

The Parables

Part 6 – The Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

In the Parable of the Sower Jesus taught his disciples that the inauguration of the Kingdom would not be greeted by a uniform response of faith and worship. Instead there would be some who believed but many others who rejected the Messiah. In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, the disciples learned that for a time the kingdom will be mixed in character. This was to correct the false expectation that the kingdom would be perfectly pure in this life without any mixture of false professors. The disciples expected there to be no difference between the visible community of God's people and all genuine converts. So the parable of the wheat and the tares is meant in part to correct the disciples' expectation that the kingdom would be established in all its eternal perfections in this fallen world.

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares explains that there will be a great difference between the kingdom experienced in this present evil age and the age to come. In this age the kingdom is a mixture of believer and unbeliever. It is a mixture of the visible and invisible church. In this age the righteous offspring of God and the wicked offspring of the devil will exist side-by-side. So patience is required. God's people must not try to establish in this life a kingdom that is only promised for the new heavens and earth. That is, they must use great care in dealing with sinners in their midst lest they do damage to the people of God.

This parable is designed to remind Jesus' disciples that there will be judgment and for those who have received the marks and blessings of God's covenant community but whose lives confirm that they are outside the kingdom. The parable is therefore a call for those within the church to search their hearts and examine their lives to see if there is evidence of kingdom citizenship. It also reminds us that our work of evangelism begins within the visible church.

Main Idea: The kingdom of God is inaugurated only partially in this present age while the time of ultimate fulfillment and judgment are yet to come.



1. Two Sowers

Vv. 24-25; 37-39

- In this parable the sower of the wheat is analogous to Jesus saving and growing his people. The enemy who trespasses upon the master's crops and sows weeds is analogous to Satan who seeks to bring about whatever destruction he can accomplish.

a) Christ is building his church. (37-38a)

- That is to say the Son of Man plants Christians in the world. If you are a Christian you are one because Jesus Christ has made you. You are the fruit of His labor and the work of His hands.

b) Satan is a vandal. (38b-39a)

- A vandal is someone who seeks to defame or damage something. Satan's desire is to rob God of the glory due him by vandalizing his church. That is he sows false professors among the people of God in an effort to damage the witness and unity of the body of Christ.

2. Two Seeds

Vv. 26; 38

- The seed sown by the master produces wheat. The seed sown by the enemy produces weeds. The two kinds of seed in the parable are analogous to the children of God (wheat) and "the sons of the evil one" (tares). The use of "seed" is reminiscent of Genesis 3:15 when the Lord promises that the "seed of the woman" will defeat the "seed" of the serpent. Until then, the Lord promised, there will be enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. That enmity, as Jesus' parable illustrates, is experienced within the church.

a) The Counterfeit Christian

- This parable teaches that within the visible church there will be counterfeit Christians growing up alongside genuine Christians. They look like Christians at least for a while but there is no fruit.

b) The Genuine Christian

- The final evidence that separates the wheat from the weeds is the presence of fruit. The weeds do not produce wheat.

3. Two Responses**a) Avoid overzealous judgments.**

Vv. 28-29

- Upon learning that an enemy has sowed weeds among the wheat the servants offer to go into the field and root out the weeds. The master stopped them lest they uproot the wheat in the process. This is analogous to overzealous attempts to judge the hearts of others. The church is commanded to exercise discipline for sins which are particularly damaging to the peace and purity of the church (Matt 18; 1 Cor 5). However the church must avoid believing it can purify the church this side of Heaven.

b) Avoid the judgment that is to come.

Vv. 30; 40-42

- As he does elsewhere Jesus warns about the judgment to come and Hell. His description of Hell is brief but arresting: "...and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs. 42).
- Matthew Henry comments that, "weeping and gnashing of teeth," describes, "comfortless sorrow; an incurable indignation at God themselves and one another which will be the endless torture of the damned souls." It's a terrible picture upon which we must look. No one taught the doctrine of hell so vividly or frequently as did our Lord Jesus. It makes perfect sense that One who would go through the horror of the cross to save sinners would do so because He knew better than anyone the horrors of hell from which His sufferings would rescue us.