

Marks Of Authentic Christians: Introduction, II

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Salvation

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Bible Text: Matthew 13:24-30,36-42

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Matthew chapter 13 verses 24 to 30. Start there. Jesus records for us, gives to us a parable. It says:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou 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? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 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.¹

And then down to verse 37 he gives the explanation.

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.²

Now on a previous occasion we began to look at this parable and its implications and meaning and how it fits for our day. And since it has been a few times since we have

¹ Matthew 13:24-30.

² Matthew 13:37-43.

been together, I will just very quickly summarize it and then we will move on to what I want us to examine today.

The parable very simply as he described to his disciples explains to us and gives us a picture of the Church in the world. And there is present wheat and there are present tares. The wheat are the children of God. The tares are the children of the devil. And he gives to us several truths that we can see. First of all, we can identify them. There is a difference between wheat and tares. One is a weed. One is good food. And you can distinguish them. There are characteristics about them. There are marks about them that identify them so that you can say, "That is wheat. That is tares," but you can't always tell until the end.

Early in their growth cycles it is hard to distinguish between the two. But you will notice in the parable it says, "But when the fruit came..."

When the time of the fruit came then you could see, oh, there is wheat and tares. And so even in our day present within the Church of Jesus Christ today there are wheat and tares. There are those amongst us who are children of the devil. There are children amongst us who are children of God and there is the mixture together. And notice the separation comes when Christ returns and he makes the separation using his angels to separate them, to separate destinies.

Well, as we examine this parable one of the critical questions at least in my mind comes up. Since this parable is a description of the Church and it describes for us the existence of believers and non believers together and since that is our present experience and I would dare say among you, you have made that observation and churches are places where you have worshiped you have wondered about certain people within the congregation whether or not they really were children of God, I thought it good for us to examine what does the Scripture say for us are some of the characteristics which we can use to help us as those who saw the field could distinguish between the wheat and the tares.

What are the characteristics, then, about believers which can help us identify and make a distinction between those who are true followers of Christ and those who are children of the devil?

That has great implications, I believe, not only upon our fellowship among people, but also upon the leadership within the Church because I believe and am convinced of the fact—as I have observed churches function and operate over all of my life—that all too often we have people in positions of leadership in the Church who are children of the devil. They are not children of God. They are not then leading the congregation over which they preside as leaders in a godly fashion. They can't. They can't because they don't know God. They are not children of God. And it is important for us to be able to have some level of discernment and ability to distinguish and separate wheat from tares so that we do not find ourselves following after those who are tares, but rather

fellowshipping with and elevating to positions of leadership and responsibility among our fellowships those who are wheat.

And so I would like us to examine some of these characteristics and see what distinguishes wheat from tares, believers from unbelievers.

And as part of our introduction in our last study I went into more detail on the parable. I want us to begin looking at an overview of some of these characteristics of Christ followers that Jesus himself described and presented in his own speaking that would identify those who are followers of Christ.

And so I want us to begin look at those in this particular overview on our occasion today. We will just look at a few of them and we will take a couple of sessions to come up with a list. And it certainly will not be a complete list, but at least it will be a workable list that we can use from the teachings of the Lord Jesus himself as to how we can identify wheat from tares.

The first characteristic I would like us to see is the characteristic of regeneration. We find this identified by the Lord Jesus in John chapter three and his discussion with Nicodemus, a ruler of Israel, a teacher of Israel who came to him by night and spoke to him.

And Jesus said to him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of [heaven].”³

Now unfortunately even though I love the King James Version, that doesn’t always give to us a good understanding of what those words mean. And so just real briefly I want to identify the key words here so that we see what I am talking about when I talk about regeneration.

When it says here, “You must be born again,” literally the meaning is you must be born from above. This is a new kind of birth. This isn’t some kind of a born again experience that I can manufacture on my own by going through a personal transformation from being a person incapable of achieving success and now I have finally found the five ingredients that make me successful and I have had a born again experience. No, that is not what we are talking about here. What we are talking about is regeneration, something that is done to an individual from above, from outside of the person. It is not something that I can do or any individual can do to themselves. It is something that is done to them.

And as we read through this encounter that Jesus had with Nicodemus he goes on to explain a little bit further about it and he talks about it as being something that is being a birth by the Spirit. This new birth, this being born from above, is a birth, is a regeneration. It is something that comes from above and is done to us by the Holy Spirit.

And then it goes on to say, “Unless you have been born from above you cannot see the

³ John 3:3.

kingdom of God.” And there is actually two ways you can take that word “see.” One of them is to understand. And it is true. No one can understand the kingdom of God, the gospel, the Scriptures, unless he or she has been born from above. You can’t understand it. And the Scriptures tell us that.

Oh, you may have some measure of understanding. You may grasp certain of the truths and say, “Oh, yes, I understand that.” But you don’t grasp a full complete understanding of the gospel of Christ unless you have been born from above by the Holy Spirit. You just can’t. The Scriptures tell us these truths are spiritually discerned. Men don’t understand them. They are foolishness. They don’t make sense.

And as you observe in our world today and people that you know who are unbelievers, I think you will confirm that that is true. It doesn’t make sense to them. They go away shaking their heads.

“That just doesn’t make sense. How can you believe something so foolish? That is silly.”

Those are descriptions given by those who have never been born again.

There is a second way the word “see” can be used and that is to experience. You will never see it. You will never enjoy it. You will never experience it unless you have been born from above by the Holy Spirit. So the first characteristic that Jesus identifies for us that is true of the wheat which is true of the believer, the true believer, the authentic believer in Christ, is every one of them have had this experience. No exceptions. They have been born from above by a work of the Holy Spirit supernaturally done to them, not of their own doing or making.

Well, that is the first one.

A second one I would identify is this. As a consequence of regeneration, of this new birth, of our now having enlightenment to a certain level, to a certain degree, we now recognize our sinfulness.

It is one thing for us to say, “Oh, yeah, I am a sinner. You know, I have been a sinner. Yeah, I have done some things in my past that I wish I hadn’t have done. Yes, I told some lies. Yes, I stole a bar of candy. Yes, I did this. I did that.” And we just kind of just kind of in a blasé fashion so, “Oh, yes, I am a sinner.” Everyone you would encounter would at least give you that level of recognition of their sinfulness.

“Oh, yeah, I’m a sinner. Everybody is a sinner. You’re a sinner.” And they point to you as a professing believer to them. They will even point to you. “Yeah, you are a sinner, too.”

Yes, we are all sinners.

That is one level of recognition of your sinfulness. It is yet another level of your understanding of your sinfulness to recognize that you have violated God's law. You have sinned against him and you are worthy of eternal damnation. That is an entirely different level of understanding and recognizing your sinfulness. And it is that level of sinfulness to which we must descend before we will understand and grasp the salvation that Christ offers to us.

The Scriptures put it this way. If you were to go on and read the encounter that Jesus had with Nicodemus he point out to him, in fact, in relating to this new birth experience, that that which is flesh is flesh. Human nature cannot produce spiritual nature. It is incapable of it. It can only produce flesh. It takes the Spirit of God to produce Spirit.

Well, why is that? Because of our inherent sinfulness. Our sinfulness has made us incapable of making any progress or steps or interest towards God. We are totally incapable of renewing ourselves to God.

As we read on in that same chapter in John chapter three it talks about, in verse 19, about, "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."⁴

And the Scriptures in a variety of other places and ways describe for us the utter inability of man to save himself. And finally in John 6:44 we read that no man can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him.

So a second characteristic that is true of the true believer, the authentic Christ follower, is a recognition of their inherent sinfulness, their total sinfulness.

And I find it interesting. I just received this past week a copy of the survey that was done among professing believers, a survey done by a group called the White Horse Inn, the radio program from the west coast. And they asked the question... The first question, one of the questions they asked is they actually quote a verse from the book of Romans and then they ask the people: Do you agree or disagree with this verse? This is the verse.

"There is no one righteous. There is no one who does good. There is no one who seeks God."⁵

That is from Romans chapter three.

And then they ask the people taking the survey to respond. Do you agree, disagree, strongly agree? And you have taken these kinds of surveys so you know the questions.

These are believers, professing believers. Sixty seven percent of the people taking the survey disagreed with that verse. A true Christ follower, an authentic believer in Christ has come to the point where they recognize their utter sinfulness.

⁴ John 3:19.

⁵ See Romans 3:10-11.

A third characteristic that is true of the authentic Christ follower is their belief of Jesus Christ. We have in our world today and especially here in the United States literally hundreds of books dealing with Jesus, many of them written by unbelievers in which they say we are going to discover the real Jesus, the authentic Jesus, the human Jesus, the political Jesus. And there are just hundreds of ways in which they try to describe Jesus using all kinds of means and ways to come about their conclusions regarding this man Jesus.

For the authentic Christ follower there are many statements about the Lord Jesus which they believe. I will just mention two of them in our study today. First of all, there is an understanding and a belief in the deity of Christ. Jesus Christ was no mere man. Oh, yes, he had human flesh. He was born of a woman, Mary. He grew up as a child like all of us have and other children will. He knew what it was like to be hungry. He knew what it was like to be tired. He knew what it was like to work. He traveled up and down the coasts and the cities of Israel of his day. So he was a man. He had human flesh.

At the same time he was God in the flesh. To the unbeliever a mystery, to us believers a mystery. But to the unbeliever it is rejected. It is denied. It is refused. They only view him as a mere man, an example to follow, a good teacher, a moral example, one who taught us by his death on the cross how sincere it is to die for one's beliefs and all of those kinds of statements, but they don't accept the deity of Christ.

An authentic believer of Christ believes in the deity of Jesus Christ. He was the God man. He wasn't just human flesh, but he was God in the flesh.

John 10:30. I will just read this real quickly because it is pertinent to this point and then we will move on to the next characteristic. But John chapter 10 verse number 30 and it is the reason why... one of the multiple reasons why the scribes and the Pharisees of his ay wanted to crucify and kill him. But Jesus said in John 10 verse 30, "I am my Father are one."⁶

And he told Philip in another place, "You want to see the Father. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."⁷

"I and the Father are one. We are inseparable. We are of the same essence."

Jesus declared beyond question his deity as well as his humanity.

A second feature about the Lord Jesus that an authentic Christ follower believes and accepts is he is the Savior. Not only is he the Savior, but he is their Savior; a big difference between those statements.

It is one thing to believe that someone is the Savior. Yes, that person is a Savior. He came to save people. And it is yet another to say he is my Savior. He saved me. And what he

⁶ John 10:30

⁷ See John 14:9.

accomplished in his life, in his death, in his resurrection he accomplished it for me. And I am trusting my eternal destiny in Christ and what he did for me. Every true authentic Christ follower not only accepts and believes the deity of Christ, but trusts Christ as their Savior.

Well, there is a fourth characteristic I want to bring to your attention today and that is this. Repentance.

Sadly in our day repentance has fallen on bad times. No one likes to talk about repentance. We talk about a changed life. We talk about new goals and purposes. We talk about enlightenment, but we don't like to talk about repentance.

And when we do talk about repentance all too often our discussion or our concept about repentance has to do with a one time repentance.

“Oh, yes, there was a day when I recognized my sin and, yes, I repented of my sin and I turned to Jesus,” and that is the only time we talk about repentance.

Whereas the Scriptures, when they talk about repentance, it isn't a one time thing that you did when you prayed the sinner's prayer as many make reference to the time when they trusted Christ. But repentance is a life long practice. It isn't something that happens just one time. It is a life long practice.

And it is interesting. When the Lord Jesus himself began his ministry in talking about the gospel of the kingdom he spoke about repentance. And yet in our day we find many of those who profess to be evangelists presenting what they say as the gospel, never mention repentance. They talk about asking Jesus into your heart. They talk about making and turning a new leaf. They talk about following the example of Jesus and being like Jesus and living a life like Jesus lived. And they never mention repentance.

Jesus, when he presented the gospel, that was the first thing he mentioned. And if you will look in Mark chapter one, verse number 15, you find Jesus beginning to preach about the gospel and the kingdom and listen to what he says.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent.”⁸

Repent. Turn from your old lifestyle. Turn from your old beliefs. Turn from your old practices and begin to follow something new which is the next point we are going to come to in just a moment, but repent. All authentic followers of Christ not only can point to a time when they began to repent, but have repentance as an ongoing life practice. Repentance, turning from the old life to follow something new, turning from sin to live and walk in holiness.

So a fourth characteristic that I would present to you is repentance. All authentic followers of Christ practice repentance from sin.

⁸ Mark 1:15.

The last one we will mention and look at in our time today is faith. They are coupled together by the Lord Jesus here in the beginning of his message. Repent and believe, really.

And then he goes on throughout his ministry explaining how they were to believe and trust him.

“I am the bread that has come down from heaven.”⁹

“Believe me. Trust me. I am the door.”¹⁰

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”¹¹

And so there is a variety of things that the Lord Jesus presents which we are to believe as true followers of Christ. But there is faith and trust in Christ.

Here are five characteristics of authentic believers. I haven't attempted to dissect them in detail. We can do that at a later time. I simply wanted to present the beginning of an overview of the characteristics of the Lord Jesus himself presented and taught that would describe, identify, distinguish his true authentic followers. They will experience a new birth from above by the Holy Spirit. They will recognize their sinfulness before God, their utter inability to approach God or in any way make themselves acceptable to God. Third, they will trust Jesus Christ and believe in his deity and trust him as Savior, their Savior. Fourth, they will repent, turn from their sins and believe God.

Well, there is five of them. On another occasion in the future we will look at some additional characteristics before we begin to examine them in detail. My question for you: Do these characteristics identify you? Do they distinguish you as wheat instead of tares?

Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.”¹²

If you are an authentic follower of Christ, these characteristics will mark you. They will identify you so that a surrounding world can observe and distinguish you from a tare. You are different. I trust that it is true of you, that these five characteristics that we have examined characterize your life and identify you as wheat. If they don't, then I call upon you today to trust Christ. He is the Savior and he can become your Savior today by simple faith and trust.

Let's close in prayer.

⁹ See John 6:51.

¹⁰ John 10:7,9.

¹¹ John 14:6.

¹² Matthew 7:16.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your great grace and mercy which you have demonstrated which you have demonstrated to us by changing us, by giving your Son Jesus in his life, death and resurrection and ascension to your right hand on behalf of sinners like us. Thank you that we can identify in our own lives the changes that he has brought by his Spirit into our lives so that we can examine ourselves in regards to these characteristics and determine their presence and give you thanks for what you have done for us.

And I pray for those who might hear this study on another occasion. I would pray for them and ask, Father, that you would open their eyes to see and to examine themselves whether they are true authentic followers of Christ. And if your Spirit leads them to see their need of trust in Christ, that today would be that day. And we will give you honor and glory and praise, heavenly Father, for what you accomplish in Jesus' name. Amen.