

THE GREATNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

I love to see a dazzling sunset. It is something many of us like to share with others. If we see a beautiful sunset, it is difficult not to invite someone else to “come look.” Though we can see in our mind’s eye various sunsets that have impressed us, it is very difficult to put what we have seen into words that will do justice to the beauty of seeing the real thing. Describing the Kingdom of Heaven is even more difficult. Jesus used parable and analogies to convey to us what the Kingdom is like.

One of the ideas about the Kingdom that Jesus wanted to communicate to us was that though the Kingdom is a reality and God is in control, it does not mean evil is eliminated. The parable Jesus used to make this point is well known.

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' Matthew 13:24-27

Jesus used the common place things to make His points. The idea of seed germinating, growing and producing fruit was used quite often. It is a good illustration of how things with small beginnings, if given the right environment, will grow and have significant influence. We see from this illustration that it does not matter if the “thing” is good or bad relative to its propensity to grow. If you welcome and entertain good ideas or bad ideas, both will grow in the fertile environment of your mind. Both can have significant influence.

Another point that would have been significant to those familiar with wheat and tares is that before the fruit appeared it was not apparent that two different types of plants were in the field. The differences in good and evil are not always evident to the causal observer until there is fruit borne.

"An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked

him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' "No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" Matthew 13:28-30

We can see a contrast here. The farmer owned the land and had a legitimate right to put the good seed in the field. The “enemy” had no right to do what he did. That did not keep him from doing it. The presence of evil does not give it legitimacy. Many times people will argue that they have the right to believe whatever they want to believe or to do whatever they want to do. Would these people argue that the enemy had the right to put tares in the farmer’s wheat field?

What is the farmer to do? In a more general sense, how can we deal with evil once it is recognized? In this case the decision was made to sort it out later. Some problems will not lend themselves to solutions until the time is right. The fact that “evil” can exist and grow along side “good” may tend to make think that it doesn’t matter if we are basically good or bad. That, of course, is a wrong conclusion.

Jesus explained some of the parables to His disciples so they would be sure to understand the point of the story.

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. Matthew 13:37-43

The world-wide influence of the Kingdom of

Heaven was likely a difficult concept for the disciples of Jesus. They were conditioned to think of God's influence and concern being mainly confined to the nation. We can see evidence in our society of those who would like to limit the influence of the Kingdom of Heaven to the church building. Many are uncomfortable with Christian influence in any other arena. However, Jesus clearly stated "the field is the world" and both type of "plants" (sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one) are in the world. Therefore, we should not avoid having influence where we are planted. One could, in fact, argue that the sons of the kingdom should have the greater influence since we are the ones planted by the farmer. While we might like to see a world in which there is no evil, we can see from this parable that the ultimate solution for evil in the world will not occur until the "end of the age."

The basis of differentiation between the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one is the fruit that is produced. The angels "will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil." We know that the fruit produced is determined by the seed. The contrast of the outcome of the saved and the lost is not to be taken lightly. God's judgment is a reality and those who are not saved face an eternity in hell which is described here as a furnace of fire. There are people who would accuse or blame God for this fate of the unsaved. However, God has provided a means of salvation and if people refuse to accept His salvation, then they have no one to blame but themselves. Some would claim we have a right to be wrong. That may be so; however, this right is not without its consequences.

A tendency many of us have is to attempt to apply the same prescription to dealing with evil "in the world" to error and evil "in the church." As a result, we take an approach of creative avoidance when such situations occur in a local body of believers. Other scriptures on false teaching and sinful behavior in the body of Christ teach us to not tolerate evil in the church. The church must be kept pure, there is no place for evil.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that

field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." Matthew 13:44-46

These two short parables emphasize the great value of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is like a treasure or an expensive (or rare) piece of jewelry. We see a call for sacrifice and commitment if one wants to fully participate in the benefits of the Kingdom.

The hidden nature of the Kingdom of Heaven is that it is not always obvious to the casual observer and the way to real happiness is not through materialism or doing "fun" things. Real happiness and joy come through helping other, through knowing that we have done what is right and good (whether anyone else knows about it or not). The value of such peace and joy is worth all other things. To know that we are in the center of God's will and He is on our side is worth any price.

These two parables contrast the fact that people are different. One person could have been an ordinary guy going about his business and suddenly discovered Jesus and the way of salvation. He wasn't looking for the secret of happiness but recognized it when he came across it. The other person is representative of those who seek the best. They search for a better philosophy of life and way of living. These are like the merchant who was looking for the good pearls.

We see similarities in the two parables. Both people were willing to step out in faith, to risk all they had, to break with the past. Both recognized the great value of their find.

Sometimes we wonder why some people do not accept the salvation available to them. It could be that they do not see the value or maybe doubt the reality of the benefits of the Kingdom of heaven. The fear of the unknown sometimes traps people in poor circumstances. This is why those who have been saved need to share their experiences with those who have fears and doubts. We need to tell others about the greatness of the Kingdom of Heaven.