

The Parable of the Wheat & Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The parable of the sower is found in 3 of the gospels, including Matthew in chapter 13. This week we finish by looking at another parable with an agricultural theme, the wheat and tares, or just Weeds, which in Matthew comes immediately after the parable of the sower. They come in the body of teaching from Jesus about the Kingdom of God, and that it is both here and now but also in the future.

In one way the story Jesus tells makes complete sense by itself. The weeds planted by the man's enemy were probably darnel which looks very much like wheat when it starts to grow. But it soon becomes clear that it is a weed, not wheat. The servants of the owner ask if they should pull up the weeds. Just as in the parable of the sower wheat growing amongst weeds will be choked to some extent. The yield will not be as good as if the weeds were not there. But the farmer realises that pulling up the weeds will cause more harm than leaving them. So those are his instructions. When harvest time comes the weeds will be separated from the wheat, tied into bundles, left to dry and eventually used as fuel. The wheat will go into the barn.

This is a classic parable because Jesus begins with "The kingdom of heaven is like....." and so challenges his hearers to ask further questions. In one way Jesus is asking "Do you really want to know what the kingdom of heaven is all about? If so you must enquire further."

His disciples did precisely that and so Jesus explains it to them.

Jesus says the field is **the world**. Some commentators apply this parable to the church, saying that the church always has and always will contain mixed multitudes and that only the Lord can sort things out at the end. But Jesus says the seed is the "sons of the kingdom". The parable deals with the problem of the delay of the kingdom's arrival and the present realities and opposition believers will *always* face. Don Carson puts it this way; it is about eschatological expectation, not ecclesiological deterioration. (End times, not churches) In other words the kingdom of heaven can be present today without sweeping everything out of its way and destroying all its opponents.

This is a message we need to hear today when in some circles there is emphasis on "kingdom power". If we pray hard enough and have enough faith any obstacle can be overcome. The kingdom of heaven **will** move forward, we will have the victory. But this parable tells us precisely why we are *not* triumphantly sweeping all before us to victory. It tells us that whenever there is growth and fruit being produced for the kingdom we can expect opposition.

Of course, we see this in the church as well as in the world, and we should not be complacent about false teaching which can creep into a church. But zealous endeavours to have a "pure" church do more harm than good. We need to be faithful and patient, leaving the Lord to be the final judge in all things.

Finally, and very importantly, this parable tells us the fearful outcome for all who are not part of the kingdom, that is all who do not accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. What greater incentive can there be for us to keep working for the Lord and telling others the Good News of Jesus.

Heavenly Father, save us from false expectations, give us patience and fill us with joy as we contemplate one day shining like the sun in your kingdom.