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Matthew 13:24 - 13:30, 13:36 - 13:43



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the parable of the wheat and tares found in Matthew 13. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a field where good seed is sown but an enemy comes and sows tares among the wheat. When the servants ask the master if they should go and pull up the tares, the master replies to let both grow together lest the wheat be uprooted as well. Gregg explains that this parable reveals how the church should maintain its own purity but should not seek to eliminate sinners from the world. Ultimately, the tares will be gathered and destroyed, and the righteous will shine forth in the kingdom.

Transcript

Today we're continuing in our study of Matthew chapter 13 and the parables of Jesus found in that chapter. Chapter 13 is a collection of parables of Jesus on the subject of the kingdom of God, or as it's called many times in Matthew, the kingdom of heaven. The terms kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are interchangeable and synonymous.

We can see this, for example, if you would look in Mark or in Luke and look at the same parables that are told in those as those that are here in Matthew, and you'll find that whereas Matthew uses the term kingdom of heaven, in the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, Jesus is represented as using the term kingdom of God. It's clear that these terms are treated in the Gospels as synonymous and interchangeable. Today we're beginning at verse 24 of Matthew 13, a new parable.

We've studied only one because quite a lot of verses were occupied by telling the parable of the sower and also giving its explanation. The parable that comes to us now is another one that will receive a lengthy explanation. Let's read the parable itself in Matthew 13, 24.

Another parable he put forth to them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

So the servant of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares? He said to them, An enemy has done this. The servant said to him, Do you want us then to go and gather them up? But he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares, you also uproot the wheat with them. But let both grow together until the harvest.

And at that time of the harvest, I will say to the reapers, First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles and burn them. But gather the wheat into my barn. Now Jesus does not exactly explain this right away.

He does not immediately do so. He goes on and tells a few other short parables, three more as a matter of fact. And then he gets around to explaining this parable we've just read.

And for the sake of getting to that explanation, we'll for the moment skip over the three shorter parables and come to them later. In Matthew 13, 20, excuse me, 36, Jesus begins to explain it. It says, Jesus sent the multitudes away and went into the house.

And his disciples came to him saying, Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said to them, He who sows the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world.

The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. And the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The son of man will send out his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend.

And those who practice lawlessness. And will cast them into the furnace of fire. And there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, we have read the parable itself and Jesus' explanation to the parable.

The parable is about a man who was a farmer. Apparently he grew wheat in his fields. He had somebody who was hostile toward him and wished to do him harm.

And apparently this kind of thing was done from time to time. A man who wanted to do a mean trick, a mean practical joke. A harmful practical joke on somebody that they did not like.

They could go at night when no one was watching and sow in the field along with the wheat. This other plant called, here it's called tares. Scholars tell us that the modern

name for this plant is called bearded darnell.

But this particular plant is, well it resembles wheat somewhat in its early stages. Although when it is grown, it doesn't look exactly like wheat anymore. And also if you would eat it, if you would grind it and put it in your bread along with your wheat, it would make the bread somewhat unpleasant to say the least.

And from what I understand you could get sick from eating it. I don't know if you could die from it, but it would certainly ruin a crop of wheat. To have along with the wheat, the darnell harvested and brought in and of course ground into flour and so forth.

So it's quite mischievous on the part of this enemy to come and mix the darnell with the wheat. Because it somewhat spoils the wheat field. Now the servants who discovered this came to the owner and said, what's going on? Where did these darnell come from, these tares? And the man said, well obviously an enemy of ours has done this.

And they said, well perhaps we should go and get this darnell out of here. And he said, no, no it's premature to do that. You might accidentally pull up some of the good wheat as well and we'd lose some of our crop.

It's not clear exactly whether he means by that that they might mistake the darnell for wheat and wheat for darnell. Because at the early stages of growth they look similar. Or if he means that because of the close association of the tares with the wheat in the field, that if you pull up the darnell it might destroy the root systems of wheat that is nearby.

In any case, he said it would be a destructive thing to pull up the tares immediately. But the time would come when they were ready to harvest the wheat, they would first go in and they would gather up all the tares, take them aside, burn them in a big pile, and then they'd harvest the wheat and gather it into their barn. Now that's the story.

Now this is one of the few parables, the previous was also one, where almost every detail has significance. In many cases a parable may have only one point that is making and much of the story is simply stage props to support the story. And not all the props have significance.

But in this case everything has significance. When Jesus sent the crowds away and the disciples came to him in the house and said, well listen, we don't quite get the message. What's this business about the wheat and the tares? Jesus explained to them.

And there's two parts of his explanation. The first part is where he goes through and he explains what each symbol represents in the story. Then in the latter part he gives the message in plain words of what the parable was saying.

In verse 37 he says, He who sows the good seed is the son of man. So that's the owner of the field. And he sowed good seed, wheat, in this field.

That is the son of man, who obviously is a reference to Jesus himself. Then he says the field is the world. So the owner of the world is Jesus, the son of man.

And he has planted good seed in his field. He says the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. And that would be of course the followers of Jesus.

Those who really belong to his kingdom. And therefore in the world at large, Jesus has planted persons who are his children. And then he says the tares are the sons of the wicked one.

That would be children of the devil. And he says the enemy who sowed them is the devil. So you've got the son of man sowing his kids, the sons of the kingdom, in the world.

And you've got the devil sowing his kids, the sons of the devil, the sons of the wicked one, in the world. And he says the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. Now, he then gives a summary of what is going to happen at the end of the age in the next few verses.

But before we read that, let's consider this for a moment. Because there is a part of the parable he skips over and does not explain. He assumes it is self-evident, but it is worth paying attention to.

He has told us now who all the players are. You've got the son of man and his sons. That is the sons of his kingdom.

You've got the devil and his sons, the sons of the wicked one. You have the world, which is the field. And you've got the end of the age of the harvest.

But the harvest came late in the parable. Earlier in the parable, there was the suggestion made by the workers. Should we go and pluck out the tares? And the master said, no, it's premature.

Let's wait until the harvest. Now, that part Jesus doesn't explain, but it obviously has significance. Because Jesus is saying to the disciples, it is not time for us to pluck out the wicked ones.

That will happen at the end of the age. The harvest is the end of the age, and that's when they will be taken out. Now, this parable has been greatly misunderstood by a lot of Christians.

Because I've heard some Christians tell me that we should never remove the wicked from the church. Because Jesus told us that the church would be a mixture of wheat and tares until the time of the harvest. And God alone can sort them out.

Now, if that is correct, then it certainly contradicts a great amount of teaching in the scripture otherwise. Jesus himself, in Matthew 18, said that if a man sins, and he is

confronted several times at several levels, and he rejects the confrontation and will not repent, he should be treated by you as a heathen and as a publican. In other words, he's not part of your church.

In other words, if a man in the church sins, is confronted, does not repent, he's confronted further and doesn't repent, and he's been confronted in all the manner that Jesus describes in Matthew 18, verses 15 through 17, then if he will not repent, then he should be kicked out of the church. He'll be treated as if he's not a believer. Now, there's other places in scripture that say such things.

In Romans chapter 16, Paul says that you should mark those who cause divisions among you, contrary to the doctrine that you've heard from Paul, and have nothing to do with them. That means you don't fellowship with them. They are disfellowshipped.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, Paul said that if anyone disregards our words by this epistle, have no company with them. In other words, you can't fellowship with them. There is such a thing as recognizing that in the church there are some people who are not Christians, and if they are going to persist in disobedient living against the gospel and against God, then they are going to have to be removed from the church.

Now, is this somehow contrary to the teaching of the parable of the wheat and the tares? Not at all, because Jesus was not talking about the state of affairs in the church. He said the field, now remember in the parable the wheat and the tares were planted in the field. He didn't say the field is the church, and therefore let the wheat and the tares continue in the church until the end of the age.

He said the field is the world. Now, that's a big difference. The church is one thing, and the world is another.

The church is required to maintain its own purity, and throughout Scripture we are told that if persons in the church will not submit to Christ or to the teaching of the apostles, they are to be removed from the church. He says that also, of course, in Titus chapter 3 in verse 10. I've already given you several Scriptures where that's taught.

The Bible is clear. Paul and Jesus taught it that the church is not to be a mixed group of believers and unbelievers. Now, we don't always know who is and who ain't a believer, and therefore the church typically does have perhaps persons in it who are not true believers, but they are thought to be.

Only God knows that, of course, and we're not supposed to go sniffing around to try to make people who seem to be believers, you know, try to do some kind of inquisition to see if they really measure up. The issue is really whether they show themselves to be pagans. If they show themselves to be tares, as it were, in the church, then, of course, they're to be removed.

But that's not what the parable is about. The parable is about the world. What is the relationship of the church to the world? Now, the sons of the kingdom, he said, are, of course, the good seed.

That's the Christians. That's the church, in other words. The church is the kingdom, and its members are the citizens of the kingdom, the sons of the kingdom.

Now, the church is in the world, but it's not alone in the world. The devil has his people in the world, too. And there are times when Christians are tempted to go and remove the non-Christians.

This can only happen, of course, when the church comes to political power, that this becomes a temptation. In the days of the apostles, and for a few centuries afterwards, the church was a persecuted minority in the Roman Empire, and the idea of removing all the wicked from the world never arose. However, when Constantine was converted, and the Roman Empire became associated with the church, it was much more a temptation of the people of the church to try to perform inquisitional functions on the citizens, even who were not necessarily Christians, or are professing Christians.

Today, there are people who feel, or at least they would like to, that Christians should rise to power, and basically rid the world of the wicked. Now, I don't know that that's a possibility. First of all, in the end of the age, which is the harvest in this parable, there are still going to be tares there to pull out.

And so, we're never going to rid the world of wickedness. There's going to be tares right down to the end. This certainly raises questions about the whole legitimacy of a post-millennial worldview, which suggests that at the end, everyone is going to be converted, because Jesus describes there as being tares that grow through the whole age of the church until the end.

And there's probably about as many of them at the end as there were at the beginning, and they have to be plucked out and taken away. And then the righteous remain. Now, what he's saying, of course, is that the church's mission is not to eliminate sinners from the world.

They will be eliminated in due time, at the end of the world. But it is not our place to try to rid the world of wicked men. Of course, there is an aspect to this parable that doesn't really match up completely with the reality, because we know that you can take a person who is a wicked man, and he can become converted.

And, as it were, he who was a child of the devil can become a child of God. And if that is so, then, of course, there's the analogy of the wheat and the tares breaks down, because a tare can never become wheat. But that's a side issue as far as what Jesus is getting at in this parable.

He's not trying to say that everything matches up exactly as the analogy would suggest. But rather, that when it comes to our acceptance of the presence of the wicked in the world, we have to live with that reality until the end of the world. And then, when Jesus sends his angels out, they will gather out the wicked.

Now, did you notice that? It says that... Here's what it says. Back when the parable is being given in verse 30, Matthew 13, 30, the master says, Let both grow together until the harvest. And at that time, I will say to the reapers, First, gather together the tares.

Now, that's the bad guys. And bind them in bundles to burn them. And gather the wheat into my barn.

Now, what happens first at the end of the age? The tares are gathered out. Now, when Jesus gives the explanation of this parable in verse 40, he says, Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, when Jesus returns and sends his angels, what will he do first? Now, I have been told, and many people say, that one of the first things that's going to happen, as far as the sorting out of the good and the bad, is that God is going to rapture the church.

I know you've heard this too, that when Jesus comes back, one of the first things he's going to do is rapture out the church. But Jesus didn't seem to believe that. He said he's going to send his angels, and they're going to pull out the wicked.

They're going to remove the wicked, all who offend and those who practice lawlessness. They'll be gathered together to be burned. And then he said, of the righteous, then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father.

But that is after he has plucked out the tares, after he's plucked out the wicked. If you've never noticed that before, let me urge you to look at that passage more closely than maybe you have before. The idea of the wicked being removed at the time of the second coming is agreeable with the Old Testament expectation as well.

Because in the Old Testament, in Proverbs chapter 2, we have this statement in verse 21 and 22. Proverbs 2, 21 and 22 says, For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it. But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

You see, Jesus said to his disciples, The meek, and he meant by that his disciples, shall inherit the earth. The earth is not going to be abandoned by the church and then the

wicked inherit it. It's the other way around.

The wicked are going to be rooted out of it, and the meek will inherit it. The meek will inherit the earth. That is what the Scripture says.

It says that, of course, Jesus was quoting, or almost quoting, from Matthew 5, where it says, The meek shall inherit the earth. But in the same place, in Matthew 24, he says this in verse 9, For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall be no more.

Indeed, you will look diligently for his place, but it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Now, this is the Old Testament teaching in general, that when God judges the earth, it is the wicked who will be removed, and the righteous who will stay.

Now, you might say, well, Steve, don't you know about 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 16 through whatever, 18, about we're going to meet the Lord in the air and so forth? Yes, I know the passage, and I agree with it. Of course, it's in the Bible. But this does not contradict what's being said here.

When we meet the Lord in the air, apparently, we'll come back down with him, and we will inherit the earth. Some people have assumed that when we meet the Lord in the air, we'll have to go somewhere far away from here, maybe go to heaven. But the Bible doesn't say that.

Jesus said he's coming back here. He said, If I go away, I'm going to come again and receive you to myself. Now, he's going to be here.

He says, So that where I am, you will be also. So, Jesus is going to come back here. When he does, of course, the church will meet him in the air and accompany him on the final leg of his journey.

But his coming is going to be a removal of all wickedness and a turning of the earth over to his disciples, the meek, who will inherit it. And this is what Jesus taught. He taught it in various places, just like the Old Testament teaches it.

By the way, the New Testament teaches it elsewhere also. Because in 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul said in verse 6 and following, Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Jesus will come.

He will give us rest at the time, not before, but at the time when he comes with his holy angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who don't know God. As it says in

Psalm 91, A thousand will fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you behold and see the reward of the wicked.

When Jesus comes back, he will destroy the wicked in flaming fire with his holy angels. And then the righteous, as Jesus put it, will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. That's what the parable of the wheat and the tares is saying.

And there's another parable later on in chapter 13 that teaches the same thing. And that is the parable of the dragnet in verses 47 through 50. And in verse 49 it says, And so it will be at the end of the age.

The angels will come forth and separate the wicked from among the just. Not vice versa. The wicked will be taken out from among the just.

And then, of course, the just will inherit the earth. This is the teaching of Jesus. This is the teaching of the Old and New Testament.

It isn't the teaching of all churches today, but then again, some people have not paid very close attention, it seems. I hope you'll be paying attention. Tune in again next time, and we'll continue our study in the Word of God.