

## THE COMPASS

Part 1 of “The Eye Chart Gospel”: *Seeing Others God’s Way*

### The Parable of Dr. Seuss

Doug Brendel

#### Matthew 13:47-50

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

Look at that phrase: “all kinds of fish.”

In this story, we’re fish.

We come in all kinds.

Remember how Dr. Seuss put it, in his famous book?

*One fish*

*two fish*

*Red fish*

*Blue fish.*

*Black fish*

*Blue fish*

*Old fish*

*New fish*

What kind of fish are you?

Are you single? You’re one fish.

Are you married? You’re two fish.

Do you tend to be hot-tempered? Maybe you’re a red fish.

Do you tend to be cool as a cucumber? Maybe you’re a blue fish.

My friend Doris Brown is a beautiful old fish. She’s 84.

My friend Konnor Victor is a relatively new fish. He’s almost 1.

We live in a great big lake; that’s the world.

God throws out the cosmic net.

What does he get?

Are we all identical?

Do we say the right things and do the right things?

Do we even agree on what are the right things to say and do?

Nope.

Some of us feel certain things are wrong to say or do.

Others of us feel those same things are perfectly acceptable.

Some of us have abandoned our traditional religious backgrounds completely.

Some of us are comfortable continuing to observe certain aspects of our traditional religious backgrounds.

Some of us feel church should be very reverent, even somber.  
 Some of us feel church should be joyful, with dancing and laughter.  
 Dr. Seuss says some are sad,  
 and some are glad,  
 and some are very, very bad.

Look at the person sitting next to you.  
 Is that the kind of fish God was *hoping* to pull up in his cosmic net?  
 Shouldn't we throw the bad fish out?  
 Isn't that what God wants?  
 Why would God allow so many different kinds of fish into his boat?  
 Or as Dr. Seuss puts it,  
*Why are they  
 sad and glad and bad?  
 I do not know.  
 Go ask your dad*

Fortunately, we have a Dad we can ask.  
 Our heavenly Father has provided the answer to the question,  
 through this parable.  
 Jesus goes on in the first part of verse 48:

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

Let's underline that phrase: "when it was full."  
 Jesus says that spiritual life is a process.  
 God's plan isn't finished yet.  
 There's more work he wants to do out on this lake.  
 He's not done fishing.  
 But the day will come when God will decide — hey, my boat is full.  
 That's all the fish I'm gonna catch.  
 Time to go home.  
 The event we call "the rapture of the Church" will take place.

**1 Thessalonians 4** describes it this way:

**16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.**

**17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**

God's boat is full at this point. He's done fishing for the day.  
 But until then, God carries on with his plan; the process of our spiritual life continues.

Now let's underline the phrase "up on the shore."

The story Jesus is telling here doesn't really happen out on the lake.

If we were the fishermen, maybe the story would be over by the time the boat came into shore.

If it were up to our human nature, we'd exclude the fish that weren't up to our standards.  
 Our nature is to say, Hey, your worship style is too tame for my taste;

would you please just get with it or get out?  
 Or Hey, your worship style is too exuberant for my taste;  
 would you please just settle down or settle somewhere else?  
 Or Hey, you're doing something that I consider to be a sin.  
 Or Hey, you're all hung up about something that doesn't ultimately matter.

How do we sort it all out?  
 Jesus sorts it out like this, in the second part of verse 48:

**48 ...Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.**

Good fish — those are the ones you can sell because they're good to eat.  
 Bad fish — those are the ones that have no value, because they're no good to eat.  
 Kristina used to live on Guam, where everybody's a fisherman.  
 She says the rule of thumb on Guam was,  
 If it doesn't look like a fish, don't eat it.  
 It's deep thinking like this that has made Guam such a major world power.

Jesus says,  
**49 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.**

Who gets separated from whom?  
 Does God finally send his angels to separate the Baptists from the Pentecostals?  
 Or at least the Catholics from the Protestants?  
 Who goes to heaven? Who goes to hell?  
 Would that be smokers one way, non-smokers the other way?  
 Or possibly people who feel strongly about smoking go through one door,  
 people who don't really feel strongly about it go through the other?  
 Maybe it's just people who really worked hard at their spiritual life, and made some progress,  
 vs. people who really didn't work all that hard at it, they just kind of bumped along.  
 Faithful church attenders vs. sporadic church attenders?  
 Or what if it's something like If you went to church on a Wednesday or Thursday night instead of Sunday morning, you go to hell.  
 Who goes to heaven? Who goes to hell?

Jesus doesn't make distinctions the way we make distinctions.  
 As human beings, we tend to set up identity markers to tell us whether people are IN our club or OUT of our club.  
 What were the identity markers in the religious system YOU came from?  
 Maybe they weren't spoken about, maybe they were UNspoken.  
 A new guy walks into the church.  
 What did you say to yourself?  
 Hm! Long hair. Not one of us.  
 Or Hm! Shaved head. Not one of us.

A woman visits for the first time.  
 Hm! Old-fashioned hairdo. Not one of us.  
 Or Hm! Spiked hair. Not one of us.

We make these instant value judgments about people  
 based on the identity markers we've established in our minds.  
 He dresses so rich. Who's he trying to impress? Must not be very spiritual.  
 Or, He dresses like a slob. Why can't he get a clue. Must not be very spiritual.  
 Or, All that body piercing! Nose ring, belly button ring — Since when is your navel a  
 fashion accessory? (What is that guy trying to PROVE?)  
 Or, Sheesh, she wears no jewelry, not even any rings — no makeup, that little cap on  
 her head ... What is she trying to PROVE?  
 Or You went to WHAT movie? Do you know what kind of RATING that movie has?  
 Or, you objected to them going to THAT movie? Are you some kind of PRUDE?

Or, it can be heavier stuff.  
 She's been divorced HOW many times?  
 He comes from WHAT kind of sexual lifestyle?  
 They went through WHAT kind of treatment program?

Jesus says God is going to separate his catch the same way a fisherman does — on  
 the basis of one simple standard.  
 The fisherman's one simple standard is, Good to eat? Or not?  
 God's one simple standard is, Wicked? Or righteous?

Now, who's righteous?  
 Somebody who acts like me, of course.  
 No, that's not what the Scriptures tell us.  
 Somebody who follows the religious rules, of course.  
 No, that's not what the Bible tells us.  
**Acts 13:39** says, "Through [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from  
 everything you could not be justified from by the [rules, the] law...."

Righteousness means perfection.  
 Having no charge against you.  
 And since we all sin, someone has to MAKE us righteous.  
 Someone has to plead our case before God,  
 tell him we're good fish when actually we're bad fish.  
 Tell him to keep us when actually we deserve to be thrown out.  
 That's what Jesus does — he "justifies" us to the Father.  
 And he doesn't just take our case when we're good enough.  
 He takes our case just because we ask him to,  
 and trust him to take care of it.  
 That's faith.  
 That's what **Romans 5:1** means when it says "**we have been justified through faith.**"  
 That's what **1 Corinthians 6:11** means when it says "**you were washed, you were  
 sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by  
 the Spirit of our God.**"  
 That's what **Romans 4:5** means when it says God "**justifies the wicked,**" and for

anyone who trusts Jesus to do this work, “**his faith is credited as righteousness.**”

Are there rules to follow?

Is there a law to obey?

Not to get into heaven.

Not to be made righteous.

The law is just there to help us.

**Galatians 3:24** says “**the law was put in charge [of us] to lead us to Christ — [Why?] that we might be justified by faith.**”

The rules, the law, the commandments — we can't follow them in our own power. So they have the effect of showing us how much we need Jesus, the effect of driving us to Christ.

Anyone who has trusted Christ to justify them,

to make them sinless before God,

is sinless before God.

If you have simply asked Jesus to do it, and believed him when he said he could, then he's done it.

You're righteous.

You're a good fish.

God will keep you.

\* \* \*

Okay, now we know who are the good fish and who are the bad.

Let's throw the bad fish out and get on with the work of being good.

But no.

In God's kingdom, timing is everything.

Let's go back and look at the timing words:

**Verse 48: “THEN they sat down.”** Let's underline “then.”

Not now. Then.

**Verse 49: “This is how it WILL be.”** Let's underline “will be.”

Doesn't happen now. It WILL happen.

**“At the END of the age.”**

Let's underline “end.”

Not the middle part. The END.

When this earthly life is over.

**“The angels WILL come.”** Let's underline “will.”

They haven't come yet. (And it ain't US, it's the angels who separate the wicked from the righteous.)

**Verse 50: “where there WILL be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

Let's underline “will.”

My nature is to see someone whose choices I disagree with or whose lifestyle I don't appreciate

or whose commitment to God isn't exactly up to what I feel MY standards are and I want to see to it that they do some weeping and gnashing of teeth right here, right now.

But Jesus says Get the timing right.

It's future tense.

At the end of the age.

When our earthly life is over.

***We're not in a position to throw bad fish overboard.***

***Because we're fish ourselves.***

No fish in history has picked up another fish and thrown it over the side of a fishing boat.

Jesus says, Hey, everybody stays in the boat till the ride is over.

The bad fish go right along with the good.

We've all been bad fish.

If we're considered good fish now, it's not because of anything we accomplished.

We're only justified by faith in what JESUS did for us.

We've been bad fish ourselves,

and in fact, day to day, we're still bad fish in a whole bunch of ways.

Our job isn't to pass judgment on someone else's spirituality

and decide whether they can stay on this boat ride with us.

**Romans 2:1 says You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.**

Our job isn't to judge the next guy.

Our job is just to love the next guy — until the boat pulls up onto shore.

Our job is to see that person as a spiritual traveler just like us;

someone on a spiritual journey in some ways different from us, but in some ways just like us;

someone who is carrying around baggage in some ways different from us, but in some ways just like us;

someone who has weaknesses in some ways different from us, but in some ways just like us;

someone who is dealing with unhealed hurts in some ways different from us, but in some ways just like us.

I like how Dr. Seuss puts it:

*Where do they come from? I can't say.*

*But I bet they have come*

*a long, long way.*

*We see them come.*

*We see them go.*

*Some are fast.*

*And some are slow.*

*Some are high.*

*And some are low.*

*Not one of them  
is like another.  
Don't ask us why.  
Go ask your mother....*

*Come on ... Why aren't you like me?  
But maybe that's not the right question.  
Why aren't you up to my standard?  
But maybe that's not the right question.  
Why are we putting up with all these sinners in this church?  
But maybe that's not the right question.*

Our tendency is to look for people's failures and shortcomings and use those as a reason to *separate* ourselves from them. But Christ calls us to look for people's frailties and needs and use those as a reason to *love* them. Meanwhile, he will use the differences between us to teach us, to grow us, to mature us. The more slack we can cut people, the more we can focus on what's really important — whether people are trusting Jesus and walking with Jesus and growing in Jesus — the more peace we'll experience, the more unity we'll experience, the more fulfilling our own lives and ministries will be.

Let me read you the words of Jesus from **Matthew 5**:

**43 You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'**  
**44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,**  
**45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**  
**46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?**  
**47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?**

\* \* \*

Hey — let's face the facts: Who will be in heaven?  
 People who trusted Christ but who drank alcohol,  
 AND people who trusted Christ but were offended by the drinking of alcohol.  
 People who trusted Christ and made the sign of the cross every time they walked into church,  
 AND people who trusted Christ and thought crossing yourself was silly.  
 People who trusted Christ and spent their lives fighting the government over laws they considered immoral,  
 AND people who trusted Christ and who felt that if you spent your time fighting the government you were wasting your time.  
 People who trusted Christ and who thought you should only pray standing up; kneeling down was an obnoxious way of calling attention to yourself.

AND people who trusted Christ and who thought you should only pray kneeling down;  
standing up was utterly irreverent.

People who trusted Christ and who felt you should just pray about a situation and not  
take any action because that's what God really wanted,

AND people who trusted Christ and who felt you should do everything you could in a  
situation because that's what God really wanted.

People who trusted Christ and grew mature,

AND people who trusted Christ and refused to mature.

People who trusted Christ and who were faithful

AND people who trusted Christ but who cheated.

People who trusted Christ but who never quite fit in,

AND people who trusted Christ and were major social butterflies who got invited to all  
the parties.

All kinds of different people.

People are funny.

People are strange.

People are annoying.

People are confusing.

People are frustrating.

People are unpredictable.

But until we get to shore, all the fish stay in the boat.

Which is why Dr. Seuss's parable ends with kind of a happy sigh, or a shrug:

*Today is gone. Today was fun.*

*Tomorrow is another one.*

*Every day,*

*from here to there,*

*funny things are everywhere.*

That's the kind of spirit we need every single day of our lives.

Today was fun.

God surprised me today.

Not every other fish in the boat is like me.

Some of these other fish kinda stink, if you ask me.

But I'm going to go along for the ride again tomorrow,

do what God calls ME to do,

and see what neat stuff God has in store for us all!

### ***One Fish Two Fish***

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