

Parable of the Wheat & Tares

Mat 13:24-30 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.” ’ ’ ”

Mat 13:36-43 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!”

Questions On The Text

What is this parable about?

Verse 24: This parable is about the kingdom of heaven which is the kingdom of God. This is the place where God rules and is not to be limited with a physical location, but includes the hearts of human beings.

What did the man in the parable do?

Verse 24: He sowed good seed in his field. Note that he is the owner of the field.

What happened while men slept?

Verse 25: While they were asleep, an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat seed so as to destroy the crop. The tares have been identified as the bearded darnel, a plant that looks a lot like wheat while it is growing. This was a problem in ancient times, so much so that the Romans even enacted a law against doing this. It has even been known to happen in more recent times in places like India. The basic idea is to sabotage the crop.

What happened when the grain sprouted?

Verse 26: The bearded darnel is like wheat in appearance up till a certain stage of growth. When this point had been reached, and the grain had sprouted, it became apparent what the enemy had done. The difference between the two crops was now evident.

How did the servants want to solve the problem?

Verses 27-28: The servants reported to the owner the presence of the tares in the field and asked how they got there. The owner at once identified it as the work of his enemy. The servants then suggested that they uproot the tares.

Why did the owner not uproot the tares?

Verse 29: The owner knew that it would do more damage to try to uproot the tares than to leave them there. The roots of the bearded darnel intertwine with the roots of the wheat and make it impossible to remove them without also tearing up the wheat.

What was the owner's solution?

Verse 30: The owner said that the problem would be solved at the time of the harvest. He would send forth his reapers into the harvest and reap the bearded darnel first. They would be gathered into bundles and burned, whereas the wheat would be gathered into the owner's barn.

At the time of the harvest, the difference between the wheat and the bearded darnel is obvious. The heads of wheat are bowed over and the bearded darnel are stiff and erect.

Who did Jesus say was the owner of the field?

Verse 36-37: Having sent the multitude away, Jesus' disciples ask for the meaning of the parable. He identifies the owner of the field as the Son of Man. This is a Messianic title (one of the titles of the Messiah). Other Messianic titles include Christ, Prince of Peace, Counsellor, Alpha and Omega, Son of David, Morning Star and Son of God.

The title Son of God emphasises the divinity of Christ, whereas Son of Man emphasises His humanity.

What do the field and the seed represent?

Verse 38: The field is the world. Remember that the field belonged to the owner. In a day when land rights are major issues in many countries, it would be wise to keep in mind that real owner of all the land on this planet is the Son of Man. See Psalm 24:1.

The good seed represents the sons of the kingdom of God. It is not explicitly stated in this parable, but it should be kept in mind that when the owner planted his seeds he expected fruitfulness.

The tares represent the sons of the wicked one. Ephesians 2:2 refers to them as "the sons of disobedience." These have been interspersed throughout the world in amongst God's people. The devil's purpose in doing this is to sabotage the work of God in the world.

Who are the reapers and the enemy, and what is the harvest?

Verse 39: The enemy is the devil himself, the great opponent of God's work in the world. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.

What will happen to the sons of the wicked one?

Verses 40-42: The harvest is the judgment. See also Jeremiah 51:33, Hosea 6:11 and Revelation 14:17-19. This is a time of great separation where the wheat will be separated from the tares, the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the unrighteous, the sons of the kingdom from the sons of the wicked one.

These are also described as those who offend and practise lawlessness. At this point, the time for making decisions will be over. Jesus says that there will be "wailing and gnashing of teeth." This description indicates a time of overwhelming despair, regret, grief and sorrow.

Just as the tares are gathered and burned at the harvest time, at the end of the age, the sons of the wicked one will be gathered by God's holy angels and cast into the furnace of fire. The furnace of fire is the lake of fire mentioned Revelation 20:14-15.

It is tempting to want to uproot these sons of the wicked one, but Jesus said that He would take care of that at the end of the age at the great harvest.

What happens to the righteous?

Verse 43: In contrast to the wicked, the righteous will shine forth like the sun in their Father's kingdom. This event is called the "revealing of the sons of God" in Romans 8:19, and a time when we will be "glorified" in Romans 8:30. The contrast between the wicked and the righteous is also mentioned in Daniel 12:2-3.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Why do you think God allows His enemy to attempt to sabotage His field?

Why do you think the devil tries to sabotage God's field even though Christ has already defeated him?

Why is it important not to try and uproot the tares in this world before the end of the age?

What has this parable got to do with judging others?

What does it mean in Romans 8:30 when it says that we will be glorified?

How should this parable impact your life and how you live?