

**Text:** Matthew 13:24-30, 13:36-43

**Title:** Wheat and Tares

**Truth:** Believers and unbelievers will coexist until the final judgment.

**Date/Location:** Sunday November 27, 2016 at FBC

## Introduction

In the parable of the soils, we learned that although the seed of God's word is liberally planted, only some of the seed matures to a point of bringing forth fruit. It is the fruit-bearing plants that picture the true believer in Christ. The other seed-recipients do not produce fruit — pictured as those whose hearts are rock-hard feeding ground for the Devil, or who have little depth to endure persecution or tribulation, or who are choked with riches and the cares of the world.

The Devil wants to stop good growth before it starts, and certainly before it can produce fruit. But the Devil is not content to only stop good seed from growing. He also wants his own plants to grow. He wants to choke out the good growth with his own bad growth. He wants to control everything, to overrun all good with evil.

We can illustrate this with the thistle weeds that were growing on the north side of our church building. Seeded from a bird feeder for finches, the thistle tried to take over the whole area. It took several rounds of hard work, pulling those noxious weeds and planting a mix of native cone flowers, before the area was able to be reclaimed with something beautiful and less prickly.

It is this kind of situation that the Lord pictures for us in the second major parable, that of the wheat and tares.

### I. The Parable, 13:24-30

A. The phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven is like" introduces the second major parable of the Lord since he started to use parabolic teaching. It reflects that He is drawing a comparison between an easy-to-understand situation in the world and the spiritual truth of the Kingdom of God.

B. In this parable, the sower sows good wheat seed. The idea is that it will bring forth good plants. This is in contrast to the enemy who came and secretly sowed bad seed among the good wheat seed. The first parable dealt with the good seed and its results; the second parable deals with bad seed and its relationship to the good seed.

I noticed the phrase "and went his way" indicating that after the enemy does the damage, he knows the damage is done, and he does not care. He has accomplished his ruinous goal and he moves on to the next field to do more damage. Tearing down is easier than building up. It takes a lot of work to build, to organize, to put things together, to help a person have a better life. But it is easy to ruin a life and then leave that person, or church, to pick up the pieces.

"While men slept" indicates that the mischief happened at night. This does not suggest delinquency on the part of the farmers, that is, there should have been a night watchman. But like in other parables where we are told to "watch" it is true that we must take good care of our fields.

C. Only after the plants grew up for a while and got to the mature stage did the mischief become evident. Time and growth brought out distinguishing marks on the plants that could be seen. When in the immature state, tares and wheat look an awful lot alike. Only when they hit maturity can the difference be easily seen.

I should note that this is more than mischief. It made a lot of extra work for the farmer. It reduced his crop and profit. The plant may have been darnel, which looks like wheat. The goal of the enemy was to ruin the crop, perhaps even destroy the field for several years, and thus eliminate the profit of the farmer. This was real economic harm. The enemy did this as a form of revenge or punishment. Roman law prohibited it.

When we understand how this corresponds to spiritual life, we see that the mischief is deadly, not merely economically harmful.

D. Time passed, and the honest workers who were employed by the owner became troubled as to why the field had tares. They were

the ones who had done the work of plowing and planting the field, and they thought that the owner gave them good seed to put into the ground. The multitude of bad plants in the field indicated that it was no accident that tares came up. A few might "volunteer" from seeds blown on the wind or from birds transporting them from other fields, but there were too many tares for that to be true.

- E. The owner, knowing that he did purchase good seed (or had kept it from last year's crop), concluded that some enemy had messed up his field.
- F. The servants offer a solution to the owner, namely that they would go out and gather up the weeds. Notice that these servants must be dedicated to helping their master get a good crop. This was a suggestion that would, if implemented, entail a tremendous amount of labor. But they were missing an important side effect of this kind of work, which the owner understood and would explain to them momentarily.
- G. The owner mulls over the situation a bit, but decides that they cannot do a pre-harvest of the weeds before the real harvest. Their roots are intertwined in the soil, and pulling up the weeds will greatly disturb the wheat as well. The job would be intractable and devastating to the good plants. However, leaving it also does damage to the good plants. Leaving the tares is the lesser of two evils. Less damage is done this way, and the owner wisely decides that less damage is better than more damage so that he can salvage something.
- H. The solution is to wait until the final harvest. This will avoid severe damage to the crop. Then the reapers—perhaps servants who specialized in reaping—would go through the field once, separating the good from the bad. They will take care of the bad by tying them into manageable bundles and then throw them into a burn pile. They will gather the wheat into bundles and then store it in the barn to be processed.

Notice that there still is a lot more work involved in the sorting and bundling and burning. But it could be done.

## II. The Correspondence to Spiritual Truth, aka Real Life, 13:36-

43

A. The identity of the various parts of this parable is detailed by the Lord in a series of explicit "this IS that" statements and then an "AS" statement. This is a great amount of detail in terms of identifying the various parts of the parable. Not every parable has this level of detail.

<b>Parable</b>	<b>Corresponds to the Explanation</b>
Sower of good seed	Son of Man
Field	World – note this: <i>not</i> the church.
Good seeds	Sons of the kingdom. The good seed is not the word of God, as it was in the parable of the soils.
Tares	Sons of the devil
Enemy who sows tares	Devil
Harvest	End of the age
Reapers	Angels
Gathering and burning of tares. There is a sorting process and then a burning.	The angels will separate the sons of the devil at the end of this age, taking them out of the kingdom. Then they will be thrown into a fiery furnace and experience great torment. This is final judgment.
Then the wheat is gathered and stored in the barn.	The righteous (sons of the kingdom) will be "stored" in the kingdom of God and will shine with glory. Although not mentioned here, there is also a judgment associated with them, but one with a positive outcome.

B. It is important to note that the field is the world. Jesus clearly identifies it. We are not to read this text and say "Oh, there will be tares in the church. OK, that's fine." It is NOT fine to be lax about tares joining the church. They do not share the life of the church, and although they may sit in meetings, they need to be made to

understand that they are tares, and not wheat. Tares can be saved, to be sure, but we have to keep the church pure. It must be distinct from the world!

I take it that there is a need for some level of toleration—again, not in the church membership—for these tares. We know they will exist. When they become evident, we know that they are all around. There is also a need for discernment because it is very difficult sometimes to tell which are the tares and which are the wheat. It behooves us to examine ourselves to make sure we are producing fruit that matches the real fruit, and will not demonstrate ourselves to be weeds after all is done.

- C. The parable presents a problem: why not remove the sons of the wicked one (tares) immediately? I think we can understand that there is a correlation between plucking tares out of the field early and removing unbelievers from the world before final judgment.
1. You can imagine that removing unbelievers would be problematic: for one thing, it would destroy families whose "roots" are intertwined with one another. Even though there are believers and unbelievers in a family, they still constitute a family.
  2. Another issue is this: when would the unbelievers be removed? All of us start out as "tares" and only at some later point do we become wheat—and that is a mercy of God that He brings us to Himself. This problem is minimized, I suppose, by the theory that God knows the elect and could perfectly decide who to keep and who to remove. But then again, how many of you had unbelieving parents or grandparents or great grandparents? If they were removed from the world in judgment, how would you have come to exist?
  3. Unlike the parable, some tares become wheat—under the miraculous influence of the sower, Jesus, and the non-miraculous influence of the wheat that surrounds it.
- D. As we indicated in the introduction, the devil is busy trying to "evangelize" a bunch of people for himself. But it is not good news that he gives people. He does all kinds of things that lead people

astray from God. He has been highly effective, in part because the nature of people is tare-ish from the beginning of their lives. In reality, there is not a huge percentage of wheat in most "fields" or countries of the world. In some places there are vanishingly small numbers of wheat plants.

- E. There is a question about the timing of the harvest event, which Jesus says is the end of the age, and how it applies to the church.
1. Some interpreters suggest that since Jesus is talking about the end of the age (*this* age in NKJV or end of the world in KJV), it must be that *our* present age ends this way with a single general judgment and no pre-tribulation rapture [where the church is taken out of the world before this harvest occurs](#).
  2. To the contrary, it is very plausible to believe in the pre-tribulation rapture. What happens after the rapture is that during the tribulation, there will be more sowing of the good news of the kingdom. Some will believe and others will not. When Jesus returns, His angels will come and do the sorting process. See Matthew 25:31-46 for another look at this separation and judgment. Believers will be gathered (Matthew 24:31), kept, and allowed to enter into the glory of the kingdom, while unbelievers will be cast out into punishment. They will not be permitted to enjoy the glory of the kingdom.
  3. [The church era has a somewhat separate standing from the prior age of the Old Testament and the era of Jesus' preaching, and it also is distinct from the future Tribulation. In much of Jesus teaching, the church specifically is left out of the picture. And while it is not an afterthought to God's program, Jesus can leave it out without distorting reality. The church is started in Acts 2, and effectively ends at the rapture. Then things continue on in the world as they did before the church—with Israel and Gentiles and the seed-sowing process. The Tribulation period actually has a level continuity with the pre-cross world.](#)
  4. [That being the case, some will vociferously object that I must not believe that the parable applies to the church. But it does apply to the church! Although it is not a direct fit \(as we indicated when we said the field is not the church\), the rhyming](#)

nature of history and the universality of spiritual truth guarantees that there is some application to our present era. In the church age there is gospel preaching, just like in the Old Testament era and the Tribulation there will be preaching of good news about God and His kingdom. The devil is busy just the same today as he is in all eras of history. Jesus is busy today, just as in all eras of history. Although some details are different, and we have some new revelation that came after Matthew 13 to fill in other details, this parable applies quite directly to today. The church has the challenge of tares just like it is taught here.

- F. So, are you a wheat or a tare? Are you a son of the kingdom or a son of the wicked one? Do you hold ultimate allegiance to Jesus or to the world and the flesh and the devil?
- G. The righteous shine in the kingdom because they share in and reflect the radiant glory of Jesus Christ who has redeemed them. Other texts that speak of a shining light include Luke 1:78-79 which speaks of a shining light that glows upon those who are saved by the Lord; John 1:5 speaks of Jesus as the uncomprehended light which shines forth in the darkness; Matthew 4:13-16 concerns those in the presence of Christ when he moved his residence to Capernaum; Daniel 12:1-3 explains that dead will be raised, and some will shine like the brightness of heaven in the kingdom of Christ. 2 Cor. 4:6 explains salvation in terms of light of knowing Christ and thus the glory of God. The prophetic word of God is to us like a light that shines in the darkness of the world (2 Peter 1:19). We must pay heed to that word until the "day dawns and the morning star rises" which refers to the coming of Christ and His kingdom. Psalm 119:105 that teaches us the word of God is a lamp and a light for our lives.
- H. We must note that those who do the sorting and casting into the furnace are **angels**, *not people*. This parable is the exact opposite of a call to believers to root out the unbelievers before the time. The tares are to be allowed to remain. We do not convert by the power of the sword, nor kill those who do not believe to send them to an early judgment. That is God's business, not ours. Ours is to be robust wheat plants, and convert as many tares as we can by

the preaching of the gospel. And yes, our business is to put up with some tares and their foolishness in this age. The inquisitions of the so-called Christian church and the jihad of the Muslims are negative examples which God absolutely does NOT condone, teach, or support. God will sort out everything in the end.

I. Another note about timing. Many have used this parable to say that we are presently in the kingdom of heaven, and that the kingdom of heaven is characterized by a mixture of believers and unbelievers. Then some add that this is distinct from the kingdom of God, which contains only believers. To the contrary, while there are kingdom sons and devil sons present in this church age, we are not in the kingdom age. We are in the church age. The bigger picture of the parable is that there is a preparatory phase (growth of the wheat) and then there is a judgment phase (the harvest). It is at this end point where the meaning of the parable comes into focus. The tares are removed so as to not enter into the kingdom; and the wheat is gathered into the kingdom "barn" so to speak. That's when the kingdom is inaugurated with Christ on its throne. Right now, in the church, we are still in the growing phase.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude as did Jesus. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" If you have any spiritual hearing, turn up the hearing aid and pay attention! Listen to the words of Jesus in the Bible. Pay attention and figure out if you are a wheat or a tare.

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