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“Who Did This?”

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

You will recall, last week we discussed the parable of the sower and seed falling on diverse types of ground alluding to Jesus teaching to people with different mind sets with different results.

Our reading this morning is also about sowers and seeds, but with this difference. Today we have two sowers, two types of seed spread among the same people and two harvests..

What we heard is usually referred to as the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares are a weed called the bearded darnel which in its early stages is so like the wheat that it is next to impossible to tell them apart. Before it is headed even the most experienced farmer could not tell one from the other. After it is headed, the difference is clear; by that time, the roots are so intertwined that any attempt to root out the darnel would also tear out the wheat.

There are three ways in which to separate the two. When fully grown, the darnel does not grow as tall as the wheat. In a badly infested field, the wheat would be harvested over the darnel and then the whole field set afire. Another method would be to reap both, separate the wheat and drop the darnel in bundles to be burned. When the infestation was small, the seed was picked out from the wheat before milling. Though of the same size, darnel is slate gray in color so was easily distinguished from the golden wheat, and the darnel is toxic.

In this parable, as so often, Jesus was telling a story from a real life background that his listeners would understand. It was common practice for quarreling and feuding parties to infest their adversaries' fields with weeds. This was so severe a matter that

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Roman law exacted penalties for this conduct. We see this type of behavior in business, politics, family, and yes in the church. Jesus was saying something, which his disciples needed to learn. The disciples were concerned about the kind of people Jesus was gathering around Him. They could see that there were great numbers of people crowding about Him that the world counted as undesirable. Even apart from those that society branded as sinners, there were many loosely attached to Jesus whose lives would not bear close scrutiny.

It is easy to understand this point of view by His critics considering the Jewish dream of not only a world political power, but also a morally reformed humanity. John the Baptist who preceded Jesus had preached an ethical message of repentance. He looked for the one who would come and purge the threshing floor and gather the wheat into the garner and cast the chaff into the unquenchable fire.

In face of all this background, it is easy to understand why the disciples were put out by the motley crowd around Jesus. They made it quite clear that they expected Him to do some weeding out. There was always a certain degree of intolerance in the minds of the disciples. They were jealous of others casting out demons in the name of Jesus because they weren't one of them (Luke 9:49, 50). They didn't want to allow the Gentile woman seeking help to see Jesus (Matthew 15:23). And the thought of Jesus being a guest of Zaccheus started the tongues wagging (Luke 19:7). The disciples were certainly waiting for Jesus to sort out the mixed crowd following Him.

If this messages was intended for His disciples, even more so for the Pharisees. It was one of their stock complaints that Jesus associated with tax gatherers and sinners (Matthew 9:11). The wide welcome of Jesus was totally incomprehensible to men with their outlook. If the disciples were disappointed, the Pharisees

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were fit to be tied. It was in the face of this intolerance and critical spirit in both His inner circle and the Pharisees that Jesus told this parable.

One of the main points of the subject matter is the close resemblance between the darnel and the true wheat. The parable is an extension of the commandment, “Judge not that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). It tells men that they are simply not able to distinguish between the good and the bad. If they try to, the result will most likely be that they will destroy the good with the bad. It teaches that judgment must be left to the end of time and committed to the hands of God.

Remember again the close similarity between the wheat and the darnel. Rhetorically, how many of us would be prepared to say, “This person deserves to go to heaven but that person is fit only to go to hell”? Or in another way, “How many of us would dare to say without misgiving, ‘I am of the wheat’? How many would care to say, ‘I am of the tares’?” I think the answer is that we must leave the matter of judgment up to God. It has been said, “God Himself does not propose to judge a man ‘til he is dead. So why should I?” To God only are known all the facts and God only can be the judge.

Though the parable counsels patience and asks us to leave judgment to God, it includes the absolute certainty that someday selection will come. The darnel and wheat may be allowed to grow together for many days but in the end there will be the harvest and the time of separation. So the parable says to us, “Be patient in your judgments; but remember that some day God’s judgment inevitably will come.”

Finally there is one last point and a very important one. When told of the darnel in the field, the owner replied, “An enemy must have

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done this.” Here we are brought face to face with the fact that there is in the world a power that is hostile to God. We may call that power the Devil, the Tempter, Satan, whatever, but it is there. There are times when an evil power seems to assault us and draw us away from God. The why and wherefore of this is not the point. Jesus spent little time speculating where evil came from, but He recognized it because He had experienced it. He told men that the way to safety is never to walk alone but to always to walk with Him.

We now come to the contemporary message to us. It lies in the last verse. The disciples were saying in effect to Jesus, “You say that the Kingdom has come. How can the Kingdom possibly have come when there are still so many bad people in the world.”? To that question, the parable says the following. “No farmer would delay his harvesting just because there are some weeds about. He knows there are weeds; there never was a harvest without weeds. Therefore, weeds or no weeds, when the harvest is come he reaps.” So then, sinners or no sinners, the Kingdom is here and God’s reaping has begun.

Though two thousand years old, it speaks to the present and future state of the gospel church...Christ's care of it, the devil's enmity against it, the mixture in it of good and bad in this world, and the eventual separation between them in the other world.. So prone is fallen man to sin, that if the enemy sow the tares, he can confidently go his way, knowing they will spring up and do hurt; whereas, when good seed is sown, it must be tended, watered, and fenced. It is charge to Immanuel; it is a charge us, to you and to me.

The servants complained to their master, “Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field?” No doubt he did. Here sometimes it is hard to distinguish them. Whatever may be amiss in the church,

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we can be sure it is not from Christ. Though gross transgressors who openly oppose the gospel ought to be separated from the society of the faithful, yet no human skill can make an exact separation. Thus, those who oppose must not be cut off, but instructed and instructed with meekness. And though good and bad are together in the world, yet at the great day they shall be parted. Then the righteous and the wicked shall be plainly known.

Jesus, because of His total acceptance of God's will, was the embodiment of the Kingdom. Because of that, a man's reaction to Jesus demonstrates unquestionably what kind of man he is. Therefore by his acceptance or rejection of Jesus a man has automatically placed himself among the wheat or the tares. It is not so much that God has judged him but rather he has judged himself. In that sense the harvest has come.

Glory be to God! Amen.

Reference: "All the Parables of the Bible," H. Lockyer; "The Gospel of Luke, Rev. Ed.," W. Barclay; "And Jesus Said," W. Barclay; "The Gospel According to Luke," The New International Commentary; "Matthew," J.N. Davies, "Luke," J.A. Findlay, The Abingdon Bible Commentary; "Matthew Harry's Concise Commentary on the Bible"; also 072110.