The Parable of the Tares by Bro Robert Roberts

(Nazareth Revisited Page 222, Chapter 27)

IN the last chapter, the parable of the sower engaged attention. It bears particularly on the individual results of the word preached. The parable of the tares deals with a larger matter. It deals with "the kingdom of heaven" in a history extending to the rectification of all things. The kingdom of heaven is a phrase interchangeable with the kingdom of God as we saw on page 115. We must have in view the truth concerning the kingdom of God before we can understand parables that illustrate it. The kingdom of God is not exclusively an affair of futurity, though it mostly belongs to the future. The foundation of it has been laid in what God has already done upon the earth. His work with Israel by Moses—his work by Christ—have both contributed important and powerful elements; and even his work in Providence among the Gentile nations is doing something towards it in the way of preparing the earth and mankind. When the kingdom is finally and fully established, it will have been "prepared from the foundation of the world." The parable of the tares represents that phrase of it that embraced the personal work of Christ. This appears from Christ's explanation. We will look at that explanation item by item:

"A man sowed good seed in the field."

EXPLANATION—The sower, Christ: the field, the (Jewish) world: the good seed, the truth, as embodied in its true believers.

"While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat."

EXPLANATION—The enemy, the devil, consisting of the authorities of the nation, who everywhere stealthily neutralised the teaching of Christ, disseminating evil doctrines, and scattering wide their sypathisers and disciples, who drew away

the people, and multiplied their own number greatly by the energy of their operations and the popularity of their influence.

“When the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared forth tares also.”

EXPLANATION—When Christ’s teaching began to take effect in the development of earnest disciples, the result was not so general as might have been expected, for the Scribes and Pharisees had meanwhile been very busy on the quiet, and out of the sight of Christ, and the people sided with them in larger numbers than would have been the case if they had been let alone to consider the works and words of Christ for themselves.

“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him: Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?”

EXPLANATION—The surprise of the Apostles that the people did not submit to the word of Christ, and their proposal (as on one occasion) that they should command that fire should come down from heaven and destroy them.

“But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.”

EXPLANATION—The destruction of the wicked would have interfered with the development of the righteous, which requires that the wicked prosper for a while in their disobedience.

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

EXPLANATION—Both the wheat-class and the tare-class in Israel to be left unmolested till the arrival of their respective times, to be dealt with "according to their deeds." The tare-class to be harvested "FIRST": the wheat-class afterwards—the one a long time after the other, as the event has proved. The harvesting to be performed by the angels in both cases, under Christ's command, but the harvesting of the tares to be done in the way of Providence, in which the angels work by influencing natural circumstances, while the harvest of the wheat would be done by them in an open and visible manner. The parable has been nearly all fulfilled, except the glorious part which is still future. "First" as the parable required, at the end of the Jewish world, the tare-class were gathered into Jerusalem, as into a furnace of fire, where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, where they were destroyed with every circumstance of suffering and horror, as a study of the details of Josephus' account of the devastation of Judea, and the destruction of Jerusalem, nearly forty years after Christ's ascent to "all power in heaven and earth," will abundantly shew to the reader. Thus were retributively "gathered out of his kingdom all things that offended" during his personal ministry, and "them who did iniquity." The kingdom of the Holy Land is his kingdom which enables us to understand the interpretation.

If we supposed with modern theologians that "his kingdom" was "heaven" or the "church," it would be difficult to apply the statement that he is to gather the workers of iniquity out of his kingdom. But with an understanding of the kingdom, there is no such difficulty. The destruction of the whole generation of Jews that were honoured by his presence and wonderful works, and proved themselves so utterly unworthy by rejecting and crucifying him, enables us to recognise the historic application of a parable which was at the same time a prophecy. The gathering of the wheat is next in order—tares "first,"—wheat afterwards. The

wheat-class will be gathered openly by the angels at Christ's return. "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven even to the other" (Matt. xxiv. 31). The "gathering of the wheat into the barn" will have its fulfilment in the entrance of the righteous into the Kingdom of God. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

It reads as if the shining forth of the righteous in the Kingdom would be immediately after the gathering out of the Kingdom of all that do iniquity, but the scope of the parable compels us to attach the larger meaning of "then" to its use in this case. When we say, "first this, then that," we do not define time, but order. "First the tares, then the wheat" gives no indication of the length of the interval. As a matter of history, it has already run into more than 1800 years. The righteous will shine forth in the kingdom when the angels come forth to gather them for an entrance therein. It is a long time since the tares were burnt up on the same spot with fire unquenchable. It does not follow from this that there is no judgment and rejection of the unfaithful at the second coming of Christ. There is a place for every part of truth: and one part of the truth is that the tares of Christ's own day were cast into a furnace of fire for consumption within forty years or so of the utterance of the parable.