

[R3769 : page 137]

## THE SOWING AND THE REAPING.

– MATTHEW 13:24-30,36-43. – MAY 6. –

"Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." – Gal. 6:7.

OUR LORD followed his parable showing the four kinds of hearers of the Word (illustrated by the wayside, the stony ground, the thorny ground and the good ground) with the parable of the wheat and the tares, which is the center of this lesson. An intimate connection between the two parables is to be observed. The majority who heard the Lord's message opposed it directly or indirectly. The parable of the sower represents the four [R3769 : page 138] classes willing to hear at all, and shows us that but one class of hearers could possibly bring forth the good fruit. The present parable shows some of the difficulties which interfere with the best hearers, the best hearts, some with the best seed.

The parable as a whole is a picture of the Kingdom of heaven – not in its complete and glorious Millennial reign, but in its embryo condition, in process of development. The Kingdom of glory will be the Church in glory, as the Kingdom in embryo is the Church under present conditions, called to glory, honor and immortality, but first experiencing trials and difficulties which must be battled against by those who would make their calling and election sure to a share in the glory that is to follow. This Kingdom class did not begin with Adam nor with Noah nor with Moses, but with Christ. There was no Kingdom seed, no Kingdom promises and hopes planted, until Christ came, who brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. (2 Tim. 1:10.) As the Apostle declares, this great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by our Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. (Heb. 2:3.) It was the Son of man who sowed this good seed, and the members of his

body from his day until now have continued the work – – the apostles being most prominent therein.

## **SATAN SOWED THE TARES**

"While men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." This enemy our Lord explains is Satan – "the enemy that sowed them is the devil." On this statement Dr. Abbott wisely comments thus, "Observe that here, as elsewhere, the personality of the devil is recognized by our Lord in unmistakable terms. This is no parable, but the interpretation of a parable; it is no concession to popular prejudice, for it is uttered to his own disciples alone."

The statement that this was done "while men slept" may be interpreted, first, as signifying that while the Lord and the apostles lived the enemy did not have the opportunity for introducing the tare element; that it was done after their death, when they had fallen asleep. It is equally true that Satan did this sowing of tares while the entire Church slept, in the sense of not being wide awake to their duties and privileges. Such a period of drowsiness and slumber, non-alertness as respects the Truth, prevailed amongst the Lord's people for centuries, which are known to the civilized world as the "dark ages." Even yet the same thing is true in large measure, and the Apostle's words are appropriate, "Let us not sleep as do others." (1 Thess. 5:6.) Many of the Lord's true followers have been dreaming about the conversion of the world, while the great enemy, Satan, has been sowing tares with liberal hand in their very midst – or, as the Apostle Peter explains it, "bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." – 2 Peter 2:1.

## **DARNEL COUNTERFEITS WHEAT**

There are various kinds of tares in Palestine, but the **[R3770 : page 138]** most troublesome kind and the kind

evidently referred to in the parable is known as "bearded darnel." It looks exactly like the wheat when springing up, and not until the maturity of the head is the difference discernible. Then the wheat, weighted with golden grains, humbly bows its head, while the tares stand straight, the heads having little weight and the seeds being black. At this time the difference between the tares and the wheat becomes clearly discernible.

Passing from the parable picture to the reality, we find the good seed, the gracious promises of the Kingdom, which the Lord showed has brought forth the children of the Kingdom – true Christians who appreciate the Kingdom, who have thankfully accepted the Lord's proposition of their becoming heirs with him in that Kingdom and who heartily lay hold upon the terms of joint-heirship, that they must suffer with him if they would reign with him. (Rom. 8:17.) These Christians as they develop bring forth much fruit, some thirty, some sixty and some an hundred grains, representing the fruits and graces of the holy Spirit – representing them as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, "God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works" – begotten of the Spirit through the Word of Truth. (Eph. 2:10.) Contrarywise the darnel class are those not begotten of the Truth but of error – misled into forms of godliness without its real power.

### **THE DEVIL SOWED THE DARNEL**

Who planted the seeds of error which have developed this class? The Scriptures answer, Satan, the devil. But why should he plant or develop any teachings that would bring forth imitation Christians, those who are outwardly godly? Would he not rather plant seeds of immorality, etc.? We answer that he already has a large part of the field, the world, under cultivation along the lines of ignorance, superstition, etc., as the Apostle declares – the heathen worship devils. (1 Cor. 10:20.) The work

of Satan as represented in this parable is one of expectancy. He is not so anxious for the development of the tare class as he is anxious to choke the wheat. This purpose can better be accomplished by the sowing of tares than by other sowings, which from the first would show widely in contrast and could be exterminated. It is the fact that the darnel-tare exactly resembles the wheat for a considerable time, which makes it the more dangerous, the more troublesome to eradicate. And so it is with the tare class of Christendom: respectable, educated, influential in outward morals and demeanor, closely resembling the Lord's consecrated ones, there is no means of discerning their different character at first.

## **GATHERING OUT THE TARES**

In the parable the servants inquired of the Master whether or not they should pull up the tares, but his answer is that the tares are so abundant that this procedure would be unwise, impossible. In eastern countries a certain amount of tares spring up with the wheat anyway, and these the servants gather out as soon as discerned, because the darnel seed is poisonous. So with the Church: the parable would be true if the Lord had left out all reference to the enemy sowing the tares amongst the wheat, and if then he had proceeded to say that certain tares sprang up with it. Naturally there would be some imitation Christians with the true anyway, just as darnel is usually found amongst the wheat in that country. But our Lord wished to show an abnormal condition – that the tare seed was specially sown for the very purpose of choking the wheat. This is in harmony with the Apostle's statement, **[R3770 : page 139]** "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with wicked spirits in high positions." – Eph. 6:12.

We have today not merely the natural downward tendency of the human heart toward forms of godliness without the

power, but, far worse than this, the wicked spirits – Satan and his associates, fallen angels – have been plotting against the divine plan and operating with a view to thwarting the same all through this age. The Master in this parable showed that he foreknew all this and that it was a part of the divine plan to permit it. In permitting it the Lord does not endorse it nor make himself responsible for it, but he will eventually so overthrow it as to bring out of the evil certain valuable lessons for all eternity.

One of the lessons most difficult for the Lord's true people to learn is that the masses of Christendom are tares, having merely the form of godliness but knowing nothing of its inward power. As they see the wheat-field overrun with these they are inclined to think that the majority must be the wheat, and the comparatively few stocks that are real wheat they are inclined to consider fanatical extremists. Only those who are themselves begotten of the Spirit through the Word of truth, the good seed of the Kingdom – only these as they ripen are prepared to properly discriminate and to note the difference of fruitage, and, looking backward, to draw their comparisons as between the Lord, the apostles and the early believers, and the true wheat of the same class and character today. The entire parable fully attests this.

## **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE TARES**

(1) They were not merely such as usually sprang up amongst the wheat. The parable declares that they were sown in the same systematic manner as the wheat, and with the deliberate intention of ruining the wheat-field – choking the wheat.

(2) It shows that the tares were too numerous to be dealt with after the ordinary fashion of pulling up – that such a procedure would have unsettled everything as respects the interests of the true wheat in the present time.

(3) It shows the same preponderance of the tares in the picture of the harvest, when it is the tares and not the wheat which is gathered and bound in bundles, the wheat evidently in smaller proportionate quantity being taken directly to the barns unbundled – precious, scarce.

This parable pictures what we are to expect as the result of the entire work of grace throughout this Gospel age. The results will be a tremendous harvest of tares and a comparatively small gathering of the precious wheat.

Spiteful enmity, such as is represented in this parable as moving the devil to injure the wheat-field, to choke the wheat, is not without its parallel in human affairs. As, for instance, not long since the public prints told how a tenant in Ireland, having been evicted from a farm property he had long rented, felt spiteful toward the owner and sowed the fields with wild oats. In the case of Satan we can see that his course in the matter has been in full accord with his entire procedure from the time of the beginning of his rebellion against God. He deceived our first parents by malicious representations of the divine character and by falsehood, telling them that God had forbidden the eating of the fruit of the trees of knowledge of good and evil because he desired to keep them in ignorance, lest they should become competitors with him in knowledge, again assuring them that the Almighty was unable to execute the sentence against them, "Dying thou shalt die."

All the way down the history of the world shows Satan's opposition. Amongst heathen nations today, everywhere, he has planted the seeds of error and blasphemy against God, misrepresenting his character and his plan and making them to appear adverse. And these same seeds of error he has planted in the wheat-field of Christendom, scattering it so that it would intermingle with the truths of the Lord's Word. This evil seed is

represented in all the false doctrines of the "dark ages," which misrepresent the divine character and plan. Those influenced by the errors of Satan are begotten of fear and not of love, not of the spirit of truth with which the Lord begets those who are truly his, the wheat; and only in the latter can perfect love cast out fear and bring the fruitage and graces of the holy Spirit in heart and in character, in word and in deed. The error brings merely outward forms of Sabbath keeping, Church going, decency and morality, but does not affect the heart so as to bring forth the fruitage of consecration, self-sacrifice, etc., which are the essential qualities of the wheat class which the Lord is now developing.

### **"THE HARVEST, THE END OF THE AGE"**

Neither in this parable nor elsewhere does the Lord intimate that the present order of things is to continue – the strife between truth and error, between righteousness and sin, with the latter predominating in every way. Quite to the contrary, the Scriptures everywhere teach that the present age had a particular beginning and that it will have as positive and particular an ending. Unfortunately the translators of our common version Bible have used the word "world" here and in other places instead of the word "age" or "epoch" or "dispensation." Nothing could be further from the Scriptural teaching than that the earth is to be destroyed in the harvest time when the wheat will be gathered.

On the contrary, the wheat class now being selected will be glorified and, as this lesson shows, "Then will the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13:43.) They will shine forth for the blessing of mankind, to bring order out of present confusion, to scatter present darkness and ignorance and superstition, to cause the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth, to enlighten every man that

has ever come into the world, to cause all to know from the least to the greatest of the love of God and the abundant provision which he has made, which guarantees that none shall die the Second Death except the wilfully, intelligently disobedient. – John 1:9; Hab. 2:14; Jer. 31:34.

To our understanding we are already living in this harvest time, and this accounts for the wonderful commotion and changes which we are anticipating in the wheat-field, in Christendom. The time of separation has come, and the Lord will make no mistake: not a single tare will be gathered into the barn – beyond the veil into the heavenly condition and glory; and as respects the wheat, the harvest is to ripen, and not a ripe head of wheat, whether it bear thirty or sixty or a hundred fold, will be left in the field or burned with the tares, but all will be safely garnered – gathered to the Lord.

The angels are already at work – the Lord uses various [R3771 : page 140] human instrumentalities as his servants, messengers or angels. The bundles of human organization are tending more and more to combination, federation. Not only those institutions styling themselves churches, including Christian Scientists, but other institutions, orders, etc., are combining. The harvest time is specially favorable to the ripening of the wheat, and the Lord's true people everywhere are finding assistances in the growing in grace and knowledge and the fruits of the Spirit such as they never have enjoyed before, because we are in the harvest time, and because the Lord is providing these angels, messengers of Truth and Grace, for our assistance and development.

### **"CAST THEM INTO A FURNACE OF FIRE"**

With false fears already in their hearts there is a disposition to interpret this statement about the tares being cast into a furnace of fire and all other similar statements of the Scriptures



as literal, as signifying eternal torment. We notice, however, that the parable strictly limits this furnace time to the harvest of the age: there is no such furnace for the wheat and tares all down through the Gospel age – they are to be gathered in the end of the age and to be burned in a furnace. This certainly is very contrary to the ordinary conception of the matter, that immediately at death many pass to an eternity of torture. If this statement had any reference to a torture time, either for eternity or for a shorter period, it certainly limits the time of its beginning to the harvest time, the end of this age.

But let us look at the figure and we will see more particularly what this feature of the parable signifies. The field is the world, the wheat are the Lord's people who rise up out of the world and bring forth fruit to his praise, the result of the good seed, the gracious promises and arrangements of the Kingdom which inspire them with hope, faith, perseverance to the end. This is the class which the Lord seeks, the only class. He is not dealing with the field, the world in general, but merely with the corner of it which he has planted with the good seed. The other parts of the field, the world, are not in the parable at all. When the farmer gathered his crop to the barn it was his custom to burn the tares, so that the seed might not propagate further and thus cause additional trouble; hence it was the usage to burn the tares in bake-ovens, to use them as we would use kindling wood, for heating the oven for the baking of bread.

Everything in this figure of the burning of the tares, therefore, would signify nothing approximating torment; it simply illustrates destruction. When the tares are burned they are reduced to dust and become again a part of the field, the world. So we understand it will be in the end of this age: the Lord will permit various agencies to enkindle a great fire of trouble – "a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1.) With this fire the tare class will have

terminated, for so-called Christendom will be the great furnace. True, there will be trouble in the outside heathen nations also, but the trouble will specially affect civilized nominal Christendom – Churchianity. By the time that trouble has ended imitation Christians will all have disappeared, there will be no more. The true Christians, the Kingdom class, the elect, will have been changed in the First Resurrection to heavenly conditions; the remainder of mankind will all be of the earth earthy and make no pretensions whatever to be called-out ones of the heavenly order.

### **WEeping AND GNASHING OF TEETH**

There will surely be great disappointment, sorrow, pain, trouble and anguish throughout Christendom in that "day of trouble." Already, as our Master predicted, men's hearts are failing them for fear and for looking after the things that are coming upon the earth (Luke 21:25-28); but their fears and their anguish will not be eternal. When the trouble shall have accomplished its work of mellowing society and preparing mankind for the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom, when it shall have burned itself out, it will be no more, and instead of trouble blessings shall come in – not upon the tares, but upon those who once were tares, yea, upon all the families of the earth shall the blessings come through the seed of Abraham, the glorified Christ, Head and body. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." All cannot understand or appreciate, or receive this message, and this our Lord clearly foresaw and declared, saying, "He that hath an ear let him hear." Neither should we despise those who cannot hear, but rather we may sympathize with them and be thankful to the Lord for the hearing ear which permits us to appreciate these and other features of the divine plan.

## **OUR GOLDEN TEXT**

Our caption, our Golden Text, is true enough and carries with it a very valuable thought, but one totally out of accord with the lesson of this parable. The parable represents the Lord as the sower, the Truth as the seed and true followers as the result. The Golden Text pictures a totally different matter, and points us to the fact that the seeds of today will bring forth fruitage by and by, whether they be good seeds of kind words, gentleness, meekness, patience, helpfulness, or evil words and evil conduct, backbiting, slandering and evil doing. Every act, every word, every look, every thought is a seed, and will bring its results in our own minds and hearts and conduct, and have to do with whether or not we shall bring forth thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold or no fruitage whatever, or an evil fruitage, which the Lord declares he will utterly destroy in the time of reckoning in the end of this age. All who are the Lord's true people can profitably apply both lessons, but they must not be confounded or confusion will result.

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