

Don't Fear the Reaper: The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

People of God, The Grim Reaper is perhaps one of the most iconic characters in Western Folklore. He is depicted sometimes as either a skeleton, or a faceless figure cloaked in a black hooded robe, holding a scythe in his hand. The Grim Reaper is the harvester of souls, hence the scythe, or sickle he carries with him, which he uses to cut down the harvest of humanity and take them away in death unto judgment.

In our passage today in Matthew 13, Jesus teaches that at the end of the age He will send out his reapers to gather the whole of humanity, and harvest them from out of his kingdom. These reapers, Jesus tells us, are angels, and they will cut down both good and bad alike at the end of the age, and they will take away those who are bad, who are guilty of lawlessness and placing stumbling blocks before people which cause them to sin or fall away from the faith, and he will bound them together to be burned in the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, Jesus says. But those who are righteous, those who are the sons of the kingdom, he will take to his barn, to his Father's Heavenly kingdom where they will shine like the sun for eternity.

This is a classic image which warns of the horror of eternal punishment, and the blessedness of eternal paradise. The Bible is filled with many such teachings and imagery illustrating this very basic point that is at the core of our religion.

And because we are promised that it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment, it would be good for us to know where we are going when the Reaper comes for us. Either into the kingdom of the Father to shine like the Sun, or to the fiery furnace where we will suffer in the unquenchable fires in weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But in order to know that, you must know which one you are. Are you the good seed sown by the Son of Man? Or are you the bad seed sown by the Devil? Are you the sons of the kingdom? Or are you sons of the devil?

Some may think that recognizing which is which is quite easy to discern. our parable teaches us today, that discerning which is which before the end, is quite difficult. Hence the meaning of the Tares in this parable.

Tares are not just weeds, like dandelions or some other weeds that might rise up in the wild. Tares are actually the grain known as Darnel. Darnel, when it is planted and puts forth the blade is almost perfectly identical to wheat. Even the most trained eye cannot tell the difference between the two, not until the grain is in the ear, and it is time to harvest them. Wheat produces a brownish grain, while Darnel, produces a black grain. And that is one of the only ways to distinguish between the two.

When ingested Darnel causes dizziness, and even drunkenness. It is known to effect people's speech and sight, even causing hallucinations. And if too much is ingested it has the potential to kill you. Its effects have long known to produce intoxication, which is why brewers have been adding it to their beer for a long time. Generally is not something you would want to include in your bread, though. For this reason the French call Darnel: '*Ivraie*,' from *Ivre* (drunkenness); the word Darnel is itself of French origin and testifies to its intoxicating qualities, being derived from an old French word *Darne*, signifying stupefied. The ancients supposed it to cause blindness, hence the Romans had a saying *lolio victitare*, to live on Darnel, was a phrase applied to a dim-sighted person.

In his play King Lear, Shakespeare had the king's crown made up of 'Darnel and all the idle weeds that grow In our sustaining corn.' Thus signifying the maddness that King Lear was afflicted with.

There are many other similar things to say about Darnel and its intoxicating effects. But perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this pernicious weed is that it has been reported by the ancient Greek botanist [Theophrastus](#), stated in his *De causis plantarum* (8:7

§1) that wheat can [transform](#) (*metaballein*) into darnel (*aira*), since fields sown to wheat are often darnel when reaped.¹

Another person reported a similar finding. One woman, for the purpose of illustrating the truth of the Parable of the Tares to her Bible-class, procured some ears of Palestine wheat and also some of Palestine 'Darnel' ('tares'). After sowing both kinds in a patch of ground she asked her students to watch the appearance of the respective 'blades' as they appeared. They attached small strands of wool to distinguish each. In many cases wheat grew from the tare seeds, and tares from the wheat.²

This then gives us more of an understanding of our Lord's words, about why we should be careful to not uproot the tares too early.

First, When the Tares and Wheat grow side by side, their roots get tangled in and mixed in with each other, and the separation of the two becomes impossible until harvest. If you pull up the tares, you will also pull up the wheat and destroy the good crop. So that is reason number one why the two must be left to grow together until the end.

While we tend to abhor the degenerating effects of sin and unbelief in societies, and we want to see it gone, can you imagine

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolium_temulentum#:~:text=The%20ancient%20Greek%20botanist%20Theophrastus,are%20often%20darnel%20when%20reaped.

² <https://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/g/grasse34.html#dar>

what would happen if all the unbelievers in the world were taken away? How many people, who do not know Jesus as Lord, are instrumental for your everyday life? The gas that you get from Casey's, are you certain the truck driver was a Christian? The owner of the oil refinery, was he a Christian? And the same is true of a million other things in life. It very well might be that with out unbelievers providing the backbone of the infrastructure of society, you might not have basic things like food, or gas, or water, or electricity, or streets, or sewer systems, or trash removal, or clothing.

Whether you want to admit it or not, our lives with other people who do not believe in Jesus are intricately tied up with one another, such that if you were to remove all the unbelievers you would most certainly destroy the lives of the Christians, too.

Remember Abraham pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah that for the sake of even 10 righteous the cities would have been spared. Because the livelihood of the righteous in many ways depended upon the existence of the wicked and unbelieving. And thus, God often spares the wicked for the sake of the righteous, because our lives are often so intertwined together, that to destroy the one would be to destroy the other. The judgment, when it happens, happens at the end.

And another reason why God leaves unbelievers with the believers is so that God can test His people to see if they truly trust

him. As the Lord said in the book of Judges, *“I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations that Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their Fathers did, or not.”* (Jud. 2:21-22)

So whether you want to admit it or not, Tares are intricately wound up together with the Wheat, and the two must grow together until the end. And so, you might want to actually give thanks to God for your unbelieving fuel truck driver, and car manufacturer, and auto mechanic, and shelf stocker, and road worker, and everything else. They allow you to live in comfort. They are a gift of God to you. But even in some of their teaching and actions which are ungodly, God uses that to test you as well, to see if you will follow him. He uses the unbelievers in the world to strengthen your faith. And that is a good thing too.

Another reason to not pull up the Tares too early is because the wheat and the tares often look indistinguishable until harvest time. It would be impossible to discern which was which before harvest time, and undoubtedly the harvester would pull up the wheat mistaking it for the tares. And this too would result in the unnecessary destruction of the wheat. And God has no intention on destroying the wheat. The Reapers must wait until the end, when the fruit and grain is in the ear, and it is clear which is wheat and which is Darnel.

This then should encourage us to be patient with others as we all grow at different rates. Where I am in my faith and understanding is different than where others are at. And if I were to judge others based upon where I am at right now, not living in an understanding way that God works all things together for good in his good timing, and I determine a person's maturity or godliness based upon an arbitrary standard of myself, then I can destroy the faith of another. Or I could write them off as hopeless, and leave them to their own destruction, because in my pride and impatience, and judged them not worthy, because they hadn't produced the amount of fruit as I have thus far.

Don't do that. Everyone is at a different place in the life. Be patient with everyone, and be kind, and encourage one another. And in God's timing the person will start to bloom, and we will know what kind of person they are becoming, for good or for ill.

But even then, we do not have the authority to judge a person before the Reapers come. Because, another reason t not pull up the Tares early is, as fantastical as it may seem, but it is indeed reported to have happened - that Darnel seeds have produced Wheat, and Wheat seeds have produced Darnel.

So again, just because it was planted one way, doesn't mean that it won't surprise you and somehow cross pollinate and become the other. Spiritually speaking, this is the case for both conversion and apostasy.

Certainly we know that a tare becomes wheat when a person repents of their sins and believes in Jesus. One can be a son of the devil, and by the grace of God become a son of the kingdom. Likewise the opposite. A son of the kingdom, a wheat seed, can apostatize and become a tare, they can become a son of the devil.

And the lie of the devil is that both remain the same forever. The Devil tricks people into thinking that God wants nothing to do with them, that they would burst into flames if they stepped into church, that they are beyond redemption, and that God can't help them, or doesn't want to. And so they stay away and remain in their sins.

But this is not true. Salvation is for everyone. For all people, no matter who you are, where you come from, whatever your past has been. It is never too late to come to Jesus Christ to find forgiveness of all your sins and be made right with God, and have the promise and hope of everlasting life. That promise is available to you until the time of the harvest.

Now, we don't actually know when the harvest will be. Yes, Scripture presents the judgment as happening at the end of the age, or at the end of the world, but to think that such a time is so far off in the future that you then give yourself more time to live in sin, is foolish. Now of course, God is patient and kind. And yes, he has not come yet, which is to your advantage. Because God is not willing that anyone perish, but that all would come to

everlasting salvation. The kindness and patience of God is what should lead you to repentance, and all the sooner.

Do not be so foolish as to take the grace and patience of God for granted., and continue to live in your unbelief. For the Lord might just send his reaper to come and get you this very day. You don't know. And because the Scriptures teach that after death comes the judgment, we ought to all take into sober consideration that you could die even today, and face the judgment right after. You are not promised tomorrow. You are not promised the very next breathe.

So do not put God to the test and think that he will always be patient towards you, and you can throw up a quick prayer right before you die, and God will be merciful. Your death may come much sooner than you expect, and you might not get such a chance. And, why would you presume upon the mercy of God in the end, and not right now? Don't wait. Believe in Jesus now, and have your sins forgiven now. Live in the comfort and grace of knowing that God is your Father, and that Jesus is your brother, and the Church is your family, now. Don't wait.

For the Reaper will indeed come for you much sooner than when the end of the world is going to be, that's for sure. So do not wait until its too late to repent and place your faith in Jesus Christ. For the when the Reaper comes, he will take you to be judged. And Christ promises that all those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus and who love God, you will shine like the Sun in the

kingdom of His Father. But all those who remain in obstinate and sinful unbelief will burn in unquenchable fire. Thus Darnel can turn into Wheat, and that is the story of many of us.

But Wheat can also turn into Darnel. Which is an important thing for us Christians to also remember. Apostasy is a real thing. Just because you have been planted as a wheat seed, does not mean that you can live anyway you want and remain a wheat seed forever.

There are plenty of examples of those who have become intoxicated by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and have fallen away from their faith. They have been blinded by the devil, they stumble as in the darkness, their minds have become darkened. Whether Christians fall into heresy, false teaching, or rank unbelief, and apostasy, and immoral living, it is a sad reality that even the sons of the kingdom can be lured away from Christ.

As the Proverb says, ‘There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death. ‘

Or as Psalm 95 says, which we sung today – *“Today if you will hear His voice harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your Fathers tempted me, proved me and saw my works. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways. Unto whom I swore in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”*

Everyday is Today, and everyday you are warned to not harden your hearts. For if you do, you will not enter into God's rest. You will not make it to Heaven.

The point is, People of God, Wheat can turn into Darnel. The sons of the evil one are likened to darnel because they make the world blind and dizzy, and put them into a sick spiritual stupor in which they mumble and stumble and cannot speak nor walk in the faith see by faith clearly. This is the effects of the tares in the world.

And far too often, the son of the kingdom become sons of the evil one when they buy into moral and doctrinal darnel. And like real wheat and tares, many times we cannot tell the difference between the two early on, and we can easily mistake the bad for the good. But Jesus said, you will know them by their fruits.

Thus, what we need to be careful about, People of God, is assigning everlasting judgment on anyone this side of eternity. Why? Well, for one, of course, God is the judge. Paul says he doesn't judge anyone, not even himself. He leaves that kind of thing up to God. You don't know a person's total story. They may start out good and go bad. Or they may start out bad and become good.

What you can discern is the fruit in their lives. But even then, you are not the judge of the fruit. God is. And what if a person

who lived like the Devil their whole lives, does in fact repent on their death bed? And God does forgive them? It could happen.

My point is, that if God can afford to be patient and allow sinners to live and exist in his world, for the purpose of bringing them to faith, then perhaps you can too. And instead of being mad at them that they are under the intoxicating influence of darnel, you might pray for them that God would save them and bring to them greater understanding.

So many times we get zealous for the Lord's sake, and think it is our job to fix all the problems in the world or in the church. We are like James and John the sons of thunder, Lord, do you want us to call down lightening on their heads? Lord, do you want us to "gather the tares right now?" You have not been called to do that. You are not the Reaper, you are not the judge, nor are you the owner of the field. All you are is are a seed in the field of God's world. And the thing that you will have to answer to God on that day when the reapers come to take you away is, What kind of fruit did I bear in my life? Not, how much heresy have you hunted? Not, how much zeal you had to make sure that those false teachers got exposed. Not how Red-Pilled you were. Not how much money you made. Not anything else that distracts us from the long ordinary everyday normal obedience in the right direction. That is what you have control over, and that is what you will have to give an account of. For that is where the fruit is manifested in your life.

And finally, People of God, I want to remind you, as I always desire to remind you of this - remember that the field which the Son of Man plants, is the world, and the world is a wheat field. It is not a tare field. Let that never escape your notice. Though the Devil causes evil to break out and blind people so that they do not know the difference between good and evil, truth and falsehood, male and female, sin and obedience, though people are blinded to their own ideological, illogical, and insane thinking and the disastrous consequences of them, the world as a whole is a wheat field, even if there are some pockets where the tares have grown in thicker than others places.

Remember that. The Field belongs to the Son of Man, and He will reap a glorious harvest of an innumerable amount of people every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Although the Devil seeks to destroy the world and turn it into a Tare field, it will never become the Devil's world. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness therefore, the world and those who dwell therein. This is God's world. Not the Devil's. And so in the end we have hope that God will judge the wicked and throw them into the fiery furnace. And the righteous will shine like the Sun in the kingdom of the Father.

But that also means, if God can afford to be bit more patient in order to see the wicked repent, so can you. As Paul says in Colossians 3 - Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." Leave the judgment up to Christ and His angels.

You, first of all, make sure you are saved. You make sure you are bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. Make sure you are praying as you ought. Make sure that you are not being intoxicated with spiritual Darnel. Be compassionate to others, kind, humble, meek, and patient. And in this way, you won't fear the Reaper, for you will end up shining like the Sun in the kingdom of the Father, in Heaven. Amen.