

The parable of the wheat and the tares appears to read very straightforwardly to us, but is full of surprises and has to be treated with caution, as we have found out. We will discuss much more of it when we look at Jesus' explanation of the parable, but for now, it is of crucial importance that we find the perspective which enables us to hold this parable about a 'future' harvest alongside the other parables and teaching of Jesus which talk of harvest in a 'present' sense.

There is a great deal at stake. I have heard little discussion of this text today which goes beyond a straight fight between these two camps; should we fulfil Jesus' call to the disciples to 'cast out demons', or should we leave all deliverance until the end times? However, as we have seen, a simple application of a standard Gospel principle which relates the present to the future and is illustrated in the life of Jesus completely explains the problem. Neither does it 'explain it all away', because the explanation given by this study presents the Christian with clear Gospel challenges for both deliverance ministry and mission.

It should also not be forgotten that Jesus was probably commenting upon the evil of the Jew's rejection of Him as Messiah, and whatever evil or good there was in Israel would be dealt with by the Father at the end of all time, not by us. The division between Jew and Gentile over Christ will remain amongst God's people for all time, but it does not stop individual people responding to the call of Christ, Jew or Gentile. Within the church of Christ, all things are possible, and they point to His glorious future.

Space for notes

\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_
\_\_\_\_\_

Questions (for use in groups)

- 1. What did you think the plain meaning of the parable was, before you did this study? In what ways did this study add to your understanding of it?
2. Do you agree with the way the study dealt with the problem of interpreting this text? Are there other realistic or logical alternatives?
3. Are you comfortable with deliverance ministry? Would you prefer this parable to simply forbid the casting out of demons? Why?

Discipleship

The whole issue of deliverance ministry and the casting out of demons is one that causes great unease amongst God's people. It would benefit us all if we were to back off from the fear and suspicion that surrounds the subject, and simply accept that in Christ we have all authority to deal with evil, and absolutely no need to fear. All manner of evil could then be dealt with as a testimony to the world of the work of God's Kingdom.

Final Prayer

Confess your sins, and know, in Christ, that your sins are forgiven.

.....

Pray to the Lord as you are led, concluding with

Thank You Lord, for saving me. AMEN

Prayer

Glorious Lord, break through the clouds of our darkened, broken world, and shine the light of Your Glory on the troubled and difficult problems of this world. By the power of Your Spirit, give us the courage to follow where Your light shines, and so be part of the solutions rather than the problems. Thank You Lord, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Sports in Schools

Pray for sports played in your own locality and the facilities in which they are played. Think for a moment about all the golf clubs, tennis clubs, running tracks, school sports field etc that are around where you live, and pray for their proper use and maintenance for the good of society.

Meditation

I love You Lord, this and every day. My feelings
Are too complicated for simple words; I start with sadness,
For people in the world say that those who believe in God are weak,
And need a 'prop'. I know it's just an insult,
Designed to make me feel insecure, when the real truth
Is that I am most secure in You who makes me
Fully human; deciding, feeling, learning, growing, experiencing
Everything it means to be most fully human;
For the Christ who made the Universe was also one of us.
Why are they jealous because I have a friend called Jesus?
Those who say they need no prop had better sort themselves out well
Before the End.

Bible Study - Text

24 Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like someone who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26 So, when the wheat sprouted and formed ears, weeds also appeared. 27 The owner's servants came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where then did these weeds come from?" 28 "An enemy has done this," he replied. The servants asked him, "Do you want us then to go and pull them up?" 29 "No," he answered, "in case you root up the wheat while you are pulling up the weeds. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters; Collect the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat into my barn."

Review

This parable is traditionally known as the parable of the 'wheat and the tares'. It is an extraordinary picture story which follows on directly from the parable of the sower and its explanation (Matt 13:1-23). Jesus, however, had just told the disciples that parables were to be the way that he spoke to the crowds and taught them (13:10-13), and that he would give them a private explanation later, which is exactly what happened. We must imagine Jesus turning to address this parable to the crowds on the seashore, and the disciples listening, waiting for Jesus to tell them what he meant. This was no simple parable which anyone might understand, and if we did not have Jesus' explanation (13:36-43) we might give any number of explanations. In order to study it today, I have given below the text of Jesus' explanation, and in the body of

our study we will look at the broad themes which it presents. When we come to study the explanation itself, then we will study the details of the explanation.

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain for us the parable of the weeds in the field." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; <sup>38</sup> the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather everything that causes sin and all who do evil from out of his kingdom, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the red hot fire, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!

Please note that although I have called this the 'parable of the wheat and the tares', I have done so because this is its traditional name. The translation I have given talks of 'wheat' and 'weeds', because it is uncertain as to what the weeds actually were. There has been much debate as to what the weeds were, possibly a plant called 'darnel', but we will look at this issue more closely when we study the details of Matthew 13:36-43.

Enormous controversy surrounds the interpretation of this parable because it touches on an issue very close to home, which is 'how to deal with evil today'. But we must remember that Jesus originally told the parable to explain why people had rejected Him, following the problems He had with the authorities in Matthew 11 and 12. The parable of the sower offered one answer to this, but by telling this parable, He found it necessary to tell us of the work of an 'enemy' (v25) who was ever present in the world and would never be removed until the end times. This is the clear and plain meaning of both this parable and its later explanation by Jesus. But as soon as we try to draw any conclusions from this about how we deal with evil in the world today, then it seems that Jesus gives no answer except to leave it alone!

### Going Deeper

There is much more to this parable, however, as we shall now find out. I also suggest that if you are reading this without having studied the parable of the sower previously, then you may find some of what follows surprising. I strongly suggest that you study Matthew chapter 13 'as a whole', and refrain from trying to explain one section without reference to the rest!

#### ***The problem of evil, and Harvests***

Some have taken this parable to indicate that good and evil should be left side by side in the church of the 'good soil' (see the parable of the sower) until the end of time when God will do the separating by His angels. However, Jesus' own interpretation rules this out immediately because the field in which this all happens is not the church, but the 'world' (see v38 above). Even so, some feel that the whole parable leaves us with a somewhat fatalistic attitude towards evil, for what is the point of doing anything about it if we are told by God to leave it to grow in our midst? There must be a deeper explanation.

To begin with, we should remember that Jesus was telling these parables to explain why the people around Him, in particular the Jews, rejected Him; His answer that 'an enemy has done this' (v28) raises a host of problems. You could say as some commentators do, that the demonic evil in this parable is the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. It is a bit close to the bone to assume a direct connection between the Jews and 'evil', as this invites unnecessary anti-Semitism; and I do believe that Jesus has more for us in this parable than that.

The previous parable of the sower which also concerned seed, soil and harvest, was about growth in the Kingdom rather than the 'end time' harvest, but the parable of the wheat and the tares is clearly about 'end times'. This is a broader subject than Jesus' rejection by the Jews, so what connection, if any, was in His mind between regular harvests (the parable of the sower) and the final harvest (the wheat and the tares)?

When the Master, in the parable of the wheat and the tares, told the servants not to separate the wheat and the weeds, does this mean we should not do anything about evil until the end of time? Elsewhere in scripture Jesus commanded His disciples to deal with evil by casting out demons (Matt 10:1 for example), and in the Lord's Prayer He told His disciples to pray for deliverance from 'evil' (in some translations, 'the evil one'), and this seems totally the opposite to what is said in this parable. If one scripture seems to contradict another then we need to ask ourselves serious questions about how we have read the texts concerned and what they really mean.

Some people prefer to live with the many contradictions that arise from reading the text of scripture without thinking about the problems, and this is noticeable amongst Christians who argue from this text about whether to cast out demons; one quoting this scripture to say 'no you shouldn't', and the others quoting Jesus' command in Matthew 10:1 and saying 'yes you should'. In trying to sort out this problem, I suggest that the command of Jesus to cast out demons (10:1) is crystal clear; yet the parables generally contain, by Jesus' own words (13:11) 'secrets of the kingdom', and we have not yet dug deep enough to uncover its secrets. However, we shall assume that Jesus did not mean to tell His disciples on one occasion that they should cast out demons, and then tell them later in a parable that they should not try to root out evil in their midst.

#### ***Connecting the future and the present***

There is one general Gospel principle that will help us. It is clearly established in Matthew's Gospel, and it is evidenced right throughout the New Testament, and is essential if we are to sort out the problem of how to interpret the parable of the wheat and the tares.

This Gospel principle is twofold, and I call it the 'future / present principle'; firstly, Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God on earth and makes it real for us today, as He said in His sermon 'repent because the Kingdom of Heaven has come' (Matt 4:17). Secondly, from our perspective, what we experience of the Kingdom through Christ, is a small portion, glimpse or foretaste of the future glory of God's heavenly Kingdom; this is reflected in the writing of Paul, for example, who talks of the gift of the Holy Spirit today as a 'guarantee' of what is to come (2 Corinthians 5:5), or the writer of Hebrews who talks of Jesus as a 'promise' of future glory (Hebrews 7:22). The principle as a whole connects the future to the present through Christ, and for our search concerning the picture of 'harvest' in Jesus' parables, it indicates that the glory of the great end time Harvest should be experienced by us today, but in part only and through Christ alone.

At the very least, therefore, when Jesus describes the parable of the wheat and the tares as the final harvest of God in a few verses time (vv36-43), this also tells us something about the harvest of the Kingdom which God is reaping in our lives today. This all means the following, and I shall indicate in each conclusion whether it relates to the 'future' or the 'present'.

- Satan is never totally defeated until God alone separates all evil out from all good in His final harvest at the end time. It is the job of angels, not people. (Future)
- When Jesus told the servants in the parable of the wheat and the tares not to separate the two, He meant this; we cannot definitively defeat all evil in this world now, nor should we act and behave as if we can. It is God's work. (Present)
- What we can do is demonstrate that in the church, where Christ reigns (note that the parable of the wheat and the tares is about the world, not the church), evil can be defeated (Matt 10:1), demons cast out in His name, and the prayer 'deliver us from evil' (Matt 6:13) can be answered. (Present)
- The deliverance ministry we perform in the church and in Christ's name is a testimony to the world that God alone will one day defeat all evil, and its exercise is part of our mission and also our goal in the 'end time' harvest of the Kingdom. (Future)

### Application