

Kingdom Parables

Parable of the Tares

III. The Parable of the Tares - Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43

A. The Central Point of the Parable

The theme of the Parable of the Tares is that the interim, external Kingdom of God is composed of both true and false believers.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

These are just listed briefly since most of the discussion regarding each of these elements will be dealt with in the next section.

An interesting historical note is that this parable describes a somewhat common event. In fact, Roman law stipulated a specific penalty for oversowing a field with weeds.

1. The Man Who Owns the Field

The man in this parable, as in the other two "Seed" Parables, is the one who has sowed the seed. Unlike the other two, however, the man is identified for us in this parable.

2. The Seed

Same point as #1 above.

3. The Field

In all three "Seed" Parables, the field is the environment which allows the seed to grow, or in the case of the Parable of the Sower, ultimately causes the destruction of the seed.

4. The Crop

The crop is what the field was to produce, that is, fruit.

5. The Tares

The tares is what the field brought forth that was not originally intended.

6. The Servants

These are the men that cultivate the field and perform the work at harvest time. Note that these servants were intimately interested in the fruitfulness and quality of their work. They were as shocked as the owner was when the tares appeared.

7. The Enemy

This is the man who comes in at night and oversows the field with weeds.

8. The Reapers

These are the men that will ultimately harvest the grain. It is important to note that the reapers are a distinct group from the servants. This is stated in Matthew 13:30.

9. The Harvest

This is described as the time of reckoning. It is at this point that the true crop and the tares are separated, the crop to the barns, and the tares to the fire.

10. The Barn

This is the ultimate destiny of the crop. It is the storage place that the fruit will be kept until such time as needed.

11. The Fire

In contrast to the barn, a place of safety, the fire is seen as the destiny of the tares. Since they are good for nothing, they will be burned.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

None

D. Interpretation of the Parable

This Parable, as the Parable of the Sower, is somewhat easy to interpret since Jesus Himself tells us what it means.

1. The Man Who Owns the Field

Matthew 13:37 definitely states that the owner is the Son of Man. This term, Son of Man, is a title that Christ often used to speak of himself. In fact, it is used in the New Testament almost exclusively by Jesus to refer to himself. Therefore, the sower is Jesus.

This parable can not be understood without realizing the two sides of the predestination paradox. The Bible clearly teaches that God sovereignly chooses those whom he will save. It also very clearly teaches the human responsibility to respond to the call to salvation. The Parable of the Sower gives the human side, the Parable of the Tares gives the divine side.

Note that although this man owned the field, the servants were probably the ones that actually sowed the seed. This squares with the other two seed parables in which we find the seed being sowed by anyone proclaiming the gospel.

2. The Seed

Matthew 13:38 defines the good seed as being the children of the kingdom. This term is used by Christ here, and elsewhere, to refer to those true believers who are part of the true Kingdom. Hence, the good seed is true believers.

It is at this point we see a breakdown when one tries to interpret the parable allegorically, that is, each point in the parable must relate to one, and only one, point in real life. The breakdown is the simple fact that at one time all of us were tares. It is by the sovereign act of God in salvation that transforms one from a tare to wheat.

3. The Field

The field is stated to be the world in Matthew 13:38.

There are those who try to make the field be something else, like the church. To make this interpretation is to say that Jesus did not know the difference between the words "world" and "church."

Additionally, to make the above interpretation is to put oneself into a position against church discipline. This runs counter to many passages in the New Testament.

Note that the field belongs to the owner. It is his field just as the world is God's world.

4. The Crop

The crop, produced from the good seed, is defined as being the children of the Kingdom in Matthew 13:38.

It is reasonable to use the term "crop" as being synonymous with "good seed" in this parable since it is the good seed that produces the good crop.

One of the essential points to see in this parable is that the good seed grows alongside the tares. This means that in the visible Kingdom of God, there are both true and false believers. More will be said on this in point 5.

5. The Tares or Darnel

The tares are defined as the children of the wicked one in Matthew 13:38.

The term "wicked one" means "the evil one." It is a term often used to speak of Satan. See Matthew 6:13 and Matthew 13:19.

The term "children of the wicked one" refer to all who have not submitted to Christ and as a result received salvation.

The two kinds of plants, tares and wheat, show graphically that there are only two kinds of people in the word, children of the Kingdom, or children of the wicked one.

As was pointed out in #4 above, the tares are seen as growing alongside the wheat. It is sad, and frightening, to know that many people who profess to be part of God's Kingdom actually are not. Mere profession means nothing.

6. Servants

The servants can be interpreted as being those who have sowed the seed as well as those in charge of cultivating the crop.

Again, if we interpret this parable allegorically, we have problems at this point. If the servants are those who sow the seed, how can they also be wheat?

The solution to this problem is to bypass the seeming discrepancy and concentrate on the central truth of the parable. This is one of the times when strict allegorical interpretation causes problems. The important issue is that the wheat are the children of the Kingdom and have been sown in the world. How they have been sown there is really not the main point of this parable.

That the servants are those who sow the word is based on the following reasons:

- It fits in with the interpretation of the other two “seed” parables.
- The man who owns the field is not specifically stated as planting the seed himself. If he was, the mention of the servants is a superfluous issue.
- The servants ask the man if he wishes them to pull out the tares. His reply is that the reapers will separate the crops. Since the reapers are identified as angels in Matthew 13:39, the servants cannot be the angels. That only leaves men.

7. The Enemy

The enemy is identified as Satan in Matthew 13:39.

Note that the desire of Satan is to destroy the work of God.

8. The Reapers

The reapers are defined in Matthew 13:39 as the angels.

In scripture we find that the angels have several responsibilities, one of which is to carry out the judgments of God. In the Old Testament we find one angel wiping out the army of the Assyrians. In Matthew 24 and 25 we find the angels as participating in the judgment of the Nations and the Jews at the time of Christ's Second Coming. In Revelation we find the angels time and time again involved in the judgment of God.

We need to realize that it is not our place to execute judgment on sinners. That prerogative belongs to Christ and his angels.

The above point is seen in the fact that the owner of the field did not allow the servants to pull up the tares lest they pull up wheat also. We lack the divine insight to discern between the true and the false. Only God knows those that are his. If we take upon ourselves the role of judges, we might inadvertently pull up wheat instead of tares.

Please note that the above point does not rule out church discipline. It does rule out condemnation of the sinner, not condemnation of the sin.

9. The Harvest

The harvest is defined as the end of the age, that is, the Second Coming in Matthew 13:40.

The period of the Second Coming is often referred to as the harvest. Paul uses this illustration in 1 Corinthians 15 to speak of the resurrection of the believers.

Note that the judgment of unbelievers takes place at the time of the Second Coming. This judgment is the judgment on the visible kingdom of God as a whole. For individuals, this judgment takes place at death. However, Christ is not giving this parable to speak of individuals, but of the external and visible kingdom as a whole.

A good passage that describes the harvest better is Matthew 24 and 25.

10. The Barn

The barn is identified with the Kingdom of God in Matthew 13:43.

The Kingdom of God is a place of eternal rest and service for all who have received the salvation God offers. In that Kingdom, there are no tares or any other thing that offends.

11. The Fire

The fire is identified as hell in Matthew 13:42.

The phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” refers to the eternal torment of those who are assigned to hell. Although the New Testament describes hell as a place of fire, it is probably a lot worse than we can imagine. We are bound by concepts that we can understand.

Note that God knows those that are his. No tare will ever get into the Kingdom even as no wheat will ever get into hell.

E. Application of the Parable

1. This parable teaches that the visible Kingdom of God is made up of both true and false believers. They may look alike for a while, but ultimately the difference will be made manifest.
2. It is not our place to condemn the sinner. We can condemn the sin, but never the sinner. God has reserved judgment for himself and the angels.

3. There are only two destinies for men. The barn, which is a picture of heaven, or the fire, which is a picture of hell.
4. Contrary to what many believe, torment in hell is real and eternal. The teaching that hell is only temporary is not true.
5. God knows those that are his. No wheat will ever get into hell, and no tare will ever be allowed into heaven.