

Parables of the Kingdom: Part 2

The Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30

Last week we began a series entitled *Parables of the Kingdom*. There can be little doubt that our Lord had in mind Asaph's words used to open Psalm 78:

“O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old – what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.” (Psa. 78:1-4)

This is precisely what Jesus is now doing. He is speaking of the deep things of the Kingdom of God, things that to the darkened mind seem to be shrouded in mystery and secrecy. Whenever the Lord speaks in parables, unbelievers are quickly distinguished from believers. Unbelievers cannot discern the things of God, because such things are spiritually discerned through the Spirit of God – and unbelievers do not have the Spirit of God. That's why Paul wrote that:

“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and they are not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

However, hope springs to life when we remember the power of God to enter, renew and inhabit the natural mind of man. The *unbeliever* can become a *true* believer by opening himself or herself to the Spirit of God as he knocks on the door of the heart. So we always encourage everyone to open themselves to the voice of God.

Last week, we focused on the Parable of the Sower, and we saw how great is the transforming power of the Word of God when it falls into good soil, the good soil of the heart that is open and receptive to the things of God. Clearly, in that parable the seed sown represents the Word of God, and it is so transformative that it results in a great harvest – thirty, sixty, or even a hundredfold.

The parable of the wheat and the tares is similar, but it provides a different perspective on the nature of the Kingdom. It also provides great encouragement for the true believer. Keep in mind, of course, that this parable is explained by the Lord himself in verses 36-43. If our ears are open, it should keep us from straying from his intended meaning.

First, understand that our Lord is drawing upon the common things of life in order to illustrate the nature of the Kingdom; that is, how it comes and how it operates during this present age. A farmer plants *good* seed; however, unlike the previous parable, this seed is assumed to fall on *good* soil. It takes root and grows into healthy grain.

An enemy, however, surreptitiously sows *bad* seed in the farmer's field, and tares soon sprout among the wheat. There is a variety of darnel weed that closely resembles wheat and is almost impossible to distinguish from it until the wheat ripens and brings forth grain. We know that in those days an enemy, who wanted to destroy or at least reduce the value of someone's crop, would sometimes sow tares in their field. It was a common enough crime for the Romans to have had a specific law

against it. It would become apparent weeks later by the *great quantity of tares* among the wheat that the crop had been intentionally sabotaged (even a good crop would have a few weeds, but not like this!). So the landowner exclaims, “An enemy has done this!” How reassuring it is to note that the faithful servants are not blamed for this circumstance. It’s the enemy!

Next, we need to remind ourselves that while the Kingdom of God has indeed come into this world, its advance does not mean that our arch-enemy, Satan, will be completely vanquished during this age. His doom will surely come at the end of this age. For now, as Peter warns, he “*prows around like a ravenous lion seeking whom he may devour*” (2 Peter 5:8). The enemy is a terrorist and a saboteur, but his time is short.

Notice the reaction of the landowner’s servants. It is rather predictable. They are all too ready to plunge into the field, yank out the tares, and throw them into the fire. But the landowner says, “Not so fast! You may inadvertently uproot the wheat along with it. Let them grow together until harvest time. At that time, I will instruct the reapers to make the separation and cast the tares into the fire.” You see, the landowner knows that it will be easy to tell them apart at that time because the wheat will be mature, having grain, but the tares will have no grain!

We ought to be grateful that our Lord interprets this parable for us beginning in verse 36. The landowner who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. This was one of the Master’s favorites titles, no doubt because it represents his *humility* and his *humanity*, but also because it was a title that was understood to point to the Messiah.

Then, he identifies the field as the world. It is in the world that he plants the children of the kingdom. It is in this fallen, corrupt, decaying world that we are to mature and bear fruit to the glory of God. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, Satan. In this world one is either a child of God or a child of the devil. There is no neutrality. The harvest comes at the close of the age when all who have rejected the Lord and worked against his kingdom find themselves rejected and expelled from His presence. Since they have loved darkness, that will be their inheritance. But those who have embraced the light, which is the righteousness of Christ, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The Apostle Paul’s hope and confidence in our future was greatly kindled as he pondered these words of the Lord. It made him want to work all the more for the Master right now while there is opportunity:

“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life ...” (Phil. 2:14-16a).

The other day Gary Crossett and I were in Tim Horton’s when Gary noticed a poster on the wall. It read, “**Don’t just rise – shine!**” That’s it! That’s our mandate and our mission in this world of darkness – to shine like stars as we hold forth the Word of God! I know that there are those days when we don’t feel much like shining. Compared to the brilliance of the noonday sun we feel like a 25 watt bulb. But there is a day coming when we will shine like the sun with unhindered brilliance. If we keep our focus on the Lord and our faith in God Almighty, Satan cannot snuff us out, cannot extinguish our light, cannot keep us from shining. The next time the devil tells you that you’re only a 25 watt bulb in a very dark world, you tell him that he hasn’t seen anything yet. As you keep on shining for Christ, living up to the light he has given you, he will increase you wattage. We are children of the One who came into this same world as the Light of the world. John wrote that, “***The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood or overcome it***” (John 1:5). No, we are not the

Great Light, we are lesser lights – but we are His lights!

After hearing the parables of the sower and the wheat and tares, our Lord's disciples must have wondered how Christ's kingdom could possibly survive if so many people were allowed not only to reject him, but to stay on earth in open rebellion and hostility. Would not the great power of Satan and his evil forces, both demonic and human, completely overwhelm the remnant who remained faithful to the Lord?

The answer is that we would be defeated if not for the far greater power of the Lord which does not depend on numbers. The Almighty One has promised, "***I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not overcome it***" (Matt. 16:18).

John MacArthur gives the following illustration of how those who feel weak can work together to turn the world upside down:

Lord Kelvin once suspended a large piece of metal from a cord in his laboratory. He then proceeded to wad up small pieces of paper into balls about the size of a pea and systematically throw them at the metal weight. At first the almost imperceptible impact of paper hitting the metal seemed to have no effect. But eventually the steel weight was swaying rhythmically back and forth due to the cumulative force patiently applied against it.

In an immeasurably more dramatic and important way, God would demonstrate through the church how a handful of believers, totally weak and inept in themselves, would in His power turn the world upside down. The kingdom of Heaven would grow and prosper in spite of Satan's opposition and would ultimately permeate and influence the whole world in Jesus' name.

That process began with men like Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and Silas, and it continues unabated today. We will not see the uprooting or elimination of evil until the end of this age – but we will see it! For the time being, we must live in this milieu of competing kingdoms. We should expect there to be spiritual warfare throughout this age. But there looms on the horizon of history the dawning of a new day on which all darkness will be vanquished, on which the disciple's of the Lord will be rescued, and on which certain judgment will fall on those who are aligned with the evil one. We have a rock-solid basis for hope. Our hope is in the Lord!

There is one final word of caution. Sometimes God's people think that they are here to judge the world. Sometimes we are tempted to rush to judgment and execute the wrath of God on the unrighteous. We are like the landowner's servants who wanted to immediately pull out the tares and cast them into the fire. This was James and John's mistake. Luke tells how they were accompanying Jesus through a Samaritan village on their way to Jerusalem.

When the people there did not welcome Jesus, James and John became indignant and they asked the Master, "***Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?***" (9:54). The Lord rebuked them! Judgment and retribution belong to the Lord, not to us. And there is good reason for this. Only God knows who *now* belongs to him and who *will* belong to him.

It is not our place to rush into the world and attempt to uproot and destroy those we think are evil. We might make mistakes with tragic consequences. Remember the wheat and the tares. They could not tell the difference until the wheat was mature enough to bear fruit. We cannot always tell who belongs to Christ and who does not. Some have already begun to believe, but the fruit is not readily apparent. They have not had time to mature. They need to be discipled, mentored, nurtured in the

Faith – not judged and thrown into the fire!

Our appointed task is not to judge – that prerogative has been given to Christ – our task is to be his witnesses and his ambassadors. We must never look upon those who don't know the Lord as the enemy. Satan is the enemy! The unsaved and unevangelized are not the enemy – they are the lost!

Until this age is brought to a close by the Lord, let us scatter the good seed of the Word with him, confident of the fact that our labors in the Lord are not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).