

Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43 The Kingdom's Opposition - The Tares

Have you ever encountered opposition? One comedian said he sometimes got the feeling that the whole world was against him, but deep down he knew it was not true – some of the smaller countries were neutral! Have you ever encountered opposition? If you are a believer, you sure have!

When Jesus came, He announced the coming of the Kingdom. The first words of Jesus' public ministry were, "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Throughout His teaching, Kingdom subjects were prominent. Almost half of all references to God's kingdom occur in the gospels. To Jesus, the kingdom was an important topic. To Jesus, the church was part of the kingdom plan. But the church was NOT the kingdom! We often talk about building our churches, but Scripture never tells us to build a church. In fact, Jesus Himself said, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). We should more accurately speak of kingdom building.

Matthew chapter 13 contains seven parables about the kingdom. The Parable of the Sower speaks to us about the origin of the kingdom. Yet Jesus continues in Matt. 13 to discuss opposition to the kingdom by giving us three parables (Tares, Mustard Seed, Yeast (or leaven)). He culminates this series of kingdom parables with three dealing with the outcome of the kingdom (the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the dragnet).

As we consider the parable of the tares, we need to realize that Satan is a master counterfeiter! He has counterfeit Christians (2 Cor. 11:26); a counterfeit gospel (Gal. 1:6-9); he encourages counterfeit righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3); Rev. 2:9 describes a counterfeit church belonging to Satan; and at end of age, will produce a counterfeit Christ (2 Thess. 2:1-4). As the parable of the Sower showed, at the kingdom's beginning, Satan will snatch some seed away (wayside hearer). He will also bring the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to cause shallow and thorny hearted hearers to stumble. Yet, some still possess good soil and receive the Word. What does Satan do in that case? He plants false Christians - counterfeits among the true to cause problems. That is what the parable of the Tares is all about!

Note then the **Details of the Parable**. Jesus Himself gives the details in vv. 37-39. Making the correct substitutions let me summarize what Jesus is saying:

"The kingdom of heaven is the Son of Man sowing believers in the world. But secretly, the devil came and sowed unbelievers among the believers, and went away. When the believers began multiplying, then the unbelievers also appeared. The angels came to the Lord and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow believers in your world? Where then did the unbelievers come from?' 'Satan did this,' the Lord replied. The angels asked him, 'Do you want us to go and destroy the unbelievers?' 'No,' the Lord answered, 'because while you are destroying the unbelievers, you may hurt the believers with them. Let both exist together until the end time. At that time I will tell you to first collect the unbelievers and tie them in bundles to be burned in hell; then gather the believers and bring them into my heaven.'"

It must be remembered that this is a parable about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom began with the ministry of Jesus. While its ultimate fulfillment is yet future, nevertheless it is a present reality. Thus while the opposition of Satan to God's plan will ultimately be thwarted, it

still impacts us in the present. Theologians and non-theologians alike have long observed the reality of this parable. Theologians use terminology like the church visible versus the church invisible, or the church militant versus the church triumphant. Non-theologians generally speak more clearly, referring to true believers as opposed to pretend believers!

It is important to realize that just because you are a member of a church does not mean you are right with God! Billy Graham estimates that 67% of all church members are in fact lost, having joined the church for cultural or other reasons, but having never truly been born again! If his estimation is even close to reality, it is a dreadful thought to contemplate. Make sure today that you are wheat and not a tare!

But having seen these details of the parable, let us now continue to notice the **destruction in the parable**. Notice again vv. 40-42. One of the most unpopular subjects today is the subject of hell. Some years back, PhD research done by a student at Southern Baptist Theological seminary among fellow students revealed that 96% of the diploma students believed in the devil and hell, whereas only 58% of the Masters students and 37% of the PhD students did! In the same research, only 63% of the PhD students even believed in God!

Jesus spoke more about hell and its reality than He did about heaven. And His language here is not only clear, it is graphic. It is a dangerous thing to “play church.” You will no more be accepted by God just because you go to church than you would be accepted as president of the United States because you visit the White House every day.

The truth of the parable here is that there IS a day of destruction for those not belonging to God. You say, but I can’t tell who is a true believer and who is not. That is right – it is not for you, me, or anybody else to make that determination. But notice that the harvesters know. They know right now. They even ask, “do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?” (v. 28). It is simply because of the grace of God that justice is not immediately executed. God Himself says, “the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). But do not mistake God’s patience for indecisiveness. The day will come when He will act. At the end of the age, harvest time will come. The tares will be pulled up and eternally punished. And those who come to reap will know the difference between wheat and tares.

Herbert Lockyer says, “Burned in the fire is a most solemn phrase. As the tares symbolize all lost souls, we cannot make light of their future after such a declared fate. Jesus affirmed the utter destruction of the tares. The furnace of fire and wailing and gnashing of teeth describe the horrors of Hell, and of the final abode of the wicked, the Lake of Fire. Such terrific strength of language is dreadful to contemplate . . . What Jesus said about the bundles burning was not mere parable drapery, but a solemn revelation and declaration of fate.” This destruction is the harvest awaiting all tares. But what a different harvest awaits the wheat!

Notice then the **delivery in the parable**. I believe we see 2 times of delivery here. First, notice v. 30. There is no mention of time – it simply says, “in the time of the harvest.” The word for time is the Greek word *kairos*, signifying “season” or “period” as opposed to chronological time. The first action with the tares is gathering into bundles – nothing is mentioned about burning in the NIV translation (the KJV does mention that the tares are bundled and burned, but this translation is based on later manuscripts. The earlier manuscripts do not include this phrase). The first action with the wheat is gathering into barn. What is this? I believe it is a picture of the rapture. There is no destruction of the tares because the tribulation time follows the rapture; the tares are still here during that time. The gathering together pictures the coming together of world forces (one world government, one world

religion, etc.). The wheat, however, is NOT here. It has been removed from the world at the rapture. It is gathered into the Father's House, that Divine Barn! This is harvest number one - the harvest of the righteous.

But now, notice vv. 40-43. Here, time IS specifically mentioned – the “end of the age” (v. 40). After the rapture and tribulation time, Scripture declares that Christ will return and set up His millennial kingdom. Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit during that time and unbelievers will be cast away from the earth with a single word from Jesus (Rev. 19:21). This is harvest number two - the harvest of the wicked. As vv. 40-42 say, “just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And then, all that will be left are those believers (those saved during the tribulation and still alive at the second coming) whom God has delivered. As v. 43 says, “then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Again, as Lockyer says, “what a glorious destination awaits the righteous, who are to shine as the stars forever. Exaltation and blessedness are to be theirs throughout eternity.”

Destruction or deliverance. These are our only two eternal options. Such knowledge should lead us finally today to the **discernment from the parable**. What can we learn from this wonderful parable of our Lord? There is much, but let me mention two things I believe to be important.

First of all, notice again vv. 28-29. It is not for us to determine who is wheat and who is a tare! That is all too easy for us to do, and we cloak it in religious terminology. “I’m just inspecting fruit!” There is a portion of that which is true. We should be discerning. Yet, all too often we move past discernment to point where we pull up and cast away. Be careful that while you pull up tares you do not also pull up some wheat. Or better yet, do not pull anything up at all! Leave that up to God and His harvest team.

But most important, I believe, is that we live in an age of grace. Tares can still become wheat. Sinners can be fashioned into saints. Scripture never talks about the wheat becoming tares, but it does tell us tares can become wheat. Children of the devil, when they look to Christ, can become children of the kingdom. Perhaps today, Mr. Tare or Mrs. Tare, it is time you put off your counterfeit Christianity and ask the Divine Gardener to plant you as wheat in His heavenly harvest!

In closing, let me ask, have you been under attack by the devil lately? He does not mess with the tares. Instead, he enables them to flourish. He engineers events so they become Sunday School teachers, deacons, active tithing members, even pastors. But he certainly does mess with the wheat. Remember what Jesus said to Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Those attacks should be welcomed, for when wheat is sifted, the tares and chaff disappear! What an application for us - the more the Lord has of us the less the devil will have. We should search the field of our heart to see if the enemy has sown any tares therein. And we should search our lives to see if ultimately we are a tare or wheat.