

The Kingdom and the World

Scripture: Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Code: 2300

INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ is the ruler over this earth. The Old Testament tells us that God is the King of the universe: "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof..." (Ps. 24:1). In the book of Daniel it was confirmed that "the Most High God ruled in the kingdom of men" (Dan. 5:21). In His kingship over the earth, the Lord Jesus has allowed Satan and sinners a certain amount of freedom. Despite this freedom, He is still the ruling King.

Every phase of human history marks some facet of the rulership of Jesus Christ and God in the world. There is no period of time when the Kingdom of God is not in effect on the earth. Initially, God mediated His rule on earth through Adam. Then He mediated His rule through the patriarchs. After that, His rule was successively mediated through the monarchs, the priests and prophets, and the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. Then, in the early church, God mediated His will and rule through the apostles, by whom God brought revelation to man about His Kingdom. There's coming a future time when God will bring His rule to earth through the living, exalted, glorified, incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, in what we know as the millennial Kingdom. Finally, after that, the earth and the heaven will be merged in the eternal Kingdom, when the universal Kingdom and the mediated Kingdom on earth become one.

The Bible clearly delineates all of those elements of God's rule on the earth, with one exception--the period of time from the rejection of Christ to the return of Christ. We are living in that age now, and it too is ruled by Jesus Christ. The New Testament designates this form of the Kingdom as the mystery form, which was not revealed in the Old Testament. It is through the New Testament teaching of our Lord and the Apostle Paul that this age becomes defined for us. Jesus tells us what the character, the extent, the value, and the consummation of this period will be in a series of seven parables in Matthew 13. During this time, God is mediating His rule on the earth through His church, through believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

A. The Curiosity About the Kingdom

The disciples didn't know about this period of time, just as the Old Testament prophets weren't aware of it. Even after Jesus died on the cross, they were still curious about the Kingdom. Jesus had taught them much about the Kingdom--both before His death and after His resurrection. Their curiosity led them to ask Him in Acts 1:6, "...Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power" (v. 7). In other words, it wasn't for them to know when His Kingdom would be established. An angel did tell them, however, that "this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Ac. 1:11b).

B. The Confusion About the Kingdom

1. The Expectation

The disciples were told that the Kingdom would not come in its fullness until Christ came back. The Kingdom of glory, righteousness, and absolute holiness which the prophets anticipated--where the Lord Jesus will rule with a rod of iron and tolerate no evil--will not come until Christ's return. For now, there is a form of the Kingdom that is described as "the mystery" (Mk. 4:11). That was hard for the disciples to understand; it was a devastating truth to them. They weren't aware of any such form of

the Kingdom. They didn't know there would be a Kingdom that tolerated both good and bad people. They thought that there would be a full and glorious consummation in which the Kingdom of righteousness was established and unbelievers were devastatingly judged, punished, cast out, and destroyed. They saw what William Barclay calls "a new and stainless humanity" (And Jesus Said [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970], p. 39).

Having already heard the first parable, the disciples probably thought to themselves, "There are going to be three kinds of rejecters and one kind of genuine fruit-bearer. What's going to happen to the rejecters?" They may have thought that the blasphemous Pharisees in Matthew 12 who accused Jesus of being Satan were among the rejecters Jesus was talking about. They were probably asking Jesus, "What are You going to do to the rejecters? Are they going to be condemned?" They had good reason to think that, because they knew John the Baptist had said of Christ, "...He shall baptize you,,,with fire ["fire" being symbolic of judgment]; whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the granary, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11b-12). John the Baptist, the immediate forerunner of Jesus Christ, didn't even see that interim period. He announced that when Christ came, He would burn the chaff in a fire of judgment, and would keep the wheat. That's why the disciples thought that Christ's Kingdom would be set up immediately.

The disciples were trying to figure out what would happen to the three kinds of rejecters of Christ. When they asked Jesus in Acts 1:6, "...Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" they were really asking, "Is this the time when you're going to condemn those who have rejected You? Is this the time for their devastating judgment?"

2. The Explanation

In the second parable, starting with Matthew 13:24, the Lord tells the disciples what He is going to do with the unbelievers who are on the earth during the mystery form of the Kingdom. Again, with omniscience, the Lord tells a simple story, the truth of which is infinite. This parable has so many wonderful thoughts in it that I'm just going to have to scratch the surface in trying to explain it. In our study of this parable, we'll be looking at three things: The Narration, The Interpretation, and The Application.

I. THE NARRATION (vv. 24-30, 36)

A. The Parable Declared (vv. 24-30)

1. The Scene (v. 24)

"Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field"

This parable is about the Kingdom of heaven. The phrase "the kingdom of heaven" is synonymous with "the Kingdom of God." Jesus is talking about the mystery form of the Kingdom here. Now, the truth that the parable teaches is true of the age prior to the mystery form of the Kingdom, and will be true of the millennial Kingdom, but Jesus is specifically referring to the mystery form of the Kingdom. He says that this form of the Kingdom will be like a man who sowed good seed in his field. Notice that this man owns the field that he is sowing-- he's not borrowing it. In it, he sows "good seed," not mediocre or average seed.

2. The Sabotage (v. 25)

a. The Time of the Attack "But, while men slept..." Verse 25 indicates to us that the sower had a crew to help him. He must have been a wealthy man to be able to hire people to help him with the sowing. They were sleeping not because they were lazy, but because it was nighttime. A man who has worked hard has the right to enjoy his sleep. b. The Technique of the Attack "...his enemy came and sowed tares [Gk. zizania] among the wheat, and went his way." "Tares" were known by the people at the time as darnels, which are a weedy grass. The enemy came and sowed darnels among the wheat. The word "among" is a very strong Greek expression, and indicates that the enemy sowed

the darnels all throughout the wheat. After he was finished he left. You say, "What is the enemy doing?" One way for a person to destroy the crop of someone he doesn't like is to sow his field full of weeds. That was done often enough in those days that the Roman government had to have a law against it, and prescribe a certain punishment for violators. It was a great way of ruining your neighbor's crop, and that's exactly what the enemy in that verse did. He secretly oversowed the field with weeds, and having finished his awful deed, went off into the night.

3. The Surprise (vv. 26-27)

"But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From where, then, hath it tares?"

The servants who worked for the man were shocked when they saw the dandel growing. They wouldn't have been shocked if there were just a few of those darnels because they were a grassy weed common to the area. There were always a few weeds that had to be dealt with in every crop. The reason they were shocked was because the field was full of weeds.

4. The Solution (vv. 28-29)

"He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou, then, that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."

The servants, wanting to save the crop, help their master, and protect their livelihood, asked the master if they should pull out the weeds. When the heads of the crop become mature, the darnels take on a slate gray color, and thus can be differentiated from the wheat. The servants were saying, "We can tell the weeds from the wheat, and can go through the field to tear the weeds out." But the master said, "No, don't do that. The darnels are so many, and so close to the wheat, that if you try to pull out the darnels you'll root up the wheat with them."

5. The Separation (v. 30)

"Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." That is a very simple story, and easy to understand. But what does it mean? That's what the disciples wanted to know.

B. The People Dismissed (v. 36)

After telling the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus told two more parables. Starting in verse 36, Jesus proceeds to explain the parable of the wheat and the tares. We learn from the other Gospels that He had to explain all the parables because the disciples could not fully understand them (Mk. 4:10-11, 33-34; Lk. 8:9-10). But before explaining the parable, we read in verse 36 that "Jesus sent the multitude away." The only people that were left with Him were the disciples. Then He "went into the house [the same house He had left in Matthew 13:1, which was very likely Simon Peter's house in Capernaum (cf. Mt. 8:14)]; and His disciples came unto Him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field" (v. 36b). Just as Mark 4:10-11 says, only the Apostles and those who were believers got the explanations to the parables. God only revealed His truth to His own.

In the question the disciples asked, notice that they gave a title to the parable, which Jesus hadn't yet done. This shows that they knew what the main feature of the story was about: that the darnels did not belong in the field and that in the end they were going to be burned up. Now that they were alone with Jesus, they asked Him to explain the parable, because they were confused about the form of the Kingdom they lived in. Starting in verse 37, Jesus gives to them...

II. THE INTERPRETATION (vv. 37-43a)

A. The Characterizations Explained (vv. 37-39)

1. The Sower Identified (v. 37)

"He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man"

Who is "the Son of man"? Christ is the Son of man. "The Son of man" was a title that Christ used when referring to Himself. In fact, He used it more than any other title for Himself. There was only one time in the New Testament that the phrase was ever used by anybody else to refer to Him (Ac. 7:56). He used that title because it identified Him in His incarnation and His humanness. It identified Him as One who lived among us, the perfect man, the second Adam, and the representative of the human race. It is also a Messianic title: In Daniel 7:13 the Messiah is called "the Son of man." It is a marvelous title.

The Jewish leaders knew that it was a Messianic title. In Luke 22:69 Jesus said to the Sanhedrin, "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God." The Sanhedrin then asked Him, "Art Thou, then, the Son of God?..." (v. 70a). He called Himself "the Son of man," and they asked Him if He was "the Son of God." Their response shows that they must have known "the Son of man" was a Messianic reference.

The sower, then, is Jesus Christ. He's the farmer sowing the seed, and He's sowing it in His field.

2. The Field Identified (v. 38a)

"The field is the world..."

The Lord is sowing seed in the world, which is His field. He is the sovereign King of the earth. He holds in His hand the title deed to the earth, even though He hasn't really laid claim to it yet as He will at the end of the age when He unrolls the sealed scrolls in Revelation 6, and takes back the earth. Romans 8:22 says "the whole creation groaneth," waiting for Him to take possession of what is rightly His.

So, the Lord says that He is sowing seed in the world that belongs to Him. He made the world, and planted Adam and Eve in it. Even though Satan came along and usurped everything, the world still belongs to Christ. He created it, and will eventually reclaim it.

3. The Good Seed Identified (v. 38b)

"...the good seed are the children of the kingdom..."

This means that the Lord sows the children of the Kingdom in the world.

A Frequent Misinterpretation

You would be amazed how complex people have made this parable. Many commentators, in discussing this particular passage, say that the field is the church. They say that both tares and wheat are growing together in the church. But Jesus says here in verse 38 that "the field is the world." That is quite clear, isn't it? You say, "But you have to interpret what He meant when He said that." No, Jesus already made clear what He meant. He said that the field the sower was sowing in represents the world. Some people try to say that "the world" really means the church, and before you know it, someone will come along who will say it means the Baptist church, and someone after that will say it means the Baptist church over on that street corner. The verse does not say that the field is the church. The Lord said the field is the world. If He had meant that the field was the church, He would have used the word church.

If you make the field the church, you will end up with chaos in trying to interpret the parable. For example, when the servants ask, "Can we pull out the darnels?" and the Lord says, "Don't pull them out," that would mean that we have no right to discipline people in the church or expose a heretic. It would mean we have no right to deal with sin in the church, whereas in the Epistles we are told we can deal with sin in the church. Interpreting the field as being the church creates too many problems. Leave it the way the Lord interpreted it--the field is the world.

Jesus is saying that God sows the children of His Kingdom throughout the world. The disciples were able to understand that--the mystery form of the Kingdom was going to be an earthly one. God is going to plant His people all around the world.

The phrase "the children of the kingdom" is a marvelous phrase. We are the children of the Kingdom--the subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been planted in His world. That is a picture, not of the world in the church, but the church in the world. We who genuinely love the King and affirm His lordship are planted in the world by Him. We're not here by accident. We are planted by the Lord where He wants us. That tells us that we're not to be off in a monastery or a holy house or city, away from the world. I know of a man who wanted to build a sinless, holy city, and put a wall around it to keep sin out. However, we're not called to isolate ourselves. We've been planted throughout the world, and are here for two reasons:

a. To Perfect the Saints We have been placed in the world to be matured by the trouble that the world gives to Christians. 1) 1 Peter 5:10--"...after ye have suffered awhile, [the Lord will] make you perfect..." 2) John 16:33--"...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." 3) James 1:2-4--This passage says that it is the trials we experience in the world that mature us and build us up. The Lord plants us in the world to develop us. b. To Persuade the Sinners We have also been placed in the world to influence it. Now, a parable can only go so far before it breaks down as an analogy of spiritual truth, and this is the point at which it breaks down, but I still want to introduce this thought. We're in the world to be a good influence for the tares. Everybody who is wheat now once was tares. We were all bad seeds before we were converted. One person said that if you understand verse 38 in a Calvinistic sense regarding predestination, we were planted as good seeds and just grew as good seeds. That's not true. No matter what you believe about predestination, we were all bad from the beginning. The Lord puts us in the world to be matured by the pressure that it brings, and to influence the tares into becoming wheat. Our redemption must be at work in the world. That's why Jesus said to the Father in John 17, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one]" (v. 15). We're supposed to be in the world. Next, let's look at...

4. The Tares and the Enemy Identified (v. 38c-39a)

"...but the tares [Gk. zizania] are the children of the wicked one [Gk. ho poneros=the devil]; the enemy that sowed them is the devil..."

Satan is called "the wicked one" in several different places in the New Testament. The article "the" is emphatic there, indicating that he is the absolutely wicked one, and the wicked one of all wicked ones. The very foundation of his being is wretched; he is unmitigated darkness and error personified. Anybody who is not a child of the Kingdom is a child of the wicked one. There are only two kinds of people in the world: children of the Kingdom, and children of the wicked one. If you're not a child of the King through submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ, then you're a child of the devil. It's that simple. You are on his team, and you are functioning under his control. Ephesians 2 says that the unsaved are directed by the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience" (v. 2). That is discussed further in...

a. John 8:44--Jesus said here to the leaders of Israel, "Ye are of your father the devil...." b. 1 John 3:4-24--In this passage of Scripture, John contrasts the children of God and the children of the devil. Those are the only two kinds of people there are. It is true that there is relative evil within the category of the children of the devil, but they're all representative of Satan himself. c. 1 John 5:19--"...the whole world lieth in wickedness." The whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one. d. Matthew 5:37--This verse is often overlooked. In Matthew 5, the Lord is contrasting righteous behavior with unrighteous behavior. To sum up a point about what is right, He says at the end of verse 37, "...whatever is more than these cometh of evil." In other words, whatever contradicts or goes beyond God's law proceeds from the Evil One. That is a monumental theological statement. The origin of evil is the Evil One. God is not the author of evil. The Evil One is the enemy who oversowed the good field in the parable (Mt. 13:25). We see that in creation. God sowed children of the Kingdom: Adam and Eve. Then along came the enemy who oversowed, bringing the Fall of man. The sowing and the oversowing have continued through all of human history. Matthew 5:37 tells us that evil comes not

from God, but from the Evil One.

The Lord sows believers in the world, and Satan oversows his own children in the world. The world, then, is inhabited by both subjects of the King and subjects of the Enemy, who is the devil himself (The word "devil" in verse 39 is the Greek word *diabolos*, which means "enemy or adversary."). This co-mingling has been happening since the Fall, and will continue on through the mystery Kingdom. In verse 25, when Jesus talked of the enemy who came and sowed tares among the wheat, He used a very strong term that indicates that Satan has sowed his people everywhere. There are some parts of the world where there are nothing but tares. You'd have to look a long time to find wheat in those areas. He has sowed many tares, and he likes to sow them as close to the wheat as he can. He even sows tares in the church. We know that because in Matthew 7:21-23, we read about people who claim to have done good works for Jesus, but the Lord says to them, "...depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (v. 23b). Satan has his iniquitous workers sown in the church. The Bible instructs us to throw them out if we find them (Mt. 18:15-17).

In this parable Jesus tells us the way things are going to be in the mystery Kingdom. The Judases will be among the apostolate. We exist together, breathe the same air, eat the same food, drive the same highways, live in the same neighborhoods, work at the same factories, go to the same schools, visit the same doctors, entertain ourselves with the same entertainment, live under the same sky, and enjoy the same warm sun. Both the just and the unjust receive rain in this era because there will be a co-mingling until the end (Mt. 5:45). That brings us to verse 39:

5. The Harvest Time Identified (v. 39b)

"...the harvest is the end of the age..."

Why does Jesus say that? Because the disciples were ready to put the sickle to the tares.

Sometimes we feel like doing the same thing. When we see the wickedness of the world and the grief that it causes to the Lord's church, purposes, and people, we say, "God, why don't you come down and wipe out the world?!" David cried the same plea to God, asking God to destroy his enemies (Ps. 13:1-2; cf. Ps. 35). In Revelation 6:9-10 we see under an altar saints who had been slain, crying out to God, "How long will it be before You judge the earth?" However, through the parable, the Lord is saying, "Don't be impatient; the harvest waits until the end of the age." The phrase "the end of the age" appears several times in Matthew, and speaks of ultimate consummation in judgment--that final time when God judges the world (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20).

a. An Unnecessary Condemnation In verse 28 of the parable, the servants asked the householder, "...Wilt thou, then, that we go and gather them [the weeds] up?" The servants were saying, "We can tell the difference between the wheat and the tares, now that they have grown. Do you want us to pull out the weeds?" To that, the lord of the household said, "No, because if you pull out the darnels, you're liable to pull out some wheat, too" (v. 29). Jesus is simply saying that if we go about trying to judge the world, we're going to end up condemning Christians, because we lack divine insight. God didn't call the church of Jesus Christ to judge the world. He doesn't want us in a position of political power destroying unbelievers, because we don't have the discernment to know who truly is saved and who isn't saved. It is not the church's function to be pulling out the tares of the world. We have not been called to attack the world. As evidenced by this parable, the wheat and the tares are going to grow together. Satan is going to continue to sow and oversow in the church because he loves to deceive by imitation (2 Cor. 11:13-15). But it is not our responsibility to try to find those tares and rip them out. You'll notice in history that whenever the church became a political power, invariably it was prone to corrupt that power for the sake of destroying "the apostates." Such was the case in the Inquisition. John Foxe's Book of Martyrs tells of many martyrs of Christ that were slaughtered by people claiming to be Christians. During the Crusades, one of the most abysmal periods of human history, crusaders in Europe planned to take the holy places of Israel back from the Turks and, in the process, massacred people all across Europe. They claimed to be doing all of that in the name of Jesus Christ. In one village alone, they trampled three thousand Jewish people with their horses

because they said they were apostates.b. A Necessary Compassion¹) Imitating Christ's PatienceThis is not the age of judgment. What was the Lord Jesus Christ's attitude toward publicans and sinners? He treated them with meekness, love, and kindness. He didn't devastate Judas, even though He knew Judas would betray Him. He was patient, tolerant, and gracious. We are to act the same way. Those of us who are busy trying to destroy the darnels should remember that we, too, were once darnels. God knows there are still darnels that need time to become wheat. If we go out trying to destroy all the darnels, we put ourselves out of line with God's plan. The Lord knows which people will eventually be in the Kingdom. Speaking of Corinth, God told Paul, "...I have many people in this city" (Ac. 18:10).If we as a church act against the ungodly people of the world, then we would be interfering with God, who is patiently waiting for some of those people to come to Him. Our attitude is not to be one of damning the unbelievers of the world and praying that God would destroy them. We're to pray that God would save them. That's the proper attitude. That was the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ on the night He was betrayed. In John 13:26, Jesus dipped some food and gave it to Judas. Whenever a person did that, he was signifying that the person he gave the food to was an honored guest. Jesus was still showing His love for Judas. We are to act the same way in this age of grace.We cannot act as executioners. We must be loving, patient, and graciously tolerant, like our Lord was. Otherwise, if we try to act in judgment, we might end up sparing the rocky and weedy soils, and uprooting the wheat. We are to have a heart of compassion, not a heart of condemnation.²) Imposing Christianity's PrinciplesWe also cannot apply the spiritual principles that we live by in the Kingdom to the rest of the world. You can't say, "I wish worldly people would do what they should do." That's impossible for them, because they're doing the only thing they know how to do: behaving as children of the devil. If you try to enforce Christian standards upon the world, then you are casting your pearls before swine (Mt. 7:6). In the first few verses of Matthew 7 Jesus tells us that we are not to judge one another without carefully examining our own lives: Before we attempt to pull a splinter out of another person's eye, we are to get the two-by-four out of our own eye. Then in verse 6, He says in essence, "Don't do that with the world; that would be casting your pearls before swine." The same could apply to the whole Sermon on the Mount: We are not to take the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and try to enforce them on a society of ungodly people, because they can't apply them. Rather, we are to love them and call them to Christ.In a sense, we who are saved are in a precarious position because we are co-mingled with the world. But I don't think the Lord is greatly disturbed by that, because the nature of the wheat is that it cannot be changed. We may be next to the darnels, but they can't change our nature. But the converse is not necessarily true; the nature of the darnels can be changed by the influence of godliness. We are called, then, to be patient.

6. The Reapers Identified (v. 39c)

"...and the reapers are the angels."

In the parable, the householder told the servants, "Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn" (v. 30). Here in verse 39, Jesus says it is the angels who are called to be reapers. Christians are called only to act as a righteous influence, not to condemn the world. We are to preach against the world's sins, but we are also to love the world's sinners. We are to be gracious and patient with them. We are not God's executioners. If we were, we would end up making terrible mistakes like those that were made in past history.

The Bible says that God is going to judge men at the end of the age and the angels are going to be the reapers. We see throughout the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, that it is the angels whom God has called to reap. In Matthew 16:27 it says, "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels...." In Matthew 24:31 we are told that "He shall send His angels...and they shall gather together His elect...." The gathering of those to be judged will be done by the angels. In Revelation 14:15-19 and 19:14, we see that the angels are God's agents of judgment.

Jesus is saying through the parable, "You are the sowers. I'll have the angels do the reaping."

B. The Clarification Expressed (vv. 40-43a)

1. The Comparison (v. 40)

"As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this age." We have to wait until the King comes back with His angels before the reaping can occur. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 confirms this: "...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." You say, "When is that going to happen?" "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints..." (v. 10). When Christ comes to be glorified in His saints, that's when He will bring His holy angels and burn all the children of the wicked one in unquenchable fire.

2. The Condemnation (vv. 41-42)

a. The Gathering Together (v. 41a) "The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom..." The word "kingdom" refers to the whole world, which is His field. The angels will pull in the net, and gather everyone together. Augustine says of those in that gathering, "They are like unclean animals in the same ark with the clean, goats in the same pasture as sheep, bad fish in the same net with good ones, chaff on the same floor as grain, vessels to dishonor in the same house with vessels to dishonor...." b. The Casting Away (vv. 41b-42) "...all things that offend, and them who do iniquity [or 'lawlessness' (cf. Mt. 7:23)], and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." There is coming an inevitable judgment when the Lord will send His angels and pull out of the Kingdom all of those who offend Him. All of those who are sinful and unbelieving will be thrown into a furnace of fire. A death by fire is the most horrible death that a man could ever experience. Fire is the imagery of eternal hell. It speaks of the terrible and everlasting doom of the unrighteous sons of Satan. We read in the Scripture about the burning of weeds (Mt. 13:30), chaff (Mt. 3:12), barren branches (Jn. 15:6), and trees (Jl. 1:19). The idea is that the ungodly will be consumed in fire. That is also pictured by the lake of fire in Revelation 19:20, the unquenchable fire in Mark 9:43-48, and the everlasting fire in Matthew 25:41. It is the same fire of Malachi 4:1, and is alluded to in Daniel 12:2. The reaction of the people who will be cast into this fire will be "wailing and gnashing of teeth." Some people think that hell is going to be fine: they are going to be there with their friends and they will love it. But Matthew 13:42 tells us that there will be grinding of teeth and piercing shrieks. It is going to be a painful, eternal, inescapable judgment. The Lord is saying to the disciples, "Be patient for now, and be a good influence during this age. The judgment will come later." Let's look now at what will happen after the judgment:

3. The Conversion (v. 43a)

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father...."

After the judgment is over, the anticipated Kingdom will come. The righteous Shekinah will come at that time, lighting the faces of all the saints for all the ages. They will "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." In Daniel 12:3 the Bible says the righteous will shine as the stars. They'll shine like the brightness of God's glorious, marvelous heaven.

III. THE APPLICATION (v. 43b)

"...Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

You say, "What does that mean?" Jesus is simply saying, "You better listen!" Jesus is asking each one of us to look at our own life and ask ourselves, "Am I wheat? Am I a child of the Kingdom? Or am I a tare, and a child of the enemy?"

If you are a child of the enemy, then listen: This is a time of patience and grace, but God's judgment is inevitable, eternal, and painful.

If you are a child of the Kingdom, then Jesus has a message for you, too. You are to be used by God

to influence the darnels near you to become wheat. You are not to condemn the world; that is God's business. Love the sinner, and condemn only his sin. Are you being a good influence in the world and persuading the darnels to come to God for salvation?

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why did the disciples think that Christ's Kingdom was going to be established immediately? What statement by John the Baptist seemingly supported their belief?
2. What does the Lord explain in the second parable in Matthew 13?
3. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, what form of the Kingdom did Jesus refer to (Mt. 13:24)?
4. What are tares? What else are tares known as? In Matthew 13:25, what does the word "among" indicate about the way the enemy sowed the tares?
5. What reaction did the servants of the householder have when the crop began to ripen (Mt. 13:26-27)? Why?
6. According to Matthew 13:28, what did the servants want to do? Why did the master not want the servants to do that (Mt. 13:29)?
7. What did the master say he would do to rid the wheat of the tares (Mt. 13:30)?
8. What did the question the disciples asked in Matthew 13:36 reveal about their understanding of the parable?
9. Who is the sower in the parable (Mt. 13:37)? What significance does the title "the Son of man" have?
10. What does the field represent (Mt. 13:38a)?
11. Who are the good seed (Mt. 13:38b)?
12. How is Matthew 13:38a commonly misinterpreted? What problem is there with that misinterpretation?
13. Should Christians hide themselves from the world? Support your answer.
14. What is the first reason God has placed Christians in the world? What is the second reason? What did Jesus say in His prayer to God in John 17:15?
15. Who are the tares? Who plants the tares? What does the article "the" in "the wicked one" indicate about Satan (Mt. 13:38c)?
16. Into what two categories can the people of the world be placed? If a person is not subject to Christ's lordship, what category does that person automatically fall into?
17. From whom or what does evil originate?
18. Satan sows some tares in the church. How do we know that (Mt. 7:21-23)?
19. Why did Jesus emphasize to the disciples the fact that the harvest will take place at "the end of the age"? What does the phrase "the end of the age" refer to (Mt. 13:39b)?
20. Why are we to allow the wheat and the tares to grow together in the world?
21. Describe the attitude of Christ toward sinners. What attitude are we to have toward them?
22. Why can't we apply spiritual principles to worldly people? Rather than imposing Christianity's principles on ungodly people, what are we to do?
23. Who are the reapers in the parable (Mt. 13:39c)? What other Scriptures show that to be true?
24. What kind of people will the angels remove from the Kingdom (Mt. 13:41)? Where will those people be placed, according to Matthew 13:42? What will be their reaction to that place?
25. According to Matthew 13:43a, what will happen to believers after the final judgment?
26. What did Jesus mean by the phrase "...Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mt. 13:43b)?

Pondering the Principles

1. The parable of the wheat and the tares illustrates a great truth: God has planted His children in the world on purpose. We are not to isolate ourselves from the world. Read the following verses: Psalm 145:11-12; Matthew 5:13-16; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15. What common exhortation is made in all of

these verses? As a child of the Kingdom, are you living your life to influence the darnels around you? Do you find yourself deliberately avoiding any contact with non- Christians? Write down the above verses, and place them your list where you will see it every day this week. Whenever you find yourself avoiding contact with non-Christians, ask God to give you courage, which will enable you to "give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

2. Christ knows that we face persecution from the world. Memorize John 16:33b for the times that you will need to be comforted when facing that persecution: "...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

3. Make a list of the non-Christians you are in contact with every day. How do you feel toward each person on your list? Do you feel any resentment, impatience, anger, or bitterness toward anyone? How do you think Christ would feel toward each of those people? Think of the different ways that Christ showed His love for the unsaved in the New Testament. Do the unsaved people around you know that you care about them? If so, how do you make your care known? If not, what are some specific things you can do to change that?

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