

LEAVE THEM BE
Parable 22: The Wheat and the Tares
Mt 13:24-30; 36-43; [Net] 13:47-50

I. ILLUSTRATIONS—IMPATIENCE

Red Light Crashes

Average wait at light—50 seconds
18 persons killed each week in red-light crashes
National cost for running lights—\$5 billion

Train-car Collisions—5 persons will die next week

Phillip Brooks (1835-93), New England Episcopal preacher and lyricist of ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’, was known for calmness and poise. But friends knew he, too, suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him pacing the floor like a caged lion. “What is the trouble Dr. Brooks?” he asked. Brooks replied, “The trouble is that I’m in a hurry, but God isn’t.”

II. BACKGROUND

A. RESISTANCE AND REJECTION—MATTHEW 9-15

1. PHARISEES OPPOSITION—eating with sinners and tax collectors—**Mt 9**
2. JOHN’S DISCIPLES—question Him about not fasting—**Mt 9**
3. JESUS WARNED THEM OF FRUSTRATION AND DANGER—**Mt 10**
 - o *Shake the dust off your feet*
 - o *I send you out among wolves*
4. REBUKE AGAINST UNREPENTANT CITIES—Chorazin and Bethsaida—**Mt 11**
5. PHARISEES OPPOSITION—**Mt 12**
 - o Disciples **picking grain** on Sabbath
 - o Healing **withered hand** on Sabbath
 - o Exorcising demons—by **Beelzebub**
 - o **Demanding a sign** from Him—again in Mt 16
6. REJECTION AT NAZARETH—**Mt 13**
7. JOHN’S EXECUTION—**Mt 14**
8. ABANDONMENT AFTER FEEDING 5000—**Mt 14/Jn 6**
9. SCRIBES AND PHARISEES COMPLAIN—about not keeping purity code—**Mt 15**

B. INTERNAL MURMURING

- JEALOUS—about others performing miracles—**Mk 9:38-41**
- INDIGNANT—about Syrophenician woman’s persistence—**Mt 15:21-23**
- GRUMBLING—about His eating with Zacchaeus—**Lk 19:7**

C. IMPATIENCE ABOUT DELAYED ACTION

- JOHN'S PROCLAMATION—*The axe is already laid against the roots*—Mt 3:10
- JAMES AND JOHN—wanted to call down fire in Samaria—Lk 9:54
- PETER, JAMES, JOHN, ANDREW—asked for signs of end times—Mk 13

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mt 13:24-30; 36-43

24 *Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'*"

36 *Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 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, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT OF MATTHEW 13

1. SEVEN PARABLES—ABOUT KINGDOM—ITS GROWTH AND VALUE—Matthew 13
 - Sower
 - Tares and Wheat
 - Mustard Seed
 - Leaven
 - Hidden Treasure
 - Costly Pearl
 - Dragnet

2. THREE 'SEED PARABLES'—**Matthew 13**

- o **Sower**—seed is—the **word**
- o **Tares/wheat**—seed is—the **people**
- o **Mustard Seed**—seed is—the **kingdom**

3. JESUS EXPLAINED ONLY FOUR PARABLES

- a. Three—here in **Matthew 13**
 - **Sower**—**vv18-23**
 - **Tares and Wheat**—**vv36-43**
 - **Dragnet**—**vv49-50**
- b. Only explanation outside **Matthew 13**
 - **Uprooted Plant**—**Mt 15:12-20**

4. TWO SETS OF TWIN PARABLES—in **Matthew 13**

- a. The **value** of the Kingdom
 - **Hidden Treasure**—and—**Costly Pearl**
- b. The **nature** of the Kingdom of Heaven—in the world
 - **Tares and Wheat**—and—**Dragnet**
 - Meaning and application are similar
 - These bracket **Hidden Treasure** and **Costly Pearl**

5. THE PARABLE TWIN OF THE TARES/WHEAT—THE DRAGNET—**vv47-50**

47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; 48 and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. 49 So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, 50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

B. PURPOSES OF TARES/WHEAT PARABLE

- TO INFORM—Kingdom of Heaven has begun
- TO SHOW— relationship between this Kingdom and the world
- TO EXPLAIN—origin and continued existence of sin in the Kingdom
- TO WARN AND PROMISE—the harvest is coming to complete the Kingdom

C. PARABLE AND EXPLANATION

1. STRUCTURE

- a. **Parable**—**vv24-30**
 - Setting—Jesus spoke to the **crowd**—**v24a**

- Sowing good seed—**v24b**
 - Sowing bad seed—**v25**
 - Both seeds growing together—**v26**
 - Why the bad seed—**vv27-28a**
 - Leave them be—**vv28b-29**
 - The harvest—**v30**
- b. **Explanation—vv36-43**
- Setting—Jesus spoke to His **disciples—v36**
 - Seven metaphors explain the parable—**vv37-39**
 - Apocalyptic significance—focuses on harvest—**vv40-43**
2. TWO SETTINGS—**verses 24 and 36**
- a. Jesus spoke **first**—to the crowd—**v24a**
- b. **Later**—only to His disciples—gathered in ‘the house’—**v36**
1. Reason—*when he was alone with them, he explained everything*—**Mk 4:34**
 2. ‘The house’—same as **13:1**
 - ☆ Where Jesus defined his family—who did His Father’s will—**Mt 12:46–50**
 - ☆ Probably Peter’s home in Capernaum—**Mt 8:14–15**
3. SOWING GOOD SEED—**vv24b**—and—**vv37-38**
- a. God’s kingdom—**has started—vv37-38**
1. The ‘Kingdom of Heaven’—is the setting—**v24**
 - Already begun by the Son of Man—Jesus—who *is sowing* the seed—**v37**
 - So—the kingdom has already begun
 2. This kingdom—includes ‘the field’—**v24**
- b. The field—is the **world—v38**
1. *Not* just the church
 2. It contains **both** good and bad seed—**v38**
- c. So—the Kingdom of Heaven—here on earth—includes both kinds of people
- **Sons** of the kingdom—and **sons** of the evil one—**v38**
4. SOWING BAD SEED—**v25**—and—**v38**
- a. Tares = ‘bearded darnel’ = *lolium temulentum*
1. Type of ryegrass—that can carry poisonous fungus
 2. Amount of tares—was great
 - A few weeds were normal—unavoidable
 - For workers to take notice—number must have been significant

3. But—farmers took special care—to make sure seed was unmixed
 - So—this was not accidental—but intentional
 - b. **An enemy has done this!**
 1. The only logical explanation
 2. **Enemies actually did this**
 - Many ancient accounts—Arabia, India, Ireland, England
 - Mixed seed destroyed land productivity—many years—even permanently
 - Laws provided heavy penalties for damages
5. GROWING TOGETHER—**v26**
- a. Bearded darnel—**looks exactly like** wheat in early stages
 - Cannot tell difference until head formed
 - By then—roots were intertwined with wheat
 - b. **Three ways**—to **separate** them
 1. Let darnel grow—if infestation great—it grows lower than wheat
 - Reap wheat above darnel—then burn the whole field
 2. Reap them into separate bundles—and burn only the darnel
 3. Reap together and separate seed by hand—usually by women
 - Darnel was slate grey—instead of wheat-colored
6. WHY THE BAD SEED—**vv27-28a**—and—**v39a**
- a. The **enemy** = the devil—has sown it—**v39a**
 - God has allowed Satan certain liberty
 - b. Satan is determined to spoil God’s creation
 - **Here—he plants** evil seed (people) in society
 - Parable of **Sower—he snatches** seed of the word from people
7. LEAVE THEM BE—UNTIL THE HARVEST—**vv28b-30a**
- a. **Result**—two kinds of ‘sons’ grow in society
 - b. Sons will be identified—by their fruit
 1. Remember Jesus’ words—Sermon on Mount
 - By their fruit you will recognize them—**Mt 7:15-20**
 2. Sons of the **kingdom**—will bear good fruit—**wheat**
 3. Sons of the ‘**evil one**’—will bear bad fruit—**weeds**
 - **For example—Judas Iscariot**
- Jn 6:70-71—*Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil? Now he meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.***

Lk 22:3—*And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.*

c. Implications

1. Christ's universal **dominion**

➤ He is sovereign over all society—mixed 'field'—of good and bad

2. God's **tolerance** and general grace

➤ Bad seed will flourish for a while

➤ Agrees with Jesus' statement—*the Father sends rain on the just and the unjust*

8. THE HARVEST—**v30b**—and—**vv39-43**

a. The kingdom will be fulfilled—**v30b**

1. The Good Sower—the Son of Man—will complete His kingdom—**v41**

2. Lead agents = His angels—will do the reaping—**vv39, 41**

3. Explained more fully in

➤ Jesus' prediction of end times—**Mt 24—Mk 13—Lk 21**

➤ Paul's reassurance—and warnings—**I and II Thessalonians**

b. Two aspects

▪ Judgment and punishment—**vv41-42**

▪ Eternal righteousness and glory—**v43**

D. MAIN POINTS

1. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAS BEGUN

- God has kept His promise—established His kingdom of righteous people
- Evil is present—and the kingdom is imperfect—but not forever
- Evil will be dealt with in the final judgment

2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KINGDOM AND THE WORLD

a. Kingdom includes the 'field' of the world—mixed with good and bad seed

- Parable focuses on—**mixed nature** of the kingdom—and **waiting on God**
- **Not about ethical problems** of sinful behavior in the Kingdom
- **Does not teach individual predestination** of good and bad persons

b. Disputed historical interpretation and application

1. Situation—4th century

- Everyone in society—'the field'—was required to belong to the state-church
- Classic dispute—between Augustine and Donatists

2. Augustine

- a. Said 'field' was the church—which included 'tares'—heretics
- b. Keep everyone in state-church—do not uproot tares—try to redeem them
- c. Required Donatists to belong to state church—and tried to restore them
- d. **Advantage:** be patient and tolerant
 - ☆ Fits Jesus' warning—do not be judgmental—Mt 7
- e. **Problems:**
 - ☆ **Laxity**—ignores Jesus' command to exercise church discipline—Mt 18
 - ☆ **Compelling**—those outside the state-church to conform

3. Donatists

- a. Separatist Christians—resisted belonging to Catholic state-church
 - b. Said 'field' was secular society—where everyone lived—good and bad
 - c. State church should not persecute outsiders—Christian or non-Christian
 - d. **Advantage:** emphasized **discipline** within church—which was only good seed
 - e. **Problem:** severe **judgmentalism**—harsh legalism
- c. Jesus' clear teaching—v37
- **The field is the world**—church and secular society—with mixed seed
- d. Implications
- Jesus did not justify a **state church**—and lax discipline within it
 - Jesus did not justify a **theocracy**—with church forcing its views on society
 - The church—**separate** from society—must exercise **discipline** within its ranks

3. THE ORIGIN AND CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SIN

- a. This parable is a **theodicy**
 1. Vindication of divine goodness and providence in the face of existing evil
 2. It answers the following questions
 - Where does sin come from?
 - Why is there evil and suffering?
 - If God is good, omnipotent, omniscient—why is evil present?
 - If the kingdom is present—why does it not dominate society?
- b. Answers—provided
 - God has given **Satan liberty**—for a season—to operate in this world
 - God has given **humans free will**—to choose between being—good seed or bad seed
 - **Satan is bent on destroying** God's creation—and evil is inevitable in this world
 - **God is longsuffering**—but eventually will punish evil—and reward righteousness

4. THE HARVEST IS COMING

a. The Son of Man will complete His kingdom—with two sets of results

- Judgment—and eternal punishment
- Righteousness—and eternal glory

b. **Judgment**—and eternal **punishment**

1. Parallels John the Baptist's proclamation

Mt 3:12—*His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

2. Furnace of fire—comes from **Dan 3:6**

Not shadowy *Sheol* or *Hades*—but fiery *Gehenna* or *Hell*

3. Hell is **real**—and **permanent**

- Definite articles—**the** furnace and **the** fire—make this a specific place
- **Lake of Fire**—**Rev 19 and 21**
- Eternal fire—prepared for devil and his angels—**Mt 25, Mk 9**
- Eternal punishment—**Mt 25**

4. Eternal misery

a. **Weeping and gnashing of teeth** = bitter disappointment/anguish—7 references

b. **Five parable** references—**disobedient** or **unprepared** or **unproductive**

- ☆ This one—the bad seed—tares
- ☆ Dragnet—bad fish—**v50**
- ☆ Wedding guest improperly attired—**Mt 22**
- ☆ Unfaithful servant abusing fellow servants—**Mt 24**
- ☆ Unproductive servant—parable of talents—**Mt 25**

c. **Two non-parable** references—**presumptuous** people

- ☆ Children of the kingdom [Israel]—relying on lineage—**Mt 8**
- ☆ Those who say they followed Jesus—but did not obey—**Lk 4**

c. **Righteousness**—and eternal **glory**

1. The Kingdom of their Father—**v43**

- Finished when Jesus will turn everything over to the Father—**I Cor 15:24**

2. Kingdom of **light**—**not fire**

a. Allusion to Daniel's vision

Dan12:3—*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*

b. Foretaste—**Jesus' Transfiguration**—His shekinah glory

V. APPLICATION

A. BE ENCOURAGED—IN KINGDOM WORK

- The kingdom is **present** and working—in midst of a mixed good-evil society
- Even in a sinful world—God's limitless **grace** is active and at work
- Jesus is **sovereign** over all society—and works alongside us in the kingdom
- We are not ultimately responsible for **defeating evil**—**God does this**—and will do it
- **Be engaged** in the current battle to reform and transform society

B. BE REALISTIC—ABOUT EVIL AND SIN

1. **Evil is real**—and present—and **will continue**—until the end
2. Watch how we speak of God being '**in control**'
 - God is not to be blamed for everything
 - He is not responsible for evil—it is the work of the 'enemy'
3. **Satan will continue** to sow evil—that is inevitable
4. But we must **remain vigilant**—and never give up

C. BE CAREFUL—HOW THE CHURCH WORKS IN THE WORLD

- We should work to reform society—yes
- But **not forcibly** using political means to dominate society—by **theocracy**
- Not promoting a **state-church**—or taking state support—absorbing the 'field' of society
- We **preach** the gospel—and **God brings** people from the 'field' into the kingdom
- We **transform** the world—by working in the 'field' to **prevent** the sowing of evil

D. CALL PEOPLE TO PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND READINESS

1. Though **judgment** may be delayed—it certainly will come—eventually
2. We must impress on others—they have a **choice** to make
 - **Either** be kingdom children bearing fruit—or evil children producing weeds
 - **Either** inherit the promise of eternal blessing—or reap the fruit of eternal judgment

VI. INVITATION

OPEN MY EYES

**Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me
Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God, Thy will to see**

Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.

**Open my ears, that I may hear voices of truth Thou sendest clear
And while the wave notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God Thy will to see
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine**

**Open my mouth, and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere
Open my heart, and let me prepare love with Thy children, thus to share
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God, Thy will to see
Open my mouth, illumine me, Spirit divine**

**Open my mind, that I may read more of Thy love in word and deed
What shall I fear while yet Thou dost lead? Only for light from Thee I plead.
Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God Thy will to see
Open my mind, illumine me, Spirit divine.**