does Matthew 13:48 mean? In one of the final parables included in this chapter, Jesus once again compares the kingdom of heaven to something His listeners in and around Capernaum would have known well. In this case, the symbolism comes from fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Specifically, Jesus describes fishing with a net. This style of fishing takes many forms. Sometimes a net is stretched between two boats, or between a boat and the shore, and then dragged along the bottom of the lake. In other cases, a circular net is thrown flat onto the water and pulled down by weights. Either method results in a variety of animals being captured; not everything caught in the net is something the fishermen want or need.

What happens next is common sense, but in the context of the parable it carries an important lesson (Matthew 13:49). The contents of the net are sorted. Some are considered good, meaning they're worth eating or selling. Others are bad, meaning unusable for anything at all. The fishermen do the work of sorting through all the different kinds of fish and throwing the bad ones away while saving out the good in special containers.

Every Israelite had likely observed this process. This would have amplified the impression the parable made on those who understood the idea behind it.

Matthew 13:49

ESV

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

What does Matthew 13:49 mean? Jesus explains the meaning behind His parable about the fishermen sorting out their catch of every kind of fish (Matthew 13:47–48). He is making the same point He did in the earlier parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43), only this time with fishing instead of farming.

The fishermen who sit on the beach throwing out the bad fish and saving the good ones represent the work of the angels at the "end of the age." Jesus is describing the judgment that will come when He returns to set up His political kingdom on the earth. That judgment will begin with the angels sorting and separating the righteous from the evil on the earth. As the rest of Matthew's gospel and the New Testament will show, those who are with Jesus, saved by faith in Him and His death for their sin on the cross, will be declared righteous. Those who have rejected Jesus will remain in their sin and their status as "evil."

In the following verse, Jesus once more declares that the work of the angels will be to throw the "bad fish," those who are evil, into hell.

Matthew 13:50

ESV

and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What does Matthew 13:50 mean? Those found to be evil on the day of judgment—anyone not saved through faith in Christ (John 3:16–18)—are consistently said by the New Testament to be cast into a place of terrible distress. This is often referred to as a fiery furnace, as in this verse. This place is often described as one of crying and teeth gnashing, traditional expressions of great misery. This is Jesus' usual picture of what we commonly call hell (Matthew 13:42; 18:8; Mark 9:48; Luke 3:17; John 15:6).

In these parables, Christ does not provide details on what causes a person to be sorted either into the kingdom of heaven or into hell. The point of the parables is simply that a separation will occur—that God is going to classify people into one of only two categories. However, the Gospels and the remaining New Testament explain the criteria clearly. The righteous do not become so on their own by their good choices (Romans 3:10). Instead, they are the ones who receive "the

righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:22; Titus 3:5; John 3:16–18).

Those who reject this path to righteousness through faith in Jesus are identified by the sorting angels as evil, children of the Devil (Matthew 13:38; John 8:43–47), and are thrown into the furnace (John 3:36).

Matthew 13:51

ESV

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.”

What does Matthew 13:51 mean? This extended section of Jesus' teaching began in verse 36. Jesus and the disciples left behind the crowds and entered a house together. The disciples asked Jesus to explain the meaning behind one of the parables (Matthew 13:36). Jesus has done so both by spelling out the meaning of that parable and adding several new parables to it.

Now Jesus asks His disciples if they grasp what they've been told. The disciples claim they do—but it's certain they don't understand as well as they think they do. As the gospels continue to explain their interaction with Jesus, the disciples will demonstrate further confusion about the truths being presented. Many examples of this will be recorded in the next chapters of Matthew (Matthew 13:21–23; 26:6–13). Of course, thanks to instruction from Christ, these men had better understanding of the kingdom of heaven than before.

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom must have introduced them to several new ideas. Like most Jewish people of that era, they likely expected the Messiah to immediately overthrow Israel's enemies and set up Israel to prosper in the world. Jesus has taught, in parables, that the kingdom will start small and grow large over time (Matthew 13:31–32). He has also taught that the righteous and the wicked will live together, side by side, until the day of judgment comes (Matthew 13:24–30). Still, it is worth any sacrifice to be included in the kingdom (Matthew 13:44–46) because a day of judgment is coming in which the evil will be removed and thrown into the fiery furnace by the angels of God (Matthew 13:47–50).

Even as a partial picture of what is to come, that would have been a lot to take in. Whatever Jesus' core group of disciples truly understood, it required adjustment. They had to re-assess their expectations for what the coming kingdom would be like. In the following verse, Jesus will show why it is important for them to continue to work at understanding what He is teaching.

Matthew 13:52**ESV**

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

What does Matthew 13:52 mean? Parables, by definition, summarize a larger idea using symbolism and storytelling. That makes large ideas easier to process, but it also obscures specific details. This miniature parable is not especially clear, in part because Matthew does not record any specific interpretation. Scholars offer different views. The main point, common to all interpretations, involves the need to explain both the Old Testament prophecies and their accurate fulfillment in the New Testament era.

Christ has asked the disciples if they understood His explanation of the parables. They have said they do (Matthew 13:51). Now He responds by referring to scribes, who, at that time, were Israel's teachers of the law. They studied and interpreted Scripture and told the people the proper way to live by it. In a very meaningful sense, these disciples are being taught deeper truths by Jesus (Matthew 13:10–11), and so are like "[scribes] trained for the kingdom of heaven." As such, the disciples' work would be to teach these truths to others (Matthew 28:19–20), both "old" and "new."

The image Jesus creates is that of someone wealthy who presents the treasures of his household. Some of those items are old. We might think of antiques and family heirlooms. Some of the treasure is newly acquired, but still greatly valuable. Jesus pictures teachers of these great truths as those who show both God's revelation in the Old Testament Scriptures and the new revelations of God's truth through Jesus Christ. Those teachers would need to show how these treasured truths fit together.

This, in fact, is exactly what Matthew does in his gospel. He often references the "old treasures" of Israel's Scriptures to show how they are fulfilled in Jesus' work and words. The other men gathered before Jesus will do the same as they teach the gospel in the years to follow (2 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 1:1–4). That work will require them to understand Jesus' teaching in these parables.