

We conclude our study of Matthew's parables with Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and The Tares, particularly its disturbing lesson that the Christian church will experience false brethren in her midst. No wonder the disciples urgently ask about this parable in Matthew 13:36 at the first private moment. Jesus answers them just as patiently as He does us. When we are full of anxiety about the existence of evil, Christ always knows the word to sustain us in our battle with it – even when we meet it in the church, alas!

Monday: Read Matthew 13:36-42

Fortified by Forewarning

We begin by recalling some of the lessons from our earlier studies on the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. It is shocking that, even in the infancy of the First Century Church, false teachers crept in. This continues in the church on earth today. Almost as soon as Christ sows the seed of the Gospel, the Enemy seeks to sow seeds of false faith.

Jesus comforts His true church in their discouragement and overwhelm. Jesus promises an ultimate separation of the weeds from the wheat. On the Day of Judgment, the true church will be preserved and false brethren burned up. Even the “causes of sin” will be removed (vs.41). John Calvin well expresses this parable's promise of a final separation when he says:

Jesus speaks of a separation, in order to prevent the minds of the godly from giving way to uneasiness or despondency, when they perceive a confused mixture of the good along with the bad... Jesus intended to exhort those who believed in Him not to lose courage, because they are under the necessity of retaining wicked men among them...

Our minds therefore ought to be fortified with confidence; for the Son of God, who commands His followers to walk in the midst of stumbling blocks of false brethren, will unquestionably give us strength to overcome them all.

Meditate and Pray: May God give us poise and strength to persevere in this warfare against the wicked one and his servants – even when we encounter them planted in the church. May we learn to love the Church of Christ – even when we see her many imperfections and see her at times invaded by hypocrites. Sing about this with *Trinity Hymnal # 347*:

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.*

*She is from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.*

*The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish,
Is with her to the end:
Though there be those who hate her,
And false sons in her pale,
Against both foe or traitor
She ever shall prevail.*

*Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed:
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song!*

Tuesday: Read Matthew 13:34-38 and Mark 4:34**The Divine Permission of Evil**

We often hear the Twelve approaching Jesus to ask Him to clarify a teaching that has thrown them for a loop. In verse 36 when they ask Jesus to explain how the tares, described as “sons of the evil one,” can exist side-by-side with “sons of the kingdom,” the wheat in the parable. The Divine permission of evil is, indeed, a doctrine which unavoidably upsets all true believers.

Isn't it comforting to see Jesus withdraw from the crowds to focus upon personal teaching of His disciples? From now on, and increasingly in the rest of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will retire from the crowds in order to nurture the understanding of his own dear followers. He knows how to teach in such a way as to comfort His own, despite the presence of the wicked in the world and in the church.

Meditate and Pray: Let us rejoice today that the light of Jesus' instruction can never be dimmed by the dark presence of false professors in the church. True teaching from Jesus' lips always nourishes the sheep, despite the goats who trample truth under their unbelieving hooves. As the Good Shepherd, Christ promises to prepare a table for His sheep, “even in the presence of His enemies” (Psalm 23:5). He will make sure to deliver all the portions of His word necessary for our salvation!

Wednesday: Read Matthew 13:36-43**The Word, Forever Settled**

Jesus promises that so long as the church is on the earth, there will be hypocrites mixed in with the righteous. But this is not to say that Jesus is somehow slow and careless when it comes to confronting wickedness wherever He finds it. No, Jesus is determined to have a full harvest of all the elect from every tribe and nation on the Last Day – and will therefore, in Calvin's words, “...drive his plough through every country of the world, so as to scatter the seed of life throughout the whole world...” But this takes time. To use the symbolism of the parable, Jesus will not run the risk of harming the wheat of true faith by prematurely pulling up all the weeds of wickedness in the church or in the world!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God that in a real, prophetic sense, the “whole world” is Jesus' field (Matthew 13:38). He has asked for the nations as His inheritance (Ps. 2:8), and He will patiently wait for the growth of the wheat in those nations until each is ripe for harvest. There must needs be a “mixture” of godly and ungodly in the church visible on earth, because the offer of the Gospel goes out indiscriminately to hordes of pagans and unbelievers. Therefore, Christ is patient, not wanting any of the elect to perish (2 Peter 3:8-9). So He waits and endures evil until the full number of the elect are called and saved. Sing about His glorious determination to sow the seed so universally and victoriously, using *Trinity Hymnal* # 59:

*Forever settled in the heav'ns,
Thy Word, O Lord, shall firmly stand;
Thy faithfulness shall never fail;
The earth abides at Thy command.*

*Thy Word and works unmoved remain,
Thine every purpose to fulfill;
All things are Thine and Thee obey,
And all as servants wait Thy will.*

*I should have perished in my woe
Had not I loved Thy law divine;
That law I never can forget;
O save me, Lord, for I am Thine.*

*The wicked would destroy my soul,
But in Thy truth is refuge sure;
Exceeding broad is Thy command,
And in perfection shall endure.*

Thursday: Read Matt. 13:36-43 & 2 Tim. 2:17-20**Safe in Humble Dependence**

Almost as soon as Christ sows the seed of the Gospel, the enemy seeks to sow seeds of false faith. To comfort His true church in their shock at such false brethren growing up in their midst, Jesus promises an ultimate separation of the weeds from the wheat (Matthew 13:40-42).

However, it is not just Jesus who seeks to comfort the church as she struggles with evil in her midst. The Apostle Paul seeks to strengthen true believers in Ephesus who had stumbled because of the heresy taught by two leaders in that church, Hymenaeus and Philetus.

The way of error is downhill...when errors or heresies come into the church, the infection of one proves the infection of many, or the infecting of the same person with one error often proves the infecting of him with many errors.
Matthew Henry's Commentary

Paul reassures the church that God's saving knowledge of His elect will ensure that the true church will never perish: "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19 (ESV)

Meditate and Pray: Lord, purge us from falsehoods and limiting beliefs so that we can prove to be vessels of honor in your house. Thank you that those who come to you for cleansing will always find you willing.

Sing about the security which is promised us as God's elect in hymn # 463 in our hymnals: "A debtor to mercy alone":

*A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with Thy righteousness on, my person and off'ring to bring.
The terrors of law and of God with me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.*

*The work which His goodness began, the arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is Yea and Amen, and never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below or above,
Can make Him His purpose forgo, or sever my soul from His love.*

*My name from the palms of His hands eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains, in marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is giv'n;
More happy, but not more secure, the glorified spirits in Heav'n.*

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 13:36-43& 1 Corinthians 3:5-9**All is Safely Gathered In**

Christ's Kingdom does indeed stretch from "shore to shore." Christ will rule all the nations, and this is how we can understand Matthew 13:38's reference to "the whole world" being the field in which Jesus sows the seed of the Gospel.

But there is also a sense in which the "field" is the church, not world (1 Cor. 3:9). The gathering of the tares is not part of the harvest of true believers, because the tares are not God's chosen. They are outside God's Kingdom, and their gathering into bundles by the angels (Matthew 13:40-42) is a burning of weeds. Revelation 14:15-20 paints a picture of the church, harvested, while unbelievers are pressed down in the winepress of wrath. A sober reality, but which ought not dampen our joy at the thought of the harvest – for only then will we believers truly ripened into all we are destined to be! Then we will shine with the glory of God, as eternal wheat gathered into God's barn. Sing about this great day of harvest, and ask the Lord to increase your joyful confidence in that day, using *Trinity Hymnal* # 715:

*Come, ye thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home;
all is safely gathered in,
ere the winter storms begin.*

*God our Maker doth provide
for our wants to be supplied;
come to God's own temple, come,
raise the song of harvest home.*