

Thoughts From Other Minds:

In the second place, the parable teaches us *that there is to be a day of separation between the godly and the ungodly members of the visible Church, at the end of the world.*

The present mixed state of things is not to be for ever: the wheat and the tares are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus "shall send forth His angels" in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake: they shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory honour, and eternal life; the worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted, shall be "cast into a furnace of fire."

There is something peculiarly solemn in this part of the parable. The meaning of it admits of no mistake: our Lord Himself explains it in words of singular clearness, as if He would impress it deeply on our minds. Well may He say at the conclusion, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable; let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom, unless he repents and is converted; let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God; let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the "bundles of tares" and be burned. Surely such a prospect ought to make a man think! As Baxter truly says, "We must not misinterpret God's patience with the ungodly."

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable; let him see that there is happiness and safety prepared for him in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God will proclaim no terror for him: they will summon him to join what he has long desired to see – a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear when finally separated from the wicked ! How pure will the wheat look in the garner of God when the tares are at length taken away! How brightly will grace shine when no longer dimmed by incessant contact with the worldly and unconverted! The righteous are little known in the present day: the world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master. "The world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not." (1 John 3:1.) But the righteous shall one day shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." To use the words of Matthew Henry, "their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification will be published." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:4.)

J C Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, pp. 148-150.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

6 March 2016

Sermon: "Giving Thanks for the Harvest"

Scripture: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Matthew 13:24-43

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Today we mark what I have always called 'Harvest Festival', but which is here called 'Harvest Thanksgiving'. I like the difference, for while 'Festival' is good, 'Thanksgiving' is better. Thanksgiving is something we instinctively recognise as 'right' - and by the same instinct we don't like people who don't give thanks!

It seems to me that this instinctive knowledge is part of what it means for us to be made in the image of God; he expects us to acknowledge him with thanksgiving (Ps 107:17-22). Jesus (Lk 17:17-18) was shocked that only one leper had returned to thank him for healing him. 'Ingratitude' is a 'serious' sin (2 Tim 3:1-5).

We are also commanded to give thanks to God. Jesus is our example; about to feed 5,000+ people, before he broke and distributed the loaves and the fish he gave thanks (Jn 6:11) - and this impressed John (cf. v. 23). We are to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18) and so begin heaven on earth (Rev 4:9).

1. Good to give thanks for the harvest as providing

We are to give thanks to God, not only for the harvest, but always, in all circumstances: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thess 5:16-18). It is right to give thanks, and so it is good to give thanks to the Lord (Ps 90:1-4).

We prepare and sow, but the harvest is God's work (Ps. 147:7). Without rain there would be no harvest, no food, no life. Jesus has taught us that rain is God's gift (Matt 5:43-45). In our world, fallen on account of sin, rain can cause trouble—but it is still under God's control, and without it there would be no harvest (Acts 14:7).

So it is good to give thanks to the Lord—and it is dangerous not to give thanks to him. Our society's journey to the Christian faith banned from schools and sexual perversion everywhere encouraged began when people did not honour God as God or give thanks to him (Rom 1:21ff). If we give up on him, he may give up on us!

2. Good to give thanks for the harvest as teaching

It is also good to give thanks to God for the harvest as food for our minds and hearts.

1. The harvest teaches us that God is faithful. Without God the universe is a lonely and dangerous place—and the more we know about it the more there is to worry about. Just last week scientists were urging people not to panic because an asteroid (2013 TX68) would soon pass by the earth, and they were not sure how close it

would come, only that in astronomical distances it would be close—too close for comfort! But we are at peace because of God’s promise to Noah (Gen 8:22); in spite of all that threatens our world from both nature and from human folly, the harvest continues to bear witness to the fact that God can be trusted to keep his promises!

2. The harvest teaches us that we must work to provide for our needs; we are not to be like the grasshopper, singing, ‘Oh, the world owes us a living’ We are not to set God’s sovereignty against our responsibility (Prov 20:4); God is sovereign, but if we are lazy and don’t work, we will fail; God has indeed predestined what will happen; he has also predestined the means by which those things will happen, and told us to use those means—work! (Prov 6:6-11).

3. The harvest reminds us that Christian giving is like sowing and reaping; the apostle Paul uses harvest words to urge generosity: sow little, reap little, sow much, reap much (2 Cor 9:6-7). So generous giving according to the will of God will not leave us destitute, for as God multiplies the seed sown, so he will multiply what we give.

This does not mean that we can bargain with God, and give as some urge, that we can take Jesus’ ‘hundredfold’ literally (Mk 10:29) and promise that if we will give to them we will become rich, for God will multiply your giving back to you. The apostle urges generous, free giving, not trying to manipulate God; the harvest is never certain—but we can be sure that it is not possible to out-give God!

4. The harvest reminds us that sowing and reaping applies to the whole of life—what we sow, we reap (Gal 5:7-10). Sowing sin and expecting eternal life is mocking God, who has built the harvest principle into his creation: we reap what we sow! How then can eternal life be a present possession through believing in Jesus, if it is a harvest to be reaped in the future?

Eternal life is a present possession of every one who believes in Jesus Christ: ‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life (Jn 3:36a); yet the same ‘tension’ between faith and works is even in this verse, for it continues ‘whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.’

Eternal life is both a present possession and a future reward; if we believe in Jesus we do have eternal life—but if we sow to the flesh, if we live to please our sinful nature, doing what the apostle calls ‘the works of the flesh’ (Gal 5:19) we will reap corruption, destruction, death. But if we sow to the Spirit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) we will reap eternal life.

5. The harvest reminds us that history is not cyclical, but linear, moving towards a harvest when we will each either be gathered into God’s kingdom, or cast out of it as not belonging to it. Jesus told a parable about wheat and weeds (Matt 13:24-43); the harvest is the end of the age—and so every harvest is a call to self-examination: am I a ‘son of the kingdom of God? Is Jesus my king? Am I wheat, or am I a weed? Am I sowing to the flesh, or to the Spirit? At the harvest, where will my place be—shining like the sun in my Father’s kingdom, or gathered up with the weeds?

My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Read and reflect upon Psalm 107:17-22; Luke 17:11-19 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5; what do these teach us about God’s attitude to gratitude and thanksgiving? What might lead us to think that valuing thankfulness is part of what it means to be made in the image of God?
2. Why should we give thanks to God for the harvest, our daily bread and every good thing we have? How does the Christian’s attitude to nature, to rain, to growth, differ from that of unbelievers in regard to thanksgiving? What is the end result of not honouring God or giving him thanks? (Romans 1:18-32)
3. How does the harvest speak to us of the faithfulness of God to his promises (Gen 8:22) and how does that help us be at peace in an uncertain universe?
4. What does it mean to say that God has built into his creation ‘the harvest principle’? What is this principle, and how does it work itself out in relation to work, giving, sinning, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, our attitude to history?
5. How does this Biblical ‘harvest principle’ differ from the Hindu concept of karma? (see Rabindranath R Maharaj, *Death of a Guru*, pp. 106-107)