

Wheat and Tares

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

With Study Questions

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Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶ But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷ So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸ He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn..." ³⁶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." ³⁷ He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. ³⁹ The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Matthew 13:24-43)!"

Introduction

Children will often ask, "How did people go to heaven before the birth of Jesus?"

You ever have somebody make a promise then not keep it? Sometimes parents make promises then don't keep them because things happen that are out of their control. I might promise the kids we're going to go to Disneyland on a certain day but then it rains or I, or one of the kids, gets sick or

Disneyland unexpectedly closes. People should keep their promises but we have limitations – even parents.

But when God makes a promise, it's as good as kept. God's plans can't be cancelled due to some unforeseen incident. God is fully capable of controlling the weather, keeping the kids healthy and Disneyland running smoothly. So people before the birth of Jesus could go to heaven by believing in a promise God made that He would send His Son to die for our sins. And God used a multitude of instructional tools to reveal what Jesus would accomplish.

God would use sacrificial animals, tabernacles and temples, priests and prophets, the stars, the sand, battles, giants, donkeys and angels. All these and more used by God as an instructive gallery one walks through in the Old Testament Scriptures with the expressed purpose of revealing what God was going to do when He sent Jesus to be born.

Of course all these things pale and fall very short of the lesson they were created to convey – a lamb can tell us something about Jesus, but not everything. But this was their purpose nonetheless. And one of the greatest instructional tools in the Old Testament was a kingdom.

God designed marriage to illustrate the gospel. God designed families to reveal the family of God. God designed lambs to be sacrificed and giants to be conquered all for the purpose of demonstrating His own power and glory. And the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament had the instructional purpose of revealing and foreshadowing the kingdom of Christ.

The Kingdom

Truly the heart of the kingdom of God is its sacrificial King; apart from which there would be no true eternal kingdom at all. In the way the Sermon on the Mount reveals the true character of citizens of Christ's kingdom, these kingdom parables inform us of the infrastructure, networking, expectations, blessings and severity of the kingdom.

In short, the kingdom parables can be viewed as a general meeting with his troops and drawing the battle plans for victory on his chalkboard. There is strategy, warnings and blessings. We all know that Jesus is the cornerstone of redemption; but how is the building to be constructed? How does this Stone become a great mountain covering the earth with grace and mercy?

In the parable of the sower we learned that not all will truly receive this message. And those who consider themselves citizens of Christ's kingdom

need to be warned of shallow hearts and thorny surroundings. We must ever walk in faith, producing fruit consistent with that faith. This is perhaps the most intimate and essential aspect of the kingdom. Without this the barracks are empty.

In the Parable of the Sower the seed represented the message of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; in this parable the good seed represents the people in the kingdom. It would appear that the Parable of the Sower encourages us primarily to examine the soil of our own hearts as it is tempted by persecution or the riches of this world. In this parable we are to be aware of the fact that God has not left us in, what appears to be, a completely safe environment.

Jesus, the Sower of Good Seeds

In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares Jesus is the one sowing good seeds and the good seeds are those who have true, saving faith (Matthew 13:37). So let us recognize first off that if we have true faith in Christ it is because it has been sown in our hearts by Christ. We can no more take credit for saving faith than a seed can take credit for its own existence. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, encouraging him to humbly correct those in opposition to the truth that...

God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will (2 Timothy 2:25, 26).

God is the one who grants repentance. God is the one who takes seeds who are sinful by nature and, through the message of the kingdom, makes them good seeds. Heaven forbid any of us think we're good seeds by virtue of our own wisdom, righteousness, intellect, humility or anything else found in us. Paul also wrote to Timothy of the God...

...who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9).

Surrounded by Tares

In this parable the field is the world (Matthew 13:38). Jesus teaches that while men slept an enemy sowed tares right in next to the wheat. And when the wheat begins to grow, the tares also grow. And it seems that the main point Jesus is seeking to make is that those who are faithful should not expect that they will not be surrounded by evil. This is one reason Jesus prayed:

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one (John 17:15).

James also explains:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

This is not Jesus telling Christians to feel free to rub elbows with a sinful world; quite the opposite. It is Jesus warning Christians that they will be surrounded by “the sons of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:38). In the context here, there is little doubt that Jesus is speaking of the current clergy. Talking to priests, Jesus said,

You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do (John 8:44).

There is a word here I think would be good for us all to know – the word is ‘circumspect’. It means to be aware of your surroundings. We once had a cat that would sleep on our porch. In our neighborhood there are many dogs, raccoons, possums and skunks. The cat had to always be aware of the dangers of the environment. It was never ignorant of a sound or movement because it may cost him his life.

We must be aware of the fact that we’re surrounded by tares. In the books we read, the movies we watch, the music we listen to, the friends by which we’re surrounded. These are things for which we might have affections. And it is possible that we can have a positive and loving influence in the lives of the people we care about; but never at the expense of our own character. This was happening in the church at Corinth. That’s why the Apostle Paul wrote:

O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your *own* affections.¹³ Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."¹⁷ Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."¹⁸ "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:11-18).

We often use this passage for marriage (and it would certainly include that) but it can apply to any ungodly influence in our lives. Paul is writing to them as children who think they're being "restricted" by their parents when the true restriction is their own affections or love for the world. **"Come out from among them and be separate."** This doesn't mean we move to the moon (or even to Montana). It means we know the dangers by which we are surrounded.

An Offensive Battle

But it also doesn't mean we take a defensive posture; as if Jesus is calling us to be shaking in our boots, flinching every time we hear the sound of the world shrieking out of the shadows. The **"gates of Hades shall not prevail" against the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 16:18)**. The wheat is not to run away from the tares (it is, after all, a wheat field not a tare field). In the same letter where Paul instructed the Corinthians to come out from the influence of the world, he also wrote how we are to engage our surroundings:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,⁵ casting down

arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

This doesn't mean we should be mean or rude to people. It means helping others understand when they've built their hands on the sand rather than the rock (Matthew 7:25-27).

So apparently it is not all going to be smooth sailing for the kingdom of God. The barracks won't be empty, but the man in the next bunk may be working for the enemy. What we have to recognize is that this is going to be a battle to the very end. But we also must recognize God's gracious design in ordaining this battle to continue. It appears to be in the best interest of the wheat that the tares remain. Matthew Henry once wrote,

Note, God has so ordered it, that good and bad should be mixed together in this world, that the good may be exercised, the bad left inexcusable, and a difference made between earth and heaven.¹

There will be a great and terrible day of the Lord. God's people are to content themselves that they are not, in the final analysis, the harvesters. There is a fearful justice awaiting the sons of disobedience. We are to work and pray for the deliverance of lost souls. As Paul wrote: **"...my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).**

And through all our trials and all of our tragedies, Jesus extends to His own, the comfort of knowing that that they **"shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).**

Jesus completes His explanation by stating, **"He with ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:43).** As if to say that these self-evident truths should be readily understood by anyone with ears.

¹Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 13:24). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. How did people go to heaven before the birth of Jesus (Pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss God's promises. Is it possible He won't keep them (pages 2, 3)?
3. What kind of tools did God use in the Old Testament to teach us what Jesus would do (page 3)?
4. Who is the one who sows good seeds? What are the good seeds (page 4)?
5. Do people go to heaven because of how good they are (page 4)?
6. What do the tares represent in this parable (page 5)?
7. What does the word 'circumspect' mean and how does it apply in this parable (page 5)?
8. In what ways can you "come out" from the world (page 6)?
9. How is the wheat to engage in an offensive battle (pages 6, 7)?
10. Why is it good for the wheat and tares to grow together (page 7)?

