

# The Harvest and the Reapers

*“He that reapeth  
receiveth wages,  
and gathereth fruit  
unto life eternal.”*

—*John 4:36*

## **FULL CONSECRATION TO**

God and to the doing of his will implies an appreciation of the privilege of laying down one's life in his service quite separate from the consideration of reward. On the other hand, the Scriptures make it clear that every servant of the Lord is richly rewarded for all he does, and the “wages” are always far and beyond anything which he could ask or think. Jesus, the greatest of all servants of God, indicated that he did not seek a special reward, for he asked only to be restored to the position he had with the Father in his pre-human existence. (John 17:5) Yet it was the joy which was set before him by God's promises that enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. (Heb. 12:2) By enduring faithfully, he was rewarded with exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God. Surely, then, he who reapeth receiveth wages!

Entrance into the heavenly kingdom, which first was spoken by Jesus, is not something that we can earn. It can be ours only because provision was made

for it through the blood of Christ, and we are to rest in his finished work for us. Nevertheless, Jesus and the apostles made it very clear that there was much work for the church to do, and beginning with Pentecost, the disciples were to embark on a worldwide mission. They were to be sowers of seed; they were to be reapers of wheat; they were to be fishers of men; they were to be the light of the world. (John 4:36-38; Matt. 4:19; 5:14) These various expressions indicate that the church was to be an active body of people in carrying out God's plan for the Gospel age. By so doing they would also be prepared for, and worthy to engage in, the great work of God in the age to come.

One of the illustrations of the church's work throughout the present age is that of "sowing"—that is, sowing seeds of truth, the glorious Gospel of Christ which is "the power of God unto salvation." (Rom. 1:16) All the faithful disciples of Christ since Pentecost have been sowers. The Scriptures instruct us: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that." (Eccles. 11:6) This indicates that daily, whether in season or out of season to us, we are to be on the alert for opportunities to give witness to the Gospel message.

Much of our seed sowing may seem like wasted effort except for the blessing we receive from our labors. These, however, are the wages of joy which come as we endeavor to show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (I Pet. 2:9) Jesus, in the parable of the sower, indicated that this would be so. (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23) He said that some of the seed sown would fall by the wayside and would be snatched away by

the “fowls” before it had a chance to grow. Other seed, he said, would fall on the rocks where the soil had no depth, and while it would try to grow, the heat of tribulations would cause it to wither and die.

Some of the seed, Jesus further explained, would fall among thorns, which he said represented the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. These influences would hinder the plants from properly maturing and bringing forth fruit. Only the seed which falls on “good ground” would produce results for which the sower seeks. In view of the situation clearly set forth in this parable, none should be discouraged and refrain from the work of sowing simply because great results are not obtained. Our responsibility is to sow, leaving the results with the Lord.

## **WHEAT AND TARES PARABLE**

Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares, recorded in Matthew 13:24-30,36-43, also indicates activity for his church, and is an illustration of what occurs progressively throughout the Christian age. In this lesson the sowing is done at the beginning of the age, and the work at the end of the age is represented as harvesting. Another difference between this parable and that of the sower is that the “good seed” sown at the beginning of the age was not the word of the Gospel, but “the children of the kingdom.” In this parable, the sower is “the Son of man,” not the whole church.

It is important to recognize these differences if we are to understand the parable correctly. In addition to being a parable, it is also a prophecy of what would occur throughout the age. It shows that a great counterfeit of God’s plan would develop, and

not until the end of the age would this system be destroyed. Then the “children of the kingdom,” the “righteous” of the parable, would “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

As Jesus explained, the “children of the kingdom” constitute the “good seed.” God, through his holy prophets, had many times promised to establish a kingdom of righteousness in the earth. Jesus had now come to begin the process by which that kingdom would be established. John the Baptist announced to his disciples, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and Jesus reiterated this same glorious truth. (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) The future king had come, and starting with the call of his twelve disciples, he had begun to select those who would, in due time, be his co-rulers in the kingdom. Hence, while the kingdom was not then established, preparation for it began.

At Pentecost, as a direct result of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring in fulfillment of the Master’s promise, as well as by the apostles’ preaching of the kingdom hope, the number making up the “children of the kingdom” was greatly increased. Thus was the original sowing, or planting, of the heavenly kingdom “seed” accomplished. From this point forward throughout the centuries, the “children of the kingdom” have been called and developed. They have occupied the “field,” which is “the world,” and this work is said to continue until the end of the age.

The parable states that “while men slept” an enemy sowed “tares.” This is an evident reference to what occurred after the apostles—the watchmen of the Early Church—died. The tares are described, not as false doctrines, but as “children of the wicked one.” History indicates that false teachers did enter

in among the true, and on such a large scale that eventually the original wheat field took on the appearance of a tare field.

Tares bear a resemblance to wheat when young, but are only a valueless imitation and thus considered weeds. Since the wheat are said by Jesus to be the children of the kingdom, we should expect to find in history something which would indicate an attempt to set up an imitation, or substitute, kingdom arrangement in the name of Christ. Underlying all of God's kingdom promises is the blessed assurance that their fulfillment does not depend upon human efforts. The "government shall be upon his shoulder," states the prophet, and "the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this," we are assured.—Isa. 9:6,7

However, the sowing of tares by the great enemy of God, Satan, changed this viewpoint among many. There was a uniting of the church with earthly governments, by which a substitute kingdom was set up. The corrupting influence of this work of the "enemy" is still blinding much of professed Christianity to the real hope of the kingdom. Even when some vehemently condemn church-state unionism, they are still inclined to labor under the false idea that God wants them to bring in his kingdom by converting the world now.

### **"LET BOTH GROW TOGETHER"**

As shown in the parable, it was not the divine will that anything be done to remove the tares from the field until the end of the age. "Let both," the wheat and the tares, "grow together until the harvest," are the instructions given. This also became

historically true. Although the tares, soon after their sowing, began to dominate the field, some wheat continued to grow. In every century since Pentecost there have been some who have held to the real hope of the kingdom, who knew that God's kingdom promises could not be fulfilled until the king returned at the end of the age, and that if faithful, they would then be resurrected to live and reign with him.

At the end of the age—the harvest time spoken of in the parable—the wheat and tares would be separated. The tares would be bundled and then burned in the great “time of trouble” such as never was since there was a nation. (Dan. 12:1) The wheat would be gathered into the barn, representing, as Jesus explained, their shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The remarkable manner in which we now see this feature of the parable being fulfilled is convincing evidence that we are living in the closing period of the age, when the harvesting work is being accomplished.

The parable indicates that this work was to be done by the “angels.” This is a translation of the Greek word *aggelos*, meaning “messengers.” Often this word is applied to the heavenly messengers of God whom we commonly speak of as angels, but it is also employed in the Scriptures to describe other messengers, both animate and inanimate. For example, Paul refers to his partial blindness as a “messenger” [*aggelos*] of Satan to buffet him.—II Cor. 12:7

The angels of the parable are all those agencies which the Heavenly Father deems necessary to use in order to accomplish the work of bundling and burning the tares, as well as for gathering the wheat into the “barn.” The Lord's own people, the “children

of the kingdom,” are primarily the messengers used to accomplish the harvesting of the wheat. Some have asked if wheat can harvest wheat, but we should remember that these terms are merely illustrations. In this case, the testimony of the Scriptures is that the individual members of the body of Christ, the church, do work together to gather and prepare each other as wheat for their ultimate position in the kingdom.

It was during the harvest at the end of the Jewish age that Jesus said to his disciples, “The fields ... are white already to harvest,” and then commissioned them to enter into the harvest work. (John 4:35,38) The disciples themselves were among the ripe wheat at that time, yet Jesus sent them out to reap other wheat. It is that same situation we have pictured for us in the parable pertaining to the harvest time of the present Gospel age.

In God’s arrangement, under the direction of Christ, the chief reaper of the harvest, other agencies serve as messengers in accomplishing the bundling and burning of the tares. To note what has been done along this line, we see that more than ever before, Christendom is bound in many denominational groups, “bundled” according to their various creeds and practices of worship.

The subsequent burning of the bundled tares during the time of harvest is not to be thought of as the destruction of individuals. Rather, it is merely the destroying of their status as tares, and of the false kingdom systems to which they have been bound. This is a critical point to be noted, for it is God’s purpose that in his promised earthly kingdom, under the rulership of Christ, all people will be given the opportunity to be restored to perfection of life

and to live in harmony with their Creator and with one another. (Isa. 2:2,3; 25:6-9; Rev. 21:1-4) No religious “kingdom” under the direction of fallen man, past or present, Christian or otherwise, can in any way make this claim.

## **SENT FORTH TO REAP**

The parable of the wheat and tares is also a commission of service and activity. By it the Lord is inviting us to join in the reaping work during the present harvest time at the end of the Gospel age. Primarily Jesus himself did the sowing work of the parable in the beginning of the age, and these disciples passed on the kingdom message to other “faithful men, ... to teach others also,” as explained by Paul. (II Tim. 2:2) Then, however, the wheat and the tares were to grow together until the end of the age, when the harvest work was to be done. Thus is indicated that the beginning and the end of the age were to be periods of intense activity. What a privilege is ours of living in the harvest time of the parable, and of joining in this work!

The complete picture of the harvest includes the glorification of the church, but there is also a gathering and preparation for this which is accomplished by the power of God’s Word. It is the dissemination of this Word of truth that we are commissioned to do. The kingdom message of resurrection and restitution is being proclaimed now, during the harvest, as it originally was preached in the beginning of the age. (Acts 24:14,15; 3:20,21,24,25) Without these truths there is no kingdom message, and no genuine Gospel within the meaning of these terms as they are employed in the Word of God.



With the proclamation of this glorious Gospel message during the harvest, the renewed hope of God's kingdom has made it possible to identify the wheat as a group. They have been brought together and, in addition, been inspired to continue laboring one with another in the dissemination of the kingdom message. This phase of the harvest work which is accomplished by the proclamation of the Word of truth has been under way for well over a century, and is continuing. In the Lord's providence, the kingdom message is still sent forth, and individual grains of wheat are still being developed. Together, the wheat class rejoices in the glorious fact that God's promised kingdom of peace on earth does not depend upon the frail, imperfect efforts of men.

## **RECEIVING WAGES**

Our opening text declares, "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal." These words of encouragement were first spoken to Jesus' disciples during his earthly ministry, whom he invited to participate in the work of spreading the Gospel message. These words of the Master are just as true of those who labor in the present harvest work. The "wages" might well represent both the present and future rewards of service. How rich and satisfying are the wages which we receive in doing what we can to proclaim the glad tidings of the kingdom. The Truth itself becomes more sweet and precious as we tell it to others, and a greater inspiration of joy in our own lives.

It is a joy that fills our hearts when, as a result of our efforts, we learn that others appreciate the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, and they too

are beginning to rejoice therein. This joyous message reveals God's ultimate purpose to enlighten all mankind, to fill the earth with a knowledge of his character and his glory. If we rejoice in this purpose of God, we will delight indeed in the fact that even now one here and one there is being enlightened, and especially so if we realize that we have been used, even if only in some small way, to bring the joyful message to others.

When the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote to the Philippian brethren saying, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." (Phil. 1:12) Paul wrote thus because he realized that it would be a great encouragement to the brethren to learn that his imprisonment had not resulted in hindering the spread of the glorious Gospel of Christ. He knew that the brethren at Philippi would rejoice, that it would be "wages" to them to learn that their support of Paul by their prayers and in other ways was contributing to the general effort of the church to carry the kingdom message to all mankind.

Are we today receiving our share of the "wages" which the Lord is granting to all who are faithfully laboring? If we are working for the Lord only because we feel it is our duty, then it is possible that we are not receiving the joy which might be ours. However, if we are so imbued with the kingdom message that we are doing all we can to tell others about it, whether individually or in cooperation with our brethren in a general proclamation of the message, then our cup of joy is sure to be overflowing. Such joy will come not only because of the blessed privilege we have of

showing forth the praises of the Lord, but also in the fact that others are having an opportunity to become better acquainted with our loving Heavenly Father.

If we have the proper viewpoint of our relationship to the Lord as his servants, we realize that we will always be indebted to him for the mercies and blessings which he bestows upon us. We have been bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ. (I Cor. 6:20; Acts 20:28) Realizing this, we know that we do not belong to ourselves. We owe everything we have, even life itself, to him who loved us and died for us. Because of this, we present our all to the Heavenly Father, and endeavor to serve him as faithfully as possible. However, instead of this in any way canceling the gratitude we owe him, we become more than ever his debtor. Indeed, the wages he pays are of far greater value than anything we can possibly do for him. How wonderful is our God!

### **“AS THE SUN”**

Over and above the wages which we receive daily as we lay down our lives in God's service, is the glorious future reward which he has promised, for we are gathering “fruit unto life eternal.” To the rich young ruler Jesus spoke of this as laying up treasures in heaven. (Luke 18:22) It is described by Paul as “glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Rom. 2:7) It is also presented as the glorious privilege of living and reigning with Christ, as partaking of the divine nature, and as an abundant entrance into the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—Rev. 20:6; II Pet. 1:4,11

In the parable, this glorious future reward is described as shining “forth as the sun in the

kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) This reminds us of the Old Testament promise concerning the “Sun of righteousness” which will arise with healing in his wings. (Mal. 4:2) We can look forward to being a part of that “Sun,” to shine forth with him. Thus will the “children of the kingdom” fulfill the purpose of their calling.

As we have seen, this preparatory work began with Jesus’ earthly ministry. There the children of the kingdom began to be developed for their future shining forth as the sun. Being planted as wheat in the field, which is the world, the embryo kingdom has remained. Temporarily, the tares may have seemed to displace the wheat, but not so. By divine permission they grew together in the field for a time. The parable shows, however, that at the end of the age there is a clear separation. The tares, sown by the enemy, are rooted out, bundled and destroyed, while the wheat remains, and in resurrected glory shines forth with Jesus for the enlightenment and blessing of all mankind.

There are many evidences that we have reached the ending period of the age, and that the harvest of both the wheat and the tares is progressing and rapidly reaching a consummation. Let us look up and lift up our heads in joyful realization of the fact that the time to shine forth as the sun is near. Our rejoicing in this fact should be reflected in redoubling our efforts to be faithful reapers, to thrust in the sickle of truth more energetically than ever, rejoicing in our daily wages now. May we thus be strengthened to continue in the narrow way of sacrifice by the joy set before us of sharing with Jesus in the work of blessing all the families of the earth. ■