

Prepare for the Harvest

Harvest time has arrived in Michigan. Powerful harvesting machines are in the fields harvesting corn and soy beans. Well prepared and well cared for fields are yielding large crops. Few weeds are seen in these fields.

My garden, relying on hand labor and no machines, is a different story. My garden suffers from neglect. My other commitments and interests have kept me from caring for what I have planted. I have weeds growing eight feet tall, loaded with seeds that guarantee their return next year. The soil is good, but the gardener is too often absent. To harvest in my garden, I have to search to find my vegetables.

In Matthew 13: 24 - 30, Jesus gave a lesson about a garden that was well attended to, but still had a weed problem. This planted field is the planet Earth. We call Jesus' lesson the Parable of the Weeds.

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?'

"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.'"

I would like to burn my weeds, but the fire might get out of control.

In verses 36 - 43, Jesus tells His disciples the meaning of this parable. We read:

Then He left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

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.

Growing in a weed-filled field is difficult. In a weed-filled field, vegetables may be deprived of the sunlight that encourages and supports their growth. Weeds may draw off much of the water that would nourish the plants with nutrients from the soil. Weeds make life very difficult for the vegetables. When provided life supporting sunlight and water, the vegetables respond quickly and produce the fruit that was the purpose for their being. Growing and living, surrounded by the sons of the evil one, is very difficult and can stunt one’s growth.

Jesus taught that:

“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.”

Each of us is included in this parable, this lesson taught by Jesus about the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of us is represented by a seed. No one is left out.

There are good seeds which sprout, and grow, and develop into plants that produce value in the kingdom. They bring pleasure to the Gardener and serve the purposes for which He planted them. At the time of harvest, they are brought into the barn, the treasure house of the Gardener.

There are bad seeds, seeds that produce weeds, undesirable plants, plants that interfere with the growth of the plants produced by the good seeds. Weeds oppose the Gardener and His purposes for the garden. They oppose the good seed He has planted.

In my garden are weeds with sharp thorns. They can even penetrate my leather gloves. They are more than a nuisance, they inflict pain and injury. There are other weeds, nettles, which inflict burning pain whenever they touch my skin.

Some produce burrs, balls of seed with hooks like Velcro, which, matted together, cling to my clothes. Even poison ivy finds its way into the garden.

If it were not for the care given by the gardener to the field and the plants produced by the good seed, those good plants would be choked out, deprived of their space, sunlight and water. They would be unable to bring pleasure to the gardener. They would not be found in neat uninterrupted rows, giving pleasure to the eye even before they mature.

But pulling out weeds that have grown strong and well-rooted can easily damage the good plants, uprooting them as well. In the parable, all the plants are allowed to grow, to continue in their places, until the time of harvest. At the harvest there comes a great separation. The weeds will be bound and burned. The good plants, the wheat, will be gathered into the gardener's barn.

Jesus' parable teaches about His protective care for the good seed, His chosen, the sons (and daughters) of the kingdom. They, the righteous, will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Jesus also teaches about the righteous judgment that falls on the weeds, the sons of the evil one, His enemy. The weeds, everything that causes sin and all who do evil, will be thrown into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

As we look at our lives, we, each of us, has been planted in a certain place, in certain circumstances, in a specific part of the Gardener's field. In this parable, the problem is not in the earth. Everything grows. The earth must be good soil. The problem is in the seed, the plant that grows, the one whose plant it is.

We must examine our lives. What are we becoming? What have we become? What is our character? What fruit are we producing? Are we bringing pleasure to the Gardener, the Son of Man? Or, are we serving the purposes of the enemy, the devil, Satan? Are we serving the Gardener or opposing Him?

The Gardener is the Son of Man, Jesus, the One sent into the world not to judge it but to reconcile it to the Father. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That is the way it is during the growing season, before the time of harvest.

Jesus teaches that a time of universal harvest will come. This will be "the end of the age." At that time, "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." We do not know when this "end of the age" will come, but there is more evidence now than there ever has been in the past, that the end of this age is very near. When Jesus comes to Earth the second time, He will be here to judge.

For each one of us individually, our place in the current age may end at any time. When I read obituaries, death notices in the newspaper, a very frequent statement is: he or she "died unexpectedly". But, can we say that we do not expect to die? If there is anything, anything at all, that we should expect, it is that we will die. But, it is true that it comes at an unexpected time.

That is also true for the coming end of the age. Jesus has warned us, guaranteed to us, that there will be an end of the age. We should expect it. But, Jesus has also warned that it will come at an unexpected time. Jesus warns us that we must be ready. This warning is recorded in the same words in both Matthew 24: 44 and in Luke 12: 40:

"You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

That is true both for the final and universal end of the age at Christ's return and for the end of our participation in this age, our earthly life.

Be ready! But how? Our government warns us to prepare for many things: hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, fires, terrorism. But our government would never issue a warning about "The end of the age." Often we are warned about things that fail to occur. These are false alarms. Jesus gives no false alarms.

How must we prepare for the second coming of Jesus, when He will come to judge? How must we be prepared for the time when we are called from this world and age in which we now live? Jesus gave some instruction on this.

Jesus spoke of this in John 10: 1 - 30. Using a parable, He spoke of being the gate to the sheepfold, and of being the good shepherd. He spoke of the sheep (the saved who follow Him) knowing and listening to His voice. He spoke of false teachers of false religions, and warned against the danger they present.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what He was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ...

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10: 1 - 11, 14 & 15, & 27 - 30)

And in Luke 12: 8 & 9 we have more instruction by Jesus:

"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God."

The Bible contains much about what prepares us for God's judgment and for eternity. We can prepare by studying God's word.

The Apostle Paul, teaching the believers in Rome, wrote: ... that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10: 8b - 10)

The Apostle John recorded the words of Jesus to a man who was inquiring about salvation in John 3: 16 - 18. Jesus told him: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

In Luke 19: we read of Jesus calling out Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, a man who apparently had sold out to greed and had gone to work for the Roman rulers who were occupying conquered Israel. His was work that made him a despised and hated man. Jesus invited Himself to stay at Zacchaeus' house. When the people following Jesus saw this, they began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" Zacchaeus made a statement of repentance, and Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19: 9 - 10)

Jesus came "to seek and to save what was lost." Zacchaeus had been lost, but now he had been found and saved. Jesus welcomed this sinner and ate with him.

In Acts 4: 12, we have testimony about Jesus by the Apostle Peter in a hearing before the rulers, elders and teachers of the law in Jerusalem: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

And again in the book of Acts we read what Paul and Silas said when asked what was necessary to be saved: They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family. (Acts 16: 31 - 34)

While a prisoner, in chains in Rome, Paul wrote to Timothy, whom he regarded as his "True son in the faith": So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me His prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:8-10)

But, perhaps you are thinking that your life has labeled you “a weed”. Perhaps you fear that you have grown from a seed planted by the evil one, Satan. Perhaps you think that you may be condemned as a son or daughter of the evil one. Your sinful life, you may think, is too full of evil deeds for God ever to consider adopting you as a son or daughter. Well, you should read what Paul wrote in his letter “To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus”. In the second chapter, verses 1 - 10, he wrote: As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

These “saints”, these “faithful in Christ Jesus”, as well as Paul himself, had been “dead in their transgressions and sins”. They had been following “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient”. They all “were by nature objects of wrath”, “gratifying the cravings of their sinful nature”. But now they were new creatures. They were faithful saints in Christ Jesus. They were children of their heavenly Father. No one is too evil to be loved by God.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe that Jesus is the Son of God the Father. Believe that Jesus came and lived a perfect life so that we could stand before God clothed in His perfection. Believe that He gave His life, in a death cursed by

God, as full payment for all of the punishment due to every sinner who ever lived. Confess your sin and ask Him to forgive you. Accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord who has called you to a holy life. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. (John 3: 18)

Repent! Believe!

Accept Christ as your Lord and Savior!

Be prepared for the harvest!

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