



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 13:24–30; 36–44

Gospel of Matthew

“The Tares and the Wheat, or Satan in the Kingdom”

TRANSCRIPT

Let’s turn to Matthew chapter 13 and verse 24 for the Scripture reading this morning. Matthew chapter 13 and verse 24. The Scripture reading is the passage that has to do with the tares among the wheat, and we want to read the account of the parable itself, and then the account of the interpretation. And these two accounts are separated by a few verses which we will omit in our Scripture reading for this morning. We begin with verse 24 of chapter 13, and our Lord’s recounting of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares:

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is likened unto 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 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 whence then hath it tares?’ 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. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say

“The Tares and the Wheat, or Satan in the Kingdom” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2006 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

to the reapers, ‘Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Now, let’s turn over to verse 36 and read the interpretation of this parable.

“Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, ‘Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field.’ He answered and said unto them, ‘He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.’”

May God’s blessing be upon this reading of his Word.

Now our subject for this morning is “The Tares and the Wheat, or Satan in the Kingdom.”

Last Sunday, we began our study on this great chapter on the parables of Matthew chapter 13. I think when you think of the Gospel of Matthew, you think of the Sermon on the Mount. You think of this chapter of the parables of Matthew chapter 13, and you think of the Olivet Discourse, and these three great discourses—there are actually five in the book—but these three great discourses are the parts of the Gospel of Matthew that are probably most familiar to us.

We mentioned last time that this was a kind of new departure in the Gospel of Matthew, in that our Lord begins to speak by parables to those to whom he addresses these messages, and we tried to point out that the Lord Jesus said that he taught in parables in order to conceal the truth from the unreceptive, and to reveal the truth to those who were receptive. We also pointed out that the leading thoughts that come before the reader in Matthew 13 have to do with these things.

First of all, the Lord Jesus says that he is speaking about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, and we tried to point out that mysteries of the kingdom of heaven have to do with a new content in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Now, this new content is not a new content with reference to the nature of the kingdom, because it is certainly true that the kingdom that is announced here in the Gospel of Matthew is the kingdom that has been proclaimed in the Word of God from Genesis chapter 1, and on through to the end of the New Testament. And therefore, we should not think of the new content as if the teaching concerning the kingdom itself has changed.

But rather, the thought that the Lord Jesus brings before us particularly here is that while the nature of the kingdom has not changed, the time of its manifestation becomes more clear, or more evident to us as a result of these parables of Matthew chapter 13. For the students of the Scriptures in Old Testament times heard a lot about the kingdom, but they did not know how exactly the kingdom would come to its manifestation upon the earth. They read the Old Testament which spoke of the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories of the Messiah, and did not understand that there was a period of time between the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories of the Messiah that might stretch out to over a couple of thousand years.

So, we learn from Matthew chapter 13 that there is an indefinite period of time between the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus. It is a kind of interregnum—that is, an interval between successive reigns when a country has no sovereign. And this period of time, this interregnum that is to characterize the time between the first coming of the Lord Jesus and the second coming of the Lord Jesus is characterized by a sowing of the seed of the Word of God, by growth in outward and

inward response to the preaching of that Word, and by an ultimate separation of the genuine from the spurious as the conclusion of the age.

So the Lord has told us, in effect, that many generations will live between the first coming of the Lord Jesus and the second coming, and that this age will be characterized by a time of sowing of the Word of God, by growth of the testimony to the Messiah, and finally, by separation of the true from the false at the conclusion of the age.

The parable of the tares and the wheat add some other very important points. And first of all, I think we could say that we learn from the parable of the tares and the wheat that the present age is not only an age of the sowing of the Word of God, it is an age of the sowing of the seed of Satan. So that, concurrent with the preaching of the Word of God, throughout this age is the message of Satan. He has his seed, and he has his children, just as the Son of Man has his seed and his sons or children.

We also learn from this parable that the age that intervenes between this parable and the two advents of Christ is probably not a very brief one, because the period of time is likened to the sowing of the seed and the waiting for the growth of the plants until the time of the harvest. So, if we are to take this parable as an illustration of what is to take place, then we would gather that the period of time between the two comings of the Lord Jesus is not a brief time, experience, of course, has borne that out.

And then this parable stresses in even greater detail that the conclusion of the age is a separating judgment, and that the end of the age the Son of Man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. And there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, but the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. And the Lord Jesus adds the words, which every good preacher should add, “He who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

There are other truths that appear also in this parable of the tares and wheat, such as awful nature and reality of everlasting punishment, which seems to be very plainly taught here. There is the

truth of the coming glory of the saints and the necessity of good and evil in the world until the ultimate time of the new heavens and the new earth. We shall say something about each one of these truths at the proper moment in the message.

Let's turn now to the exposition of the parable itself. Our Lord gives us the exposition in verse 24 through verse 30, and as, of course, you learn, this is simply his way of illustrating truth, and he begins with the illustration, and then gives us the interpretation, and I want to conclude with just a few points that I think need some special stress.

In the exposition of the parable, he first of all speaks of the sowing of the seed. He says, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field. Now that parable opens very simply, and we quickly see the similarity between the parable of the tares among the wheat, and the parable of the soils, which have just studied, for in both of these parables, there is a sower, there is a field, there is seed, and there are harvests.

But there are some differences, too. While in the first, we have four classes of soil, in this second parable we read, simply, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed into his field.” It's almost as if, the Lord having told us the parable of the four types of soil, in which we have three which represent unbelievers and one that represents believers, he now turns his attention to that which represents believers, eliminating the unbelieving for the moment.

Remember, last time, we tried to point out—and I'm going over this again, because I misled some of you. I don't remember whether it was in the 8:30 hour or the 12 o'clock hour, but I made a statement that one person came up and quizzed me about, and I realized I probably had misled you a little bit. I was trying to point out that in these types of soil, we have in the first case, the soil that was by the pathway or the wayside: the superficial hearer of the Word who was an unbeliever, and in whom the Word of God had no root at all.

Then we looked, briefly, at the stony kind of soil in which we have a light layer of soil and then a heavy rock underneath, and we likened that to the superficial hearer, who for a moment received the Word, even gave some evidence of response—Luke tells us “he believed for a while;”

temporary faith—but then the plant withered away because there was no possibility of root. And I suggested that that was the superficial hearer who does respond to the Word of God, but the response is not of a permanent character. It is kind of an emotional response of outward joy, but nothing real deep down within.

And the third type of soil was that in which the thorns were, and that, too, I intended to stress was a kind of unbeliever—the one in whom the seed has a half-hearted kind of response—but the pleasures of life, the thorns, choke out the life so that there is no true birth from God.

The fourth kind of soil, that which Luke describes as the soil in which the Word of God is planted and in which there is a good heart, that kind of soil represents the believer, and the plant that is planted there springs up and bears fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Different degrees of fruit, but, nevertheless, good soil. Good soil is the soil that is responsive to the Word of God, and represents the true believer, in whom the Word of God planted, grows and reaches its maturity and brings forth fruit. The Lord Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And so if there is no fruit, there is no assurance that life is there.

Now it would seem that in the parable of the tares and the wheat, the Lord Jesus refers to this fourth type of soil when he says, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field.” So, he picks up that fourth kind of soil and deals with that. Has to do with the genuine believer.

There is one other thing I want you to notice in verse 24, before we move on. He says the kingdom of heaven is likened unto. Now we shall have this, more than once, not only in Matthew 13 but throughout the remainder of the Gospel of Matthew. Now we must not think that he is trying to compare the kingdom simply to the sower, but the whole parable is designed to stress spiritual truth. In other words, the parables are not intended to be definitions of the kingdom, but are designed to be descriptions of various aspects of the kingdom. They are candid camera shots, so to speak, each from a different angle. And some of these parables give us various aspects of the kingdom of the heavens.

Now I do think that when he says the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field, that we are to gather that that is the most important fact about this parable, but it is not the only fact that is important.

Then we move on to the Satanic activity described in verse 24. He says, “But while men slept.” Many of you remember that clause because it was the clause chosen by more than one man as a title for a book, and probably is best known to us as the title of a book which John F. Kennedy wrote before he became president of the United States: *While Men Slept*. It was frequently used with reference to the Western powers during the age of the rise of Adolph Hitler and the others who were associated with Hitler in the 1920s and 1930s of this era. But while men slept.

Here is the satanic activity described, “His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.” So, the evil one, Satan himself, appears again. Now in the first parable, we read that when the seed was cast along the wayside, then the wicked one came and caught away that which was sown in his heart. Here, we find Satan sowing his own seed, but these seed are the wild seed of the tares.

What Satan does, one of the commentators says, is mean, cruel, cowardly, sadistic. He waits until everybody is asleep, and secretly, and silently, and surreptitiously sows his nefarious seed. This wicked work is true to human experience, of course, because Satan is a kind of silent, secret, wicked worker in this world.

This, incidentally, that appears here in this illustration of the Lord Jesus is very true to the experiences of farmers. Many historical illustrations can be given of individuals, who in order to destroy the work of their friends or their competitors, have sown wild seed in the field of those that they wanted to do this work to. For example, R. C. Trench says, in his book on the parables, “A modern writer affirms the same to be now practiced in India.” In Ireland, an outgoing tenant, in spite, sowed wild oats in the fields which he was leaving, and it was next to impossible to exterminate them. Henry Alford, who has written a very important and influential commentary on the Greek New Testament, says in his work on the exegesis of the Greek text of the New Testament, that a

similar kind of deed was done to one of his tenant on land that was owned by him. So you see, human nature is still the same. Two thousand years later, the same kind of acts are being performed as that described by the Lord Jesus in this parable.

The tares we must understand in order to understand this parable. The word, tare, is a reference to the common vetch which has a resemblance to wheat, but the Greek word is a word that refers to what has been called the bearded darnel. The bearded darnel was a kind of grass. It is the only species of the grass family that has poisonous seeds. When it comes to its fruition, it is characterized by seeds that are poisonous, and if you eat these seeds, then you have a stomachache. As a matter of fact, you have more than that. You have nausea. You have convulsions. You are sick at your stomach. And it becomes, therefore, a very beautiful illustration of the result of the sowing of the seed of Satan in the hearts of men. So the parable of the wheat and the bearded darnel is a very significant thing. And not only that, but this particular type of grass breeds a particular type of poisonous fungus, so that when you eat the seeds, you are poisoned, and that is exactly what happens when an individual accepts the lie that Satan purports to proclaim.

Well, what is the solution of this? Well, in the remainder of the description of the parable the Lord Jesus describes what happens. “When the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the household”—evidently, this man is a very wealthy man, because he has servants and he also employs reapers—“the servants of the household came unto him.”

Now, he doesn't tell us who these servants are in his interpretation, and perhaps it would be wise if we said nothing about it, except that commentators have said a great deal about it. And they have suggested that the servants of the sower, who is the Son of Man, is a reference to the ministers of the Word of God. Well, we cannot really say that, of course, because the Lord Jesus does not tell us who the servants are. It does agree with the fact that historically, preachers have been the most eager to uproot the tares [slight laughter], and in that sense, it is true to experience, but I think it's best to leave it at that without saying anything more about it.

They come to the owner and they say, “Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From where then does it have the tares?” Incidentally, when they say, “From where then hath it tares?,” they express the fact that they are asking the question about the problem of evil, which has been, of course, perhaps the greatest of the theological problems that have troubled the students of systematic theology. Where does evil come from? If you understand sin, you understand everything, and the problem of evil is a problem that philosophers as well as theologians have wrestled with for centuries.

Now the owner has no doubt about the cause. He says an enemy hath done this. And they say, well, you want us to go out and gather up all of the tares in order that the wheat may grow? And surprisingly, the owner says no, don’t do that. Because if you gather up the tares, you are liable to pull up some of the plants of wheat. Now this was good farming. I know that you know by the way I speak that I do not speak the language of a farmer. Any farmer could tell immediately, well, he’s no farmer—and I want to confess that. But I do know that this is good farming, because it is true that the plants of the weeds and the plants of the wheat would have their roots entangled, so that if you did try to pull up the weeds—provided you could tell the difference between the plant of the darnel and the plant of the wheat—you would pull up some of the wheat.

And since the wheat had not reached some of its maturity, then you would be destroying plants that would produce. So it was good farming to let them grow together, because if in the end, you could be sure which was which, then even if you did pull up the tares and you pulled up the wheat with it, since it was the time of the harvest, the wheat would be there and you still would have a great deal of use with the wheat, even if you pulled up the plant. So this was good farming advice.

And the servants were told by the owner of the field, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest,” and then we’ll talk to the reapers about it. And the reapers are the experts. And the reapers will be able to first gather together the tares and then the wheat and they’ll take the wheat and put the wheat into the barn. Evidently, the reapers were the transient laborers of that time.

The language of verse 30, incidentally, in which he says, “Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn,” is language very reminiscent of John the Baptist’s message. So, why don’t you take your New Testaments and turn back to chapter 3 and verse 12, and I want to have you look at a couple of verses here in order to see how our Lord’s parables give us information that John the Baptist’s message did not give us.

John, evidently, had to learn just as you and I learn, by the study of the Word of God. Now we read here in verse 11 of chapter 3 of John’s message, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.” Now notice, he says the Lord Jesus is coming and he’s going to baptize you with the Holy Spirit. We know that takes place at the Day of Pentecost. “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.” That’s the very thing that is said by the Lord Jesus in this parable of the tares and the wheat.

But you see, the thing that the Lord Jesus had added that John the Baptist has not given is that there is a long period of time between the sowing and the harvest. John, looking at the Old Testament and having the message that he had only said, the Messiah is coming, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and then he will execute judgment. But the period of time between the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit and the judgment was unknown to him. And he must learn, as we learn, through the study of the divine revelation that there is an interval between the first coming and the second coming. And through the parables of Matthew 13 we learn these facts about the divine revelation.

Now let’s look at the explanation of the parable given by the Lord Jesus in verse 36 through verse 43. And first of all, he interprets the sower. But before he does, let me ask you to notice something that I think is rather interesting: “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house.” Now remember, those parables that have to do with the world as a whole are generally given when he was outside the house. The explanations—and we gather from this that he gave this in the

house—the explanations here probably have to do with Christian believers, giving them information that they are able to take and understand.

But look. And we read, “and his disciples came unto him.” Isn’t that interesting? The multitude departs. But it is the disciples who seek light from the Lord Jesus. Now I think that we have a great principle here, and a very important principle. And it is simply this. That there are in the hearts of disciples, desires to know the Word of God. It’s evident that the multitudes are sent away and the disciples, in their coming, express the fact that they want to know the meaning of spiritual truth.

Now it is my observation—my observation may be wrong—but it is my observation that today this is one of the greatest things lacking in evangelicalism. The truth of matter is, for the most part, that evangelicals do not really want to understand the Word of God very deeply. It is the disciples who come and seek light. It’s my observation—again, only my observation; you can take it for what its worth—it’s my observation that evangelicalism today is only interested in the light and superficial. They are not really interested in the great doctrines of the Word of God. They are not interested in the great doctrines of the prophetic Word.

They’re interested only in little, what they call “practical,” truths. As if to say the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, our great God in heaven, has let slip all of this other truth which is really harmful to the church of Jesus Christ, unnecessary for our spiritual development and growth.

You see, a true response to the Word of God must be an interest in all of the Word of God—all of the Word of God. God the Holy Spirit has given us all of these pages of Holy Scripture. And the proper response sure is to come to him to seek light upon all of the Word of God—the prophetic portions, the theological portions and the ethical portions that have to do with our daily lives—all of these are important in order that the man may be perfect, “thoroughly fitted unto every good work,” to use the language of the King James Version.

So it is the disciples who come, expressive of the desire that they had in their hearts and planted by the spirit to know the Word of God. May I ask you a question? Do you really desire to

know what God has to say in the Scriptures? To know the deeper meaning of the Word of God? To know what the doctrines of theology are and the doctrines of prophecy and the doctrines of the ethical sections of the Word of God? Well, they come.

Now, the interpretation is rather simple, I think. The Lord Jesus said, after they said, “explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field.” He said, ‘He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.’ So, that’s very plain. The sower is the Son of Man. So, the first point of identity is settled. The sower pictures the Lord Jesus in his sowing of the good seed of the Word of God. He’s the most prominent character in the parable, for the unusual wording of the first sentence lays great stress upon him: “The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field.”

So, one of the important and principal lessons of this is that this parable teaches the conduct of the king in view of the growth of the weeds in the field of the world. What would you do, if your field, thinking of it spiritually, if your field in which you have sowed good grain manifests the fact that weeds had been sown in it, too? Well, I think that the first inclination of most of us would be to do just as the servant suggested: root them up. The Lord Jesus said, no, don’t do it. Now what that means, I think, we’ll come to in a moment.

The next thing that he interprets is the field. He says in verse 38, “The field is the Word.” In other words, the place in which the seed is sown is the entire world. Not the church, incidentally—for this parable does not have to do with the church directly—it has to do with the world. It has to do with the program of God and the whole of the world. What a flood of light this sheds on missionary activity. We have—again, I think, because we have not studied the Bible—been speaking down through the generations of the “home mission field” and the “foreign mission field.” And also, we have tended to create in the hearts of some a feeling of guilt if they were not led to a foreign mission field—as if they’re not missionaries at all if you don’t go outside of the confines of your own country. But the Lord Jesus said the field is the world.

So wherever we are ministering the Word of God, we are doing the sowing of the seed—missionary activity. As far as I can tell, I have never seen biblical reason or justification for speaking

about home missions and foreign missions. All mission work, in which the Word of God is spread, is mission work. That’s what I’m doing right now: a missionary preaching the Word of God, hoping that some of you in the audience who have not come to Christ may come and that those of you who have may be built up in your faith. The field is the world.

Now, incidentally, in verse 24, the Lord Jesus, in giving the parable, said, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man who sowed good seed in his field.” Now, if the sower is the Son of Man, and if it is his field, and the field is the world, what do we learn from that? Why, we learn by a process of biblical inferring that the whole world belongs to him. That’s exactly what he claims. He claims to possess the whole world. Now that’s an amazing claim, to think that the whole world belongs to him.

Carlyle said, “Of all acts of man, repentance is the most divine. The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.” Now think of that for a moment. The greatest of all sins is to be conscious of no repentance. Now we all know that’s true of men. The man who has no sense of sin has committed the greatest of sins. Of all the faults that a man can have—a man who is only a man—why the greatest of these, I’m inclined to agree with Carlyle, is the consciousness of no need of repentance.

But the Lord Jesus had no sense of a need for repentance. “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” he said. Why? Because he is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity who owns the world, pure and holy in his being. He has no sense of sin because he is sinless.

Now the seed, he says in verse 38, “The good seed are the children of the kingdom.” Now I don’t think we can make any real point out of the fact that the seed are spoken of as the children, and then, at other places, seem to be referred the Word of God. Because, after all, a seed is identical with the plant that grows up out of the seed. When you take a seed and put it in the ground and a plant comes up, that’s the same thing as the seed. So you can speak of the seed as the Word of God and that which the Word of God produces—a believer in the Lord Jesus who possesses divine life

which is contained in the seed of the Word of God. For the Word of God is quick (or living) and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. This is just a manner of speaking.

Then he speaks of the tares. He says, “The tares are the children of the wicked one.” The tares are those in whom Satan has sowed his corrupt seed, and they produce a harvest of corruption in the hearts of the wicked. Side by side with the work of the Lord is the work of Satan. And they go on side by side, just as I am preaching right here. And I am trying to preach in such a way that the seed of the Word of God is sown. At the same time in this world, Satan is carrying out his ministry of sowing weeds.

Now Paul puts it this way, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work.” “Satan goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,” Peter says. So, side by side with the work of God is the work of Satan. We must recognize that. And also, where the Word of God is most effectively proclaimed, where the Holy Spirit seems to be working, it is likely at that place that we shall be most likely to see the working of Satan. So we should bear this in mind as we think about what God is doing.

One deposits his truth in the hearts of men; the other deposits his evil principles, or the lie. One proclaims salvation through grace; the other proclaims salvation through works. One proclaims—I’m going to hit you below the belt, now—one proclaims that the will is in bondage to sin, the other proclaims man has a free will and various other types of truth. You can put them side-by-side. Many of the doctrines of Satan are very, very close to the doctrines of the Word of God; it’s just the essential truth of grace that is missing. Just like the tares are so much like the wheat that you cannot tell them apart until the time of the harvest comes. Then you can see the difference, but not until then.

McLaren has an interesting quotation. I’m going to read it. He says, “It is a glimpse into a mysterious region, nonetheless reliable because so momentary. The sulfurous clouds that hide the fire in the crater are blown aside for an instant, and we see. Who would doubt the truth and worth of the unveiling, because it was short and partial? The devil is God’s ape. His work is a parody of

Christ’s. Where the good seed is sown, there the evil is scattered thickest. False christ and false apostles dog the true like their shadows. Every truth has its counterfeit.”

Now we could stop here and speak for an hour or two or three on the counterfeits of the Word of God. We have counterfeit churches in which the gospel is not proclaimed. We have counterfeit ministry in which the Word of God is not proclaimed. We have counterfeit ministers who open up the Bible and who preach false doctrine. We have whole procedures which are counterfeit. We even have counterfeits of the great ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper carried on not in the biblical pattern, with the Lord Jesus at the center of the worship, but contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, such as exists in a well-known, large denomination with which you are well-acquainted. In other words, the counterfeit is always there in the presence of the true, and it is very easy to be misled by them if we are not students of the Holy Scriptures, and come to the Lord Jesus and ask him to explain his word for us.

We learn, of course, too, that things are not going to get as they say down south, “gooder and gooder” [laughter] during this age. As a matter of fact, evil shall exist right by the truth till the end. The purest metal oxidizes. Scum appears ultimately on the purest of water. And a second generation of dwarfs arises in the midst of a first generation of giants in spiritual things. That is one of the things that terrifies me about Believers Chapel, and which I have seen over the years. A number of you come to faith in the Lord Jesus, and now your children are growing up, and I’m wondering, what kinds of children they will be. Will they be like you, who responded to the Word of God in the freshness and vitality of the new birth, or will they be a second generation of dwarfs, not worthy to stand on the footsteps of the spiritual giants that are their parents?

The Lord Jesus identifies the enemy. He says, “The enemy that sowed them (in the 39th verse) is the devil.” By the way, it is evident the Lord Jesus regards the devil as a personality, doesn’t he? The harvest is the end of the age, the reapers are the angels, and then he describes the separating judgment that is the final action that explains the force of the parable. And he says that in the end

there shall be a division of that which is the wheat and that which is the tares, and the tares shall be cast “into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Yesterday, I was in Nashville, and I picked up a book in my son’s home, and was reading it, and in the course of it, I read a little account of a preacher who announced this to his congregation. He said to his congregation, “There shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth at the final judgment.”

A member of the congregation came up to him and said, “Well, suppose you don’t have any teeth?” [Laughter]

He said, “They will be provided!” [Johnson laughs; more laughter from congregation]

I noticed that this younger congregation laughed more vigorously than the congregation did this morning, in which there are some who evidently don’t have their own teeth at the present time.

Now let me say just a word or two about the points of this parable. There are a number of things that are taught in the parable, and we don’t have time to discuss all of them. But let me lay a little bit of stress on one or two things. There are a few things that we do need to stress, and first concerns the present age.

There are a number of things that this parable tells us about the present age. It tells us that this is a time of the sowing of the seed, and I would gather from this that not only individually, but as a congregation, our chief task is the sowing of the seed of the Word of God. That is our chief task, and we do not really fulfill our purpose as Christians and as a Christian congregation if we do not have, foremost in our ministry, the preaching of the Word of God.

Then, also, we learn from this that the period of the present age is probably a lengthy period of time, and we probably have seen that fulfilled by history.

And finally, we see that the wheat and the tares are to grow together throughout the age. Now, someone might say, does that mean that in the Christian church we should allow evil to exist by the side of that which is holiness? No. The Lord Jesus is not speaking about the church. He’s speaking about the world. He has given us, in his Word, instructions for dealing with those who, in

the church, make profession of faith but who fall into sin. It is the responsibility of the elders to exercise discipline. And so in the church, we are to exercise discipline.

But what he is speaking about is the progress of the Word in the world. And he is saying that his parable has to do with conditions of the growth of the kingdom in human society. He is telling Christians that they should not persecute those who are professing Christians, but who may not see truth exactly as they do, and about whom they do not have ultimate knowledge as to their spiritual condition. In other words, he is dealing with the world and the religious relationship that exists between those that profess the name of Christ and the world.

He’s saying that the church should not engage in the kinds of persecution that it has down through the centuries. We have sought to do just what he tells us not to do here, because the church as often persecuted those who did not hold to their particular views concerning spiritual things.

Outstanding illustrations of this are the Spanish Inquisition, in which a large religious organization took it upon itself to legislate Christianity—their version of Christianity. We have had the religious persecution of men like Tyndale and Hus and Bunyan and Latimer, and we have even had, in those who were genuine Christians, without question—such as in the case of the Genevan society of John Calvin—we have had a viewpoint which led to the attempt to exterminate viewpoints that were contrary to theirs.

The Lord Jesus says that as far as the world is concerned in the profession of Christianity it is not the responsibility of the church to legislate and to persecute and to bring to pass their own view of Christianity by force. That is what this parable teaches us.

Now there is one other thing that I think is important—well, there are two other things that I think are important—one is that this parable seems to say very clearly that there are two classes of men, and that ultimately they are distinguishable by their conduct. There are tares, and there is wheat. And that while we may not be able to see the difference now because they may both sit in the same congregation. They both may make the same profession of Christianity. Ultimately, we shall see the

difference, because when the harvest comes, one can distinguish the wheat from the tares. In other words, the Lord Jesus says, “By their fruits, ye shall know them.”

And finally, he has a word to say about everlasting punishment. There is probably no more vivid description of everlasting punishment than that 42nd verse, “And shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Some have said, well, the reference to the fire here is figurative. I agree. I agree its fire. It’s not like the fire in which, if I had a match in my pocket, I could take it out and strike it and you could see that fire. It’s not the same kind of fire. That is a figure.

But I want you to notice two things. First of all, the fire is in the parable, and it is in the interpretation. In other words, the fire is fire. It just so happens that it’s a kind of fire that’s even more terrible than the kind of fire that I can make when I strike a match. It’s the kind of fire that is able to torment and torture a spiritual body, for remember, everyone shall have a resurrected body. Some shall have a resurrected body like the Lord Jesus Christ’s own glorious body, the saints. But others shall have a resurrection body, too—one in which they are able to suffer eternal punishment. It is the resurrection of the damned.

Now, the fire that the Bible speaks about is the kind of fire that is able to torment that kind of body. So it is figurative, that’s true. But it’s even more terrible than the reality. Everlasting punishment. The world does not like that doctrine.

So Satan sows by the doctrine of everlasting punishment the doctrine of universal salvation. And everybody is going to be saved. Now I had intended to give you a report on a recent discussion in one of our very decent Christian denominations over the subject of Universalism. I only mention this because I don’t have time to deal with it.

In the midst of a discussion that appeared in the midst of the church body, the final court of appeal, one minister stood up, in the midst of all of these officials who have to do with the whole course of this large denomination, and made the statement, “I cannot believe in a loving God who would condemn people unless they accept and believe in Christ.” And he said just previously, after

reiterating it, “Maybe the assembly will want to defrock me here and now, but I cannot buy the idea that without faith in Jesus Christ, men are lost.” Universal salvation. The tare by the side of the wheat.

Now the section closes with a new principle of association at the dissolving of the bands of human society and it is this: men are marshaled according to their religious character. The tares are bound together in a fellowship, and their fellowship is an eternal fellowship, but it’s one company I don’t want to be a part of. It is eternal communion, but it is forced communion, compulsive communion—grotesque and yet eternal.

The other communion is the communion of the saints. We are taken and put in the Lord’s barn. That’s our security. We are beyond the mutations of probation, gathered into his barn. We have the distinction of being the sons of the kingdom, and furthermore, we shall not burn, but we shall shine in that kingdom of our heavenly Father.

If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus, I do not know of any more urgent appeal that could be made than the appeal of the parable of the tares and the wheat. Of what kind are you? Are you tare, or are you wheat? Have you believed in the Lord Jesus who died for sinners? Or is it possible that you have heard the gospel that the Son of God came from heaven, gave himself a sacrifice for sinners, and yet, you either have never recognized your need of salvation or you have rejected it. May God the Holy Spirit bring home to your heart your desperate condition, and may you come to faith in him.

I was thinking last night, late—I won’t tell you how late it was, because I came in last night late on the plane—how wonderful it is to be described in the Word of God as being a son of the kingdom, and having as my destiny that I, this terrible, condemned, iniquitous sinner, should shine ultimately in glory. What an amazing truth of grace that is.

May God speak to your heart. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] How thankful we are, Lord, that someone sowed the seed, and that the Holy Spirit took that seed, implanted it in our heart, regenerated us for faith, repentance and salvation. And O

“The Tares and the Wheat, or Satan in the Kingdom” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2006 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

God, we do ask thee that in Thy marvelous grace, within Thy will that Thou wilt work within this congregation this morning.

And if there is someone here who has not yet come to Christ, O Father, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in efficacious grace, bring them to him. Bring them to their own senses and then to him, the Savior of sinners. May grace mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.