

The Parable of the Tares in the Field

Introduction

This is the second of Jesus' parables, probably delivered at the same time as the Parable of the Sower (see our previous Article) and, once again, Jesus is teaching truths concerning "the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:24). Like the previous parable, it involves a sower sowing seed in his field. The Parable of the Tares, or, the Wheat and the Tares, is only found in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 13:24-30).

Two types of Seed

In the Parable of the Sower the focus is on the **different types of soil** into which the good seed fell. In the Parable of the Tares, the focus is on **two different types of seed** which were sown in the field and what happened to them both at harvest time. The picture in this parable is, again, that of a farmer "which sowed good seed ("wheat" – verse 25) in his field" (verse 24). But during the night, "while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (verse 25). The fact that tares (*Lolium temulentum*, "darnel", also known as "cockle" and "false wheat") had been sown along with the wheat didn't become obvious to everyone (except the farmer who, according to verse 28, appears to know exactly what has happened and who has done it) until the plants began to grow and produce fruit (verse 26). When the farmer's servants realise what has happened they ask him where the tares had come from (verse 27). The farmer replies, "An enemy hath done this" (verse 28). The servants, jealous of their master's good name, want to remove the tares immediately, but the farmer says that they should be left to "grow together until the harvest" (verse 30). At harvest time the farmer will get the reapers to separate the tares from the wheat, then "bind (the tares) in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into (his) barn" (verse 30).

In Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:36-43), He tells his disciples that the farmer who sowed the good seed is "the Son of man" (verse 37), that is, Jesus Himself; the field in which the seed is sown is "the world" (verse 38); the enemy who sowed the tares is "the devil" (verse 39); the good seed are "the children (sons) of the kingdom" (verse 38), those in whose hearts Jesus reigns as king, that is, disciples of Christ; the tares are "the children (sons) of the wicked (evil) one" (verse 38), that is, disciples of the devil – "Though they do not own his name, yet they bear his image" (Matthew Henry); the harvest is "the end of the world" (verse 39); and the reapers are "the angels" (verse 39).

The Tares

These tares, are sown in the farmer's field (the world) by an enemy – the devil; it is always the aim of the devil to spoil God's work. The devil sowed his seed under the cover of darkness: an appropriate time for the evil one to sow them as he sows darkness, deceit and lies wherever he goes. Revelation 12:9 describes the devil as the one who "deceiveth the whole world"; and Jesus said of the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

When God originally created man he was created upright and good, but with an unfettered free will – free to choose right or wrong. The Baptist Confession of faith of 1689 states that “(God) created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls... having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change” (chapter 4: Of Creation). In the Garden of Eden, God gave man a simple test of his allegiance: “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Along came the devil, under the guise of a serpent, and began sowing doubts into Eve’s mind: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Genesis 3:1). Here was the first lie, which should have put Eve immediately upon her guard. Eve answered that that was not what God had said but that they should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they die (Genesis 3:3). The devil then replied with lie number two: “Ye shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). At this point Eve should have run a mile and sought God and His wisdom (and warned her husband); but, instead she continued listening to the devil and, when her husband (Adam) joined her, they both eventually succumbed to the devil’s temptation. As a result of their disobedience to God’s command, Adam and Eve’s relationship with their creator was immediately ruined: “they hid themselves from the presence of the LORD (Jehovah) God” (Genesis 3:8). As God had warned them, **they died instantaneously, as far as their spiritual life of fellowship with God was concerned, and they became liable to physical decay and eventual physical death.**

As a consequence of their sin, all of Adam and Eve’s progeny, including you and me, are born sinners: “by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, **for that all have sinned**” (Romans 5:12). The Psalmist, David, complained, “Behold, I was shapen (brought forth) in iniquity; and **in sin did my mother conceive me**” (Psalm 51:5). Being born with a sinful nature, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3); you don’t need to teach a child to lie, they do it naturally! Paul describes the condition of Christians before they are “born again” as “**dead in trespasses and sins**; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (the devil), the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also **we all had our conversation in times past (once lived)** in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and **were by nature the children of wrath** (under, and liable to, the wrath of God), even as others” (Ephesians 2:1-3). Thus we live our lives estranged from God, “in the vanity (futility) of (our) mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in (us), because of the blindness (hardening) of (our) heart” (Ephesians 4:17-18); and, in Romans, Paul makes it clear that we are all completely responsible for our sin: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (suppress) the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; **so that they are without excuse**” (Romans 1:18-20; see also 2:14-15). In other words, although the evidence for God and His holy character is clearly revealed in nature and in our innate (inborn) God-consciousness, we suppress it by our sin and unrighteousness, making us all **inexcusably guilty before God.** What a bundle of noxious weeds we all are! Is there no hope for us?

The Wheat

People are **born tares**; they are **“born again” wheat**. Jesus said, “Except a man be born again (born from above), he cannot see (understand and enjoy) the kingdom of God” (John 3:3); and again, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). By our natural birth we are children of the devil; it is only through a **spiritual rebirth**, produced by the Spirit of God, that we become children of the kingdom (those in whose hearts Jesus reigns as king). And, to effect this new birth, the Spirit of God uses the Word of God (the Bible), the word of the kingdom (Matthew 13:19), the Gospel, as we read in 1 Peter 1:23: “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”; and similarly in James 1:18: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth”. And the only reason that some people become wheat, children of God, is because of God’s great love and mercy, as Ephesians chapter 2 goes on to say: **“But God**, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Ephesians 2:4-5). Jesus Christ died upon the cross, and rose again, that our sins might be forgiven and that we might enjoy fellowship with God again.

The children of the kingdom show themselves to be such by the good, godly fruit they produce: love for God, holiness of life, obedience to God’s word, putting Christ first in every area of our lives. We have already spoken about the “wheat” in our article on The Parable of the Sower – the Good Ground (whole-hearted) Hearers in the Parable of the Sower, are the children of the kingdom in the Parable of the Tares. We will not repeat here what was said in our previous article.

The Harvest

Remember that Jesus, in His explanation, said that the field represented the world (verse 38). In this field there are two (and only two) types of seed: the children of the kingdom (wheat) and the children of the evil one (tares); there is no in-between seed: you are either one, or the other. It doesn’t matter how good you think you are compared to other people: if you haven’t been “born again” you remain a child of the evil one.

This mixture of the good and the evil is a great grief to the children of God; Psalm 120:5 puts it figuratively like this, “Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech (a wicked people to the north of Israel), that I dwell in (among) the tents of Kedar! (a wicked people to the south)”. Being surrounded by ungodliness is a thorn in the flesh to God’s people. But this is how God wishes things to be, **for now**. We cannot, and should not, attempt to escape from the world; Jesus prayed in the upper room (John 17:15), “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil (one)”: we are to live **in the world**, but not be **of it** (John 15:19; 17:11).

We said above that this mixture of the good and the bad was to continue **“for now”**: this will not always be the case; harvest time is coming! On that day “The Son of man (Jesus) shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41-42). Judgment Day is coming! Remember that this description of the final destiny of the ungodly was given by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. People are all too apt to think of Jesus as either a

cute little baby in a manger, or as “Gentle Jesus meek and mild”; but He is **the Lord of glory** (1 Corinthians 2:8), before whom, one day, every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:10). Revelation 6:15-17 states that when Jesus returns to this earth for judgment, the ungodly will “(hide) themselves in the dens (caves) and in the rocks of the mountains; and (will say) to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from **the wrath of the Lamb**: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”. And if all that doesn’t sound bad enough, listen to this: the children of the evil one “shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and (they) shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:10-11); could there be a clearer statement of the Biblical doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell? I don’t know about you, but that sounds like a destiny I would like to avoid!

The Good News is that there is another destiny for those who take seriously and respond to what Jesus has to say. Those who willingly bow the knee to the Lord Jesus **now**, and accept Him as the only means of escape from the wrath to come, will have, when Jesus returns, **a future which will be full of glory**: “Then shall the righteous **shine forth as the sun** in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43). Daniel describes this future in similar words: “And they that be wise (because they paid attention to Christ’s voice and accepted His salvation) shall **shine as the brightness of the firmament**; and they that turn many to righteousness (by warning them of the danger they are in and pointing them to the Lord Jesus as their only hope) **as the stars for ever and ever**” (Daniel 12:3); and in Revelation 21:9-11, in the new heavens and the new earth which will follow Christ’s return, John sees, in a vision, the glorified church, “the bride, the Lamb’s wife... the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, **having the glory of God**: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”. What cause we have, if we are God’s wheat, to “(give) thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet (qualified us) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12-14).

Which group will you be in come Judgment Day? Will you be ushered into the kingdom of God in its final, glorious manifestation, or will you be cast into the outer darkness, with the devil and his angels, where there shall be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” for ever and ever? At the beginning of His ministry Jesus said “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Will you listen and respond? “Who that hath ears to hear, let him hear”. Jesus died and rose again in order to purchase access into the kingdom of heaven for all who trust in Him. Will you turn to Him now, before it’s too late?

Jesus elsewhere describes the separation of the children of the kingdom (the wheat) and the children of the evil one (the tares) as a separation of the sheep from the goats: “Then shall the King (Jesus) say unto them on his right hand (the sheep), Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”; but, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand (the goats), Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:34, 41). Don’t remain a goat (tare) all your life: turn in repentance and faith to “the good shepherd”, who “(gave) his life for the sheep (wheat)” (John 10:11). Amen.